

OBSERVATORY OF LONE PINE

by Leslie A. Hancock

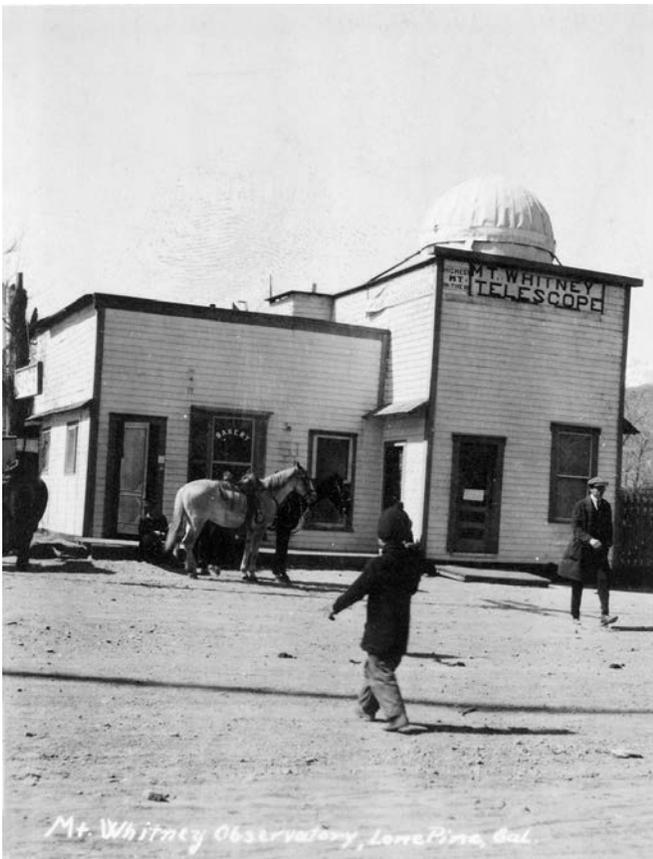
An engineering feat by William Charles Probasco, away back in the early 1920's, so that he could further his studies of astronomy.

In this small town of Lone Pine, California, on the main street, was a two-story flat-top building with a very special Observatory Dome on the second story with a Dome having one V shape opening, it would turn on rollers so that viewers could see up or down, north, south, east or west. A telescope set inside the Dome, could also be turned so that the heavenly bodies - fixed stars, planets, satellites, comets, and eclipses could be studied, also to view human affairs on the mountains, hills or main street.

This was not as large as the Telescope that is now on top of Mt. Wilson, but for that day and era, a period of history having some special characteristics, this was a big Telescope. Many tourists looked through it as well as all friends in this nice little town, and at night the stars and the moon could be viewed.

Wm. Chas. Probasco climbed Mt. Whitney, "The highest mountain in the U.S. before Alaska", and took a flag with him and placed it on top of the rock monument that he helped to build. The flag could be seen through the Telescope from this Dome at fifteen miles distance.

Another feat - many pictures were taken through the Telescope. Very remarkable, kinda unbelievable, yet as you look at the picture, it is real - a picture of Mt. Whitney taken through a Telescope, at fifteen Crow-miles distance. He also took several pictures of tourists or climbers on Mt.



Whitney trails, even of two couples from Lone Pine. Looking to the east, viewing some of the mines and partly dug holes was of interest, because as the Telescope was turned, a spot came into view. "Some one should dig there?" Might be a chance to make his weight in GOLD.

Now looking down and into the Telescope in this Dome, one could see most of the Main Street, north and south of Lone Pine. Many interesting sights for people-watching. A special one was to watch the attendant at a Garage and Service Station in the next block, to check the oil. If it was a dip stick car, and on the side of the view from the telescope, the viewer could be sure a quart of oil would be sold, as the viewer could see the attendant did not push the dip stick all the way down. This was seen for sure.

Wm. Chas. had this Telescope and Dome as a hobby. He had several books on the Moon and Stars and wrote several letters to the Lone Pine and Los Angeles papers, which were published. He had a gift for writing, along with many other

hobbies. Two newspaper reporters wrote an article in the Los Angeles Times and a picture of Mt. Whitney was printed in the Times Section.

A few years after Wm. Chas. passed on, the Telescope was sold to Ellis Sterling. He had a service station and garage on Main Street and placed the Telescope there in position for viewing Mt. Whitney. It was quite a tourist attraction.

The building was something else to see. It had living quarters for the Probasco family; Wm. Chas., Minnie, Nellie, and George. They had a restaurant and bakery with many tasty foods by Wm. Chas. and Minnie, and served by Nellie.

A large part of the building was used as a town hall for meetings. Wm. Chas. was for some time Justice of the Peace, and the Court of Law was held in this room. At one time a show house for the latest movies, "Hoot Gibson, and the Others," a reel at a time, with a break for the next reel. The projector-operator was his grandson Leslie. He got them all mixed up, running them backwards - what fun, though!

The room was also used for storage, as it was dark inside. Many boxes of apples from the Manzanar harvest were there for sale, but mainly for the Delicious Pies that everyone enjoyed. Applesauce to clear the way and to fill up the out-house. "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." I heard this many a time, yet I wonder. I know for sure the food was good. I remember eating everything, YUM YUM!

Before this building, Wm. Chas. had another restaurant on Main Street. I have often wondered, for many years, if Amos (my dad) knew the food had any taste, or was he only going to the restaurant to make goo-goo eyes at the waitress? I guess it was everything, as he won her, to serve him food and love for many a year thereafter, along with children: Delmer, Leslie, Anson, and Marva.

Wm. Chas. Probasco has many more stories to be told about him. He had an active life, though he came to an early end - 1864 to 1929. His children are trying to complete his ideals.