



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

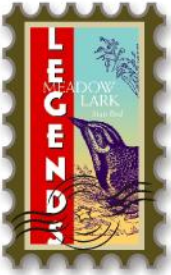
Clyde Tombaugh (1906-1997)

Clyde Tombaugh may have grown up as a small town Kansas boy, but his achievements were as enormous as the vast skies he studied. Tombaugh was born in Streator, Ill., in 1906 but grew up in Burdett, Kan. On the treeless plains of Western Kansas, Tombaugh had ample opportunity for star gazing, which he was encouraged to do by his father and uncle. He first examined the night sky through his uncle's telescope and began his lifelong career in astronomy by building his first telescope in 1925.



Tombaugh crafted more than 30 telescopes throughout his life, but he began building them with hand ground mirrors and farm equipment parts. At the young age of 24, Tombaugh built a nine-inch reflector that he used to draft intricate drawings of Jupiter and Mars. He sent his drawings to astronomers at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Ariz., for feedback, but instead received an offer to join the observatory as a junior astronomer.

At the Lowell Observatory, Tombaugh took up Percival Lowell's search for "Planet X," the elusive ninth planet. Tombaugh's job was to take pictures of the night sky and examine pairs of pictures using a comparator to find unidentified points of light that might be the planet. Each photographic plate of the sky could contain between 150,000 and 1million stars, and Tombaugh spent countless hours day and night for 10 months searching, simultaneously photographing nearly 65% of the sky.



On Feb. 25, 1930, Tombaugh fulfilled Percival Lowell's dream. In comparing two photographic plates taken January 23 and 29, Tombaugh discovered the ninth planet, which was named Pluto by a suggestion from a schoolgirl in England. Throughout his studies, Tombaugh also discovered more than 100 asteroids, several star clusters and two comets.

Tombaugh worked at the Lowell Observatory from 1929 to 1945. Following the discovery of Pluto, he earned astronomy degrees from the University of Kansas. After teaching stints at Northern Arizona University and UCLA, Tombaugh became a professor of astronomy at New Mexico State University from 1955 to 1973. He started the astronomy research program there, the Planetary Group, which is now considered one of the top in the nation. He continued to lecture and raise money for additional scientific research even into his 80s.

Clyde Tombaugh became seriously ill in the last year of his life and died in Las Cruces, New Mexico, just two weeks before his 91st birthday. Tombaugh's passion for astronomy lives on through his programs and scholarship fund at the university.

