

DARK SKIES for March 2018:

T/F Mar.	1/2	none	
F/S Mar.	2/3	none	
S/S Mar.	3/4	7:26 p.m.	- 7:59 p.m.
S/M Mar.	4/5	7:27 p.m.	- 9:06 p.m.
M/T Mar.	5/6	7:28 p.m.	- 10:11 p.m.
T/W Mar.	6/7	7:30 p.m.	- 11:13 p.m.
W/T Mar.	7/8	7:31 p.m.	- 12:13 a.m.
T/F Mar.	8/9	7:32 p.m.	- 1:10 a.m.
F/S Mar.	9/10	7:33 p.m.	- 2:03 a.m.
S/S Mar.	10/11	7:35 p.m.	- 3:53 a.m.
S/M Mar.	11/12	8:36 p.m.	- 4:38 a.m.
M/T Mar.	12/13	8:37 p.m.	- 5:19 a.m.
T/W Mar.	13/14	8:38 p.m.	- 5:40 a.m.
W/T Mar.	14/15	8:40 p.m.	- 5:38 a.m.
T/F Mar.	15/16	8:41 p.m.	- 5:36 a.m.
F/S Mar.	16/17	8:42 p.m.	- 5:34 a.m.
S/S Mar.	17/18	8:44 p.m.	- 5:32 a.m.
S/M Mar.	18/19	8:45 p.m.	- 5:30 a.m.
M/T Mar.	19/20	9:39 p.m.	- 5:29 a.m.
T/W Mar.	20/21	10:46 p.m.	- 5:27 a.m.
W/T Mar.	21/22	11:54 p.m.	- 5:25 a.m.
T/F Mar.	22/23	1:02 a.m.	- 5:23 a.m.
F/S Mar.	23/24	2:07 a.m.	- 5:21 a.m.
S/S Mar.	24/25	3:07 a.m.	- 5:19 a.m.
S/M Mar.	25/26	4:01 a.m.	- 5:17 a.m.
M/T Mar.	26/27	4:48 a.m.	- 5:15 a.m.
T/W Mar.	27/28	none	
W/T Mar.	28/29	none	
T/F Mar.	29/30	none	
F/S Mar.	30/31	none	
S/S Mar.	31/1	none	

Times listed are for Dodgeville, Wisconsin when

(1) Moon is below the horizon

(2) Sun is > 18° below the horizon
(astronomical twilight)

Time Travel

conducted by David Oesper

THE RISE AND FALL OF EDWARD S. HOLDEN: PART 1

DONALD E. OSTERBROCK, University of California

In 1885, when the University of California needed a president, Holden was offered and accepted the post. The appointment was made on the initiative of John S. Hager, a California regent and friend of Floyd. Holden told Hager he would take the presidency only if it were understood that he would give it up when Lick Observatory was completed, and that he would then be appointed as its director. His terms were accepted and he was named president of the university and director of the Lick Observatory, although, as Holden hastened to assure the captain, the latter title would not take effect until the Lick Trust turned the observatory over to the university. Nevertheless, it amounted to making it official that Holden would be the director, although one friend warned him not to relax until he was actually in office on Mount Hamilton. Newcomb congratulated Holden, advising him to “be as wise as a

serpent though it will hardly do to be quite as harmless as a dove.” He added “one wish respecting your policy, to wit: that you will keep out of all fights, except those which you are sure of winning”. The older man had by now somewhat cooled toward his younger protégé, and in fact had recommended David P. Todd, rather than Holden, for the Lick directorship earlier that year. Now Newcomb asked Floyd how Holden could be appointed director before the university had assumed control of the observatory, adding “I hope and think he will be a success in his new field, but it is rather a difficult position for a man as young as he is to take”. Floyd, on his part, made it clear that he had no intention of turning the observatory over to the *prospective* director until it was finished.

Charles H. Rockwell, a wealthy amateur astronomer from Tarrytown, New York, was disturbed to learn the news of Holden’s prospective appointment. Rockwell knew Holden well, for he had accompanied him on both the Colorado and Caroline Island eclipse expeditions, and he had a very low opinion of his astronomical abilities. In a long document, the *New Yorker* compared Holden’s qualifications unfavourably with those of a long list of American astronomers, including Hall, the deceased Watson, Hastings, E. E. Barnard, John M. Schaeberle, Lewis Swift, and Charles A. Young, as well as with the English scientists A. A. Common, William Christie, William Huggins, and David Gill. All of these men had accomplished far more than Holden in research, Rockwell said, and any one of them (except Watson, presumably) would have been a better choice for the directorship. Holden’s only qualifications, Rockwell insisted, were as a writer, a cataloguer, and a librarian. The Lick trustees, he concluded, should reconsider their choice, and get a man in the forefront of research, to whom they could safely turn over the observatory with the certainty that he could use it to make important new discoveries.

The slashing but basically correct attack on Holden never saw the light of day. Rockwell had cast it in the form of an anonymous letter to the editor, and included in it a few phrases which made its author seem to be a Californian. He sent the manuscript to George Davidson, the pioneer West Coast scientist who had a small private observatory in San Francisco. Rockwell knew Davidson well and trusted his judgement of the local conditions; he sent the California astronomer his attack on Holden with a request that he read it and get it published if it would do any good, but “[i]f better placed in your grate, shove it in there”. Davidson knew that if the letter were printed in any San Francisco newspaper, he would be suspected of being the author of it, and he would certainly be asked for his opinion for quotation in a follow-up story. He believed that the regents would not change their decision, and he did not want to get into an open quarrel with the coming director even before his appearance on the scene, so he did not forward Rockwell’s letter to the newspapers. The Tarrytown amateur accepted Davidson’s decision, but continued to criticize Holden.

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