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Department of Astronomy records 5804362

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Creator:	Columbia University. Department of Astronomy
Title:	Department of Astronomy records
ID:	5804362
ID:	UA#0055
Date [inclusive]:	1880-1917
Physical Description:	5.83 linear feet 5 record cartons 2 document boxes
Language of the Material:	The material is predominantly in English. Some correspondence is in German, French, and Italian.
Abstract:	The Department of Astronomy and the Observatory Records document the origins of the modern astronomy department and the construction of the early observatories at Columbia University. The correspondence and writings of faculty members illustrate the growth of the department in its formative years and highlight contemporary scholarly interests within the field.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Department of Astronomy Records; Box and Folder; University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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Biographical / Historical

The records within this collection begin with the recruitment of J.K Rees to Columbia College as Director of the Observatory in 1881. A graduate of Columbia in 1875, Rees left his position at Washington University in St. Louis as Professor of Math and Astronomy and joined the faculty of the School of Mines at Columbia. He took charge of the newly founded Summer School of Geodesy and taught courses in astronomy and geodesy throughout the academic year. At the urging of his fellow professors of the School of Mines to President Barnard in 1883, Rees was promoted to the position of Professor in 1884 and to the title of Professor of

Practical Astronomy and Geodesy in 1892. In addition to his contributions at Columbia, Rees was an active member of many professional societies throughout his career.

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Biographical / Historical

As Director of the Observatory from 1881-1902, Rees oversaw the construction of the first observatory at Columbia and lead the astronomy department through significant transitional phases both in academic structuring and in physical location. When Rees began his work at Columbia, the college was located in mid-town Manhattan and the School of Mines at the corner of 4th Avenue and 49th Street. Soon after the construction of the Latitude Observatory between 1881 and 1883, the college began to outgrow its limited campus size. As Columbia College developed into Columbia University, the campus was relocated to Morningside Heights and Rees was once again in the position of building another observatory at the new location. Simultaneously, the astronomy department moved from a department within the School of Mines to the School of Pure Science. A Faculty of Pure Sciences was established in 1892 with 13 professors and adjunct professors spanning 10 departments. The faculty grew quickly over the next four years and officially moved to its Morningside Heights location on October 4, 1897.

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Biographical / Historical

A student and protégée of Rees, Harold Jacoby was hired as the Assistant in the Observatory in 1888, as Instructor in Astronomy in 1890, and was promoted to the Faculty of Pure Sciences in 1896. As successor to Rees, Jacoby lead the department and continued working to rebuild an observatory at the new location. The Wilde Observatory was constructed between 1906 and 1907 on the corner of 120th Street and Broadway.

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Biographical / Historical

Use of the Wilde Observatory was essentially replaced in 1927 by the Rutherford Observatory. Still in use today, the Rutherford Observatory is located on the roof of Pupin Hall at 550 W 120th Street and hosts regular public outreach programs.

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Summary

This collection contains the records generated by the founding members of the modern astronomy department at Columbia University. The bulk of the collection is comprised of the correspondence of Professor John K. Rees along with the correspondence and writings of Professor Harold Jacoby. The records also include financial reports, departmental reports, curriculum outlines, student reports, and observatory ledgers. A few photographs and technical drawings of telescopes are included with the correspondence. The collection provides insight into many aspects of the department including: procuring donor support to build the observatories, the growth of the department as it went from the School of Mines to the School of Pure Sciences, the central role of the observatory within the department, contemporary astronomical events of interest to the scholarly community, and the professional input sought in regard to the construction of the observatories. Furthermore, the collection highlights public interest in the observatory and in the field of astronomy in New York City at the turn of the century.

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 5 series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

xml document instance created by Carrie Hintz EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. Added Box 7 (JR) 2009-11-17 2019-05-20 2021-11-09

Restrictions on Access

This collection is located off-site. You will need to request this material at least three business days in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Source of acquisition--Dept. of Astronomy. Method of acquisition--gift.

