



News Release

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World-Class Telescope
Collection is Major
Acquisition For Museum

Columbia, S.C. --- The stunning collection of historic telescopes donated to the South Carolina State Museum by collector Robert Ariail of Columbia is more than merely a group of scopes gathered randomly over a lifetime, according to Director of Education Tom Falvey.

“Astronomy experts say these telescopes represent the finest collection of 19th- and 20th-century American-made telescopes in the United States,” said Falvey. The firms include Alvan Clark & Sons (the world’s finest lens makers), Henry Fitz, his son Harry Fitz, John Byrne and John Brashear. The works of numerous European craftsmen, including the famous Zeiss company, also are included in the collection.

The 200-plus-piece collection of telescopes and astronomy equipment joins more than 5200 rare books and star atlases, scientific journals, rare offprints and manuscripts housed at the University of South Carolina to comprise the Robert B. Ariail Collection of Historical Astronomy. The two institutions will operate a joint Web site that will highlight the collection. It can be found at www.library.sc.edu/ariail or at www.southcarolinastatemuseum.org.

Ariail is well-known in astronomy circles nationwide. He received his first telescope as a child and began collecting in earnest in 1965.

“These rare and beautiful instruments will bring the museum international attention,” said an excited Falvey. “It is impossible to overestimate how important this gift is to the South Carolina State Museum. It contains pivotal pieces that define the

development of the telescope, and trace the history of scientific advances in lens design over the past three centuries.”

Ariail made this gift to the State Museum for several reasons, said Falvey. “First of all, he wanted the collection to stay together and not be broken up into small pieces. He also has a long association with the museum, and served on the State Museum Foundation board. He has contributed to the museum for many years, most prominently his exquisite restoration of the large Henry Fitz telescope that has graced our science gallery since we opened in 1988.

“In addition, Bob is a South Carolinian, and he wanted South Carolinians to be able to enjoy and learn from these instruments as a group. Of course, he’s interested in getting more people interested in astronomy. Who knows, a future astronaut or astrophysicist may arise from a child’s imagination being set on fire by the sight of this collection?”

While most of the scopes will be for exhibition purposes only, several modern scopes will be available for use by the public in future astronomy events, such as the museum’s popular “Planets for the People” stargazing programs that began earlier this year, and which will continue this fall beginning Oct. 1.

A few of the scopes include: an 1892 Alvan Clark 7” scope; an 1852 2 ¾” Henry Fitz equatorial telescope; a c. 1900 William Mogyey 4” astrograph; a c. 1871 or 1872 John Byrne 4 ¼” refractor scope with a zinc tube; an 1856 3” Benjamin Pike telescope; and a 3” Jesse Ramsden telescope from 1760.

Many other side pieces and instruments are included in the collection, said Falvey, such as a late 18th-century Dolland micrometer (which aids with measurements such as planet diameter, angular distances between stars and distances between double stars) and a late 19th-century Clark Comet Seeker eyepiece.

“We are overwhelmed with excitement over this gift,” said Falvey. “Bob’s generosity is matched only by the enormity of the benefit that students, researchers and the public will derive from this collection for not just years, but centuries, to come.”

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CUTLINE FOR ARIAIL COLLECTION DONATION

This series of telescopes and details is a sample of the more than 60 historic telescopes and scores of other equipment contained in the Robert B. Ariail Collection of Historical Astronomy. The telescopes are housed at the South Carolina State Museum, and thousands of documents, books, scientific journals and manuscripts are housed at the University of South Carolina.

[Photo one](#)

[Photo two](#)

[Photo three](#)

[Photo four](#)

[Photo five](#)

[Photo six](#)

[Photo seven](#)

[Photo eight](#)

[Photo nine](#)

Photos courtesy S.C. State Museum

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