

Chapter 8:

Membership Drives and an Earthquake

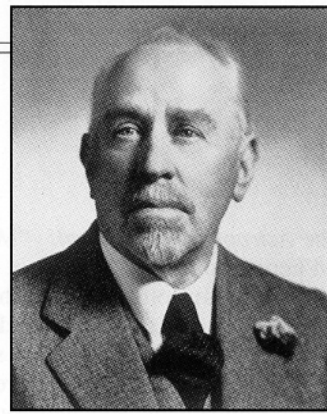
In 1897 Holden resigned as Director of Lick Observatory, as well as from the A.S.P. Board, on which he had served since the founding of the Society. His departure was the climax of a long period of difficulty in getting along with his staff members on the mountain, most of whom did not respect him as a scientist and found him arrogant and overbearing. Complaints to the University of California Board of Regents eventually forced his resignation; he left for the East Coast, where he was presently hired as librarian at West Point, a position he held until his death in 1941. (For more on Holden's life and contentious career, see the article by Donald Osterbrock in the "For Further Reading" section.)

With Holden's departure, the almost exclusive association of the A.S.P. with Lick Observatory began to lessen, and the Society's focus became broader. In 1899 the *P.A.S.P.* began a column of "General Notes," to cover astronomical work done elsewhere than at Lick. In 1905 the column "Notices from the Lick Observatory" became "Notes from Pacific Coast Observatories," primarily due to the founding and rapid growth in importance of the Mount Wilson Solar Observatory near Pasadena in southern California.

George Ellery Hale, formerly director of the Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin, had recognized the high quality of the sky conditions on Pacific Coast mountain tops, and had founded the observatory on Mt. Wilson in 1904 as part of the Carnegie Institute. Its earliest instruments were two solar telescopes, but by 1908 Hale also had a large (60-inch) mirror mounted for stellar use.

Hale, a member of the A.S.P. since 1890, joined the Society's Board of Directors in 1905, "with the understanding, necessarily, that it will be rarely possible for him to attend the meetings on account of the distance between Mount Wilson and San Francisco." Hale served on the Board for twelve years, and was also a frequent contributor of articles to the *Publications* on the work being done at Mount Wilson. This included his own important discovery of the magnetic fields in sunspots, made in 1908.

During the period of financial difficulties described earlier, a letter went out in 1903 to all members



Charles S. Cushing. Cushing was an attorney who was a staunch supporter of the A.S.P. He joined the Society in July of 1889, served on its Board of Directors for 45 continuous years, and was its president for two terms. (Photograph from the April 1946 issue of the Publications of the A.S.P.)

of the Society concerning the necessity of increasing the membership of the A.S.P.: "For some years membership has remained stationary, if it has not actually retrograded; while at the same time there has been a great increase in the population of our State. There are doubtless many who would be glad to join if we could place ourselves in touch with them... This letter is addressed to you because we know that you can assist us in increasing our membership..." The letter was signed by three important leaders of the Society: attorney Charles S. Cushing, Charles Burckhalter, and Armin O. Leuschner of the Students' Observatory at the University of California at Berkeley.

Charles Cushing was a staunch supporter of the A.S.P. who had joined the Society in July 1889, only five months after its founding. He served continuously on the Board of Directors for 45 years (longer than anyone else) and twice held the office of President. Despite his persuasive letter of 1903, however, A.S.P. membership did not increase, but continued to drop very slowly from 260 members in 1903 to 200 in 1915.

Accordingly, in 1916 plans were made for another membership drive, and late in that year some 700 copies of a letter soliciting members were sent out to prospective members, describing the goals, history, and activities of the Society. This effort seems to have had a little more success, as membership jumped to 350 in 1919. The increase continued during the prosperous 1920's, passing a thousand in 1931; but a decline set in after that with the deepening of the Great Depression, and the 1,000 mark was not reached again until 1957.

In 1905 the Board created the title of A.S.P. Patron for "a person who renders distinguished services to the Society." Any Patrons would automatically become Life Members. Seven Patrons were elected: Holden, Donohoe, Montgomery, Miss Bruce, Dolbeer, Alvord, and Pierson. Of these, only Holden was still living at the time. The Patrons of the Society are still listed on the title page of each volume of the *P.A.S.P.* The Society has continued to elect Patrons occasionally over the years; by 1989 thirty-five individuals had received this honor, including Cushing and Hale. The most recently selected Patron is Harold Weaver, a long-time officer and Finance Committee Chair for the A.S.P., of whom we will learn more in later chapters.

For a Society already struggling with money problems, April 18, 1906 brought a most unwelcome event. Early that morning a massive earthquake struck the San Francisco area, toppling buildings, cracking foundations, and breaking gas and water mains. Fires spread and could not be extinguished due to a lack of water. Over the next few days, the entire business district and large parts of the residential areas of the city burned to the ground, including the California Academy of Sciences Building where the A.S.P. then had its rooms.

