



Archives and Special Collections Department,  
American University of Beirut  
Beirut, Lebanon  
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## **Lee Observatory Collection, 1874-1979**

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the University Libraries, AUB  
Prepared by Iman Abdallah Abu Nader

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## Descriptive Summary

**Call No:** AA: 1.8

**Library Catalog ID:** [b14617687](#)

**Record Creator:** Lee- Astro-Physical Observatory, Lee Observatory, AUB Observatory (1874-1978).

**Collection Title:** Lee Observatory Collection, 1874-1979.

**Collection Dates:** 1874-1979

**Physical Description:** Approximately **84 boxes**, (boxes and packages), 25 photos.

**Abstract:** Established in 1874, the Lee Observatory was founded under the supervision of Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck and was later reconstructed and renovated in 1894 under the supervision of Dr. Robert West. The operational activities of the observatory included timekeeping, weather forecasting, and the recording of celestial movements and events. All the observations made, and the data collected by the professors and the student assistants were kept in logs on a daily basis and were later published in a monthly bulletin.

**Language(s):** English

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions:** The collection can be used within the premises of the Archives and Special Collections Department, Jafet Memorial Library, American University of Beirut.

**Photocopying Restriction:** No photocopying restriction except for fragile and handwritten material.

**Preferred Citation:** Lee Observatory Collection, 1874-1979, AUB, AA: 1.8, Box no., File no., Archives and Special Collections, American University of Beirut/University Libraries

## Scope and Content

This collection includes historical and administrative information; logs and registries of meteorological data and astronomical observations; as well as a few publications based on research conducted at the observatory and the University.

The Lee observatory stands out as one of the oldest observatories in the Middle East. Its historical records document the history of astronomy, physics, meteorology in the region, and are of great significance to cultural historians, and scholars who are interested in physics, astronomical and meteorological research, and the history of science in the region. It is an invaluable source for meteorologists, scientists, scholars, and activists interested in climate change, water and geographic studies, as well as sustainable agriculture and ecology in the region.

## Arrangement

The collection is arranged in three series:

**Series I:** Lee Observatory documents including correspondence, and some

- administrative documents, e.g. a list of directors
- Series II:** Observatory logs and meteorological registers
- Series III:** Publications comprising articles about the observatory, its history and operational activity

## **Historical Background**

Considered one of the oldest observatories of the Middle East, the Lee Observatory was among the first buildings erected on the Campus of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC as AUB was known). It was founded under the supervision of Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck who was trained as a practicing physician, but also had a serious interest in astronomy and physics. This interest led Van Dyck to secure the necessary funds to build an observatory, raising a hefty donation of 150 pounds from the British Merchant Henry Lee, and financing the purchase of some astronomical equipment out of pocket, --including a 10-inch Newtonian telescope--which he then donated to the University upon his resignation in 1883. The building, which was edified in 1874, was called the Lee Astro-Physical Observatory. With the assistance of Faris Nimr, Van Dyck kept meteorological records, which he sent to the Ottoman authorities via telegraph on a daily basis.

Following Van Dyck's resignation in 1883, Robert West became the Director of the observatory, during which time he designed a new building that would accommodate a 12-inch telescope. Professor Charles Young (then at Princeton) approved West's design and the construction of the new building was launched in 1892 and terminated in 1894. New equipment were added later such as "*a spectroscope, a 7-inch photographic doublet (1906) and a spectrohelioscope (1927)*" (Hajjar, 2000).

Throughout its service, the observatory witnessed several celestial events, one of which was the observation of the Haley comet in 1910 by the then director Alfred Joy. It also kept logs of several operational activities such as timekeeping and weather forecasts, and was also used for religious purposes such as detecting the moon crescent for the month of Ramadan (reports were sent to Dar el Fatwa in Beirut). Throughout its years of service, the observatory kept logs and published a monthly bulletin, 1912-1975, and several articles about the recorded observations, which form the bulk of this collection.

Although it passed through a rough patch during the two World Wars, the observatory was kept running thanks to the efforts of many people including Raymond S. Dungan, Mansour H. Jurdak, George M. Maler and Alfred H. Joy, Nicolas Shahin and Emile Bustani to name a few, and remained completely functional until it was shut down, and the astronomy classes were discontinued in 1979.

## **Subject Headings**

- American University of Beirut -- Buildings.
- American University of Beirut -- Employees.
- American University of Beirut -- Observatories.
- American University of Beirut. Faculty of Arts and Sciences.
- Asteroids.

Astronomy -- Data processing.  
Astronomy -- Databases.  
Atmospheric pressure.  
Constellations.  
Meteorology -- History.  
Meteorology -- Lebanon -- Beirut -- Observations.  
Meteorology -- Textbooks.  
Rainfall rate.  
Seismology.  
Sunspots.  
Telescopes -- Design and construction.  
Winds -- Speed -- Lebanon -- Beirut.

