

## Museums

# Planetarium to host 'Ancient Americas'

**A**STRONOMY of the Ancient Americas, a new planetarium feature opening Monday at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, will transport audiences back in time to see how early civilizations tracked the sun and stars.

Museum officials say the new show at the Burke Baker Planetarium will look at how American Indian populations chronicled the daily and yearly motions of the sun, moon, planets and stars long before the arrival of Columbus.

*Astronomy of the Ancient Americas* will explore the relationship between six ancient civilizations and the heavens they worshiped and used as both clock and calendar.

The show, museum officials explain, will trace the beliefs of Indian cultures from the Great Plains and desert Southwest to the great cities of ancient Mexico, with special emphasis on:

- Medicine Mountain near Sheridan, Wyo., where a wheel of stones chronicled the passing days of summer and warned the nomadic Plains Indians to leave the mountaintop ahead of winter.
- The Anasazi Indians of the Southwest, who

designed their cliff dwellings to capture the low winter sun while avoiding the hot summer sun overhead.

- An ancient pyramid standing 20 stories tall, bearing silent witness to a great ceremonial center of Teotihuacan, Mexico.

- How the Olmec Indians, nearly 500 years before Christ's birth, corrected the complex Meso-American calendar to be as accurate as the Gregorian calendar is.

- The Mayan ruin of Palenque, where stone temples rise gracefully from the rain-forest floor to provide a commanding view of the setting sun and stars, especially during the Winter Solstice.

- A highlight of the new show is expected to be consideration of the mysterious Meso-American ruins in the ancient city of Monte Alban in the mountains of central Mexico.

According to show organizers, the Zapotec Indians nearly 2,500 years ago leveled a mountaintop and constructed this city of palaces and temples. An arrow-shaped building points to the setting locations of two bright stars, Alpha and

Beta Centauri, and the Southern Cross.

Using its computer and Digistar systems, museum officials note, the planetarium has created a three-dimensional rendering of Monte Alban, allowing audiences to study the heavens as though they were doing so from this mountaintop.

*Astronomy of the Ancient Americas* will remain at the museum through May 29.

Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1.50 for children under 12.

Show times will be at 2 and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, and every 30 minutes from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

The Museum of Natural Science is in Hermann Park across from Miller Outdoor Theater.

Museum hours are noon-6 p.m. Sunday and 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

General museum admission is free for members, \$2.50 for non-member adults and \$2 for non-member children under 12.

For more information, including group rates, call 639-4600.

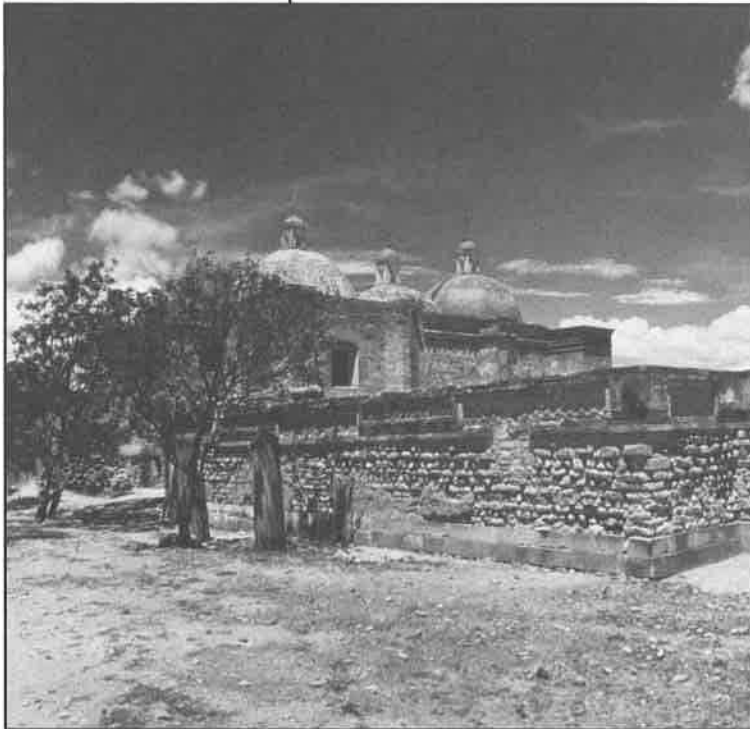
## "Astronomy of the Ancient Americas"

