

FRANK PARKHURST BRACKETT
1865-1951

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Dr. Frank Parkhurst Brackett, the last member of the original faculty of Pomona College when it was founded in 1888, passed away on September 3, 1951, in his eighty-seventh year.

Because of his rare genius for teaching, his love of scientific research, and his passion for the maintenance of high scholastic standards, Pomona College owes much of her academic distinction to his guiding spirit. The high regard in which he was continually held by all who knew him is well exemplified in the Frank P. Brackett Observatory of Pomona College, which was built over the years from gifts, both large and small, of a great company of admiring alumni and friends. The first observatory building, which he designed, was dedicated in 1909 and the latest in 1950, sixteen years after his retirement from active teaching.

Dr. Brackett was not only an outstanding educator but also a scholar, mathematician, musician, historian, and astronomer. He was the author of several books, among which are *A History of the San José Rancho* and *Granite and Sagebrush*, a reminiscent history of Pomona College.

A member and fellow of many scientific societies, he was also active in civic, national, and international affairs, having served as secretary of the local district exemption board during the first World War and also as a member of the Commission for Relief in Belgium under Herbert Hoover.

Frank Parkhurst Brackett was born in Provincetown, Massachusetts, June 16, 1865, of sturdy New England stock. He worked his way through Dartmouth College, doing odd jobs and teaching between semesters, and was graduated in 1887 with high scholastic honors, including Phi Beta Kappa. He received the degree of Master of Arts from Dartmouth in 1890 and her honorary Doctor of Science degree on the fortieth reunion of his class in 1927. In 1947, Pomona College awarded him another Doctor of Science degree on the sixtieth anniversary of her founding, an event in which he had played so prominent a role.

After graduation from Dartmouth, Frank Brackett came to southern California, where in the autumn of 1887 he took a teaching position at a private school in Los Angeles. However, in January 1888, at the invitation of Dr. C. B. Sumner, the leader of a group planning to establish a Christian college in the Southwest, Professor Brackett started a small school in Pomona which, in the autumn of the same year, formed the nucleus out of which grew Pomona College and her preparatory school. He served the college first as an instructor in mathematics and Latin, then was Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy, and finally Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Frank P. Brackett Observatory. He also held many important faculty positions including that of acting president in 1927-28. He retired from active teaching in 1933 after forty-six years of continuous leadership in the development of Pomona College.

