



A Classic Book Reborn

ONLINE VERSIONS OF BOOKS are nothing new. I noted libraries of them in the December 2000 issue (page 74). Since then, among the active projects to make more books electronically accessible is one by the Internet-information corporation Google, which is in the process of scanning

If you can't get your hands on E. E. Barnard's coveted books, you can examine them on the Web.

texts from several university libraries (<http://print.google.com>).

As useful as this undoubtedly will be, some publications really need an adequate representation of their illustrations, and that requires special attention during digitization. A grand example of this is the Georgia Institute of Technology's online version of E. E. Barnard's two-volume *A Photographic Atlas of Selected Regions of the Milky Way* at www.library.gatech.edu/barnard. Barnard's work is highlighted in the article starting on page 38 of this issue, which notes that amateur astronomers

revere these books. The tomes are so highly prized that on the rare occasions when a set appears on the market, the asking price is thousands of dollars.

While some people may be ready to sell the SUV to own Barnard's masterpiece, Georgia Tech's online version is just as mesmerizing. You won't feel the full sensory experience of smell and texture as you would by paging through an original copy, but the Web edition has some additional handy features — and it's free!

The first volume of *Selected Regions* contains gelatin silver prints of 50 plates taken by Barnard and his descriptive text for each photograph. The deep images are what the astronomer used to catalog the dark nebulae that so interested him. The

second volume includes charts for each plate as well as a catalog of objects recorded in each field. The Web site offers all this in easily accessible formats.

For each field, the site has separate JPEG files for the photograph, chart, a photo-chart composite, the table of cataloged objects in the field, and Barnard's narrative. You can view or download them individually or retrieve a single multimegabyte PDF that has all five components. While the photos and charts have been scanned well, the text portions exhibit a distinct photocopied look (the lines

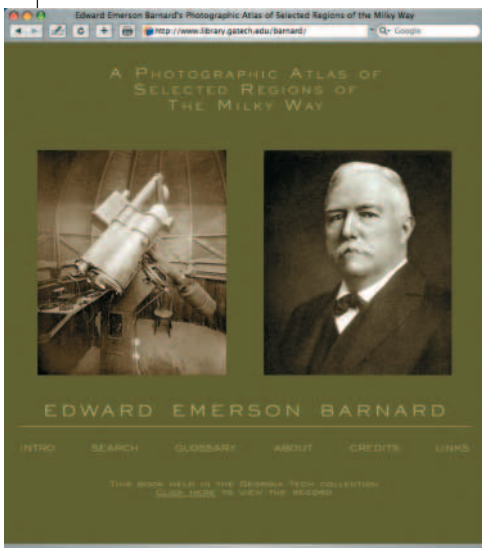


FIND IT YOURSELF Search *Selected Regions* by Barnard's photographic plate number, celestial coordinates, or by Barnard (dark-nebula) catalog number (not shown).

curve close to the edge of the page, like when you try to copy a book with a stiff spine). Nevertheless, everything is readable.

You can browse the photos by plate numbers from the atlas or by Barnard's title, such as "Nebulous Region in Taurus." But the Web site will also help you zero in on a field by celestial coordinates or by using a dark nebula's Barnard number. There's even a helpful glossary to explain olde-tyme astronomical terminology like "stellar stratum."

Barnard's plates are among the earliest examples that demonstrated the importance of photography for astronomy. Their beauty is timeless, such that modern astrophotographers continue to try to emulate them. But seeing the deep views of star fields is only half the story; paging through *Selected Regions* electronically will round out the picture. *



BARNARD'S STAR ATTRACTION Astronomer E. E. Barnard's venerable *Photographic Atlas of Selected Regions of the Milky Way* can be viewed in its entirety online, thanks to the Georgia Institute of Technology.



FULL SELECTION *Selected Regions* on the Web allows viewing individual pages from the two volumes, as well as in a PDF file that combines all the pages for a particular region of sky. Barnard's dark nebulae are tallied for each photographic plate.

Some of the astronomy books on associate editor STUART GOLDMAN's shelf may be out of print, but few, if any, would be considered rare.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.