

The Daily Journal

Vol. 53, No. 36 • Wheaton, Ill.

Friday, February 20, 1987 • 25¢

DuPage County invites its famous tinkerer to

By Mark Giulucci
Journal Staff

WHEATON — The most accomplished tinkerer in Wheaton history was at it again Thursday, piecing together another puzzle as the late winter sun set quietly behind him.

Grote Reber — the man who built the world's first radio telescope right here in his old backyard, who has mapped every star in the southern sky just for fun and is now out to tackle the other half of the globe — was standing in a garage on West Street sorting out hardware, looking at a four-page diagram.

"I just about got it figured out," he said, tossing a small metal wheel on a growing pile of nuts, bolts and assorted parts. "I'll carry it with me on the plane once I get it into the right boxes."

A new telescope, maybe, or some kind of ultra-sophisticated ionic detector? "No, nothing like that," he said, chuckling. "It's a garage door track. I need one back in Tasmania."

YES, TASMANIA, the island 150

miles south of the Australian mainland. The 75-year-old Wheaton native has made the remote outpost his home for more than 25 years, taking advantage of the site's peculiar atmospheric conditions to complete his chart of the southern heavens.

Reber is passing through DuPage County this week to be inducted into the DuPage Heritage Gallery. Tomorrow his display will join seven others honoring famous DuPage citizens, including football legend Red Grange and evangelist Billy Graham, in the first-floor corridor of the county complex on County Farm Road. Tickets for the tea to honor Reber, which begins at 3 p.m., tomorrow, are on sale at Gary-Wheaton Bank and The Daily Journal.

"I'm quite flattered they think I'm of sufficient importance to have a spot there," he says. "I'll say a few words, yank a cord and that will be the end of it."

Then it's off to Boulder, Colo., to visit some friends, before he totes his garage rail back to Tasmania.

(Continued on page 2)

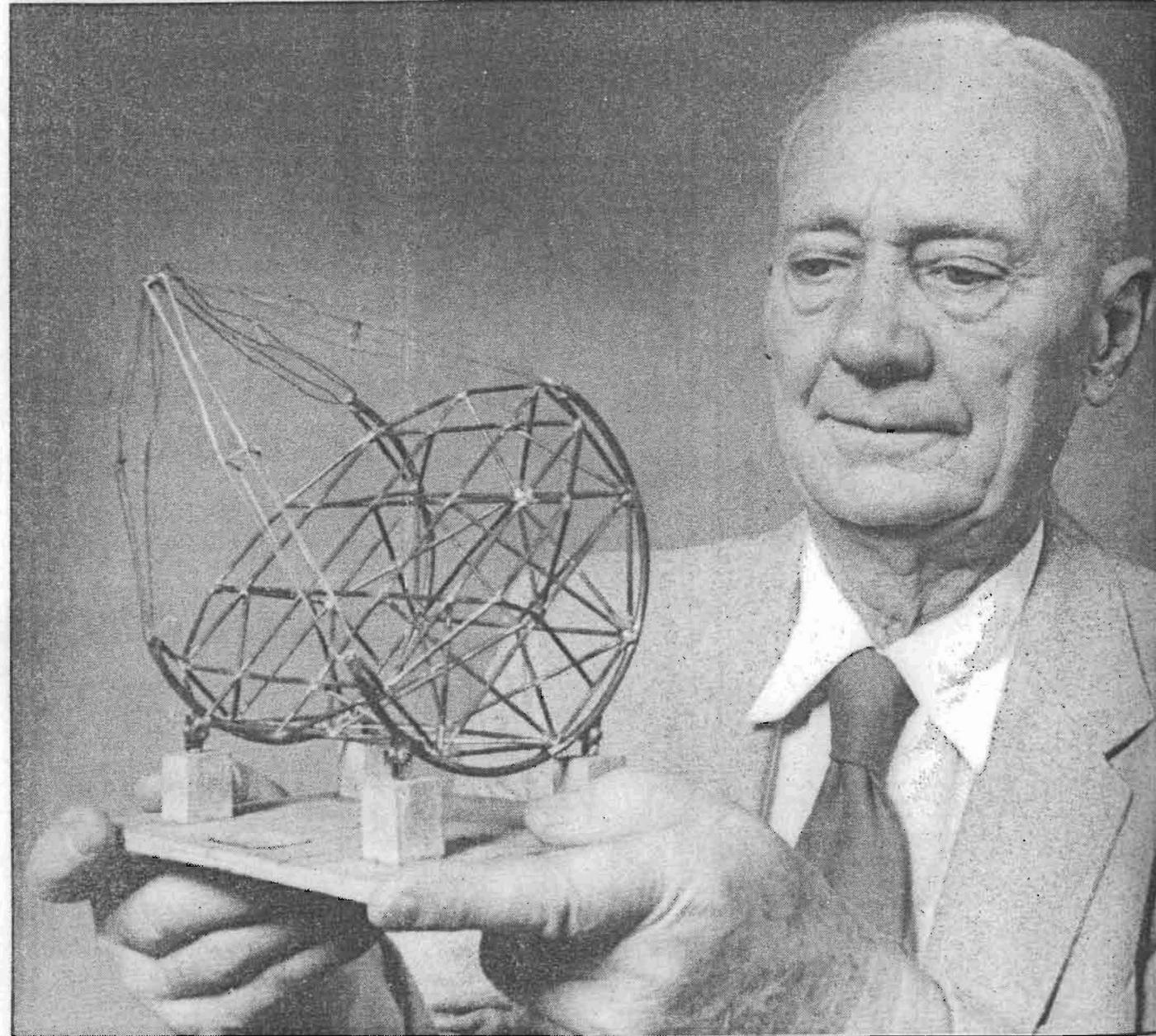
Reber tea tickets still available

WHEATON — Tickets are still available for tomorrow's tea to unveil an exhibit honoring Wheaton astronomer Grote Reber at 3 p.m. in the DuPage Heritage Gallery, 421 N. County Farm Road.