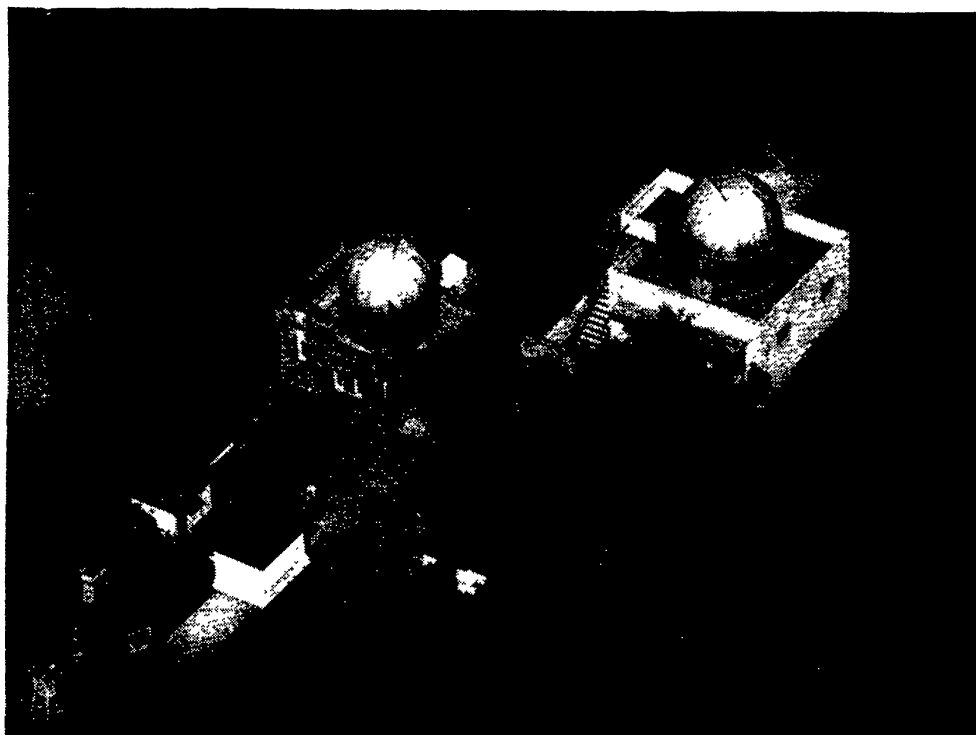


FIG. 1.—The Frank P. Brackett Observatory of Pomona College. The central dome is the original observatory building dedicated in 1909; the building to the right is the latest addition to the observatory, dedicated in 1950. The square buildings to the left contain solar telescopes. Photograph by Robert C. Frampton.

In 1889, while an instructor on the faculty of the newly founded college, Frank Brackett married Lucretia Burdick of Pomona, whose parents pioneered in the development of the citrus industry in southern California. From childhood, Mrs. Brackett had wanted to study art, and it was largely through her inspiration and natural talent that a department of art was early established at Pomona College.

During the early years of the college, and particularly from 1890 to 1897, times were hard indeed, and Professor and Mrs. Brackett, in company with other faculty families, willingly endured many sacrifices and privations in order that the young college might continue its struggle for a place in the Western sun. After forty-eight years of devotion to her husband and family and to the college for which they shared such a vital concern, Mrs. Brackett passed away in the summer of 1937. Of his immediate family, two sons survive Dr. Brackett. The elder, Dr. Frederick Sumner Brackett, is chief biophysicist of the Physical Biology Laboratory, Washington, D.C., and the younger, Dr. Frank Parkhurst Brackett, Jr., is a physical chemist and a supervising executive of Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation, Hollywood, California. There are also four granddaughters and one great-granddaughter, the latter born just three days before Dr. Brackett's death.

Dr. Brackett's earliest achievements in astronomical research were attained at the turn of the century when student groups under his direction were organized to observe and count the meteors belonging to the famous Leonid stream, whose recurrence in considerable numbers was anticipated at that time. These successful observations, when collected and published, gained for him early recognition in *American Men of Science*. A few years later, through his close association with the staff of the Mount Wilson Observatory, Professor Brackett established an enduring friendship with Dr. C. G. Abbot, director of the Astrophysical Observatory of the Smithsonian Institution, which was then operating a solar radiation station on Mount Wilson. As a result of this contact, Professor Brackett accepted Dr. Abbot's invitation to accompany him to Bassour, Algeria, in 1911, where for twelve months these two, without other assistance, conducted daily spec-

