

Bethinking of Old Orleans

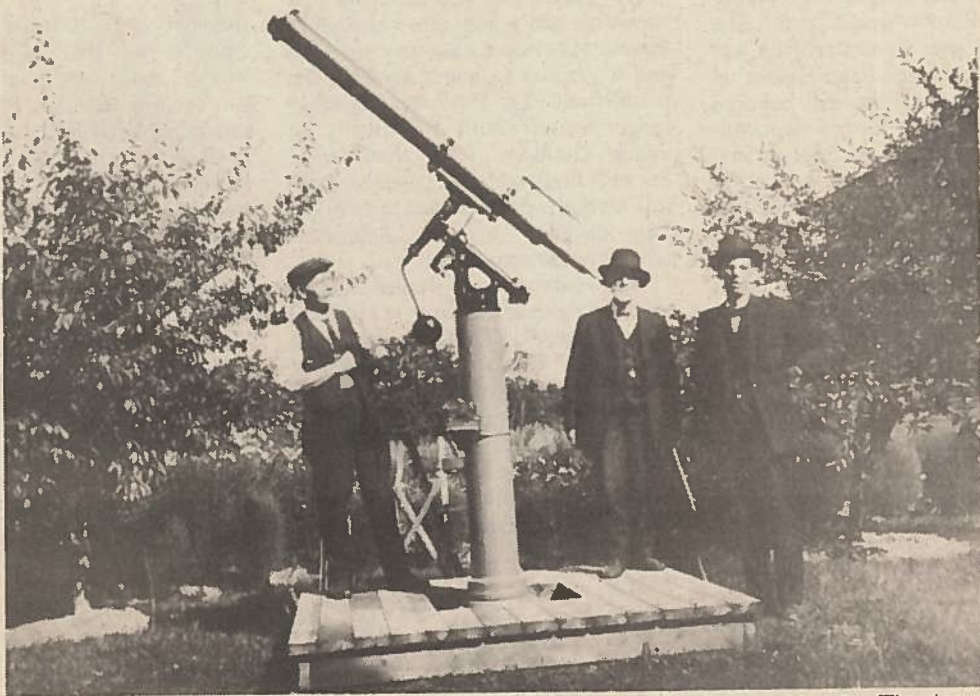
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STAR GAZER



Our photo this week comes to us through the courtesy of Miss Florence Johnson of Albion. With the 25th anniversary of men landing on the moon and the recent comet colliding with Jupiter, she thought this picture might be timely and of local interest. Florence Johnson took this snapshot over seventy years ago on Ingersoll Street showing Weston Wetherbee's homemade telescope. Shown standing on the platform is Wilbur Phillips of Michigan and "Uncle" John Gilmore who died in 1924. Weston Wetherbee is the tall gentleman at the right.

Around the time this picture was taken, the Holley Standard ran an article on Mr. Wetherbee under the title "Hunter of Stars" with a sub-title "A Citizen Well Known in Albion." Here, verbatim is the story from this old news clipping:

"Hunting means seasonal trips afield to many people, but there is a man in Albion who hunts the year 'round — in his own back yard. He is Weston Wetherbee, hunter of stars. He never studied astronomy in school or college, yet he is a recognized astronomer. He has no university titles nor degrees, yet he has made discoveries. Many think the building in his back yard is a garage, but it is his observatory. He seldom talks of his hobby; when he does it is with the authority of an expert.

"Wetherbee, once the sheriff of Orleans County, built his own telescope, making the pattern as

well as the mechanical parts. The lens is a five-inch refractor and the pedestal supporting it is four and a half high. It is mounted on a concrete base. The roof of what appears to be the family garage, slides back — and Wetherbee's hunting ground is spread before him.

"I can get everything right to the horizon, a clear sweep from here," said Mr. Wetherbee as he pulled the cord which opens the room to demonstrate. "I can see all the craters in the moon and the snow caps and markings on Mars, Saturn's rings, the markings on Jupiter's belt and the transit of the satellites, clearly. In fact, there's very little I don't get that may be seen through the largest telescope."

"Wetherbee has an eclipse camera, another for taking sun spots and a dark room for developing the pictures. Still another bit of equipment is a portable mounting for the telescope, so that he may take the instrument on his motor tours.

"For years Wetherbee sought for comets, and finally was mentioned in November, 1911 as being one of the discoverers of the comet Belijawsky.

"On three occasions Wetherbee discovered comets just a little later than the ones for whom they are named." — Holley Standard

Weston Wetherbee was Orleans County Sheriff for one term which was 1905-1906. I find him listed in the 1926 Orleans County Directory as a salesman living at 5 Ingersoll Street.