

# Preserving Fundamental Observations: Processing the Lick Observatory Records and Kenneth Norris Papers

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I am a Project Archivist in the middle of a one-year term at UC Santa Cruz. My task this year is to process 2 collections which amount to about 600 linear feet, and provide finding aids that make these collections more discoverable and accessible to a wide variety of campus researchers and community members. These two collections document important local history, namely the construction and operations of an observatory built in the late 1800s, and the life's work of a beloved UCSC professor and pioneer in the study of natural history and marine mammalogy. Both collections include essential records that provide a glimpse into times when important observations were being made in astronomy and natural science, respectively, which laid the foundation for the work that is done today in these two fields. Each of these collections also highlight an innovative way of exploring nature at the time: the Lick Observatory embarked on expeditions all over the world in the early 20th century to study total solar eclipses, and Ken Norris helped establish the Field Quarter class at UC Santa Cruz, which remains to this day a unique opportunity for students to explore and study natural reserves across California for an entire academic quarter.

## The Lick Observatory Records



The Lick Observatory was established in 1888 on Mount Hamilton (near San Jose) by the James Lick Trust. James Lick was an eccentric San Francisco millionaire who wanted to leave his legacy in a meaningful way - after several ideas, he finally settled on building a large refracting telescope in order to contribute to advancements in science, technology, and the human record of knowledge. Building this observatory was quite a feat in the late 1800s, as a low-grade road had to be constructed all the way up the mountain so that horse-drawn carriages could bring up the heavy equipment, and a full 30 feet of the mountain was taken off, amounting to about 70,000 tons of rock removed by hand.