*Astronomy of the Ancient Americas*, the new Planetarium feature which opens January 6, explores the relationship between six ancient civilizations and the heavens they worshipped. Trace the beliefs of Indian cultures from southern Alaska, through the Great Plains and Desert Southwest to the great cities of Ancient Mexico.

Astronomy throughout the Ancient Americas has been linked to

the seasons. In diverse civilizations and in diverse climates, all turned skyward in search of a clock and calendar. Centuries ago, native American civilizations chronicled the daily and yearly motions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars. The ever-changing, but predictable starfield provided a natural, accurate clock and calendar. *Astronomy of the Ancient Americas* takes a look at some of these civilizations and the marvelous monuments they built to chronicle the seasons.

Ancient ruins in Oxaca, Mexico.



### Stars of the Seasons

Star and constellation identification, planets, meteor showers, comets, eclipses and phases of the moon are featured in this live star show presented every Saturday at noon.

### Planetarium Show Times

- "Astronomy of the Ancient Americas,"  
Mon.-Fri., 1, 2, 3 p.m.  
Sat.-Sun., 1, 1:30, 2, 2:30, 3, 3:30, 4 p.m.
- "Laser Beatles,"  
Sat. & Sun., 4:00 p.m.
- Rock Laser Shows,  
Fri. & Sat., 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11 p.m.
- Stars of the Seasons,  
Saturday only, 12:00 p.m.
- "Wonderful Rocket,"  
Sat., 11:00 a.m.

### Planetarium Prices

	Planetarium Shows	Rock Laser Shows
Adult .....	2.00	5.00
Children (-12) & Seniors (62+) ....	1.50	5.00
Members .....	1.00	3.00

Call 639-IMAX for group rates.

Please call 639-IMAX  
for reservations.

## Discovering Science

HMNS and Rice University have joined to produce several hands-on exhibits at the George Observatory called *Discovering Science*. There are four exhibits representing different scientific areas: 1) Earth Science: Weather Watch, 2) Daytime Astronomy: The Sun in Action, 3) Observational Astronomy in Urban and Rural Locations: Saving the Night Sky and 4) Nighttime Astronomy: Finding Star Clusters and Clouds.

This program was made possible by grants from the Favrot Fund and the National Science Foundation.

### Members' Night Calendar for 1992

The following Friday nights are reserved for Members in the Museum's George Observatory: January 17, February 21, March 27, April 24, May 22, June 19, July 24, August 21, September 25, October 16, November 20 and December 4. Check-in is at 7:30 p.m. Bring your Membership card. The Park closes at 10:00 p.m. There is a \$5.00 per car State Park fee.

*The George Observatory is located 55 miles southwest of Houston in Brazos Bend State Park. Take U.S. 59 south to the Crabb River Road exit, then follow the brown signs to Brazos Bend State Park. The Park is open until 10 p.m.*

Want to give your friends a party that will be remembered for light years? The George Observatory is available for private groups. For more information, please call the Observatory Manager, Dana Lambert at (713)242-3055 or (409)553-3400.

### George Observatory General Public Viewing

Every Saturday from twilight until 10:00 p.m., the George Observatory is open to the general public. Visitors hoping to look through the 36" research telescope may pick up passes starting at 5 p.m. This research telescope is one of the largest in the world open to the general public on a regular basis. It is used by several different local astronomy clubs, dozens of Houston area school groups, as well as personnel from Rice University and the University of Houston. There is no charge for Museum activities, however the Park charges \$5.00 per car entrance fee.