Processing Information

Papers processed Gwyn Hervochoch 7/2008. Finding aid written Gwyn Hervochoch 8/2009.

Processing Information

Box 7 was added by Joanna Rios, November 2021.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Astronomy
- Astronomical observatories
- Jacoby, Harold, 1865-1932
- Mitchell, S. A (Samuel Alfred), 1874-1960
- Poor, Charles Lane, 1866-
- Rees, John Krom, 1851-1907
- Columbia University. Department of Astronomy
- Columbia University -- History -- 19th century
- Columbia University -- History -- 20th century
- Columbia University. Rutherford Observatory

Collection Inventory

Series I: Correspondence of John K. Rees, 1880-1902

Scope and Contents

This first series contains extensive correspondence between Rees and his colleagues from across the country and abroad. Beginning in 1880 as the newly appointed "Director of the Observatory," Rees seeks and gives advice as plans are made to construct an observatory for the department on the mid-town Columbia College campus, and later on the Morningside Heights campus. Most carbon copies of Rees' letters are preserved along with original letters from a variety of senders including Columbia faculty members, contractors, astronomical instrument makers, and scholars.

Title/Description	Instances	
1880-1882	box 1	folder 1
1883-1891 <u>Physical Description:</u> (9 Folders)	box 1	folder 2 to 10
1892 January-May	box 1	folder 11
1892 June-December	box 1	folder 12

1893 January-May	box 1	folder 13
1893 June-December	box 1	folder 14
1894 January-May	box 1	folder 15
1894 June-December	box 1	folder 16
1895	box 1	folder 17
1895	box 1	folder 18
1896 <u>Physical Description:</u> (3 Folders)	box 1	folder 19 to 21
1897	box 2	folder 1
1899	box 2	folder 2
1900 <u>Physical Description:</u> (3 Folders)	box 2	folder 3 to 5
1901 <u>Physical Description:</u> (4 Folders)	box 2	folder 6 to 9
1902 <u>Physical Description:</u> (4 Folders)	box 2	folder 10 to 13
Undated	box 2	folder 14

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Series II: Correspondence of Harold Jacoby, 1888-1913

Scope and Contents

Like his mentor John K. Rees, Harold Jacoby's written correspondence demonstrates an extensive communication with colleagues within the Columbia community and beyond.

Subseries II.1: General, 1907-1913

Scope and Contents

This subseries includes the bulk of Jacoby's professional correspondence with publishers, manufacturers of astronomical instruments and colleagues. Communication with Carl Zeiss, an astronomical instrument maker in Germany, contains some photographs and technical drawings of telescopes and is predominantly in German. Jacoby's carbon copy responses are in English. Of additional interest is correspondence between Jacoby and the general public regarding inquiries and appointments to visit the observatory, and a folder of letters pertaining to the 1908 meeting of the Astronomical Society of America at Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

Title/Description	Instances	
1907 October-1908 June	box 3	folder 1

1908 August-October Regarding Meeting at Put-in-Bay, 1908 August-October	box 3	folder 2
1908 September	box 3	folder 3
1908 October	box 3	folder 4
1908 November 1-12	box 3	folder 5
1908 November 13-30	box 3	folder 6
1908 December	box 3	folder 7
1908-1910 Regarding Visitors to the Observatory, 1908-1910	box 3	folder 8
1908-1911 With Carl Zeiss, 1908-1911	box 3	folder 9
1909 January	box 3	folder 10
1909 February	box 3	folder 11
1909 March-April	box 3	folder 12
1909 May	box 3	folder 13
1909 June-September	box 3	folder 14
1909 October	box 3	folder 15
1909 November-December	box 3	folder 16
1910 January-February	box 3	folder 17
1910 March	box 3	folder 18
1910 April	box 3	folder 19
1910 May	box 3	folder 20
1910 June-December	box 3	folder 21
1911	box 3	folder 22
1912	box 3	folder 23
1913	box 3	folder 24

Subseries II.2: Jacoby's Letter File, approximately, 1888-1891

Scope and Contents

This subseries is arranged alphabetically according to Jacoby's personal letter file and contains both professional and personal correspondence with colleagues, friends and family members. Many carbon copies of Jacoby's original letters are included and of special interest is correspondence regarding Jacoby's involvement in an expedition to Cape Hope, South Africa to observe an eclipse in 1887.

