

Earlham College Observatory  
National Road  
Earlham College Campus  
Richmond  
Wayne County  
Indiana

HABS No. IN-113

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IND,  
89-RICH,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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## EARLHAM COLLEGE OBSERVATORY

Location: National Road, Earlham College campus, west end of Richmond, Wayne County, Indiana.

USGS Richmond Quadrangle; Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16.678780.4410200.

Present Owner and Occupant: Earlham College.

Present Use: Observatory, houses telescope.

Statement of Significance: Earlham Observatory, erected 1861, is a plain, strictly utilitarian building, specifically designed to house a telescope. The scope was built in 1856 by R.B. Rutherford, pioneer American astronomer. While the structure has no outstanding architectural features other than the copper sheathed dome and the instruments, the only other observatory comparable to Earlham's in the Midwest is owned by Western Reserve University in Hudson, Ohio, dating from the 1830's. The Earlham Observatory represents an historical scientific site which is associated with a distinctive educational institution.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1860-61.
2. Architect: No information available.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The structure has always been owned by Earlham College.
4. Original plan and construction: This one-story hip roof brick structure measures forty feet by nineteen feet, and is constructed of brick laid in common bond. It has a three part plan consisting of a central block and two side wings to the east and west. On each of the principal elevations, two window openings pierce the central block and one pierces each wing. All windows have double-hung sash four-over-four lights. The main block is topped by a sheathed copper dome which has a sliding panel to permit the use of the telescope. The eave and cornice trim are plain, as is the general appearance of the structure.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The interior is laid out with three interconnected rooms in a linear relationship. The central room is raised 2'-6" above the wings and houses the principal telescope and rotation observation dome. The west room contains a transit telescope, raised on two stone piers.
  2. Flooring: Wooden plank flooring.
  3. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster on all surfaces except the telescope observation room; wooden planking covers this room's walls. The dome's wooden rib construction is exposed.
  4. Doorways and doors: A four-panel wooden door at the east end opens out to the exterior.
  5. Notable hardware: Dome rotates on single rollers, resting on a simple metal track. The main telescope, including the metal pier and stone base have been replaced. The four-inch objective transit telescope seems to be original, acquired in 1861 from the Coast Survey.
  6. Mechanical equipment:
    - a. Heating: None.
    - b. Lighting: Electrical fixtures.
    - c. Plumbing: None.
- D. Site: The observatory stands on the Earlham College campus, surrounded by a landscaped site.

Prepared by Mort Karp  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American  
Buildings Survey  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. The project was completed in the summer of 1974 under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; and Associate Professor Mort Karp of the University of Arkansas, Project Supervisor; the Architect Harry Hunderman (University of Michigan); and student assistant architects Scott Barnard (University of Pennsylvania), Mark Hall (Pennsylvania State University), and Richard Perlmutter (Yale University); and architectural historian Robert Bruegmann (University of Pennsylvania) at the HABS Field Office, Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in January 1975. The written historical and architectural data was edited, and in some cases expanded upon, in the HABS Washington office in April 1979 by staff historian, Jan E. Cigliano.