

The LOVECRAFT Collector

*Oh, I would like to be a ghoul
And ruffle the poet's mound,
To dig up the rymes he laid aside
For the sake of another sound*

Nathalia Crane

October, 1949

No. 3

LOVECRAFT'S ASTRONOMICAL NOTEBOOK

By David H. Keller

In my Underwood library reposes a Lovecraft document which gives most interesting information concerning his interest in astronomy. His love of the science has been noted by several of his biographers but many details contained in his notebook have not been given and should be of interest. In this small notebook, four by seven inches, Lovecraft went into detail concerning his observations of the habitants of the skies. This book, in his own handwriting (with the exception of one small printed item), also contains drawings of celestial phenomena such as Halley's and Delavan's Comets.

Laid in is a small printed notice, yellowed by time. It reads:

PRO. ASTRONOMICAL SCY.

1904. H. P. Lovecraft, Pres't.

An organization destined to encourage the study of the heavens.

All persons interested in Astronomy should at once join, as this society affords valuable instruction and cooperation. All business transacted by mail so those far away from Providence may join.

Persons unfamiliar with the science are taught. Members are required only to send in monthly reports. **ALL FREE.**

Write for directions and membership certificate **NOW.**

598 Angell St. Providence R.I., U.S.A.

Lovecraft was fourteen years old when this was printed. (Editor's Note: It has been suggested that Lovecraft may have printed this notice himself, but so far as is known he did not own a printing press in 1904. The lines are

printed here in the same arrangement as on the original copy. Interesting to note is the incorrect hyphenation of "afford", an error that the meticulous Lovecraft would hardly have made if he had set the type himself.)

The title page of the unbound notebook reads:

**Astronomical
Observations
Made**

-----By
**H. P. Lovecraft,
598 Angell St.
Providence,
R. I.
U.S.A.**

**Years 1909-1910-1911-1912-1913-
1914-1915**

On page 100 Lovecraft writes:

**Position of Residence
598 Angell St. Prov. R.I.
Latitude 41° 50' 00" N.
Longitude 71° 23' 09" W.**

The rest of the page is filled with **Fundamental data** showing corrections in position and time. Evidently Lovecraft was not satisfied with locating his residence by number, street, city, state and nation but wished to show that he knew exactly where he lived by scientific observations. I do not know of any other author who was so careful to be completely oriented in space.

Page 99 reads:

Principal Astronomical Work.

1. To keep track of all celestial phenomena month by month, as positions of planets, phases of the moon, Sign of Sun, occultations, Meteor Showers, unusual phenomena (record) also new discoveries.
2. To keep up a working knowledge of the constellations and their seasons.
3. To observe all planets, etc. with a large telescope when they are favorably situated (at 7 h 30" in winter, abt. 9 h in summer, supplemented by morning observations)
4. To observe opera or field glass objects among the stars with a low power instrument, recording results.
5. To keep a careful record of each night's work.

6. To contribute a monthly astronomical article of about 7p. Ms. or 4p. Type to the Providence Evening Journal (begun Jan. 1, 1914.)

On the last page of the notebook is a description of Lovecraft's telescope and astronomical library.

Instruments

Dimensions of Telescope.

Clear aperture 3 inches
Eyepieces, 2. 50 (Ten) and 125 (Ast.)
Focus (with Astro)..... 44 in.
" (" Ten) 52 in.

Manuf. By Bardore.

Altazimuth Stand by R. L. Allen.

Purchased 1906 (Sept. 13)

Accessories

Lunar Map by Wright

Year Book—Farmer's Almanack

Planispheres—Whitaker & Barrett Series.

Atlas by Upton—Library.

Opera glasses—Prism Binoculars

Am. Exh. & Want Almanac.

Page 1 of the notebook is headed:

**ASTRONOMICAL
OBSERVATIONS**

1909

Begun Sept. 1, 1909.

But on an earlier date there is a record of an eclipse.

Special Observation.

June 3 — 1909

Moon's eclipse. Clouds interfered but several glimpses were obtained. Total 7.58.

On Sep. 1 and 2, 1909, Lovecraft described the occultation of Mars by the moon.

On Thursday, May 26, 1910, he wrote a lengthy description of Halley's Comet and drew three pictures of it.

Under the date 1911 there is the statement, no observations.

On Feb. 1st, 1912, he wrote concerning a lunar halo:

Observed a lunar halo at about 6.30 P.M. Moon 1 d of full. Halo was of about 45° diameter, with rather notice-

able paraselenae on a horizontal line with the moon. The left hand (northern) paraselena was more or less obscured by clouds and appeared only at intervals. The right hand mock moon was prominent and attracted much attention. The two paraselenae were seen as diffus'd patches of light. The northern part of the halo was by far the brightest part.

