

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: Building Naming

Action Requested: Authorization to change the name of "The Observatory of the University of Michigan" to "The University of Michigan Detroit Observatory."

Background:

In his inaugural address in 1852, the University of Michigan's first President, Henry Philip Tappan, proposed the idea of constructing an astronomical observatory. With enthusiastic assistance from Henry N. Walker and numerous other friends of science in the City of Detroit, Tappan successfully completed construction of the observatory in 1854. The observatory, which was the University's first scientific laboratory, was named "The Detroit Observatory" by Tappan to honor the beneficence of the citizens of Detroit.

As astronomical science advanced at the University over the years, there was need for larger, more sophisticated telescopes. The 4-acre Observatory site, which is located at the corner of E. Ann and Observatory Streets on what is now the University of Michigan's Medical Campus, allowed for expansion. In 1908, a major addition accommodated a state-of-the-art telescope.

In 1931, it was felt that the name "Detroit Observatory" was confusing, so the Regents approved a name change to "The Observatory of the University of Michigan."

In the 1960s, the Department of Astronomy relocated to the new Dennison Building. The original Observatory site became unsuitable for astronomical observations due to city lights, smoke from the Power Plant, and vibrations from trains and truck traffic. New observatories were constructed at remote sites in Arizona and Chile. The 1908 Observatory addition was razed in 1976, leaving only the original 1854 building on the site. The focus at the Observatory returned to its original history, and the University and local communities once again referred to the historic building as the Detroit Observatory.

In 1994, oversight of the Observatory was transferred to the Office of the Vice President for Research, and a complete historic restoration of the Observatory building and its original telescopes was undertaken and recently completed under the leadership of Patricia S. Whitesell. Today, the building is as close to the way it was in the 1850s as is possible to achieve.

A museum has been created in the building to highlight the Observatory's rich scientific history, and the Observatory's Library will host special meetings and functions that are enhanced by the historical scientific setting.

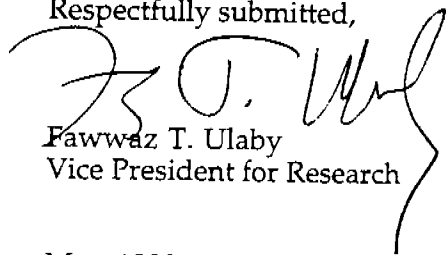
APPROVED BY THE REGENTS ON

MAY 21 1999

On May 21, 1999, the restored Observatory will be rededicated. The time is now appropriate for the Regents to officially restore the building's original name, but to also note that it belongs to the University of Michigan. In so doing, the Regents will honor President Henry Philip Tappan and his vision for the advancement of science at the University of Michigan. To assist in eliminating any confusion that the observatory is located in Detroit, we recommend that the historic observatory now be known as "The University of Michigan Detroit Observatory."

We recommend the Regents authorize renaming the observatory "The University of Michigan Detroit Observatory."

Respectfully submitted,



Fawwaz T. Ulaby
Vice President for Research



Robert Kasdin
Executive Vice President

May 1999