



Archives and Special Collections Department,
American University of Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon
2018

Lee Observatory Collection, 1874-1979

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the University Libraries, AUB

Prepared by: Iman Abdallah Abu Nader

Contact information:

asc@aub.edu.lb

Webpage:

<http://web.aub.edu.lb/libraries/asc/Pages/index.aspx>

Descriptive Summary

Call No: AA: 1.8

Bib ID: b1461768

Record Creator: Lee- Astro-Physical Observatory, Lee Observatory, AUB Observatory (1874-1978)

Collection Dates: 1874-1979

Physical Description: Approximately **84 boxes**, (boxes and packages), 25 photos.

Abstract: Established in 1874, the Lee Observatory was founded under the supervision of Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck, and was later reconstructed and renovated in 1894 under the supervision of Dr. Robert West. The operational activities of the observatory included timekeeping, weather forecasting, and the recording of celestial movements and events. All the observations made and the data collected by the professors and the student assistants were kept in logs on a daily basis, and were later published in a monthly bulletin.

Language(s): English

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions: The collection can be used within the premises of the Archives and Special Collections Department, Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut.

Photocopying Restriction: No photocopying restriction except for fragile and handwritten material.

Preferred Citation: Lee Observatory, AUB, AA: 1.8, Box no.-, File no.-, Archives and Special Collections, American University of Beirut.

Scope and Content

This collection includes historical and administrative information; logs and registries of meteorological data and astronomical observations; as well as a few publications based on research conducted at the observatory and the University.

The Lee observatory stands out as one of the oldest observatories in the Middle East. Its historical records document the history of astronomy, physics, meteorology in the region, and are of great significance to cultural historians, and scholars who are interested in physics, astronomical and meteorological research, and the history of science in the region. It is an invaluable source for meteorologists, scientists, scholars and activists interested in climate change, water and geographic studies, as well as sustainable agriculture and ecology in the region.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 3 series

Series I: Lee Observatory documents including correspondence, and some administrative documents, e.g. a list of directors

Series II: Observatory logs and meteorological registers

Series III: Publications comprising articles about the observatory, its history and operational activity.

Historical Background

Considered one of the oldest observatories of the Middle East, the Lee Observatory was among the first buildings erected on the Campus of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC as AUB was known). It was founded under the supervision of Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck who was trained as a practicing physician, but also had a serious interest in astronomy and physics. This interest led Van Dyck to secure the necessary funds to build an observatory, raising a hefty donation of 150 pounds from the British Merchant Henry Lee, and financing the purchase of some astronomical equipment out of pocket, --including a 10-inch Newtonian telescope--which he then donated to the University upon his resignation in 1883. The building, which was edified in 1874, was called the Lee Astro-Physical Observatory. With the assistance of Faris Nimr, Van Dyck kept meteorological records, which he sent to the Ottoman authorities via telegraph on a daily basis.

Following Van Dyck's resignation in 1883, Robert West became the Director of the observatory, during which time he designed a new building that would accommodate a 12-inch telescope. Professor Charles Young (then at Princeton) approved West's design and the construction of the new building was launched in 1892 and terminated in 1894. New equipment were added later such as "*a spectroscope, a 7-inch photographic doublet (1906) and a spectrohelioscope (1927)*" (Hajjar, 2000).

Throughout its service, the observatory witnessed several celestial events, one of which was the observation of the Haley comet in 1910 by the then director Alfred Joy. It also kept logs of several operational activities such as timekeeping and weather forecasts, and was also used for religious purposes such as detecting the moon crescent for the month of Ramadan (reports were sent to Dar el Fatwa in Beirut). Throughout its years of service, the observatory kept logs and published a monthly bulletin, 1912-1975, and several articles about the recorded observations, which form the bulk of this collection.

Although it passed through a rough patch during the two World Wars, the observatory was kept running thanks to the efforts of many people including Raymond S. Dungan, Mansour H. Jurdak, George M. Maler and Alfred H. Joy, Nicolas Shahin and Emile Bustani to name a few, and remained completely functional until it was shut down, and the astronomy classes were discontinued in 1979.

Subject Headings

American University of Beirut -- Buildings.
American University of Beirut -- Employees
American University of Beirut -- Observatories.
American University of Beirut. Faculty of Arts and Sciences.
Asteroids.
Astronomy -- Data processing.
Astronomy -- Databases
Atmospheric pressure
Constellations
Meteorology -- History
Meteorology -- Lebanon -- Beirut -- Observations.
Meteorology -- Textbooks.
Rainfall rate
Seismology
Sunspots.
Telescopes -- Design and construction
Winds -- Speed -- Lebanon -- Beirut.

