

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight:

An Astronomical Account: A History of Hatter Planetarium from 1966-2006

History 300

Historical Methods

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When most individuals stare up at the vast dome of Hatter Planetarium, they often gaze upon the projected stars appearing on its surface, listening to an astronomical story told by one of its operators. However, there is a second story told by the planetarium itself. This story is the history of Hatter Planetarium, which spans five decades and includes the events in the lives of several individuals who have played a critical role in its existence at Gettysburg College. Its history has encompassed several phases of Gettysburg College traditions but is in danger of passing permanently and fixedly into the history books. Gettysburg College's Hatter Planetarium is an example of a facility, rich in history, which has come to represent a steadfast bond between community and campus relations.

Physically, Hatter Planetarium is impressive in appearance for a small, liberal arts college. Located on the north side of Masters Hall, it juts out from the building in the direction of Plank Gymnasium. Once inside, the most conspicuous feature is the "hemispherical projection dome" made of "white perforated aluminum."¹ The diameter of the dome is thirty feet. It serves as the screen for the images of the stars emitted from the projector in the center of the room. It is known as an A3 – P projector, provided by Spitz Laboratories, Inc., which is still in existence today.² Together, the dome and projector are able to accurately replicate the sky at any time of day, at any year in history, at any location in the world. The Sun, Moon, stars, planets, coordinates, and meridians may be projected onto the dome to foster an understanding of the sky. The controls to operate the planetarium's multiple functions are located on a side console which includes the knobs to rotate the projector, controls for the audio-visual effects, and the computers

¹ Hatter Planetarium Vertical Files, in Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA.

² Ian Clarke, personal interview, February 13, 2006.

that help plan the shows presented for the public, among other crucial equipment. The planetarium's chamber is thirty-two square feet and houses benched seating for 100 spectators that are "tilted for optimal viewing."³

Hatter Planetarium's history can be traced back to the end of the 1950's. At that time, Gettysburg College was in need of infrastructure expansion because of the growth it was experiencing in terms of student numbers and desire to improve existing academic programs. The Board of Trustees realized, however, that the money for such improvements was virtually non-existent. A fund-raising program that was recently initiated would not reap benefits for several more years. Loans would have to be used to conduct any improvements for the college for the time being.⁴

The physics department was among those in need of better housing to conduct classes and accommodate equipment.⁵ Breidenbaugh Hall was being used for chemistry and physics classes; however, space was nearly exhausted in the building.⁶ Trustees meeting on December 8, 1959 decided it was impracticable for the physics department to continue using Breidenbaugh Hall for its facilities.⁷ Thus, it was decided to construct a new building, along with other construction projects in the next few years:

The Executive Committee recommends that authorization be given for the expenditure of the total sum of \$1,050,000. for the immediate construction of the following buildings:

New Science Building	\$200,000.
Library Extension	400,000.
Physical Education Building	450,000.

³ Planetarium Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

⁴ Charles H. Glatfelter, A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832 – 1985, vol. 2 (Mechanicsburg, PA: W & M Printing, Inc., 1987), 842.

⁵ At this time there was no astronomy department. It began to develop after the planetarium's construction.

⁶ Glatfelter, Salutory Influence, 2:842.

⁷ Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Gettysburg College (December 8, 1959).

with authority to vary the amounts for said buildings when final plans for the buildings are approved.⁸

Bids for the contracts of these constructions were opened in May 1960. Construction took less than a year as the physics department moved into its new facilities in the Spring of 1961. A dedication ceremony was held on April 6, 1962 and the building was formally renamed Fred G. Masters Hall on November 2, 1963. Fred Masters, of the Class of 1904, was a high school science teacher and bank director in western Pennsylvania. The building was “named in recognition of his bequest” of over \$220,000.⁹ The final price tag on Masters Hall came to \$236,298.¹⁰ More funds would be spent on Masters Hall in just a short time.

In terms of astronomy, the early 1960’s was an exciting time for America. Sputnik was still in the minds of many people and the space race was a preoccupation of Americans. For this reason construction projects like Masters Hall and the future Hatter Planetarium were more than likely “started up because of increased space interest.”¹¹ It was under these astronomical sensations that on October 2, 1964 the Board of Trustees, presided over by Paul H. Rhoads, reached the following decision:

The Executive Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees that it authorize the administration to have plans prepared for the addition to Master’s [sic] Hall to house the Hatter Planetarium, so that bids can be secured for the letting of the construction contracts. President Hanson . . . stated that most of these funds would be made available from the Plant Reserve Fund. On motion, seconded and carried, the recommendation was approved.¹²

⁸ Minutes of Trustees (Dec 8, 1959).

