

Lowell Observatory's Clark Telescope closes for renovation on January 1

December 27 2013

Lowell Observatory's iconic Clark Telescope is about to undergo a much-needed facelift. After 117 years of constant use, the instrument will be closed for more than a year as engineers and technicians carefully remove telescope components and repair or replace poorly operating parts.

The Clark was built by the preeminent [telescope](#) makers of their time, the Alvan Clark & Sons firm of Cambridgeport, Massachusetts. The instrument saw first light on July 23, 1896, and Percival Lowell initially used it to study Mars in support of his controversial theories about life on that planet. Significant research with the Clark included V. M. Slipher's revolutionary discovery of the first evidence of the expanding nature of the universe, the confirmation of Pluto's discovery in 1930 (made by Clyde Tombaugh with another telescope at Lowell Observatory), and creation of lunar maps in the 1960s in support of the Apollo program that sent astronauts to the Moon.

Lowell director Jeff Hall commented, "The Clark Telescope is a national treasure and is Lowell Observatory's first research telescope. Last year, we celebrated first light of our newest eye on the sky, the Discovery Channel Telescope, which will carry us through several more decades of astronomical discoveries, as the Clark did in the early days of Lowell. That makes it an appropriate time to look back and ensure that this telescope that started it all—a lovely old refractor in the wooden dome overlooking Flagstaff—is restored and maintained for the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Mars Hill who will look through it in the future."

For the past three decades, the Clark Telescope has been a staple of the Observatory's outreach program. More than one million visitors have seen and/or looked through the Clark, including Flagstaff native Samantha Christensen, who first saw the telescope on trips to the observatory with her family. Now Lowell's Outreach Manager, she said, "The Clark is special to me because I looked through it as a kid. Those experiences helped interest me in science and I'm thrilled that because of this renovation, the Clark will continue to have that sort of impact on other people's lives."

The renovation project is supported in large part by major donations from the Toomey Foundation for the Natural Sciences and by the late Joseph N. Orr. A successful crowd-sourcing effort also raised significant support, and the Observatory is still accepting donations to complete the work.

Provided by Lowell Observatory

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