Container List

Series I: Lee Observatory documents including its history and a list of its directors

Box1:

- **File 2:**

- West, R.H., *Observatory*, July 10, 1889. (A brief report highlighting the conditions, functions and necessities of the observatory.) [Manuscript and typed]
- Letter from the Minister Resident of the United States at Constantinople to the U.S. vice Consulate General at Beirut, June 3, 1874 (Written in French).
- Memoranda from Sir Howard Grubb to Professor R. H. West. (March 15, 1893; April 29, 1893)
- Memorandum from Sir Howard Grubb to Stuart Dodge, March 11, 1893.
- Letter from Sir Howard Grubb to Robert West, March 25, 1893.
- Advice of goods from Sir Howard Grubb to Robert West: April 11, 1893.
- Memorandum describing the erection of the dome, May 9, 1893.
- Copy book of meteorological entries.
- Several empty envelopes.

- **File 3:**

- Printout documents of the archival directory of the Directors of the Observatory and a portrait of each:
 - Cornelius Van Dyck
 - Robert West
 - Alfred Joy
 - Julius Brown
 - Robert Sloane
 - Owen Gingerich
 - Frans Bruin
- A copy of President Peter Dorman's address at the conferring ceremony of the Honorary Doctorate to Owen Gingerich.
- A copy of Owen Gingerich's Honorary Doctorate Address.

Series II: Publications

Box1:

- **File 1:**

- Dans "L'Orient" du 2 octobre 1964, Beyrouth et le Liban. (n.d.).
- Haddad, G. S. (2005). (M.A. Thesis). *Precipitation Trends and Modeling: Case Study Beirut Region*. American University of Beirut. Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. Department of Land and Water Resources.
- Hajjar, R. (27 -30 June). Astronomy in Lebanon: Past, Present and Future Prospects. Presented at the Ninth United Nations/European Space Agency Workshop on Basic Space Science, Toulouse, France.
- Last Glance: Lee Observatory. (2008). *AUB Main Gate, IV(4)*.
- Obeid, G. (2016, January 12). Meteorological Department remains Lebanon's reigning expert. *The Daily Star*, p. 4.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- بروين، فرنسيس، مرصد الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت و تدريس علوم الفلك فيها، الأبحاث، السنة ١٦، الجزء ٤، ١٩٦٣.
- البستاني، اميل، شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١. (two copies)
- لمحة من المطر من سنة ١٨٥٧ الى نهاية سنة ١٨٩٨، الطبيب، الجزء العاشر، السنة العاشرة، نيسان، ١٨٩٩.
- البستاني، اميل، المرقب الشمسي في الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الثاني، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣٢. (two copies)
- التأثيرات على الطاقة والزراعة في لبنان، السفير، ١٢، ٢٢، ٢٠٠٩.
- الشعار، علي عدنان، الرصد الجوي في لبنان بين الماضي والحاضر، بيروت، ٢٠١٠.
- قبل ٥٠ سنة أمطرت في بيروت والجبل، ٧، ٧، ٢٠٠٩.
- ساعات و يقع الاصطدام العظيم بالمشتري فلنصبر اشهرا حتى تصلنا صور "غاليليو"، النهار، ١٧، ٧، ١٩٩٤.
- شاهين، منى، مرصد نقولا شاهين: جردة للمطر في نيسان، النهار، ٣، ٥، ٢٠١٣.
- المطر آت، نظفو المجاري وافتحو السبيل، النهار، ٢٦، ٩، ٢٠١٤.

- المشنوق تسلم نتائج التقييم المدني للاستراتيجية الوطنية للمياه، الأنوار، ٣، ٦، ٢٠١٥.

Physical Plant Section AA: 2.5.3.3.2.3.