⁹ Minutes of Trustees (June 1, 1963); Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, 843.

¹⁰ Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, 843.

¹¹ Clarke, personal interview.

¹² Minutes of Trustees (Oct 2, 1964).

Besides the Masters Hall addition, the trustees approved construction for Musselman Stadium. The Waynesboro Construction Company “was awarded a contract...for two construction projects...at a lump sum price of \$350,000.”¹³

For such a pricey venture as was proposed by the trustees, donations to alleviate the cost were of course welcome, especially considering all the improvements that had gone on in the last few years. Most recently, the college was attempting to buy land on the north-west section of campus for potential athletic fields and to keep commercial establishments out of the area.¹⁴ George G. Hatter alleviated some of the cost with a generous donation to his alma mater. Born in 1889, Hatter was a member of the Class of 1911. Hatter was a Pennsylvania Department of Highways official and later became the president of the Pennsylvania Motor List Company.¹⁵ A story has circulated within the astronomy department regarding Hatter’s decision to help fund the project. It appears that while touring Dickinson College’s planetarium, Hatter was accompanied by its donator, a graduate of the school. This donor convinced Hatter, or perhaps shamed him, into doing the same for his alma mater.¹⁶ Regardless of the validity of this story, his donation was much appreciated. The Gettysburgian reported, “[a] gift of \$33,000 received last March [1964] from George G. Hatter, retired businessman and Gettysburg alumnus of Lemoyne, will go toward the construction of the planetarium.”¹⁷ Mr. Hatter passed away in 1976, leaving a legacy behind in his help in funding the planetarium that bears his name.

¹³ “Construction Co. Obtains Contract For 2 Additions,” The Gettysburgian, February 19, 1965, 5.

¹⁴ Gregory J. Landrey, “A History of the Gettysburg Campus” (unpublished student work, Gettysburg College, May 27, 1977), 47.

¹⁵ Glatfelter, Salutary Influence, 843.

¹⁶ Laurence Marschall, personal interview, February 21, 2006.

¹⁷ “Construction Co.,” The Gettysburgian, 5.

Organization and construction of the planetarium was done by Spitz Laboratories, Inc. A number of pamphlets and brochures explaining the benefits, costs, uses, and construction of a college planetarium were sent in the early part of 1964, before the trustees even decided to authorize the planetarium's construction. These brochures were sent from the SLI offices to the Gettysburg College Director of Development, Paul G. Peterson. These pamphlets presumably influenced the decision to build a planetarium on campus with enticing propaganda stating, "[m]any Americans are demanding an opportunity for better understanding of the space sciences. Our nation is committed to unprecedented research expenditures in space exploration and the results are issues of international concern. Consequently, not only scientists, but all citizens, need a basic understanding of space."¹⁸ Several correspondences were made between Mr. Peterson and officials of SLI. The SLI Manager of Educational Sales, John Ireland, sent a letter to Mr. Peterson on February 26, 1964 explaining the process by which to approach planetarium construction. In the letter, Ireland suggested contacting one Lloyd H. Jones, who had been "representing SLI for 2 years as an electrical engineer" and was "expertly qualified to discuss the planetarium, its architectural approach, and something of its instructional programs."¹⁹ There is documentation of Jones and Peterson meeting on March 10, 1964.²⁰

The day before, on March 9, an informal note mentioned that Gettysburg College had "received securities in [an] envelope for \$33,000 from George Hatter."²¹ The donation was crucial to the construction of the planetarium as an SLI price list for the

¹⁸ C.A. Hanson Vertical Files, in Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

costly equipment showed. The price list revealed the cost of the A3 – P projector (\$15,000), the projection hemisphere (\$10,000), and the bench seating (\$4,840).²²

As mentioned, the Board of Trustees authorized construction in the fall of 1964. However, examples of interest were still needed into early 1965 to prove the value of constructing the planetarium. This is proven by a memo from the Development Office sent to Richard Mara, head of the Department of Physics. Dated February 1, 1965 it stated that, “[w]e are in the throes of preparing proposals to prospective individual and corporate donors for support for the construction of the planetarium annex” and requested a “thought-out statement” by Mara to prove the need for a planetarium to enhance the curriculum at Gettysburg College.²³

After proposed meetings with the Buildings and Grounds Committee, Gettysburg College President C.A. Hanson’s intent was to begin construction with the Waynesboro Construction Company in the Spring of 1965, and have the planetarium in operation by September of that year.²⁴ Also, it was intended that the entire Masters Hall addition would amount to no more than \$75,000. Neither of these goals was reached. In September, the trustees mentioned that the “Masters Hall addition is behind schedule because of concentration on [Musselman] Stadium.”²⁵ Construction on the planetarium continued into the early months of 1966 and was not deemed fully operational until June of that year.²⁶ The cost exceeded President Hanson’s expectations, topping out at \$135,269.²⁷

²² Hanson Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Minutes of Trustees (September 24, 1965).

