This isn’t really answering all of your questions and certainly not in the order you asked. If there is more information that would be of use, please contact me.

It may be helpful to give some overview of the observatory. The observatory proper consists of three section (usually called bays). The central bay contained support materials for the observatory including darkrooms which were used for developing glass plates which was the original medium for taking data with the telescopes. The west bay of the observatory holds the largest of the telescopes (a 20” reflector). The central and west bays were the first ones constructed. The east bay was added later. The east bay has contained 3 telescopes although the specific telescopes have changed in the course of time. There is more detail on the current telescopes on the observatory home page.

In addition to the observatory proper, there is also a trailer which provides storage for support materials for the observatory. This had originally been on the main campus where it served as overflow housing for students attending the university on the GI bill of rights. (I believe that this may have been after the second world war.) After an overlong career, it was replaced by a newer model in 1997.

There is also a lecture building added in 1977 to provide space for classes and for the open house program. The open houses at the observatory have been held on the 5th and 20th of the month since the summer of 1969. The original open houses were in the central bay of the observatory (which can probably handle around 20 people max). There was occasional use of a tent on loan from the army and set up somewhat to the east of the current lecture hall. While there have been occasional cancellations due to extreme weather conditions, there have probably been around 1000 open houses which have seen a total of nearly 50,000 persons.

It would be useful to keep in mind that the Astronomy Program was started as a degree granting program as part of the Department of Physics and Astronomy in 1962. The observatory was dedicated in November 1964 about two years later. It was partially funded by an NSF grant which had to be written and awarded. Then the telescope had to be designed and the observatory built. Two years is a rather amazingly short period for this. It should also be remembered that in 1964, the computer revolution had not yet really occurred nor had the miniaturization of equipment which was part of the computer world. The 20” telescope was designed to handle large heavy equipment which would be attached to the instrument. While this was a sensible decision in 1964, it has constrained the ability to adapt to more modern approaches.

After this overlong introduction, let me give a condensed time line.

1962 Astronomy Program established as part of the Department of Physics and Astronomy

1964 Observatory dedicated in November. The cost for the entire facility is cited as $60,000 ($460,000 in 2014 dollars).

1969 Open House program started

Astronomy Program develops a proposal for an additional telescope in the 36”-40” range to be sited in Maryland (somewhere west of Frederick) This was not funded.

1972 A newer proposal was developed for a larger telescope (in the 60-90” range) to be sited in the southwest (most likely in California). Again this was not funded.

1977 Lecture Hall built

1997 Old trailer replaced

1998 7” refractor donated to the University by Company 7 after the original proved impossible to repair

2000 20” removed for refurbishing (returned in 2001).

2013 Department of Astronomy becomes a partner in the Discovery Channel Telescope which is a 4.3m telescope located near Flagstaff, AZ.

**Major Events hosted at the Observatory**

In general, if there is an astronomical event which is easily seen from campus, we will bring portable

telescopes on campus where access (and parking) is easier. If the observatory is being used and a large crowd is anticipated, parking at the observatory is limited to handicapped and workers. Arrangements are made with System Administration to use their parking lot (on the opposite side of the road from the observatory) and with the police department to provide assistance in crossing Metzerott Rd. The following are several events with which I was involved and are particularly memorable.

**Comet Halley** – 1986 The best known comet was a poor sight this time around. Even through a telescope, it was a small fuzzy object. It was also an early morning sight (around 4AM) and in the winter. Nevertheless, several hundred people showed up to see the comet. It is a measure of how much interest there is in astronomical events.

**Comet Shoemaker Levy 9 and its collision with Jupiter** – 1994 – One of my all time favorite astronomical events. It was visible at a reasonable time (just after sunset). The comet fragments made an easily visible mark on Jupiter. There was a large turnout of people and the media. On a personal note, I was then running a workshop for about 20 teachers (elementary through high school) who not only got to see the event but to help run the telescopes and discuss the event with the public. One of those wonderful coincidences which are so enjoyable.

**Opposition of Mars** – 2003- Mars is in opposition (opposite the sun as seen from the earth) every few years. However, as neither the Earth nor Mars has an absolutely circular orbit, the actual distance between the two planets varies with each opposition. The 2003 opposition was the closest in 2000 years. This got a lot of play in the press. Unfortunately, there was a lot of cloudy, wet weather at the same time. When we finally got a clear night, we also got a large turnout. The line waiting to see Mars stretched from the observatory up the hill well beyond the lecture building, looped back down the hill and then went back up almost to the road. The wait to get to the telescopes was about 90 minutes. Despite telling people that the visual image of Mars would not really be much different than it would be at the next opposition, essentially everyone stayed to be part of the historic moment. The observatory stayed open until the early hours of the next day when the clouds rolled in. Nearly 1000 people got to see Mars that night.

**Amateur/bginner astronomers**

There are no courses per se. However, there are two programs which are of interest.

In the early part of the year, there is a program for new telescope owners. They can bring their telescopes in and get a tutorial in how to use it. This has gone on for many years and remains quite popular. People are asked to sign up for a particular time slot, so that everyone can get a reasonable amount of attention.

Over the summer, there is a second program which is designed to give beginners an introduction to the night sky and how to find objects there. The exact content varies to accommodate the level of the class.

**Discoveries**

Unfortunately, given the climate and the light level in the College Park area, there is no possibility of making significant discoveries here. Certainly, instruments were developed in the department and field tested at the observatory and subsequently used at larger observatories in darker sites. There was important science that was done but probably not of the headline grabbing sort. I am less familiar with those result and so am not in a position to comment further.