

Mitchel 180th Celebration Speaker & Talk Information

Speaker: Phil Shoemaker

Talk Title: Discovering Ormsby Mitchel

Talk Description: This talk will explore the pivotal role of our founder, Ormsby Macknight Mitchel, and Cincinnati in the development of astronomy and science during the Antebellum Period. Focusing on Mitchel's contributions to the field, the speaker will present a new interpretation of his work, informed by recently uncovered sources. While briefly touching on Mitchel's involvement in the Civil War, the primary focus will be on his influence in advancing scientific knowledge and shaping the course of American astronomy before the war.

Bio: After completing doctoral studies in the history of science at the University of Wisconsin, Phil Shoemaker transitioned to the family business, HMC, Inc., in 1982. Following the company's sale in 1994, they worked in various leadership roles at Rieter Corporation and Maag, and later became Director of the Polymers Center of Excellence in Charlotte, NC, in 2015. However, since their academic days, the speaker has also dedicated significant time to researching and compiling information on Ormsby Macknight Mitchel. Over the past six years, they have focused on writing Mitchel's biography, a project that has led to presentations, publications, and growing recognition of Mitchel's historical significance.

Speaker: John Braggs

Talk Title: Ongoing Inspiration from our Great Refractors

Talk Description: The great telescopes of yesteryear were designed and optimized for visual observation, and in that realm, with its potential to educate and inspire, they have never been surpassed. Speaker John W. Briggs served as observatory engineer at the University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory, housing the world's largest refractor. John will review some historical highlights leading to the creation of the Cincinnati refractors and will share his enthusiasm for the timeless potential of the instruments to offer unforgettable, personal "eye-to-eyepiece" experiences that can not be matched even by the most wondrous electronic images from our current space telescopes.

Bio: John W. Briggs is a three-term past president of the Antique Telescope Society and is currently Secretary of the Alliance of Historic Observatories, of which Cincinnati is a new member. In his career in instrumentation and observatory operations, he has lived and worked at facilities across the country and internationally, ranging from Maria Mitchell Observatory on Nantucket to Yerkes, Mount Wilson, Venezuelan National, & Apache Point, including a 1994 winter-over at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. In New Mexico he contributed several years to the final commissioning of the Sloan Digital Sky Survey, and he has since served on the board of the American Association of Variable Star Observers and as a visiting scientist at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. In retirement in New Mexico he operates the Astronomical Lyceum, an informal combination museum, archive, library, and laboratory.