²⁶ Minutes of Trustees (December 14, 1965); Minutes of Trustees (June 4, 1966).

²⁷ Glatfelter, Salutary Influence, 843.

After all the waiting, setbacks, and anticipation, the planetarium nevertheless received an enthusiastic welcome. The official dedication of George G. Hatter Planetarium occurred on June 4, 1966. At the ceremony, Reverend John Vannorsdall, the chaplain of the college, gave the invocation; Paul Rhoads, the chairman of the Board of Trustees, presented a tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Hatter; and President Hanson received the official acceptance of the planetarium.²⁸ When the school year opened up for the 1966-67 academic year, Hatter Planetarium was now available to enhance the learning experience for all Gettysburg College students.

On October 14, 1966, the *Gettysburgian* announced the first public show to be held in the newest addition to the school. A planetarium show entitled “The Changing Seasons” was held that night under the direction of the newly hired Professor Eugene Milone.²⁹ Milone was the most recent addition to the Gettysburg College Physics Department. A strong addition to the department, Milone, born in the Bronx in 1939, graduated from Columbia College and eventually received his PhD from Yale University.³⁰ He was elected to the Royal Astronomical Society of London and was a member of the New York Academy of Science. A professor at the University of Calgary since the 1970’s, his brief service at Gettysburg College proved to be instrumental to the formation of an astronomy program at Gettysburg College.³¹ By the end of the decade, Milone had helped create and teach two new courses, astrophysics and space science, both of which provided the basis for the re-establishment of the astronomy program.³²

²⁸ Planetarium Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

²⁹ “Hatter Planetarium To Open Tonight With Public Show,” *The Gettysburgian*, October 14, 1966, 3.

³⁰ Eugene Milone Vertical Files, in Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Gettysburg College Bulletin 1967-1969*, vol. 57, no. 3 (1967).

Though Milone's drive and determination were crucial to the establishment of the program, the presence of the new planetarium proved to be the catalyst. "It was this gift that made astronomy visible once again at Gettysburg College."³³

Though Milone was considered the director of the new planetarium, it was not he who had the closest relationship with it. In fact, the physics department was a bit unsure of what to make of the new facility. Since there was no true astronomer on staff, there were uncertainties of who would operate the planetarium.³⁴ That honor fell upon a student, Eugene McClurken of the Class of 1968. McClurken had been considered for the job even before the dedication of the planetarium. On May 12, 1966, Paul Peterson, still the Director of Development, sent President Hanson a memo informing him that McClurken had been asked to operate the facility during Alumni Weekend because of his experience with operating another planetarium in his hometown of Philadelphia.³⁵ Peterson wanted McClurken to be considered for continuation of operational duties.

McClurken was indeed experienced and well suited to the task at hand. He had already had a close association with the planetarium as it was being constructed.

McClurken detailed his experiences with the facility:

I was present for the installation of the Spitz instrument, helped the installer solve an engineering problem or two, and served as a second pair of hands. I served as the first operator of the planetarium, created shows that basically demonstrated the capabilities of the instrument that became part of freshman orientation, showed the fall and winter constellations, [and] recreated the triple conjunction from 4-6 BC which was possibly the Star of Bethlehem.³⁶

McClurken was a trusted student-worker at the planetarium, which now has a history of receiving contributions from active and interested students. McClurken and Milone

³³ Gettysburg College Bulletin 1970-1972, vol. 57, no. 4 (January 1970), 6.

³⁴ Clarke, personal interview.

