

Chapter 2:

A Society Is Born

On February 7, the PCAPA held a dinner and meeting in its rooms in San Francisco. Holden and the other Lick astronomers were invited to attend, and after dinner Holden gave a talk in which he said: "No greater service has ever been rendered by photography to science than that recently performed by your Society." He then proposed the creation of an Astronomical Society of the Pacific, to provide a means for continuing this sort of cooperation between amateurs and the astronomers at Lick Observatory. There was great enthusiasm for this idea, and a total of forty men signed the Charter Membership Roll: the six staff members from Lick and thirty-four other interested persons, mostly PCAPA members, including fifteen who had been on the Cloverdale expedition.

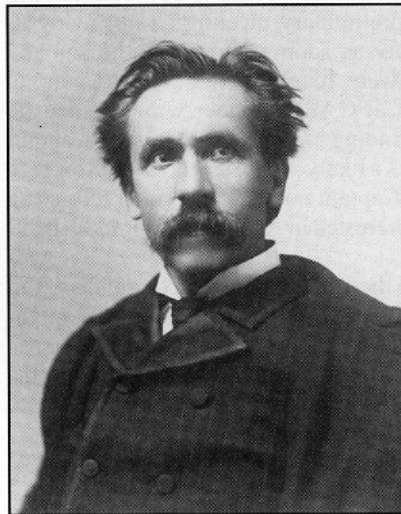
The group drew up bylaws, and elected officers pro-tem to serve until the first annual meeting. Holden was chosen president; John Schaeberle and Burckhalter secretaries; and Eusebius J. Molera, a San Francisco civil engineer of Spanish background, treasurer. The bylaws set the dues at \$5 per year, or \$50 for life membership; as it turned out, these annual dues would not be raised for 62 years!

Holden, Burckhalter, and other eager members immediately set about recruiting more people and spreading the word about the new Society. A circular was distributed to all members of the California Academy of Sciences, the Technical Society, the Microscopical Society, the PCAPA, the Geographical Society of the Pacific, the San Diego Society of Natural History, and the California Historical Society. It was also sent to anyone who was known to have observed the eclipse, and to the teachers and administrators of all California colleges, normal schools, and high schools.

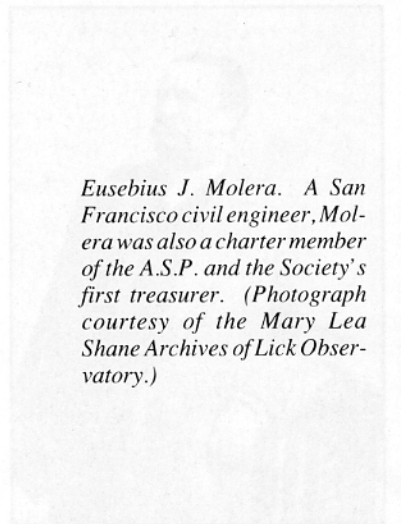
This circular, published together with the bylaws as No. 1 of the *Publications of the A.S.P.*, described the aims of the Society and the benefits of membership as follows:

"The cordial cooperation of many amateur and professional astronomers in the very successful observations of the Solar Eclipse of January 1, 1889, has again brought forward the desirability of organizing an Astronomical Society of the Pacific, in order that this pleasant and close association may not be lost, either as a scientific or as

a social force. You are respectfully invited to become a member of this organization, and to do your part toward making it useful in our community. The new Society is designed to be popular in the best sense of the word. We wish to count in our membership every person on the Pacific Coast who takes a genuine interest in Astronomy, whether he has made special studies in this direction or not, and we believe that every such person will get, and feel that he gets, a full return from the Society, either from its publications or from its meetings. You will observe that the seat of the Society (the place of deposit of its library, collections, etc.) is in San Francisco, where rooms can doubtless be found. Half of the meetings of the Society are to be held there (including the annual meeting). The other half are proposed to be held at the Lick Observatory, on certain Saturdays of the summer months when clear weather is to be expected... It would seem that, in this way, a vivid interest in our science can be created and main-



John M. Schaeberle in 1897. Schaeberle was a charter member of the A.S.P., one of its first secretaries, and a Lick staff astronomer. (Photograph courtesy of the Mary Lea Shane Archives of Lick Observatory.)



Eusebius J. Molera. A San Francisco civil engineer, Molera was also a charter member of the A.S.P. and the Society's first treasurer. (Photograph courtesy of the Mary Lea Shane Archives of Lick Observatory.)

tained, and that a Society possessing such exceptional advantages ought to grow and prosper, and be of real weight in the advancement and in the diffusion of knowledge. We should look forward to the establishment of an astronomical journal of high class, to the formation of a special astronomical library, and especially to the organization of such scientific work as requires cooperation and mutual assistance..."

The names of the forty charter members followed.

Within a week Holden had several hundred copies of this invitation addressed. He also had ordered a rubber stamp to be made to mark books donated to the new society. He himself gave a number of books to the library, and suggested to Burckhalter that he get a lockable bookcase in which to keep these and others they might receive.

Burckhalter was also busy. By February 16 he had A.S.P. letterhead stationery and envelopes. And he wrote Holden: "I can have a large number of members to join at next meeting. Will they be considered charter members? Many think they ought to be — not having a chance at the preliminary meeting. I am ready to 'boom' the society as soon as you give the signal." Other members were recruiting too. For example, James H. Johnson, a PCAPA member, wrote Holden the day after the founding meeting, suggesting Captain Charles Goodall as a likely prospect who should receive a circular: "The Captain possesses a 6 inch refracting telescope and is interested in Astronomy." (Goodall did join.)