## **Container List**

### **Series I: Lee Observatory documents including its history and a list of its directors**

#### **Box 1:**

- **File 2:**
  - West, R.H., *Observatory*, July 10, 1889. (A brief report highlighting the conditions, functions and necessities of the observatory.) [Manuscript and typed].
  - Letter from the Minister Resident of the United States at Constantinople to the U.S. vice Consulate General at Beirut, June 3, 1874 (Written in French).
  - Memoranda from Sir Howard Grubb to Professor R. H. West. (March 15, 1893; April 29, 1893).
  - Memorandum from Sir Howard Grubb to Stuart Dodge, March 11, 1893.
  - Letter from Sir Howard Grubb to Robert West, March 25, 1893.
  - Advice of goods from Sir Howard Grubb to Robert West: April 11, 1893.
  - Memorandum describing the erection of the dome, May 9, 1893.
  - Copy book of meteorological entries.
  - Several empty envelopes.
  
- **File 3:**
  - Printout documents of the archival directory of the Directors of the Observatory and a portrait of each:
    - Cornelius Van Dyck
    - Robert West
    - Alfred Joy
    - Julius Brown
    - Robert Sloane
    - Owen Gingerich
    - Frans Bruin
  - A copy of President Peter Dorman's address at the conferring ceremony of the Honorary Doctorate to Owen Gingerich.

- A copy of Owen Gingerich's Honorary Doctorate Address.

## Series II: Publications

### Box 1:

#### - File 1:

- Dans "L'Orient" du 2 Octobre 1964, Beyrouth et le Liban. (n.d.).
- Haddad, G. S. (2005). (M.A. Thesis). *Precipitation Trends and Modeling: Case Study Beirut Region*. American University of Beirut. Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. Department of Land and Water Resources.
- Hajjar, R. (27 -30 June). Astronomy in Lebanon: Past, Present and Future Prospects. Presented at the Ninth United Nations/European Space Agency Workshop on Basic Space Science, Toulouse, France.
- Last Glance: Lee Observatory. (2008). *AUB Main Gate, IV(4)*.
- Obeid, G. (2016, January 12). Meteorological Department remains Lebanon's reigning expert. *The Daily Star*, p. 4.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- بروين، فرنسيس، مرصد الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت و تدريس علوم الفلك فيها، الأبحاث، السنة ١٦، الجزء ٤، ١٩٦٣.
- البستاني، اميل، شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١. (two copies)
- لمحة من المطر من سنة ١٨٥٧ الى نهاية سنة ١٨٩٨، الطبيب، الجزء العاشر، السنة العاشرة، نيسان، ١٨٩٩.
- البستاني، اميل، المرقب الشمسي في الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الثاني، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣٢. (two copies)
- التأثيرات على الطاقة والزراعة في لبنان، السفير، ١٢، ٢٢، ٢٠٠٩.
- الشعار، علي عدنان، الرصد الجوي في لبنان بين الماضي والحاضر، بيروت، ٢٠١٠.
- قبل ٥٠ سنة أمطرت في بيروت والجبل، ٧، ٧، ٢٠٠٩.
- ساعات و يقع الاصطدام العظيم بالمشترى فلنصبر اشهرا حتى تصلنا صور "غاليليو"، النهار، ١٧، ٧، ١٩٩٤.
- شاهين، منى، مرصد نقولا شاهين: جردة للمطر في نيسان، النهار، ٣، ٥، ٢٠١٣.
- المطرات، نظفو المجاري وافتحو السبيل، النهار، ٢٦، ٩، ٢٠١٤.
- المشنوق تسلّم نتائج التقييم المدني للاستراتيجية الوطنية للمياه، الأنوار، ٣، ٦، ٢٠١٥.

### Physical Plant Section AA: 2.5.3.3.2.3.

#### File 5: Lee Observatory

- انقضاء صاعقة على مرصد المدرسة الكلية السورية، الطبيب، الجزء ٩، السنة ١١، شباط، ١٩٠٠.
- البستاني، اميل، شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١.
- بروين، فرنسيس، مرصد الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت و تدريس علوم الفلك فيها، الأبحاث، السنة ١٦، الجزء ٤، ١٩٦٣. (two copies)
- القيس، يوسف، مرصد الأميركية مغمض العينين والسماء نرفت مطرا على شاهين، النهار، ١٦، ٧، ١٩٩٤.
- AUB Observatory Is Described As Campus' Most Romantic Bldg. (1963). *Al-Kulliyah*, 39(4).
- Francis, Y. (2001). The Old Lee Observatory Building: The Beauty of AUB's Architecture. *Outlook*, XXV(2).
- Gingerich, O. (1956). Observatory Open Nights. *Al-Kulliyah*.