³⁵ Hanson Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

³⁶ Eugene McClurken, e-mail interview, February 21, 2006.

developed a solid rapport during their time at Gettysburg College. McClurken became Milone's assistant during a binary star project conducted in Arizona and aided him in other ventures until McClurken's graduation in 1968.³⁷ McClurken concurs, however, that "[t]he presence of the planetarium certainly contributed to the special memories the College provided for me from 1964-68."³⁸

Eugene Milone left Gettysburg College in 1971, leaving behind him a reinvigorated astronomy department rooted in the existence of the planetarium and new observatory built in 1969. The astronomy program for the college would continue with the hiring of Professor Laurence Marschall in 1971. He was hired with the understanding of spending about one third of his time creating and presenting planetarium shows for the public.³⁹ By this time, shows at Hatter Planetarium had gained popularity and had become notable community events. To promote awareness, the *Gettysburgian* included articles announcing when and what planetarium shows would be held in the near future. After Professor Marschall's arrival, flyers began to be posted throughout the campus, promoting shows like "Close Up on Mars," presented on April 23, 1972, and "The Realm of the Nebulae," given on April 29, 1973.⁴⁰ From the mid 1970's into the early 1980's, advertisements for the public shows were included in The Gettysburg Times. These articles were written by Marschall himself and gave background information to the upcoming shows. Under headlines such as, "Eclipses of Sun Are Not Rare Occurrences"

³⁷ McClurken, personal interview; Milone Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

³⁸ McClurken, personal interview.

³⁹ Marschall, personal interview.

⁴⁰ Planetarium Vertical Files, in Special Collections.

or “Final Catastrophe 5 Million Yrs. Away,” the articles provoked curiosity in Gettysburg residents and boosted numbers at the planetarium shows.⁴¹

Professor Marschall kept up a steady flow of shows at the planetarium geared toward the community. He emphasized that the planetarium was “always viewed as a tool for public outreach.”⁴² Marschall would prepare and present a show about one Sunday each month. Most shows consisted of slides, usually depicting constellations visible at a particular time of year. Marschall estimated that over a ten year period he may have put on close to 100 shows.⁴³ The shows clearly fostered an improved community-college relationship as it was estimated that each show attracted between twenty to thirty people, with special presentations, like the Christmas shows, bringing in up to 100 people. Its role in the community was always bigger than its role for the campus. Marschall explained that Hatter Planetarium was never “a huge presence” for students and that the other rooms of the north side addition to Masters Hall, such as the seminar room, offices, and workrooms, were more conducive to physics and astronomy education.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Hatter Planetarium enhanced the learning experiences of campus and community alike.

Professor Marschall’s involvement with the planetarium cannot be underestimated. Ian Clarke, currently the director of the planetarium, claimed that Marschall “kept Hatter Planetarium in existence” and “really made it go.”⁴⁵ Dick Cooper, himself a former planetarium show coordinator, current lab instructor, and

⁴¹ Larry Marschall, “Eclipses of Sun Are Not Rare Occurrences,” The Gettysburg Times, October 14, 1977; Larry Marschall, “Final Catastrophe 5 Million Yrs. Away,” The Gettysburg Times, November 19, 1977.

⁴² Marschall, personal interview.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Clarke, personal interview.

Gettysburg alum, insists that Marschall was always willing to “share his knowledge” and allow people to use the planetarium and other astronomy equipment.⁴⁶

Throughout its existence, the Hatter Planetarium has served many purposes. Most obvious are the planetarium shows the campus and community have associated to it. Besides the students and Gettysburg citizens it has entertained, the planetarium is also popular with children’s groups. Planetarium operators have received and still oblige requests by cub scouts, girl scouts, schools, and 4-H groups to offer specialized shows dealing with the heavens. Other groups have used the planetarium’s facilities for non-astronomical purposes. Since the 1970’s Hatter Planetarium served as the meeting place for the Gettysburg Society of Friends, a Quaker group. A Gettysburgian article brought awareness of the Society by explaining that their “meeting is conducted in complete silence, except when someone feels he has reached his inner conscience. When one reaches this point, he has, in effect, established communication with God and has been inspired to present a message to the group.”⁴⁷ The Society no longer uses the planetarium for its meetings. The facility has served other functions as well. Over the years, Hatter Planetarium has served as a meditation room, a classroom for a Buddhist group, and the locale of a few holiday parties.⁴⁸ Hatter Planetarium has clearly served the college in multiple ways.

From the mid 1980’s through the mid 1990’s, Hatter Planetarium experienced not so much a period of disuse as a period of lesser activity. The astronomy department’s attention started to shift toward other endeavors, including researching at the observatory. Professor Marschall especially began to become preoccupied with other undertakings.

⁴⁶ Dick Cooper, personal interview, February 13, 2006.

⁴⁷ “Society of Friends To Direct Services,” The Gettysburgian, November 13, 1970, 8.

⁴⁸ Marschall, personal interview; Clarke, personal interview.

