

**N.A. Richardson Observatory
and
Science Museum**



San Bernardino Valley College



The Observatory and Science Museum

Welcome to the oldest building on the college campus, the N.A. Richardson Observatory. The building was the dream of the college's founder and first chairman of the board of trustees, Noble Asa Richardson, who was also an amateur astronomer. The Observatory was built in 1930 and had a 16-inch Newtonian telescope housed under the dome on a pier-based German equatorial mount. At the time, it was the largest telescope at any junior college in the nation.

In 1931, the telescope was completely rebuilt into a modified Cassegrain instrument by a local dentist, H. Page Bailey. Bailey was a well-known amateur astronomer and telescope builder who wanted to create an example of his new mount design, called a "split-ring horseshoe". He wanted it housed in a professional setting for the examination by some of the designers for the giant 200" telescope being planned for Mt. Palomar. Alas, the planners had already come up with the same basic design and Bailey never received any credit for his mount. Thus, the instrument is a footnote in the history of that famous telescope and something of a prototype.

Enjoyed by students and the public throughout the 1930s, the telescope was used less as light pollution spoiled the once-dark night skies beginning in the 1950s. After an act of vandalism to the telescope around 1954, the head of the Astronomy Department, George F. Beattie, had it removed and put into storage. Mr. Beattie had a long tenure at the college, teaching mathematics and astronomy beginning in 1934. He was later chairman of the science division and a strong proponent for having a planetarium on campus, and it was ultimately built and opened in 1977. Around that time, the telescope was refurbished and put back into operation for class use and public viewings. Since then, it has had further upgrades and is still functional, providing pleasing views of the moon and planets.

Following initial use by the astronomy classes, the observatory's downstairs area had also been used by many other departments as office space. Finally, after years of shifting tenants, the space is now a permanent museum, a safe haven and display for any and all pieces of scientific and technological interest and college history.

What you see here is a collection of numerous items and apparatus that were used long ago and ultimately saved for posterity. When the old Chemistry and Physical Science Buildings were being taken down in 2011, an effort was made to save and preserve any old and interesting pieces of laboratory equipment to show the evolution of technology in scientific instrumentation.

The Physics Department had the largest collection, as much of the equipment used since the late 1920s had been kept in long term storage. Unfortunately, the Biology and Chemistry Departments had purged their storage years ago and had little or nothing to display. Luckily, the Physics Department had utilized a great deal of chemistry equipment in related lecture demonstrations and laboratory experiments, and had a nice collection of older apparatus for a chemistry display. Some of the astronomy paraphernalia came from the collection of material donated by George Beattie's widow, Kay Beattie, who had a great interest in the planetarium which honored her husband's memory, as it was dedicated to him. A few items came from the Geology and Geography Departments as well. Some later pieces, like those donated by KVCR, are from the 1960s and 1970s, and although modern looking, are now quite obsolete.

Alongside these interesting artifacts are other pieces of memorabilia that highlight the history of the campus. Early student desks and the lecterns used by professors of the day (including one actually used by George Beattie) and several other pieces, show how actual hardwood was used prior to manmade laminates and plastics that dominate the classroom environment today.

A nearly life-sized painted portrait of N.A. Richardson hangs in the corner while the bronze dedication plaque that was in the original administration building hangs on another wall. Other items were found "here and there" on campus and were also added to the collection. Although there is very little tangible material left from "the old days", it does give the visitor a peek into the past.

Enjoy your visit!