File 5: Lee Observatory

- انقضاء صاعقة على مرصد المدرسة الكلية السورية، الطبيب، الجزء ٩، السنة ١١، شباط، ١٩٠٠.
- البستاني، اميل، شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١.
- بروين، فرنسيس، مرصد الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت و تدريس علوم الفلك فيها، الأبحاث، السنة ١٦، الجزء ٤، ١٩٦٣. (two copies)
- القيس، يوسف، مرصد الأميركية مغمض العينين والسماء ذرفت مطرا على شاهين، النهار، ١٦، ٧، ١٩٩٤.
- AUB Observatory Is Described As Campus' Most Romantic Bldg. (1963). *Al-Kulliyah*, 39(4).
- Francis, Y. (2001). The Old Lee Observatory Building: The Beauty of AUB's Architecture. *Outlook*, XXV(2).
- Gingerich, O. (1956). Observatory Open Nights. *Al-Kulliyah*.
- Gingerich, O. (1957). American University Observatory. *Sky and Telescope*, XVI(5).
- Haddad, F. S. (1988). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 48.
- Haddad, S. (n.d.). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 1988.
- Initiated by Cornelius Van Dyck: Catching Rain and Tracking Stars. (1978). *AUB Today*, (Fall), 5.
- Kanafani, N. (1993, Fall). AUB Observatory Celebrates its 100th Anniversary. *Engineering Newsletter (Supplement of Al-Kulliya)*, (3).
- Penrose, S. B. L. (1970). *That They May Have Lives*. American University of Beirut.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- The Observatory that Was: New Use for Old Building. (1980, April). *AUB Today*, 7.
- A Photograph of the Observatory published in *Outlook*, v.18, no.5, December 21, 1962.
- [Memo], *The Ball Service - for proper time tracking*, July 1, 1914.
- Photograph of the Lee Observatory published in *SPC News Letter*, vol. 1, no. 3, June, 1920.
- Bruin, Francis, *History of the Lee Observatory*, November 19, 1979. (Article framed and hung on Lee-Observatory Wall.)
- Lee Observatory Overview, printed out from the AUB website. (3 copies)
- *The American University Observatory*, Lebanese Astronomical Society.

Series III: Observatory logs and meteorological registers

Boxes2-29: Logs and meteorological records : 1874-1947 Observers : Khalil W. Sayyidah, Veodore H. Pond, Jacob Jureidini, H. Abdun Nur, Leo Waier, Mr. Beshshur Assistant, Zeki H. Heykal and Victor Aramani.

Box30: Handwritten meteorological observations logs: 1948. "Starting with this date the elasticity of vapour will be recorded in millibars instead of millimeters or inches. Also a new hygrometrical table is put into use. V[ictor] Aramouni".

Boxes31-47: Handwritten meteorological observations logs: 1949-1967

Box48: 16 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1894(2), 1895(2), 1896(3), 1897(1), 1897-98(1), 1898 (2), 1899(3), 1900-01(1), 1901(1)

Box49: 22 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs:1901-02(1), 1902-03(1), 1903(2), 1903-04(1), 1904(2), 1904-05(1), 1905(3), 1905-06(1), 1906-09(1), 1906(3), 1906-07(1), 1907(5).

Box50: 10 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1907-08(1), 1908(3), 1909(2), 1909-10 (1), 1910-end of Feb (1), 1910-11(2), 1911(2)

Box51:19 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1912 (3), 1912-13 (1), 1913 (3), 1913-1914 (1), 1914 (3), 1914-15 (1), 1915 (2), 1915-16 (2), 1916 (3)

Box52:13 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs(20 x 15 cms)]: 1917(3), 1918(2), 1918-19(1), 1919(1), 1919-20(1), 1920(1), 1921(2), 1922 (1), 1922-23(1)

Box53: 13 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1923(1), 1923-24(1), 1924 (1), 1924-25(1), 1925(1), 1925-26(1), 1926-27(1), 1927(1), 1927-28(1), 1928-29(1), 1929(1), 1929-30(1), 1930(1)

Box54:11 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1931(1), 1931-32(1), 1932-33(1), 1933(1), 1933-34(1), 1934-35(1), 1935(1), 1935-36(1), 1936(1), 1937(1), 1937-38(1)

Boxes55-75: Small booklets of meteorological observations logs 1938-1983

Box76: Small booklets of meteorological observations logs 1909-1927.

Boxes77-80: Barograph records, Meteorological registers (registers: 45 x 69 cms.)

Oversized meteorological observations logs arranged in four packages:

Package 1: June 1874 - December1880-- January 1881 - December 1890-- January 1891 - December 1900-- January 1901 - December 1910-- Jan. 1911 - Dec. 1920.

Package 2: January 1921 - November 1926-- December 1926 - December 1930-- January 1931 - December 1935 -- January 1936 - December 1940.

Package 3: January 1941 - December 1945-- January 1946 - December 1950-- January 1951 - December 1955-- January 1956 - December 1960- January 1961 - December 1965-- January 1966 - December 1970-- January 1971 - December 1975.