The public shows eventually stopped as no one was available to operate the planetarium. Dick Cooper, however, feels it would be a “misinterpretation” to say that use of the planetarium completely stopped. “If the public asked, we’d provide shows.”⁴⁹ Beyond requests by special groups, Hatter Planetarium sat quietly as the novelty of its creation wore off.

By the end of the 1990’s, the facility enjoyed something of a renaissance. This came about thanks to the devotion and hard work of a student very similar to Eugene McClurken of three decades before. Jeff Brindle, of the Class of 2000, had some knowledge and interest in astronomy and understood technical jargon. This combination of skills fit perfectly into the needs of the nearly-overlooked planetarium. The astronomy faculty gives Brindle much credit for having an interest in an arguably unattractive and daunting job in a “windowless room.”⁵⁰ Brindle’s task included finding and organizing projector material, cleaning neglected equipment, and preparing the planetarium for the public. All this he did and a renewed interest in the planetarium began. Planetarium shows were again held in earnest led by the diligent Jeff Brindle.

When Brindle graduated in 2000, however, the planetarium was again in danger of becoming inactive. Professor Marschall did not have time to take on the responsibilities that the planetarium demanded. The problem was solved when the planetarium was placed under the direction of Ian Clarke. Clarke, who had been working at Gettysburg College since 1991, transferred to the astronomy department to continue the tradition Hatter Planetarium embraced. The transition from Brindle to Clarke is

⁴⁹ Cooper, personal interview.

⁵⁰ Clarke, personal interview.

believed to be “good momentum for the college.”⁵¹ Indeed it is, because the planetarium shows have again become an integral part of the community-campus relations, and provide both with an enriched experience about the heavens. Though Clarke feels that the significance of the planetarium was greater in the 1960’s because of its distinctiveness, the use of the facility provides a “positive force of good relations with the college.”⁵²

The new round of planetarium shows and other events have proven to be popular as a good year may bring in an attendance of nearly two thousand people.⁵³ To cater to these demanding needs, the planetarium relies on more than just the efforts of Ian Clarke. Jeff Parkinson, of the Class of 2007, is a student-worker who spends some of his time at work in the facility. Parkinson did not know the planetarium existed until he took an astronomy course and got involved in the department. Now, Parkinson works directly with Clarke to plan future planetarium shows which are currently presented bi-monthly. He has put on six or seven shows on his own and around the same number concurrently with Clarke. He also handles a wide range of maintenance issues from dealing with yellow-jacket infestations to replacing slides to cleaning and maintaining pieces of equipment. All said, Parkinson usually puts in about two hours of work per week at the planetarium.⁵⁴

Basically, the current functions of the planetarium are threefold. First, there are the bi-monthly public shows that often talk about issues in the space sciences or recreate the sky as it appears for that month. Second, the planetarium is used for college students

⁵¹ Cooper, personal interview.

⁵² Clarke, personal interview.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jeff Parkinson, personal interview, February 23, 2006.

to enhance astronomical knowledge beyond the usual classroom setting. Brief shows may be presented for students prior to labs to “promote sky awareness” and are practical teaching tools in case the weather hinders actual stargazing.⁵⁵ Lastly, there are presentations that are planned for certain special events such as Get Acquainted Day, Parents’ Weekend, or children’s group functions. “The planetarium helps provide education for tomorrow’s youth,” Parkinson says, “and provides for what most schools have forgotten to include in their curriculum.” Parkinson continues, “Hatter Planetarium provides a selective service to the community. It offers people in the area something that they can’t get anywhere else nearby but Harrisburg. It’s great for a college this size.”⁵⁶

The planetarium, however, is now entering a new phase in its history. Unfortunately, it is a phase that may bring about the end of its use at Gettysburg College. This year will mark the fortieth anniversary of the planetarium’s completion. Though it is one of the younger facilities on campus, it ages quickly. Clarke sums up the fate of Hatter Planetarium starkly. “One of two things will happen in the next five years. Either it will receive the upgrades it needs, or it will die.”⁵⁷ Much of the equipment in the planetarium, including the A3 – P projector, is original from the time of construction. Forty years for a science-oriented apparatus is literally ancient history. The planetarium has “done what’s been asked of it, but there’s a need for new equipment.”⁵⁸ Improvements have been made only sporadically and irregularly over the years. New computers, monitors, lights, and other devices have been replaced at different times, forming a bit of a hodgepodge of equipment. Since the facility’s inception, planetarium

⁵⁵ Cooper, personal interview.

⁵⁶ Parkinson, personal interview.

