

Founder's Event

THE HOUSTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

OBSERVATORY

Columbus, Texas

March 29, 2014

MEMORIAL TO HOUSTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY'S DARK SITE FOUNDERS

In 1976, the near completion of the 12.5-inch f/5 club telescope encouraged the HAS membership to approve construction of an HAS observatory at a suitable dark site. Fred Garcia, Art Ciampi and the Telescope Committee completed the telescope in 1979, so active planning of an observatory began under the leadership of Committee Chairman, Allan Parker, assisted in the earliest stages by John Hiatt, Larry Wadle and Tom Williams, with Ciampi acting as a liaison to the telescope committee. Tom Williams paved the way for the observatory by leading the effort to incorporate the HAS and then obtain the Society's status as an exempt organization under the federal tax code. This made it possible to solicit public donations for the project. Light pollution studies by Wadle concluded that a site near Columbus, Texas would remain dark for at least 20 years. Parker prepared and presented a formal proposal to Walter Fondren III. After visiting the proposed site with the committee, Mr. Fondren arranged for a perpetual lease of 18 acres on his family's ranch to the Society. Mr. Fondren also donated substantial matching funds to aid the Society's development of the site.

Parker and Hiatt then prepared detailed plans for the site and an observatory building. The building design included a large window at the south end to accommodate the f/5 telescope on its low mounting in addition to a Celestron 14-inch and a second 12.5 inch f/7 Cave Astrola telescope. Site clearance and construction of the building by Parker, Hiatt, and many other HAS members was aided substantially by the Durwood Green and Parker Brothers construction companies. A sophisticated electro-mechanical system designed and constructed by Dan Morrell controlled the movement of a massive roll-off roof fabricated and installed by Parker Brothers Construction. A windlass system and continuous cable that actually moves the roof was designed by Marvin Morris. The roof and control system still operate smoothly after 30 years. Lee Eakins installed the building's electrical wiring. John Arnold arranged for the donation of the essential building air conditioning system by the Carrier Corporation.

After construction of 22 separate observing pads with a central electrical service, the Society dedicated the Dark Site on October 15, 1983. Dr. Harlan Smith, Director of the University of Texas McDonald Observatory, provided the keynote address of congratulations to the Society and the many members who contributed to the project. Over 100 members and their guests attended the dedication ceremony at the site.

This memorial plaque honors Allan Parker, John Hiatt, and the many others, named and not named above, who contributed their labor and/or donated funds to support the development of the HAS Dark Site. HAS will preserve the results of their vision and dedicated effort for the generations to come.

Dedicated March 29, 2014.

HAS Observatory Founders Event

Opening Remarks *HAS President*	*Bill Pellerin*
Original Site Developer	*Allan Parker*
Original Site Developer	*John Hiatt*
Introducing Main Speaker	*Bill Pellerin*
"75 Years of McDonald Observatory" *Director, McDonald Observatory*	*Dr. David Lambert*
Remarks *Observatory Chairman*	*Mike Edstrom*
Plaque Presentation *Memorial Plaque* *Observatory Chairmen Plaque* *Master Observers Plaque* *Meteoroid Impact Plaque* *Discovery Plaques*	*Steve Goldberg*
Bob Rogers Observatory	*Mike Edstrom*
Closing Remarks	*Bill Pellerin*