- Gingerich, O. (1957). American University Observatory. *Sky and Telescope*, XVI (5).
- Haddad, F. S. (1988). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 48.
- Haddad, S. (n.d.). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 1988.
- Initiated by Cornelius Van Dyck: Catching Rain and Tracking Stars. (1978). *AUB Today*, (Fall), 5.
- Kanafani, N. (1993, Fall). AUB Observatory Celebrates its 100th Anniversary. *Engineering Newsletter (Supplement of Al-Kulliya)*, (3).
- Penrose, S. B. L. (1970). *That They May Have Lives*. American University of Beirut.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- The Observatory that Was: New Use for Old Building. (1980, April). *AUB Today*, 7.
- A Photograph of the Observatory published in Outlook, v.18, no.5, December 21, 1962.
- [Memo], *The Ball Service - for proper time tracking*, July 1, 1914.
- Photograph of the Lee Observatory published in SPC News Letter, vol. 1, no. 3, June 1920.
- Bruin, Francis, *History of the Lee Observatory*, November 19, 1979. (Article framed and hung on Lee-Observatory Wall.)
- Lee Observatory Overview, printed out from the AUB website. (3 copies)
- *The American University Observatory*, Lebanese Astronomical Society.

### **Series III: Observatory logs and meteorological registers**

**Boxes 2-29:** Logs and meteorological records: 1874-1947 Observers: Khalil W. Sayyidah, Veodore H. Pond, Jacob Jureidini, H. Abdun Nur, Leo Waier, Mr. Beshshur Assistant, Zeki H. Heykal, and Victor Aramani.

**Box 30:** Handwritten meteorological observations logs: 1948. "Starting with this date the elasticity of vapour will be recorded in millibars instead of millimeters or inches. Also a new hygrometrical table is put into use. V[ictor] Aramouni".

**Boxes 31-47:** Handwritten meteorological observations logs: 1949-1967

**Box 48:** 16 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1894(2), 1895(2), 1896(3), 1897(1), 1897-98(1), 1898 (2), 1899(3), 1900-01(1), 1901(1)

**Box 49:** 22 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1901-02(1), 1902-03(1), 1903(2), 1903-04(1), 1904(2), 1904-05(1), 1905(3), 1905-06(1), 1906-09(1), 1906(3), 1906-07(1), 1907(5).

**Box 50:** 10 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1907-08(1), 1908(3), 1909(2), 1909-10 (1), 1910-end of Feb (1), 1910-11(2), 1911(2)

**Box 51:** 19 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1912 (3), 1912-13 (1), 1913 (3), 1913-1914 (1), 1914 (3), 1914-15 (1), 1915 (2), 1915-16 (2), 1916 (3)

**Box 52:** 13 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs(20 x 15 cms): 1917(3), 1918(2), 1918-19(1), 1919(1), 1919-20(1), 1920(1), 1921(2), 1922 (1), 1922-23(1)

**Box 53:** 13 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1923(1), 1923-24(1), 1924 (1), 1924-25(1), 1925(1), 1925-26(1), 1926-27(1), 1927(1), 1927-28(1), 1928-29(1), 1929(1), 1929-30(1), 1930(1)

**Box 54:** 11 Small booklets of meteorological observations logs: 1931(1), 1931-32(1), 1932-33(1), 1933(1), 1933-34(1), 1934-35(1), 1935(1), 1935-36(1), 1936(1), 1937(1), 1937-38(1)

**Boxes 55-75:** Small booklets of meteorological observations logs 1938-1983.

**Box 76:** Small booklets of meteorological observations logs 1909-1927.

**Boxes 77-80:** Barograph records, Meteorological registers (registers: 45 x 69 cms.)

**Oversized meteorological observations logs arranged in four packages:**

**Package 1:** June 1874 - December 1880-- January 1881 - December 1890-- January 1891 - December 1900-- January 1901 - December 1910-- Jan. 1911 - Dec. 1920.

**Package 2:** January 1921 - November 1926-- December 1926 - December 1930-- January 1931 - December 1935 -- January 1936 - December 1940.

**Package 3:** January 1941 - December 1945-- January 1946 - December 1950-- January 1951 - December 1955-- January 1956 - December 1960- January 1961 - December 1965-- January 1966 - December 1970-- January 1971 - December 1975.

**Package 4:** Normals January - March 1876-1905. Normals April - June 1876-1905-- Normals July - September 1876-1905-- Normals October - December 1876-1905.

