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**South Carolina State Museum Opens New Observatory with Distance Learning Capabilities**  
*State-of-the-art observatory to be accessible to all students across South Carolina*

**COLUMBIA, S.C., Tuesday, Aug 5, 2014** – On Saturday, Aug. 16, the [South Carolina State Museum](http://www.scmuseum.org) is making history as it opens a new state-of-the-art observatory with the capacity to reach every classroom across South Carolina. This will be the first time in the nation that remote access of a vintage telescope will be provided free-of-charge to participating classrooms across an entire state. Even students at schools with the most limited of resources will be able to access the observatory to study phenomena from the rings of Saturn to the Orion Nebula.

The observatory will play a central role in the State Museum’s STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) distance learning initiatives. A generous grant from Boeing South Carolina will allow students in South Carolina to control the telescope and connect through real-time distance learning with museum astronomy staff directly from their classrooms. The grant also supports teacher professional development required for operating the telescope.

“This remarkable new resource will revolutionize the way in which educators can integrate astronomy into their teaching,” said Willie Calloway, executive director, S.C. State Museum. “Our goal is to help bridge the education access gap across South Carolina by delivering STEM resources directly into classrooms.”

The observatory houses a 1926 Alvan Clark 12 3/8-inch refracting telescope. The Clark telescope has a new computer control system that allows it to point at celestial objects quickly and accurately. A solar telescope, as well as an imaging camera for more distant objects, is mounted to the Clark telescope to provide more viewing options and access. The observatory also features an outdoor viewing terrace and a classroom, which will serve as a space for onsite student and teacher instruction.

The Clark telescope was originally housed at the Rutherford Observatory at Columbia University and was moved from New York to South Carolina in May 1997. The observatory is part of a 75,000-square foot expansion and renovation project, which also includes a planetarium and 4D theater. A grand opening celebration will be held from 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 16 at the State Museum located at 301 Gervais St., Columbia, S.C. 29201. Visit [scmuseum.org](http://scmuseum.org) to learn more.

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