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Library & Technology Services

Special Collections

Flyer

Planet Lehigh

If Lehigh University were ever to consider creating a satellite campus, what would be the ideal location? Perhaps it would be the asteroid labeled by astronomers "691 Lehigh", a.k.a. "Planet Lehigh."

In early December 1909, the Rev. Joel Metcalf, an amateur astronomer in Taunton, Mass., discovered a minor planet (the earlier term for an asteroid) by using his own photographic method. Lehigh astronomy professor John Hutchinson Ogburn, an authority on the orbits of minor planets, noted this discovery. Ogburn needed a thesis topic for an M.S. candidate, Joseph B. Reynolds.

Reynolds asked Metcalf for photographs of measured positions of this planet and offered to compute its orbit if Metcalf would grant the privilege of choosing a name. Under Professor Ogburn's directions, Reynolds produced the elements of the minor planet's orbit in his 1910 master's thesis titled "The Determination of the Elements of the Orbit of a Minor Planet: Taunton No. 94. 'Lehigh'." (Taunton, Massachusetts was where Metcalf discovered the asteroid.)

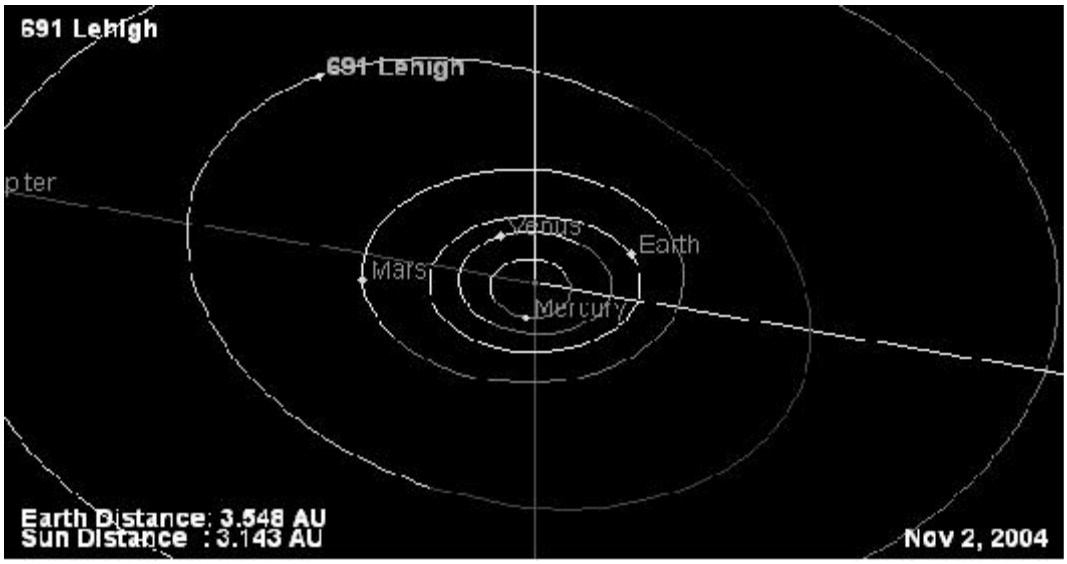
In recognition of this work, Metcalf permitted the new planet to be called LEHIGH.

Below is an orbital diagram of "Planet Lehigh," which is available on the Internet at http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/db?name=691.

According to a paper in the *Minor Planet Bulletin* (volume 27, 2000, pp. 27-28), available on the web at The NASA Astrophysics Data System, "691 Lehigh" is 44 kilometers in length and has a rotation period of about five hours.

Starting in mid-November, Special Collections hosts an exhibition focusing not only on details about "Planet Lehigh" and asteroids in general, but also on the history of astronomy as a discipline at Lehigh. Included in the exhibition are: the original hand-written M.S. thesis by Reynolds; biographies of Reynolds, Ogburn, and Metcalf; publications about Planet Lehigh, including the *Alumni Bulletin* and student newspaper *Brown and White*; publications relating to the history of the astronomy and mathematics departments; and information about asteroids past and present.

In addition the display will include astronomical



Courtesy of the NASA Near-Earth Object Program Office, NASA/JPL

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instruments used at Lehigh's Sayre Observatory, including its telescope, recently rediscovered in storage; and information about Lehigh's cur-rent-day astronomy and astrophysics majors and department research.

The exhibition is in Linderman Library's Bayer Galleria, whose hours are 1-5 p.m. weekdays.

"Planet Lehigh" is indeed one of the Univesity's special distinctions. As mathematics professor Ralph Van Arnam wrote in his May 1958 *Alumni Bulletin* obituary of Ogburn, "to the best of my knowledge and belief, a certain institution several miles down the Lehigh River from our campus does not have a planet named in its honor. Lehigh will indeed 'shine tonight'."

John H. Ogburn

Joseph B. Reynolds

This issue of the **Special Collections** *flyer* has been prepared by Ilhan Citak, Special Collections Assistant, and Brian Simboli, Science Librarian.

Special Collections materials are available for research and consultation without restriction. For further information contact Philip A. Metzger, Curator of Special Collections, or Ilhan Citak, Special Collections Assistant. Reading room hours are Monday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment. Telephone: (610) 758-4506; fax (610) 758-6091; e-mail: inspc@lehigh.edu.

Sayre Observatory, constructed in 1869, and now the home of the Graduate Student Council