Elsewhere in the United States the founding of the new Society was also noted. Burckhalter sent an account of the eclipse expedition to *The Sidereal Messenger*, a popular astronomy magazine published in Northfield, Minnesota; this appeared in the March issue, along with a separate note about the Society:

"The friendly relations which were established between the professional astronomers at Mount Hamilton and the amateur photographers and amateur astronomers of San Jose and coast on the occasion of the recent eclipse of the sun have almost spontaneously resulted in the formation of an astronomical association. Just prior to the eclipse a pamphlet of information relative to it was issued from the Lick Observatory and was widely read and followed by the many photographers and amateur astronomers, and the community of interests of last month led to friendly relations and intercourse. During the first week these culminated in the initiatory steps being taken toward the formation of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific Coast [sic], as first suggested in the field on January 1st."

The editor showed his ignorance of the West by locating the Society in San Jose rather than San Francisco; but the note did bring the Society's existence to the attention of a wider circle of amateur and professional astronomers. A letter Holden wrote to *The Observatory* magazine in England had the same result.

Inquiries and requests for membership began coming in to Holden and Burckhalter. On March 1 Holden wrote to the secretary: "...I am sure the Society will grow naturally and easily." His optimism was justified when a request for life membership arrived from William Alvord, the president of the Bank of California. Holden replied to him: "I will, with the greatest pleasure, propose your name for life-membership in the new Astronomical Society, and I think it very kind of you to write me to this effect. You may be sure that the Society is going to be a success."

On March 30, 1889, the Society held its first regular meeting, in the rooms of the PCAPA. Fifteen new members were elected, including Alvord, Armin O. Leuschner (then a 21-year-old graduate student at the University of California, and later to become a noted astronomer), and Rosa O'Halloran (a San Francisco journalist and the first female member).

The members elected a Board of eleven directors: Alvord, William Boericke, Burckhalter, W. C. Gibbs, C. Mitchell Grant, Holden, Molera, William Pierson, Schaeberle, and Frank Soulé (professor at the Students' Observatory in Berkeley). Holden was confirmed as president, and three vice-presidents (in accordance with the bylaws) were also elected: Pierson, W. H. Lowden, and Soulé. Two secretaries (Schaeberle and Burckhalter) were chosen in order to have one at Lick and one in town; and Molera was confirmed as treasurer. A Finance Committee and a Publications Committee were also set up. These two committees have continued — in evolving form — to the present day.

At this meeting Holden delivered a long address on "The Work of an Astronomical Society" (which was soon published in the Society's journal). In it he re-

William Alvord. President of the Bank of California, Alvord was elected to membership in the A.S.P. during its first regular meeting on March 30, 1889. At that meeting, he was also elected to the Society's first Board of Directors. (Photograph courtesy of the Mary Lea Shane Archives of Lick Observatory.)



emphasized what he had written to Burckhalter a few weeks earlier: "The main point is that the non-professional members shall take an active interest in it, and I think that they will." He remarked upon the great diversity in backgrounds of the members, and hoped that "every class will find a sphere of action in our programme, a stimulus in our proceedings, and a support in our friendly organization." The professional astronomers would benefit by having to explain their work to a lay audience; the amateurs with telescopes would get suggestions as to how best to use their equipment for pleasure and useful results; the photographers would contribute their expertise; some members might have time and energy to devote to the computations necessary to reduce others' observations; and the learners would have ample opportunity to read, listen, and observe. Holden felt very strongly that "meetings should never consist of mere lectures, no matter how interesting. There should be discussion, questions, remarks, interchange of ideas, contact of active minds."

One of the first projects he envisioned for the Society was the creation of an astronomical library, which would be available to all members, and he suggested a list of basic books. The Society should also produce its own publications, which it would give to members and exchange with other astronomical institutions. These publications might include summaries of work at Lick Observatory, but also observations and papers from amateur members, and perhaps translations and reprintings of important papers in other journals. "We should be extremely careful to make our publications fully worthy of the society." He also remarked that "the observations and communications from the amateur members of the society should always constitute the greater part of the publication." But almost from the start this was rarely the case, and at the beginning the Lick astronomers contributed most of the articles. Holden himself wrote many of these, to the point where some of his enemies accused him of making the *Publications* a personal vehicle for self-promotion. But it seems more likely that he merely wanted to insure the success of the Society by keeping the *Publications* active.

Holden concluded his talk with several practical suggestions of projects for the amateur members: photography of the Sun, visual study of the Moon's surface, timing occultations of stars by the Moon, recording the eclipses of Jupiter's satellites, experiments on photography of the zodiacal light, the aurora, and the Milky Way, and the observation of variable stars. If some of these things are done, he said, then "we may look forward to a career of real usefulness not only to our members, but to the science of Astronomy."

Chapter 3:

A Meeting at Lick and a Growing Membership

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the new Society was held on May 25, at Lick Observatory. A trip to Mount Hamilton in 1889 was no trivial task. Members had to take early morning trains to San Jose, where they were met by stage coaches. They were instructed that "the start from San Jose should be made very promptly at ten o'clock, in order to arrive at Smith Creek [a hotel and livery stable part way up the mountain] about half past one. Here, dinner can be had, and by starting promptly, the summit can be reached about four o'clock." (Today the same trip is made by automobile in two hours or so.)

Once the group arrived at Lick, the directors held a meeting in the library, and the Society meeting followed immediately. From seven until ten o'clock the telescopes were open to visitors; Society members could stay after the other visitors left, and observe other



An advertisement in *Sunset* magazine July 1902 placed by the Hotel Vendome to attract visitors to Lick Observatory. (A.S.P. archives)