

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Libraries Recognize Local Scientist, Celebrate Launch of Webb Telescope

Bradford County -- Fifty years before women were permitted to use the telescopes at most major observatories, Troy-born Wrexie Louise Leonard (September 15, 1867 – November 9, 1937) was publishing her original drawings and observations of Mars in *Popular Astronomy* (1907). Her work as assistant to astronomer Percival Lowell granted her unprecedented access to his Clark telescope and others around the world during their travels. She worked as his constant companion in the study of Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Mars and the hunt for the proposed ninth planet, "Planet X", predicted by the variation in the orbit of Neptune.

During their two decade partnership, Leonard's contribution to the establishment and workings of the Lowell Observatory can be seen in her detailed notes and drawings that often accompany those of Percy Lowell. She also served as his editor, speech writer, and secretary as well as business manager of the observatory. Though Pluto would not be officially located until 1930 by Clyde Tombaugh at the observatory founded by Lowell in Flagstaff, the original team of Lowell, Leonard, Elizabeth Langdon Williams, John Kenneth McDonald, and others did manage to predict the probable location with some accuracy and unknowingly captured two images of it. Percy Lowell passed away in 1916 and Leonard published a memoir five years later featuring many of their letters titled [Percival Lowell: An Afterglow](#). Leonard lived to see the discovery of Pluto and passed away near Boston at age 70 in 1937. She is buried next to her parents Renseleur Wilder and Louise Adeline Alvord Leonard, and her sister Laura Helen Leonard Goodell in Oak Hill Cemetery in Troy.

Leonard's contributions to astronomy were largely uncelebrated in her lifetime despite her publication in respected journals and admittance to the prestigious Société Astronomique de France in 1904. Since her death in 1937, however, she has been honored with the naming of the 19.7 mile Leonard Crater on Venus and inspired a character in Jan Millsapps' novel [Venus on Mars](#), published in 2014.

In honor of pioneers in STEM like Bradford County's own Wrexie Leonard, the Library System of Bradford County is excited to present the newest advancement in astronomy on Saturday, October 23, 2021 at 2pm at Mt. Pisgah State Park. This community event celebrates the December 2021 launch of the James Webb Telescope which will gaze far into the galaxy beyond Pluto in detail Leonard and Lowell could not have dreamed possible. The event will feature an expert from NASA, a pop-up planetarium presented by Kopernik Observatory and Science Museum, the NY Penn Gateway Girl Scouts STEM van, the Library System of Bradford County bookmobile, and poster exhibits in tribute to the many women of

STEM and exploration of the exoplanets. The event is open to all ages, but may be best understood by those in middle school and above.

You can learn more about the incredible people, places, and events connected to Bradford County via social media during “Fall in Love with History” season this Autumn with daily posts on Facebook and Instagram from the Library System of Bradford County between September 1st and November 30th. Each of the 9 libraries of the system also holds unique resources related to their respective communities that provide excellent avenues to explore local history and genealogy. Local historical societies and museums are also wonderful places to find out more about what makes Bradford County so special. The Library System of Bradford County is comprised of Allen F. Pierce Free Library in Troy, Bradford County Library in Burlington, Green Free Library in Canton, Mather Memorial Library in Ulster, Monroeton Public Library, Sayre Public Library, Spalding Memorial Library in Athens, Towanda Public Library, and Wyalusing Public Library as well as the bookmobile housed at BCL that serves a variety of deposit stations throughout the county and makes regular stops in many of the outlying areas.