

## SOCIETY

## OUR TOWN REMEMBERED

# Mt. Pleasant once had an observatory

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THE MT. PLEASANT AREA HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

Mt. Pleasant had an observatory.

That's right, yet another marvel in this town of never-ending wonders.

The facility was located in the very center of Frick Park.

Inside this observatory there was a Brashear Refractor Telescope that was 12-feet-tall and six-inches in diameter.

It was owned by the Mt. Pleasant Area School District.

How did the school district acquire such wonders?

They were a gift from hometown boy Henry Clay Frick.

According to *The Outlook*, a magazine of the day, the observatory opened in 1894. The telescope was created by another regional genius — John Brashear.

Brashear, born in Brownsville, became one of the most successful producers of telescopes and precision scientific instruments in the world and was head of the Allegheny Observatory in Pittsburgh.

He is the subject of the new

Pittsburgh film "The Undaunted."

So, the telescope belonging to Mt. Pleasant was and still is quite a trophy.

However, perhaps it was too sophisticated an instrument and building for such a small town.

Although the institute also asked for and was granted permission to use the telescope, it soon fell to ruin. The building was neglected.

The brass on the telescope was being destroyed from the coke oven environment of the area. Brashear was upset.

In a letter to Frick on June 2, 1903 he complained to Frick.

On January 8, 1904, Brashear told Frick he had taken back the neglected telescope and repaired the observatory building.

He noted: "I cannot refrain from saying that the authorities of Mt. Pleasant were shamefully neglectful of your gift, and I confess I considered it almost sacrilege to see the condition of the instrument, with many of the parts gone and the rest not cared for."

For overhauling the telescope Brashear, billed Frick \$340.75.

In defense of the school district, they lamented that they could not afford the annual expense for repairs and maintenance of the telescope.

Could it be that this was too large a gift for the small community?

It is believed that the telescope was never returned to Mt. Pleasant.

Was this a decision of Brashear the builder or Frick the buyer? And, where did the telescope go?

At first, in an Internet discussion with Glenn A. Walsh of Friends of the Zeiss and Bart Fried of the Antique Telescope Society, it was deduced that the telescope was in Vermont.

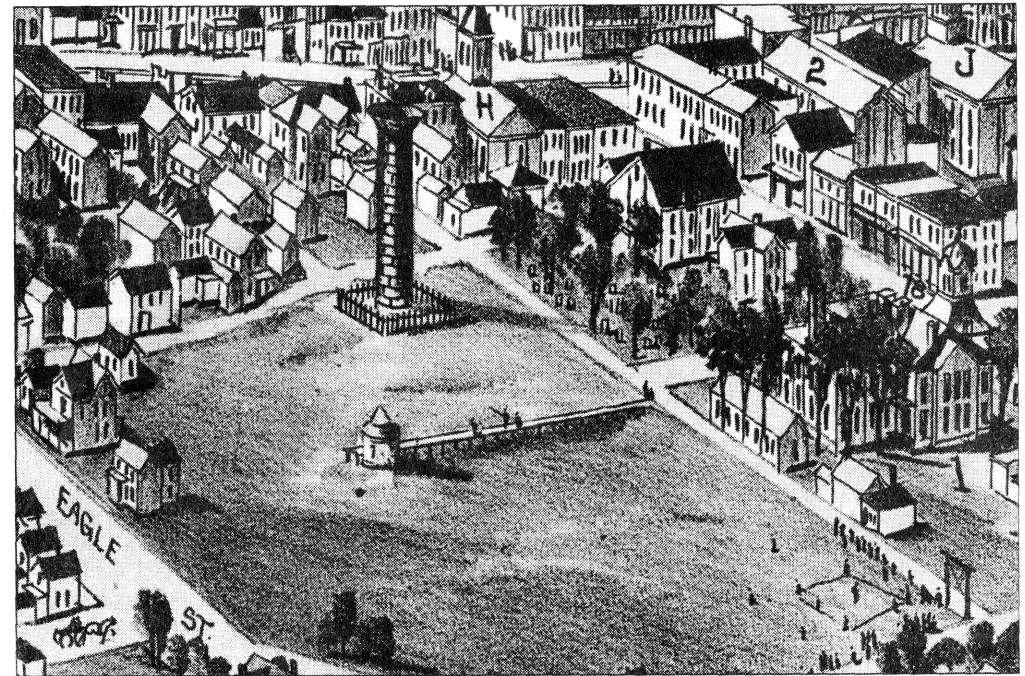
Fried believed that, in 1915, the Mt. Pleasant telescope was given to the Peabody Institute of Salem, Mass.

There, too, it remained mostly unused as they kept it in the basement.

In 1939, it was sent on to Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass.

In 2003, the academy gave it to John Briggs who, in 2005, sold it to astronomy aficionado Matt Considine of Vermont.

But that telescope does not



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An early 1900s-era Fowler map which includes the Mt. Pleasant Observatory, with its domed top, in Frick Park.

show evidence of the brass being coated by nickel and the nameplate of John Brashear that appeared on the Mt. Pleasant telescope on that telescope is of much more recent origin than 1894.

So, it's back to the begin-

ning.

Where is Mt. Pleasant's telescope?