Title/Description	Instances	
A-G	box 3	folder 25 to 31

Physical Description: (7 Folders)

H	box 4	folder 1
J	box 4	folder 2
K-L	box 4	folder 3
M-N	box 4	folder 4
O-P	box 4	folder 5
R-S	box 4	folder 6
V-Z	box 4	folder 7

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Series III: Other Faculty Correspondence, 1908-1910

Scope and Contents

This small series is comprised of two folders: One containing the correspondence of Professor Charles Lane Poor, and the other the correspondence of Professor S.A Mitchell. Poor's letters document the establishment of a course in Nautical Science as he communicates extensively with naval officers, interested attendees and other colleagues. The correspondence of S.A Mitchell provides further insight into the general departmental activity of a founding faculty member.

Title/Description	Instances	
Charles Lane Poor, 1908-1909	box 4	folder 8
S.A. Mitchell, 1909-1910	box 4	folder 9

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Series IV: Writings of Harold Jacoby, approximately 1908-1911, undated

Scope and Contents

Series IV consists of Harold Jacoby's manuscript and typewritten lectures as well as articles for publication. Jacoby's writings cover a wide range of astronomical topics and contemporary events.

Title/Description	Instances	
Approximately, 1908		
"American Astronomers to the Fore"	box 4	folder 10
"A Catechetical Grotesque"	box 4	folder 10
"Astronomical Research"	box 4	folder 10
"Attainder"	box 4	folder 10
"Gravity"	box 4	folder 10

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"How far North is 'Farthest North'"	box 4	folder 10
"Long Range Weather Prediction"	box 4	folder 10
"Measuring the Earth by Wireless"	box 4	folder 10
Approximately, 1908		
"Poesy and Paleo-Zoology"	box 4	folder 11
"Professor Migrans"	box 4	folder 11
"The Fourth Dimension"	box 4	folder 11
"Faith and the Fourth Dimension"	box 4	folder 11
"The Case Against Mars"	box 4	folder 11
"History of Astronomy"	box 4	folder 11
"Formulas for the Comparison of Astronomical Photographs," undated	box 4	folder 12
"Opening Address to the Summer School of Geodesy, Camp Columbia," 1908	box 4	folder 12
"Announcement to Precede Calendar Lecture," November 24, 1908	box 4	folder 12
Approximately, 1909		
"The Distance of the Sun"	box 4	folder 13
"Foucault's Pendulum"	box 4	folder 13
"Planets, the Wandering Stars"	box 4	folder 13
"The Planets Magnitudes, Masses, etc."	box 4	folder 13
"The Planets Again"	box 4	folder 14
"Moonshine"	box 4	folder 14
"More Moonshine"	box 4	folder 14
"The Seasons"	box 4	folder 14
"Weighing the Earth"	box 4	folder 14
"Sun-Dials"	box 4	folder 14
Approximately, 1909-1910		
"North Polar Astronomy"	box 4	folder 15
"Halley's Comet"	box 4	folder 15
"The Great Comet of Halley"	box 4	folder 15
"Is Mars Inhabited"	box 4	folder 15
"The Planet Mars and Saturn in Conjunction"	box 4	folder 15

