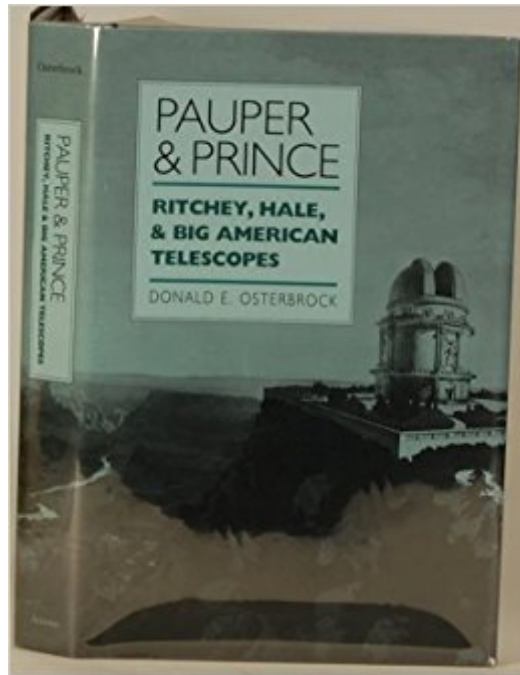




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# Pauper And Prince: Ritchey, Hale, And Big American Telescopes



## Synopsis

George Willis Ritchey was the builder of the first large, successful American reflecting telescopes and worked closely with George Ellery Hale, the phenomenal fund raiser and organizer of observatories; Mount Wilson Observatory stands today as a monument to their collaboration. Osterbrock shows how the relationship of these men helped the United States take the lead in developing major astronomical facilities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Everyone interested in understanding how modern, giant reflectors came to be, or the history of 20th-century astronomy, must read [this] book."  
—[Sky & Telescope](#) "A poignant story of human genius and human frailty, and their influence on crucial scientific decisions."  
—[Nature](#)

Hale and Ritchey, Ritchey and Hale, the chicken or the egg? This book describes the background and lives of two men who were responsible for conceiving, funding and building the three largest telescopes of their time. From what were, until now, the golden days of astronomy, it describes the building of the Yerkes 40 inch refractor, then and still today the largest refractor in the world, the Snow solar telescope, the sixty inch reflector at Mt. Wilson, (Ritchey's opus magnus), the Hooker 100 inch telescope and the Hale 200 inch reflector at Mt. Palomar. The relationship between Hale and Ritchey began congenially enough, but deteriorated over time until Ritchey was discharged by Hale. The entire series of events from collaboration on the most intricate projects ever attempted to

the events leading up to the split between these giants and their lives thereafter are described in great detail. While at times the book drags and at other times it reads as a soap opera, nonetheless, it is an exceptionally well researched work and is a must have for those with an interest in the recent history of astronomy and large telescopes. Francis J. O'Reilly

Still reading it. Great book with outstanding history.

There could hardly be a greater contrast between two men than that of George Ritchey and George Hale. Hale was a scientist, fund raiser, organizer, motivator, and extraordinarily successful at all he attempted. Ritchey was a gifted instrument maker, but a failure at human relations, organizational matters, and managed to squander most of his opportunities, particularly after he left Mt. Wilson. Osterbrock's book is the story of the great era of American astronomy dominated by the telescopes of George Ellery Hale, and Hale is necessarily prominent in its pages. However, Osterbrock tells the story, for the most part, from the perspective of the gifted mirror grinder and optician, Ritchey, who mostly received short-shrift in other documentaries of this era. Osterbrock attempts to correct some oversights of other histories which have tended to downplay Ritchey's contributions. Ritchey, for instance, was the project manager for most of the 60- and 100-inch Mt. Wilson telescope projects, and without him, arguably, these instruments would not have been the stupendous successes they were. Clearly Hale owed much to Ritchey, but after their falling out and Ritchey's subsequent firing from Mt. Wilson, Ritchey all but disappeared from American astronomy. Hale didn't overtly blackball him, but such was Hale's influence and universal respect, that if Hale didn't want to be around you, well then, nobody wanted to be around you. Ritchey spent years in France working on several telescope projects that ultimately failed, and eventually came back to the US as an old man and built the reflector for the US Naval Observatory, a 40-inch Ritchey-Chretien model. It was an exquisite instrument, but due to its location in light-polluted Washington D.C., it never realized its potential until long after Ritchey was dead and it was moved to an Arizona mountaintop. Osterbrock points out that the Ritchey-Chretien reflector model, so ignored and disparaged during his lifetime, eventually won out and now nearly all large telescopes are built using this model. Ritchey was a genius and well ahead of his time in many respects. It was simply his misfortune to have lived opposite the likes of George Hale, who because of money, position, and success, was able to overshadow and dominate his accomplishments. If Ritchey could have adapted to his position as optician, he could have had a sparkling career at Mt. Wilson, and later, Mt. Palomar. Instead, his hard-headedness met the immovable object of George Hale's ambition and momentum, and

Ritchey ultimately lost.

Dr. Osterbrock presents an excellent behind the 'hype' view of how large expensive telescopes were (and are!) built and who built them. Anyone interested in astronomy, engineering, and telescopes and has a desire to have a career in these areas should read this book. Osterbrock presents a reality about engineering, people and money that's true today as it was in the 20's and 30's. This book shows the result of personal styles and arrogance on technical decisions. It also shows how easy it is to overextend your real knowledge and capability through innocent assumptions producing a disaster. Hale and Ritchey were great men in their narrow areas of expertise. The discussion of telescope mirror design and manufacture (esp. the RC system) is very interesting. A somewhat long and expensive but fascinating book written by an obvious insider.

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