⁵⁷ Clarke, personal interview.

⁵⁸ Parkinson, personal interview.

technology has evolved into a digital phase. If this method were used in Hatter Planetarium, a computerized projector would make the rickety A3 – P projector defunct. A digital projector could instantly project the sky at any point in history. The current projector can do this, but only after much time and effort.

To replace the equipment would cost approximately \$200,000.⁵⁹ The cost may sound steep, but when compared to other projects the school undertakes, the upgrades would be well worth the price. Proposals have been made by the astronomy department in the last two years in the hopes that administration will agree to fund the improvements.⁶⁰ “It would be a real shame if the planetarium would die,” says Parkinson. “There are so many people in the community who are thrilled at having a planetarium in their own small town, instead of having to travel to Harrisburg for the same type of events.”⁶¹ The future of Hatter Planetarium essentially rests in the hands of the Gettysburg College administration and will probably be decided within the next few years.

The history of Gettysburg College’s Hatter Planetarium has encompassed forty years. During its existence the planetarium has faithfully entertained and educated countless citizens and students. This could not have been done without the hard work and dedication of faculty members like Eugene Milone, Larry Marschall, Ian Clarke, and Dick Cooper, nor without the aid and devotion of students like Eugene McClurken, Jeff Brindle, and Jeff Parkinson. The planetarium is a facility created and operated by people, to serve and instruct people. Its significance has transcended the Gettysburg College campus into the community itself. It has existed through several eras of college history

⁵⁹ Ibid.

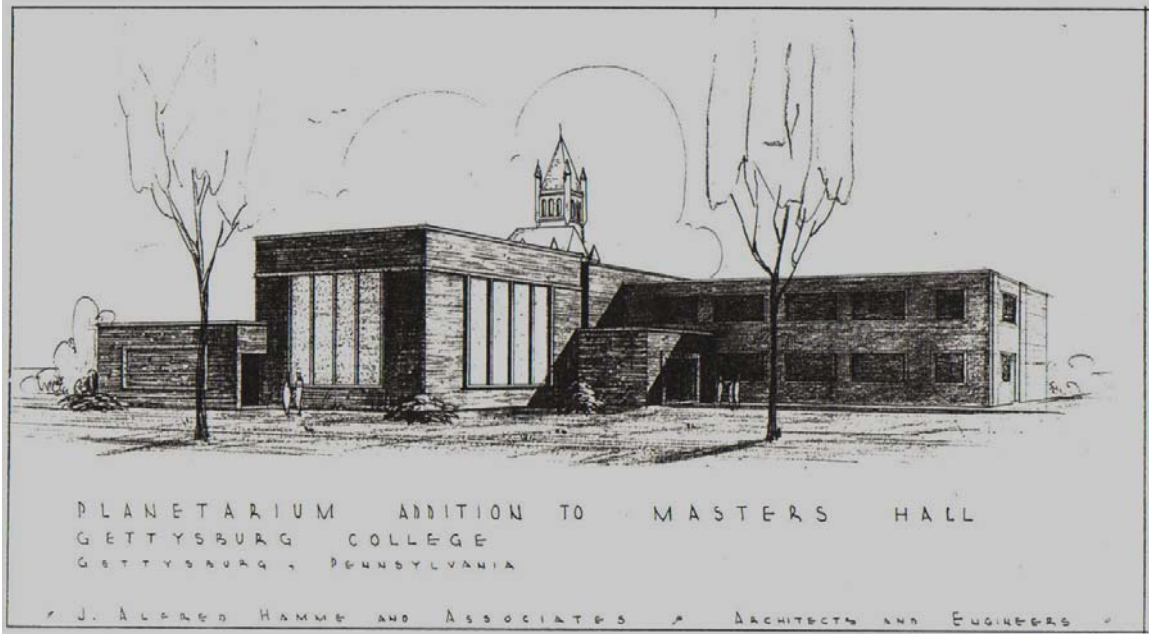
⁶⁰ Marschall, personal interview.

⁶¹ Parkinson, personal interview.

but passes into another, more bleak phase. The present is proving to be a critical time for the facility and only the future may tell whether Hatter Planetarium will continue its historic legacy.

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Architect Sketch of Masters Hall Addition
Photo Courtesy of: C.A. Hanson Vertical Files, in Special Collections, Musselman
Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA.



Portion of Thirty Foot Wide Dome, Hatter Planetarium



A3 – P Spitz Projector, Hatter Planetarium



Benched Seating, Hatter Planetarium