

Millionaire James Lick Got What He Wanted

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

He was a strange, stubborn sort of man who did not make friends easily.

No doubt he was lonely much of his life.

He got laughed at for building what the public termed his "Mahogany Mill" in Santa Clara county. But people stopped laughing when James Lick's great gift to mankind was made known—Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton.

The great observatory might have been established in Santa Cruz county except for the fog. Before selecting Mount Hamilton, Lick seriously considered Mount Bache (Loma Prieta) as the site. Administration of the observatory which is under University of California, HAS been transferred to Santa Cruz county.

University of California at Santa Cruz was designated this past November as headquarters for the observatory's distinguished astronomers who will become part of the Santa Cruz campus and teaching staff, according to UCSC.

The mountain-top observatory was founded in 1874 with Lick's gift of \$700,000 and was completed in 1888. But even this generous gift pointed up the millionaire's irascible disposition.

When Lick set up a board of trustees to handle his affairs and bequests in 1874, he was 77 years old and ill and believed he did not have long to live. In 1875, Lick discovered he was considerably healthier than he had thought the previous year, decided he still wanted to run



James Lick

his own affairs and got into a hassle with his board of trustees over the first trust deed for the observatory.

Lick issued an edict stating that his "improved health" now enabled him to take part in the execution of his own affairs and that he wished to make improvements and changes in the original deed of trust.

The trustees balked. Lick refused to budge. Lengthy litigation threatened. Lick expected a long-drawn out battle until attorney John Felton stepped into the fray. Operating on Lick's behalf (for a fee of \$100,000) Felton wrote a series of articles for San Francisco newspapers. In them he hinted at doubtful motives on the part of the trustees in refusing to resign at Lick's re-

quest. Public sentiment forced the issue and Lick quietly got rid of his stubborn trustees.

When attorney Felton presented his bill for services rendered, Lick reverted to character. He argued that since the case had been settled so quickly and easily, Felton should reduce his fee. Felton answered by telling Lick a joke about a cut-rate tooth-puller who did the dentist's job so much cheaper—but dislocated the patient's jaw in the process. Lick took the joke in silence—and paid Felton his \$100,000.

On September 21, 1875, Lick issued a new deed of trust; on November 1 of the same year a request was sent to the US regents, asking them to take over and operate the observatory which was to be established on Mount Hamilton. The Regents accepted and the observatory was turned over to them in 1888, 12 years after Lick's death. Although he never lived to see the final step in his magnificent plan, Lick lies buried at the base of the 36-inch telescope, one of his last requests.

Two steps necessary to the establishment of the observatory included the building of a road to the mountain top, and an Act of Congress conveying the mountain land, which was government property, to the university. The Congressional act was pushed through, and the road was built. It was said to have "more than 300 curves" and to have cost \$100,000.

This eccentric millionaire was born in Fredericksburg, Penn., on August 25, 1796, the son of

an impoverished German family. The original family name was Luk. James was apprenticed to a piano and organ maker and later worked at this craft in Baltimore.

In 1820, he tried to establish his own business in New York but gave up because of lack of capital and left for Buenos Aires the following year. He worked there, in Chile and Peru as a piano manufacturer, until 1848.

On January 7 of that fateful year, Lick sailed into San Francisco bay aboard the Lady Adams. With him he had a large iron box containing \$30,000 in gold doubloons, his savings from South America.

San Francisco was a village of barely 1000 persons; it had just changed its name from Yerba Buena the year before and was on its way to becoming an important seaport.

Lick invested in San Francisco real estate and eventually built the famed Lick House Hotel. He cast a wise eye on the Santa Clara valley and invested in properties there, also building a flour mill the likes of which no one had ever seen before. The mill interior was completely finished in fine mahogany and rare wood paneling, much of it the work of Lick himself.

And behind the "Mahogany Mill" there is another story about this odd man. As a boy he had been first apprenticed to a miller who had a pretty daughter. Lick courted the girl was dismissed by her father as a "worthless, penniless young beggar." As Lick left, he promised to become rich some day



Lick Observatory as it looked in 1894.

and build a mill of his own—the finest ever to be built.

Is this story fact or legend? Today no one knows. But it is a fact that Lick had his "Mahogany Mill" photographed inside and out and sent pictures back east to the miller of his boyhood experience. Lick's reasons for building an

observatory are obscure. In 1874, there was a great deal of publicity given to the Washington Observatory which had been completed that year. This may have influenced him.

He also endowed an orphanage in San Jose. In return, the grateful citizens named a high school for him. A freeway also

bears his name.

Dissension and strife followed Lick even into his grave. A nephew contested the will, and an illegitimate son, John H. Lick came west to claim his share. Lick had never denied the existence of this son who had actually lived and worked with him for a few years.

Lick died in his hotel, Lick House, in San Francisco. An elegant hostelry, again famed for its fine woodwork and paneling, Lick House stood until the 1906 earthquake destroyed it.

The 'quake also damaged one of the observatory buildings, but the original 36-inch telescope is still in use there. Since the original installation, other instruments have been constructed which include the giant 120-inch reflecting telescope, second largest in the world, completed in 1959.