Package 4: Normals January - March 1876-1905. Normals April - June 1876-1905-- Normals July - September 1876-1905-- Normals October - December 1876-1905

Related Material

Digital Material

- [AUB Observatory Brief Description](#)
- [Nikula Shahin Weather Station](#)
- [Petition circulates to turn Lee Observatory into space museum \(Outlook\)](#)

Theses

- [Haddad, Gh. S. \(2005\). *Precipitation Trends and Modeling: Case Study Beirut Region* \(Master's Thesis\). American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon. ST:4578](#)

Publications

Serials

- [Lee Observatory, \[Bulletin\], AUB, Beirut, Lebanon, 1912-1975.](#)

Books

- Hassoun, G. Q. (2013). *Walking Out into the Sunshine: Recollections and Reflections*. Windy City Publishers.
- Ogle, V. (2015). *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950*. Harvard University Press.
- Orchiston, W., Nakamura, T., & Strom, R. G. (Eds.). (2016). *Highlighting the History of Astronomy in the Asia-Pacific Region*. SPRINGER.

Articles

- AUB Observatory Combines Science and Romance. (1963). *Outlook*, 19(3), 6.
- AUB Observatory Is Described As Campus' Most Romantic Bldg. (1963). *Al-Kulliyah*, 39(4).

- Francis, Y. (2001). The Old Lee Observatory Building: The Beauty of AUB's Architecture. *Outlook*, XXV(2).
- Gingerich, O. (1956). Observatory Open Nights. *Al-Kulliyah*.
- Gingerich, O. (1957). American University Observatory. *Sky and Telescope*, XVI(5).
- Haddad, F. S. (1988). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 48.
- Haddad, S. (n.d.). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 1988.
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- Obeid, G. (2016, January 12). Meteorological Department remains Lebanon's reigning expert. *The Daily Star*, p. 4.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- The Observatory that Was: New Use for Old Building. (1980, April). *AUB Today*, 7.
- انتقاض صاعقة على مرصد المدرسة الكلية السورية، الطبيب، الجزء ٩، السنة ١١، شباط، ١٩٠٠.
- البستاني، اميل، شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١.
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- لمحة من المطر من سنة ١٨٥٧ الى نهاية سنة ١٨٩٨، الطبيب، الجزء العاشر، السنة العاشرة، نيسان، ١٨٩٩.
- البستاني، اميل، المرقب الشمسي في الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الثاني، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣٢.
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- الشعار، علي عدنان، الرصد الجوي في لبنان بين الماضي والحاضر، بيروت، ٢٠١٠.
- المطر آت، نظفو المجاري وافتحو السبيل، النهار، ٢٦، ٩، ٢٠١٤.

Conference Papers

- Hajjar, R. (27 -30 June). Astronomy in Lebanon: Past, Present and Future Prospects. Unpublished paper presented at the Ninth United Nations/European Space Agency Workshop on Basic Space Science, Toulouse, France.

Other Archival Material

- [Nikula Shahin Collection 1918-1966, AA:6.2.19.2 :](#)
- [Mansur Hanna Jurdak Collection : AUB Faculty 1901-1964, AA:6.2.10](#)
- [Personnel Department, 1924- 2005: Boxes 8-9, AA:2.5.0.3](#)

Photographs

- [Photograph of the Observatory, ca. 1902-1904.](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1960s](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1974](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1978](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1996](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1998](#)
- [Lee Observatory surrounded by flowers, 1999](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 2007](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 2011](#)
- [Award distribution to staff at Lee Observatory, April 16, 2003.](#)
- [Cornelius Van Dyck, portraits](#)
- [Robert West, portrait](#)
- [Alfred Joy, portrait](#)
- [Julius Brown, portrait](#)
- [Robert Sloane, portrait](#)
- [Owen Gingerich, portrait](#)
- [Frans Bruin, portrait](#)
- [Nicolas Shahin, portrait](#)
- [Mansur Jurdak, Award distribution to faculty for their years of service, 1950s](#)

Audio

- [Bruin, F., & Milki, R. \(1972\). *Meeting with Frans Bruin and Raif Milki, 1972* \[audio file\].](#)

Videos

- [Sarraf, S. \(2016\). *Lee Observatory* \[video file\], retrieved from Youtube.](#)
- [\(2013\). *The Lee Observatory: A Staple of AUB Left to Rust* \[video file\], retrieved from Youtube.](#)