"The Planets One by One"	box 4	folder 15
"Eclipses"	box 4	folder 15
"Long Haired Stars"	box 4	folder 16
"Meteors and Shooting Stars"	box 4	folder 16
"Sunshine"	box 4	folder 16
"Star-Shine"	box 4	folder 16
"Making Plans"	box 4	folder 16
"The Runge Dinner"	box 4	folder 16
"The Universe Once More"	box 4	folder 16
"The Universe," , undated	box 4	folder 17
"Star Catalogues," , undated	box 4	folder 17
"Astronomy," , undated	box 4	folder 17
"Astronomical Research," , undated	box 4	folder 17
"The Coming Re-appearance of Halley's Great Comet," , undated	box 4	folder 17
"How the Worlds Were Made," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"Mother Earth," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"George William Hill," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"Time," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"Precision," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"The Case Against Halley's Comet," , undated	box 4	folder 18
"The Heavens," , undated	box 4	folder 19
"A Short Course in Astronomy," , undated	box 4	folder 19
"Equations Occurring in Lectures on Geodesy," , undated	box 4	folder 19
"A Lecture on the Method of Least Squares Applied to Conditioned Observations," , undated	box 4	folder 19
"The Tides," , undated	box 4	folder 19
"Abraham Lincoln," , undated	box 4	folder 20
Scattered manuscript pages	box 4	folder 20

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Series V: Observatory Ledgers and Astronomical Reports, 1896-1917

Scope and Contents

The final series of the collection is comprised of notes, observations and computations on graph paper as well as two hard-cover bound student project reports. About half of the graph paper records are marked as the charts of the "Lick Eros Plates" and represent a collaborative effort with the Lick Observatory in California. Some correspondence regarding this collaboration can be found in Box 2 Folder 7. This series also includes 5 bound ledger books with computations on the Rutherford plates as well as from observations at Bloomingdale Station/116th Street from 1893 to 1901.

Title/Description	Instances	
1896	box 4	folder 21
1896, undated, 1896, undated	box 4	folder 22
1896-1897	box 4	folder 23
1897	box 5	folder 1
1899	box 5	folder 2
1899	box 5	folder 3
1903	box 5	folder 4
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1900-1901	box 5	folder 5
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1900-1901	box 5	folder 6
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1901	box 5	folder 7
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1901	box 5	folder 8
"Lick Eros Plates," 1901, undated, 1901, undated	box 5	folder 9
"Lick Eros Plates," approximately, 1901-1903	box 5	folder 10
"Lick Eros Plates," approximately, 1901-1903	box 5	folder 11
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1902-1903	box 5	folder 12
"Lick Eros Plates,", 1903	box 5	folder 13
Camp Columbia, Scattered Reports and Charts, 1908-1911	box 6	folder 1
"Detailed Report on Geodetic Surveying," Camp Columbia, 1912	box 6	folder 2
"Detailed Report: Geodesy and Astronomy," Camp Columbia, 1917	box 6	folder 3
Zenith Telescope, Variation of Latitude Investigation, volume 2, 1893-1899	box 7	folder 1

Scope and Contents

Definitive investigation of the periodic errors of the Zenith telescope screw, 1896. Computations by F.E. Harpham under the direction of Harold Jacoby.

Includes additional computations by J.K. Rees and H.S. Davis.

Zenith Telescope, Variation of Latitude Investigation, volume 3, 1893-1900	box 7	folder 3
Scope and Contents		
Latitude observations, variation of latitude pairs, and reduction to apparent place.		
Elongations and Transits, 1893-1894	box 7	folder 4
Scope and Contents		
Computations by J.K. Rees and Harold Jacoby, from Bloomingdale Station / 116th Street with the Zenith telescope.		
Rutherford Photographic Measures, Plates XIV-XVIII, Volume 2 , 1901	box 7	folder 2
Scope and Contents		
"Plates without Reseau." Includes designation of plate (Rutherford Perseus and numerals) and dates (1901 April-May). Book spine attributes the work to "Young" - possibly work by Anne Sewell Young for her dissertation Rutherford photographs of the stellar clusters h and x Persei (also available online).		
Computation for all stars in the Yale measures; refraction tables; computations for checking distances and position angles of the Pleiades Plates, circa 1891	box 4	folder 24
Scope and Contents		
Computers Harold Jacoby, James McRichard and F.E. Hurley		

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