## **Related Material**

### **Digital Material**

- [AUB Observatory Brief Description](#)
- [Nikula Shahin Weather Station](#)
- [Petition circulates to turn Lee Observatory into space museum \(Outlook\)](#)

### **Theses**

- [Haddad, Gh. S. \(2005\). \*Precipitation Trends and Modeling: Case Study Beirut Region\* \(Master's Thesis\). American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon. ST:4578](#)

## Periodicals

- [Lee Observatory, \[Bulletin\], AUB, Beirut, Lebanon, 1912-1975.](#)

## Books

- Hassoun, G. Q. (2013). *Walking Out into the Sunshine: Recollections and Reflections*. Windy City Publishers. [CA 956.94:H355w:c.1](#)
- Ogle, V. (2015). *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950*. Harvard University Press.
- Orchiston, W., Nakamura, T., & Strom, R. G. (Eds.). (2016). *Highlighting the History of Astronomy in the Asia-Pacific Region*. SPRINGER.

## Articles

- AUB Observatory Combines Science and Romance. (1963). *Outlook*, 19(3), 6.
- AUB Observatory Is Described As Campus' Most Romantic Bldg. (1963). *Al-Kulliyah*, 39(4).
- Francis, Y. (2001). The Old Lee Observatory Building: The Beauty of AUB's Architecture. *Outlook*, XXV(2).
- Gingerich, O. (1956). Observatory Open Nights. *Al-Kulliyah*.
- Gingerich, O. (1957). American University Observatory. *Sky and Telescope*, XVI(5).
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- Haddad, S. (n.d.). Letter to the Editor. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Spring), 1988.
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- Kanafani, N. (1993). AUB Observatory Celebrates its 100th Anniversary. *Engineering Newsletter (Supplement of Al-Kulliyah)*, Fall(3).
- Last Glance: Lee Observatory. (2008). *AUB Main Gate*, IV(4).
- Obeid, G. (2016, January 12). Meteorological Department remains Lebanon's reigning expert. *The Daily Star*, p. 4.
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- Shaheen Haffar, N. (1988). The Observatory of the Stars. *Al-Kulliyah*, (Autumn/Winter).
- The Observatory that Was: New Use for Old Building. (1980, April). *AUB Today*, 7.
- *انتقاض صاعقة على مرصد المدرسة الكلية السورية، الطيب، الجزء ٩، السنة ١١، شباط، ١٩٠٠.*
- *البستاني، اميل. شيء جديد في مرصد الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الأول، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣١.*
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- *القيس، يوسف. مرصد الأميركية مغمض العينين والسماء ذرفت مطرا على شاهين، النهار، ١٦، ٧، ١٩٩٤.*



- لمحة من المطر من سنة ١٨٥٧ الى نهاية سنة ١٨٩٨ ، الطيب، الجزء العاشر، السنة العاشرة، نيسان، ١٨٩٩.
- البستاني، اميل. المرقب الشمسي في الجامعة، الكلية، الجزء الثاني، المجلد ١٨، ١٩٣٢.
- التأثيرات على الطاقة والزراعة في لبنان، السفير، ١٢، ٢٢، ٢٠٠٩.
- الشعار، علي عدنان. الرصد الجوي في لبنان بين الماضي والحاضر، بيروت، ٢٠١٠.
- المطر آت، نظفو المجاري واقتحو السبيل، النهار، ٢٦، ٩، ٢٠١٤.

### Conference Papers

- Hajjar, R. (27 -30 June). Astronomy in Lebanon: Past, Present and Future Prospects. Unpublished paper presented at the Ninth United Nations/European Space Agency Workshop on Basic Space Science, Toulouse, France.

### Archival Material

- [Nikula Shahin Collection 1918-1966, AA:6.2.19.2](#)
- [Mansour Jurdak Collection: AUB Faculty 1901-1964, AA:6.2.10](#)
- [Personnel Department, 1924- 2005: Boxes 8-9, AA:2.5.0.3](#)

### Photographs

- [Photograph of the Observatory, ca. 1902-1904.](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1960s](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1974](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1978](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1996](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 1998](#)
- [Lee Observatory surrounded by flowers, 1999](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 2007](#)
- [Lee Observatory, 2011](#)
- [Award distribution to staff at Lee Observatory, April 16, 2003.](#)
- [Cornelius Van Dyck, portraits.](#)
- [Robert West, portrait.](#)
- [Alfred Joy, portrait.](#)
- [Julius Brown, portrait.](#)
- [Robert Sloane, portrait.](#)
- [Owen Gingerich, portrait.](#)
- [Frans Bruin, portrait.](#)
- [Nicolas Shahin, portrait.](#)
- [Mansur Jurdak, Award distribution to faculty for their years of service, 1950s.](#)

### Audio

- [Bruin, F., & Milki, R. \(1972\). Meeting with Frans Bruin and Raif Milki, 1972 \[audio file\].](#)

## Videos

- [Sarraf, S. \(2016\). \*Lee Observatory\* \[video file\], retrieved from Youtube.](#)
- [\(2013\). \*The Lee Observatory: A Staple of AUB Left to Rust\* \[video file\], retrieved from Youtube.](#)