Almost all of page 4 is used in an illustration of this lunar halo.

On Oct. 19, 1912, he notes the relation of Copernicus to the moon.

1913 shows no observations.

In January, 1914, he observes Mars and Saturn. On Feb. 26th of the same year he writes:

The moon's crescent very thin. Earthshine visible in strong twilight. The moon was almost at the vernal equinox. Earlier in the day the moon and Mercury had been in conjunction.

This is illustrated on page 6 and includes a house and a tree.

On March 11-12 he observed a partial eclipse of the moon.

The next and last note in this book was made on Sept. 16th and 17th of 1914 and concerns Delavan's Comet. It includes two illustrations. One of a house and mountains with the location of the comet in the Plough and the other of the comet showing head and tail. The text is so detailed that it is given in full:

Sept. 16 — 4 A.M. to dawn. Obs. Delavan's Comet and heavens in general. Delavan's Comet lay in R. A. 10 h. 08m 06s Dec. $49^{\circ} 14''$ in Ursa

Major, as shown in diagram. It had about the brightness of a star of the 4th magnitude, appearing to the naked eye as a blurred spot of light; rather faint, yet easily visible. In the opera glasses this blur resolved itself into a star-like nucleus, a bright coma, & a short broad tail. In the prism binoculars these details were better seen. Whilst in the 3" telescope with powers of 50 & 100 the comet was indeed a beautiful sight. A small telescope star could at that time be seen shining through the faint lumination of the tail. The best view was with 3" tel Ten, Eyepiece 50 diameters. Tail about 1° in length. Observations made from grounds of residence & somewhat hampered by electric street lights. At this same time moon was a beautiful crescent 3rd before new. Earthshine very powerful. Could see Maria Orisian, Seren Tranq. Rec. Nect. very plainly on dark part of disk. Saturn also fine object.

Winter stars fully in view—Orion, Cosmis Major & Orion's nebula very beautiful in 3" with pr. 50

Sept. 17—Obs Delavan's Comet 4-5 A.M. Also Moon. Earthshine on moon very strong, especially rising above house top & bright thin crescent hidden. Comet appears brighter as Moon wanes.

This notebook shows more than Lovecraft's interest in astronomy. There is an evident love of the beauty of the skies and an occasional sense of frustration. The clouds prevent a full view of the eclipse of the moon, the city lights make observation of a comet difficult. While he mentions these frustrations he accepts them as being unavoidable. This calm reaction to the inevitable marked much of his life.

It would be interesting to correlate

these notes with the monthly articles Lovecraft wrote for the Providence Evening Journal.

Note. Quotations from the writings of H. P. Lovecraft are used by permission of Arkham House.

(End)



One Lovecraft item that is a completely separate book and a legitimate first edition in its own right, though not usually thought of as such, is the Armed Services Edition titled *The Dunwich Horror and Other Weird Tales*. Sam Moskowitz has pointed out that this edition has not only a different selection of stories than any other Lovecraft collection, but also a completely new introduction written by August Derleth especially for the volume. The title was number 730 in the series published by Editions for the Armed Services, Inc., for overseas distribution. Uniform in size with others in the series (4 3-8 by 6 1-2 inches), the volume is held together by a single heavy staple through the wrappers at the short side. It has 12 stories in 384 pages. Copyright is shown in the book as 1939, but if memory serves me rightly, this edition was placed in circulation in 1945. Although issued for exclusive distribution to members of the American armed forces and never intended to be made available to civilians, copies have inevitably found their way into the book market, and since printings were large the volume is not at all rare.

Ray H. Zorn

The Lovecraft Collector

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Seed

Dr. Keller's article with its excerpts from the astronomical notebook of H. P. Lovecraft will at once suggest several intriguing avenues of inquiry to students of the latter's life and works.

What became of HPL's telescope and other astronomical equipment?

Did the little printed invitation secure any members for the Providence Astronomical Society? Can any of those members be located today?

Did HPL's early studies of the heavens reveal to him anything that could have served as a basis for his later development of a "mythos" of beings who thrive "outside" the earthly sphere?

Did HPL give his extra-terrestrial beings any kind of definite position in space in any of his stories?

I leave these questions as seed for Lovecraft researchers.



This journal hopes to have limited space available in future issues to collectors -- but not to dealers -- who have items of Lovecraftiana for sale or trade, or who are searching for particular items.

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