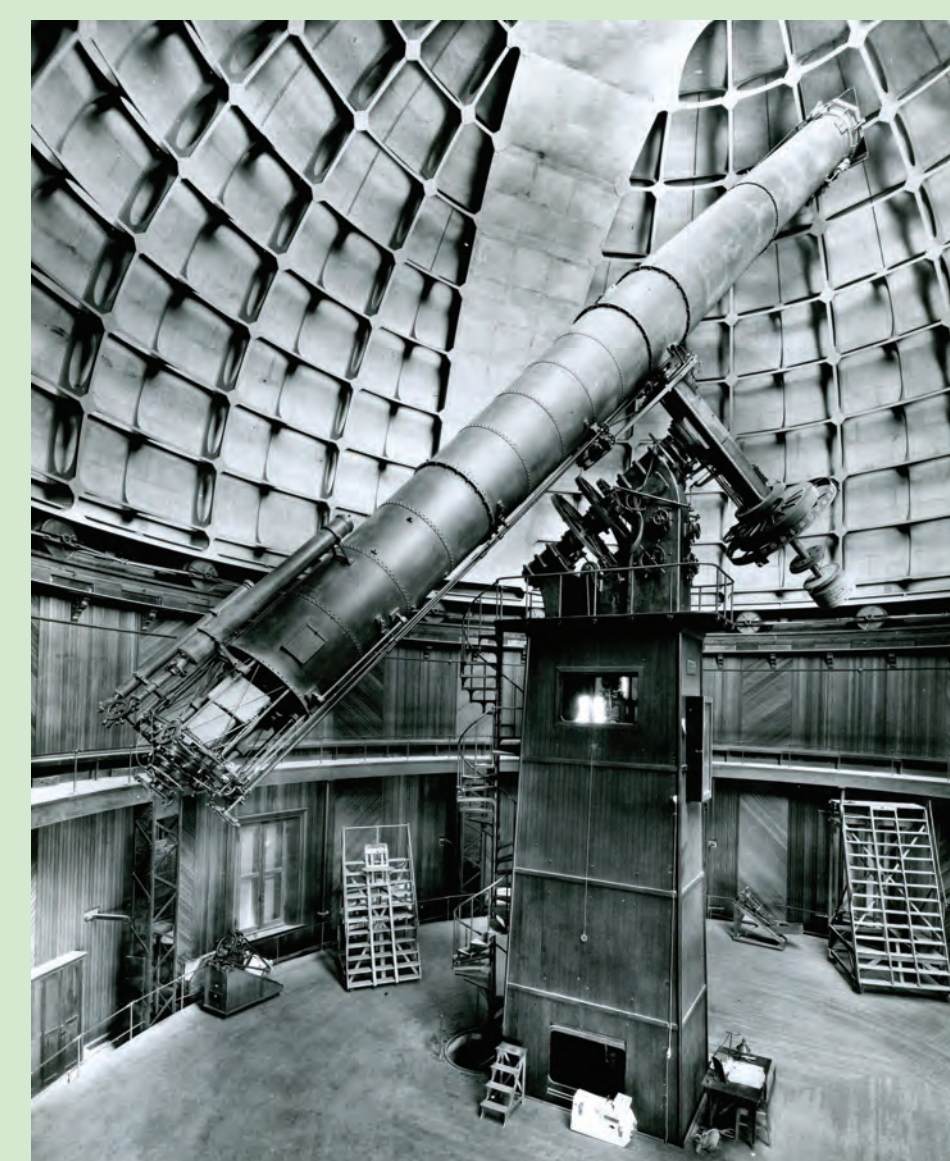


Group at Lick, ca. 1900

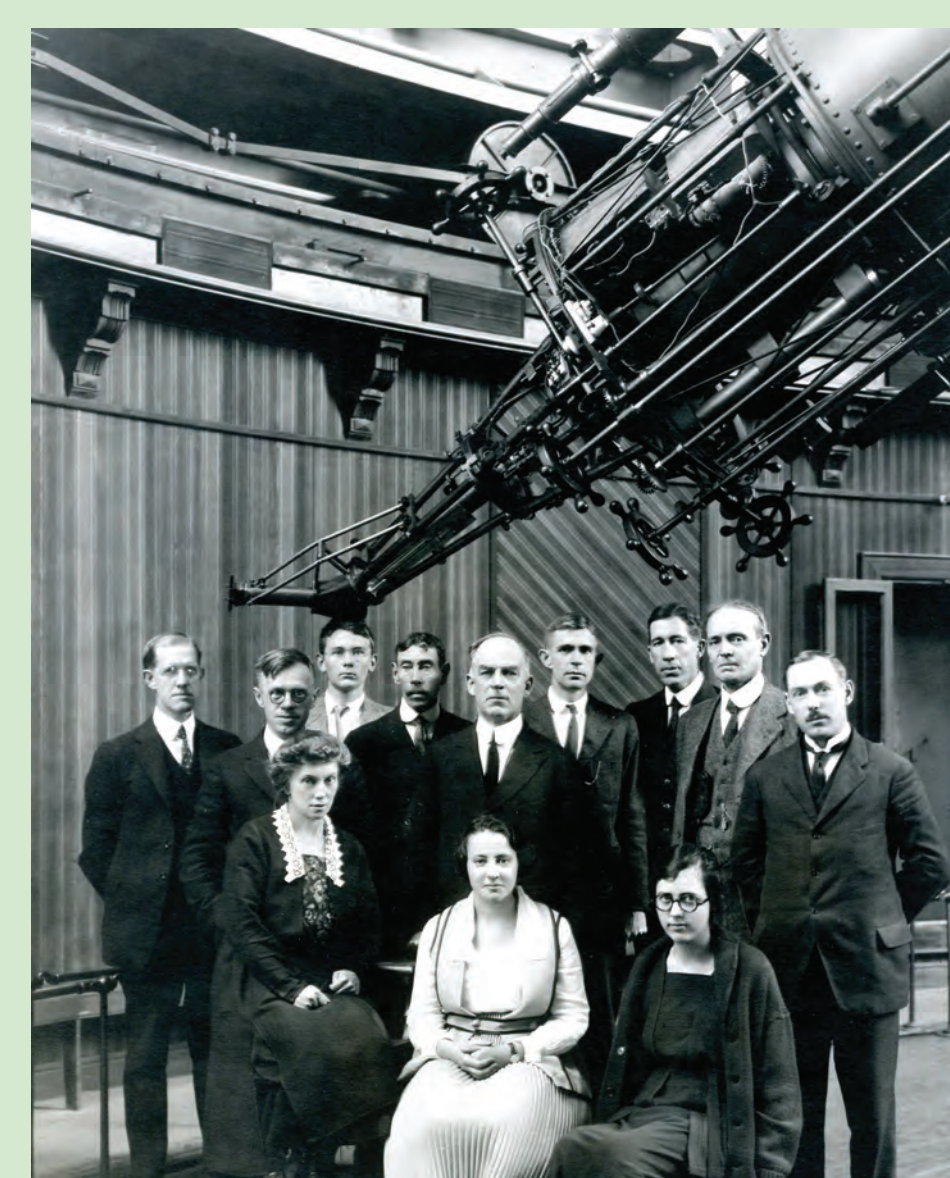
At the time of its construction, the Great Lick Refractor was the largest refracting telescope in the world (a title it held for only 9 years, until the refractor at Yerkes Observatory was built in 1897, which remains the world's largest today). In the next several decades, there were many other telescopes and astronomical instruments built and used at the observatory site. Much important work was done at Lick, with the most famous perhaps being the expeditions that director W.W. Campbell organized in the early 20th century. A team of Lick astronomers traveled across the world to study solar eclipses in Russia, Australia, India, and several American cities. At the 1922 eclipse in Wallal, Australia, the astronomers were able to gather enough evidence to support Einstein's newly published theory of relativity. The Lick Observatory is still in operation today as part of the UC Observatories.