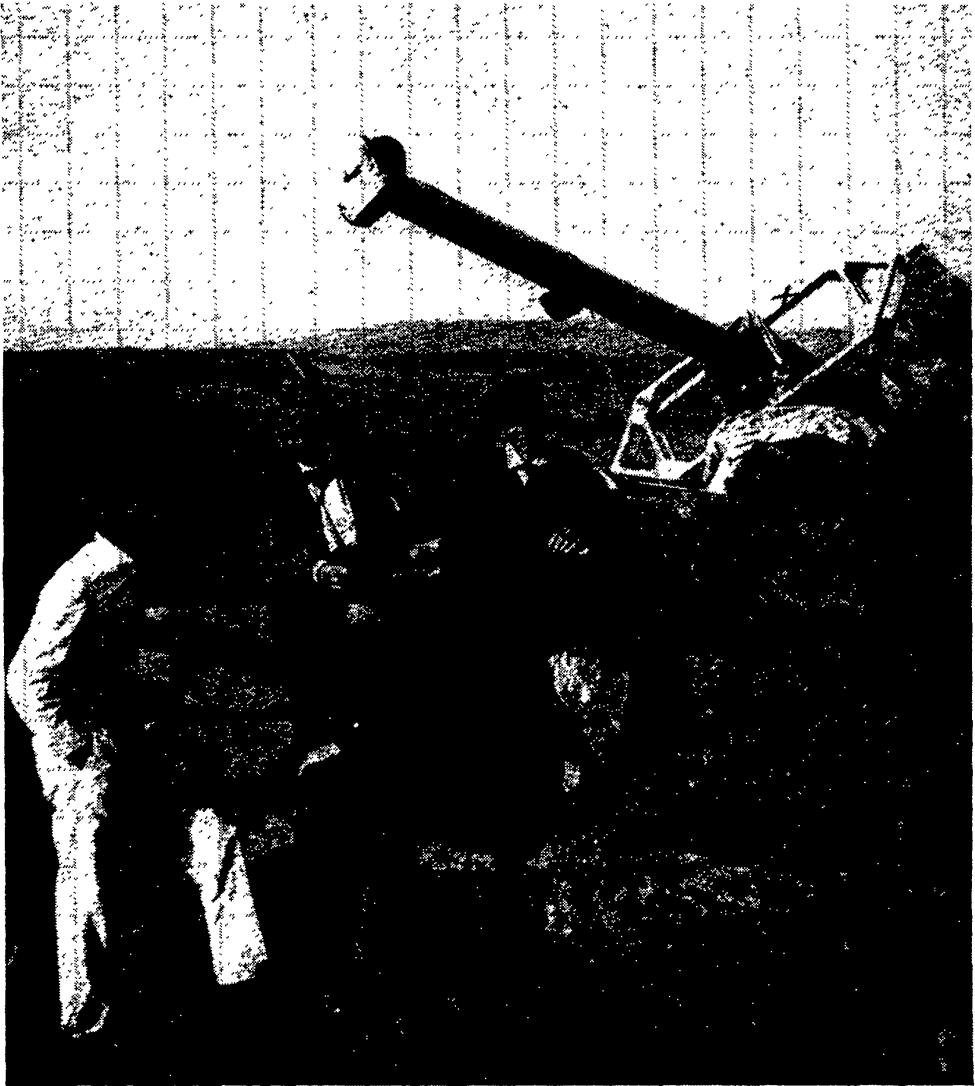


FIG. 2.—The observing station at Bassour, Algeria. Dr. Brackett is on the right, Dr. Abbot on the left, in white.

trobulographic and pyrliometric observations of solar radiation near the northern edge of the Sahara Desert. These observations were undertaken for the purpose of checking the suspected variability of the solar "constant" through the comparison of simultaneous observations from stations widely separated over the surface of the globe. Two years later, in the summer of 1913, and under the same sponsorship, Professor Brackett assisted Anders K. Angstrom in similar experiments conducted simultaneously on the top of Mount Whitney at an

elevation of 14,500 feet and on the floor of the Owens Valley over 9000 feet below. In these experiments, the daytime insolation was also compared with the nocturnal radiation from the earth beneath as observed from this vantage point.

Dr. Brackett also engaged in three solar eclipse expeditions. In 1918 he joined the eclipse expedition from the Mount Wilson Observatory at a location near Green River, Wyoming. In 1923 he organized a solar eclipse expedition from the Brackett Observatory to the Isthmus on Catalina Island and in 1930 another one to northern California. For the latter eclipse, which occurred on April 28, 1930, two observing stations were established. One was located at Ramm's Ranch in the Sierra Nevada above Marysville, and the other near Honey Lake where a broad, barren plain extends eastward from the Sierras to the Nevada border. At the Ramm's Ranch station the newly developed photoelectric cell was, for the first time, employed for recording the changing light as the eclipse progressed. At the Honey Lake location, arrangements were completed for photographing on motion picture film, from a plane flying at high altitude, the moon's shadow sweeping across the earth's surface. The co-operation of both the United States Army Air Force and the Laboratories of Electrical Research Products, Inc., in Hollywood were obtained for this experiment through the personal efforts of Dr. Brackett. It cannot detract from the importance of the conception and the planning for this unique program to report that a snowstorm was in control of affairs on the all-important day and hour!

Although retired in 1933 from teaching and active participation in research, Dr. Brackett's interest in all astronomical matters as well as in the affairs of Pomona College continued for many years, and his councils were invaluable when other hands were required to carry on. It was only recently that this valiant spirit had been compelled, through failing strength, to relinquish its lifelong objectives of service. The passing of so good and great a personality revives anew the admiration and respect of all with whom he came in contact and quickens the realization of a great loss. To know Dr. Brackett was to be inspired by his sterling Christian character and the warmth of his enthusiasm.