Reber, the latest member of

the DuPage Heritage Gallery, in 1937 built the first radio telescope. He now lives on the island of Tasmania.

Tickets, at \$12.50 each, are available through Gary-Wheaton Bank and The Daily Journal.



Grote Reber in Wheaton

(Continued from 1)

"There's always something to do," he said. "I don't like to sit still."

REBER IS a common man's scientist, more interested in logic than figures. To him, the thrill is in the doing, in the thinking, not in number-crunching. "I don't know everything about mathematics and calculations," he says. "A lot of people do, so why should I worry about it?"

He collects data, charts it, ponders it. Mostly, he tinkers.

Reber was born in Chicago in 1911 and spent the first 35 years of his life in Wheaton. He worked as a radio engineer for a while, but it didn't hold his interest. What really intrigued him were stars.

"I guess I started getting interested when I was about 14," he said. "It just struck my fancy."

HIS HOBBY became a passion and in 1937 — without the help of scientists, state-of-the-art technology or a penny of grant money — Reber invented the radio telescope, a 30-foot wide dish that collects radio waves from the heavens. "I had some help with labor, but that was about it," he said. "I didn't have any formal training. Just figured it would be the most efficient way to focus the waves."

Reber's invention has become the standard tool of astronomers, who use it to map distant stars and galaxies. His original dish, which once sat at his old house on Wesley Street, is now on display at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Greenbank, W. Va.

Reber left Wheaton in 1947 and moved on to Washington, D.C.,

where he was a less-than-thrilled employee of the federal Bureau of Standards. He quit in 1951, at the age of 40. "That's the last outfit that gave me paid remuneration for doing stupid things," he said, laughing. "But that's another story."

The real story is what he decided to do after leaving. He star-gazed atop a Hawaiian volcano for a few years, then moved to Tasmania, where he said he could get the most uncluttered look at stars and galaxies. He toiled there until he finished his famous map of the southern sky, which was published in 1968.

His attentions have now turned to a spot near Ottawa, Canada, where he is starting the same work in the northern hemisphere he has finished with in the south. With the help of the Canadian government he has taken over an abandoned military base and started charting the northern sky.

"WE'RE FINDING it's very similar to the southern sky. And that's not really a surprise, because if it was we'd have a major theoretical problem, wouldn't we?" he asks.

A couple of years, he figures, and he'll be done with the Canadian project. "I don't know what I'll do next," he says. "We'll just have to see."

Chief among his hopes, he says, is debunking the Big Bang Theory. "It's just another form of Creationism," he said, frowning again. "Instead of being promoted by religious cranks it's being promoted by astronomical cranks, and you can

Who's who in Heritage halls

Here are the eight citizens honored in the DuPage Heritage Gallery.

● **Elbert Gary.** After serving as Mayor of Wheaton and a DuPage County Judge, Gary co-founded the United States Steel Corporation, America's first billion dollar business enterprise.

● **John W. Gates.** Born on a farm near present-day West Chicago, Gates became a central figure in the development of United States' agriculture and industry. In 1901, he financed the drilling of one of the nation's first oil wells, Spindletop in Texas.

● **Billy Graham.** After graduating from Wheaton College, Graham went on to become the foremost Christian evangelist in the world today. In the autumn of 1980, he opened the Billy Graham Center on the Wheaton College campus.

● **Red Grange.** Acclaimed as

the greatest football player of all time, Grange's career helped turn professional football into America's number one sport.

● **Robert McCormick.** Former owner and editor of The Chicago Tribune. His estate in Winfield, Cantigny, is open to the public.

● **Everett Mitchell.** A pioneer during the early years of radio, Mitchell announced the National Farm and Home Hour over NBC for 35 years.

● **Grote Reber.** Inventor of the radio telescope, he built the first telescope in Wheaton with his own money. Reber has mapped the southern skies for NASA and is currently working on a map for the Northern hemisphere.

● **Dr. Kenneth Taylor.** Taylor's paraphrase of the Bible under the title of **The Living Bible** has sold more copies than any other book since World War II.

quote me. They've really pestered me."

In a flash he was explaining why he's right, picking up parts of the garage door to demonstrate. A wheel acts as a proton, a roller as an electron, his free hand as a beam of light. Reber was in his element now, talking with passion and clarity, throwing out names of past and present scientists like they were old friends.

REBER'S DISCOURSE continued for several minutes, as he dashed through Copernican theory, particle physics, light-wave inter-

pretation and more. A lightning-fast history of everything from a man with no degree from M.I.T., who would look as out of place in a lab coat as he would in downtown Manhattan, whose most important objective in life is tinkering.

His brief lesson finished, Reber turned to packing up his garage door railings. "I just can't see being around a golf course and wasting my time," he said, counting the wheels and rollers one last time. "I have to be doing something worthwhile. I have to feel like I'm contributing. It's just in me, I guess."