



Welcome to the Lowell Observatory Archives



Albert George Wilson

Albert George Wilson was born on July 28, 1918 in Houston, Texas. His higher education began at the Rice Institute, where he received his B.S. degree in 1941 in Electrical Engineering. He continued on to the California Institute of Technology, where he worked as a teaching fellow in mathematics from 1941 to 1944, receiving a M.S. in 1942. He then served as a radar officer in the Navy from 1944 to 1946. Upon return he received a PhD in mathematics in 1947. Wilson then served as a senior research fellow in astrophysics at Caltech from 1947 to 1949, participating in a supernova search program and teaching dynamical astronomy. He then joined the staff of the Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories, and was astronomer in charge of observations for the National Geographic-Palomar Observatory Sky Survey, discovering new members of the local group of galaxies and several earth orbit crossing asteroids.

Wilson came to Lowell Observatory in 1953 as the assistant director, and became the director in 1954. He held this post until January 3rd, 1957. While at Lowell, Wilson did much to invigorate the institution. For example, with the National Geographic Society, supporting the "Mars Expedition" of 1954 in which Lowell Observatory staff traveled to Pretoria, South Africa in order to observe the Mars opposition of that year; with Northern Arizona University, supporting a joint eclipse expedition to Sri Lanka; with Johns Hopkins, exploring the possibilities for planetary observations with experimental electronic photography; and promoting planetary astronomy with a first "Astrobiology Seminar." Wilson was elected a councilor of the American Astronomical Society, 1955-1958.

After Wilson left his post as the director of Lowell Observatory, he became a senior member of the research staff of the Rand Corporation, where he worked from 1957 until 1966. In 1962, he was the founding editor of the astronomical magazine Icarus. In 1966, he accepted the position of associate director of Douglas Advanced Research Labs, which he held from 1966 until 1972. Wilson then became an adjunct professor at USC, teaching courses in philosophy and science until his retirement. After retiring Wilson was associated with the Institute for Man and Science and the Institute of the Future, lecturing and consulting for both groups. Wilson died at his home in Sebastopol, California on August 27, 2012.