Left: Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton, ca. 1890



The Great Lick Refractor telescope



Above: Lick Staff with the Great Lick Refractor, 1922

## Efficient Processing and Legacy Data

Processing these collections involves digging through a lot of legacy data, as both collections have been at UCSC for decades and have had varying amounts of processing work already done, with not much documentation. With the guidance of the *Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries*, I have been utilizing legacy data where possible and making the most of the work that has already been done.

- Attach existing inventories to finding aids as PDF files
- Assign value score to materials, determine appropriate level of effort
- Use high-level description as much as possible
- Avoid item-level processing
- Assign work to student staff where appropriate

Year	Letr	Contents	See also
1880	2	First visit to Lick Obs.	See also 1880-1881, 1881-1882, 1882-1883, 1883-1884, 1884-1885, 1885-1886, 1886-1887, 1887-1888, 1888-1889, 1889-1890, 1890-1891, 1891-1892, 1892-1893, 1893-1894, 1894-1895, 1895-1896, 1896-1897, 1897-1898, 1898-1899, 1899-1900, 1900-1901, 1901-1902, 1902-1903, 1903-1904, 1904-1905, 1905-1906, 1906-1907, 1907-1908, 1908-1909, 1909-1910, 1910-1911, 1911-1912, 1912-1913, 1913-1914, 1914-1915, 1915-1916, 1916-1917, 1917-1918, 1918-1919, 1919-1920, 1920-1921, 1921-1922, 1922-1923, 1923-1924, 1924-1925, 1925-1926, 1926-1927, 1927-1928, 1928-1929, 1929-1930, 1930-1931, 1931-1932, 1932-1933, 1933-1934, 1934-1935, 1935-1936, 1936-1937, 1937-1938, 1938-1939, 1939-1940, 1940-1941, 1941-1942, 1942-1943, 1943-1944, 1944-1945, 1945-1946, 1946-1947, 1947-1948, 1948-1949, 1949-1950, 1950-1951, 1951-1952, 1952-1953, 1953-1954, 1954-1955, 1955-1956, 1956-1957, 1957-1958, 1958-1959, 1959-1960, 1960-1961, 1961-1962, 1962-1963, 1963-1964, 1964-1965, 1965-1966, 1966-1967, 1967-1968, 1968-1969, 1969-1970, 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