The Society lost its entire library, collected over the years by gifts and with the help of the Montgomery fund. It also lost many of the records of its first years, all its *P.A.S.P.* files, and the April 1906 issue of the journal, which was about to be mailed.

Undaunted, the Society immediately set about recovery. The April issue, of which one advance copy survived, was immediately reprinted in Los Angeles and distributed. In the June issue, President Leuschner addressed a statement to the members: "The first regular meeting of the Society since the California earthquake of April 18th, and the subsequent conflagration in San Francisco, was held on the evening of June 9th. By courtesy of the president of the University of California, the members of the society were welcomed

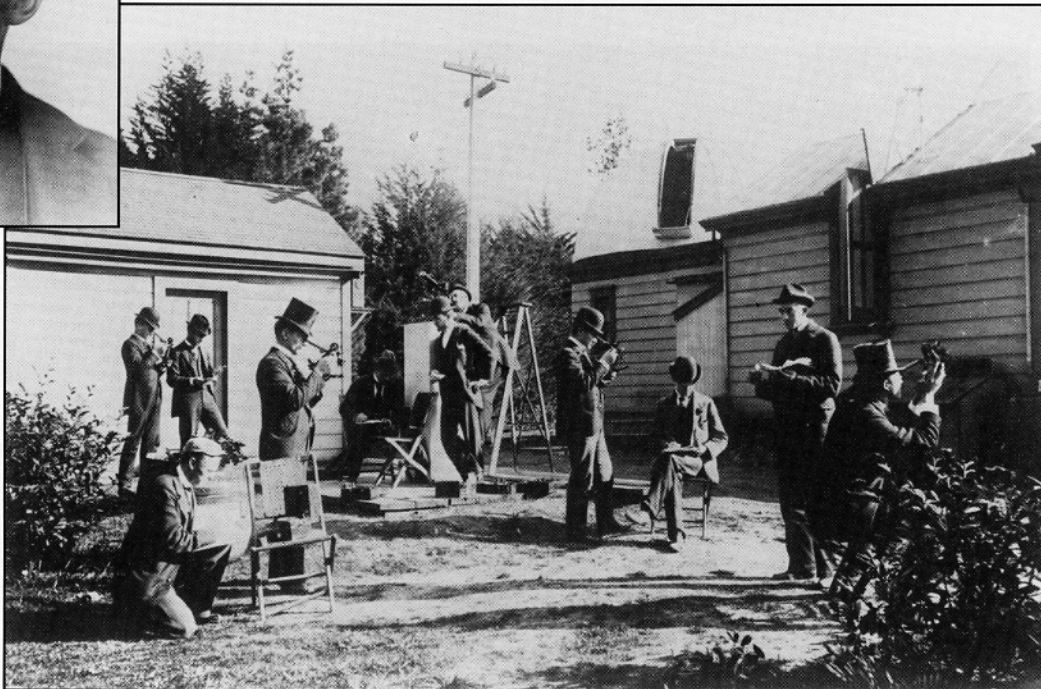
to a temporary home in the Students' Observatory at Berkeley."

After describing the A.S.P.'s losses, Leuschner wrote: "The insurance of \$2500, which the society carried on its belongings, in the Academy of Sciences Building, will suffice only for a partial restoration of its property... Nevertheless, the president and the directors are confident that an appeal to be issued to the leading astronomical observatories and societies as well as to authors, will soon give the society a new and valuable library... The present number 108 [of the *P.A.S.P.*] has been unavoidably delayed, but from now on the *Publications* will continue to appear as though nothing had happened."

The Finance Committee reported that the Society's permanent funds were safe, and that a new \$500 bequest had just been received. Leuschner also expressed gratitude for the loyal members around the world. He concluded: "The society has lost none of its enthusiasm and will continue to disseminate the results of research in the oldest and noblest of sciences, through lectures and publications, with ever increasing vigor and let it be hoped, effectiveness." For the next several years the Society continued to meet at and operate out of the Students' Observatory, until it obtained new downtown San Francisco headquarters in the Phelan Building in 1909.



Armin O. Leuschner as a young man. Leuschner joined the A.S.P. as a student at the first meeting, and later served the Society as a Director and as President. He was President at the time of the devastating earthquake and fire in 1906. (Photograph courtesy of the Mary Lea Shane Archives of Lick Observatory.)



Students' Observatory on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley in 1890. It became the temporary home of the A.S.P. after the earthquake and fire destroyed the Society's San Francisco headquarters in 1906. Students' Observatory was later renamed Leuschner Observatory. (Photograph by O. V. Lange reproduced courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.)