The efforts of Lick astronomers during the past seven decades have given the world some of mankind's most noted discoveries in the heavens. The observatory also serves as a major training ground for advanced students in astronomy.

And there is another paradoxical twist to the entire story of James Lick and his wonderful gift of the observatory which perches 4200 feet above sea level on Mount Hamilton:

The man who is remembered for "bringing the heavens down to earth" through his observatory, did not believe in "heav-

Building Permits In SC Hit \$397,000 Total For May 17-21

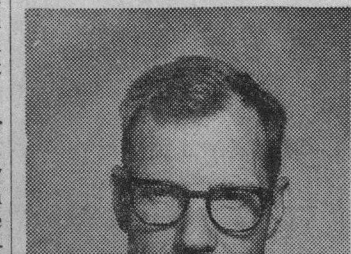
A \$40,000 permit for construction of Felton Center, Inc., led the list of county building permits for the week of May 17 to 21.

A total of 61 permits were issued with a total value of \$397,900.

Cliff Taber was issued the permit for Felton Center, which will be a complex of several shops and offices on the west side of Highway 9 in Felton.

Other permits valued at over \$10,000 were issued to A. R. Salveira, house Quail Hollow road, Ben Lomond, \$13,200; Don Fields, house, 3309 Maplethorne lane, Soquel, \$16,300; A&S De-

pany, three houses, Seacrest Park, Aptos, \$12,100 at 113 Santa Cruz avenue, \$10,900 at 218 Valencia avenue, and \$9,300 at 629 Middlefield drive, and W. B. Catro, house, 3362 Paul Sweet road, \$10,700.



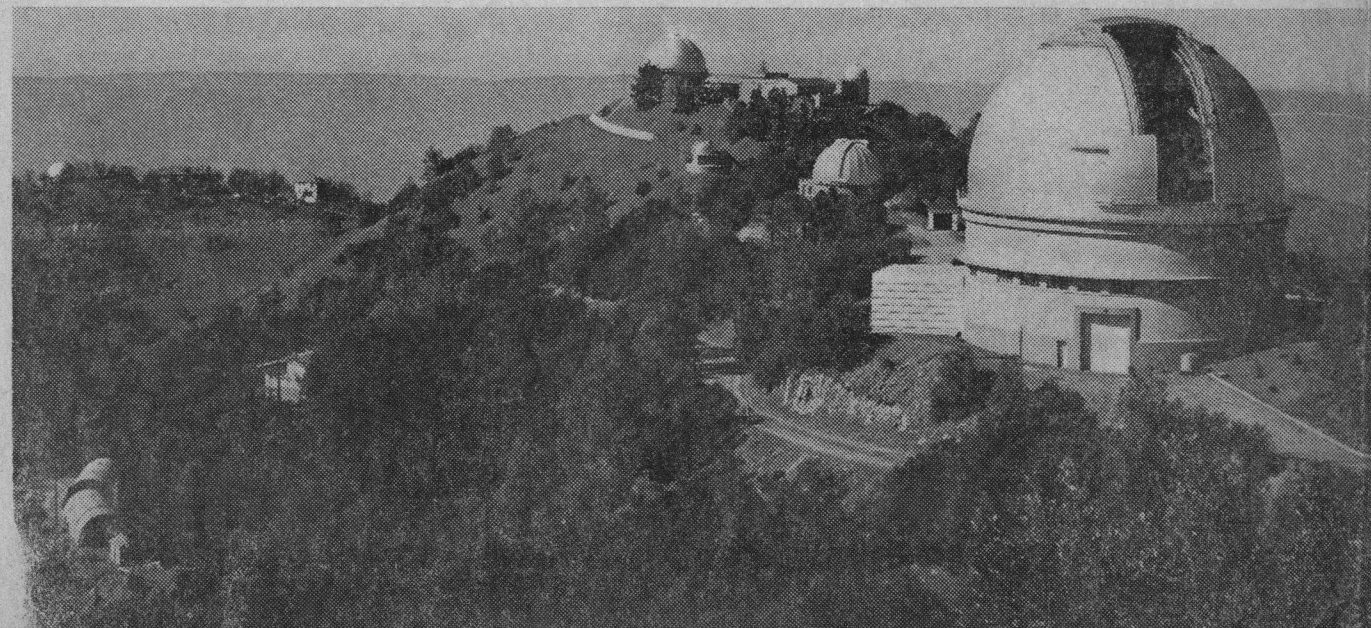
Jaycees Open Flag Campaign

Santa Cruz Jaycees will start their American flag placement campaign Tuesday with calls on merchants in downtown Santa Cruz.

The Junior Chamber of Commerce has purchased the flags and will seek to interest merchants in having them placed in front of their stores on national holidays. The service includes installation and removal of the flags on the 10 holidays at a cost of \$15 the first year and \$10 the ensuing years.

"The service guarantees our community of a patriotic display of the flag," Jaycee members said.

Persons interested may



Lick Observatory Today