

# HISTORICAL ASTRONOMY DIVISION NEWSLETTER 8 APRIL 1988

## \* Historical Astronomy Division President's Report - *Don Osterbrock*

The Historical Astronomy Division held its eighth annual meeting in conjunction with the 171st meeting of the American Astronomical Society at Austin, Texas, January 9 - 10, 1988. The Local Organizing Committee, chaired by David Evans, together with Sally Leach of the Humanities Research Center, provided a special exhibit of seminal texts of early astronomy and manuscripts (Copernicus, Tycho, Kepler, Newton, Herschel, etc.). It was on display at the Academic Center of the University Library on the University of Texas campus throughout the entire AAS meeting.

On Sunday afternoon, January 9, the HAD meeting, held at the Academic Center, began with a guided tour of this exhibit, combined with a social hour. Then the first paper session, consisting of one invited paper (by David Evans) and six contributed papers (including one late paper) took place, with over 60 people in attendance.

On Monday, January 10, two more historical paper sessions were held at the Stouffer Austin Hotel as a regular part of the AAS meeting. Six papers, all contributed, were presented in each session. About 70 people attended the morning session, and about 60 the afternoon session. The HAD Business meeting was held in the afternoon, before the paper session. About 20 members attended. Plans for future HAD meetings in conjunction with the AAS meetings at Boston in January 1989, and at Ann Arbor in June 1989, both requested by the respective local hosts and accepted by the HAD, were discussed. Also, suggested names for a new Nominating Committee were requested and various other items of business were discussed.

Following the afternoon paper session on January 10, an Invited Panel Discussion on the history of Lick Observatory, organized by the HAD, was presented to the entire AAS. It marked the occasion of the centennial of the Lick Observatory going into operation as part of the University of California on June 1, 1888. D. E. Osterbrock presented an introduction on the early years of Lick Observatory's history, and then chaired the discussion by a panel consisting of S. Vasilevskis, D. M. Popper, G. W. Preston, R. P. Kraft and J. S. Miller. Also, taped responses by N. U. Mayall, G. E. Kron, G. H. Herbig and O. J. Eggen to questions sent them earlier were played during the discussion. About 300 people were in attendance, and judging from their comments afterward, this discussion was well received.

In the evening of January 10 the HAD Committee met and discussed future meetings, plans for closer contact with other AAS divisions, the Nominating Committee to be put in place this spring, and other items of business. At present there are approximately 227 members in the Division.

## \* Notes from the Paper Sessions and Exhibit-- *David DeVorkin*

Three paper sessions, a AAS Invited Panel Discussion in honor of the Centenary of the Lick Observatory, and an exhibit of notable incunabulae, texts and historical manuscript material held by the University of Texas highlighted the Austin meeting.

The first paper session "Biography and Classical Astronomy" was held on Sunday, January 9 at the Academic Center of the University Library on the University campus. It was preceded by a powerful demonstration of the holdings of the University of Texas: David Evans, with the collaboration of Ms Sally Leach of the Humanities Research Center within the Library, provided a most exciting display of the wealth of historical materials the Library maintains. Prominent was one of three known copies of a magnificent 1679 map of the moon by Jean Dominique Cassini which revealed his penchant for fanciful

lunar fountains and rays as well as portraits of fine women embroidering the lunar face. Kepler's Mysterium Cosmographicum was opened to its legendary fold-out portrayal of the dimensions of the planetary orbits nested within the five solids, and one could easily see the smiling face of a tiny sun at the very center, forever lost in countless textbook reproductions in the ensuing 392 years. Celestial and terrestrial drawings by John Herschel, Giovanni Battista Riccioli's lunar maps and portrayals of the chief world systems, along with William Herschel's log of the telescopes he built for European nobility sat together with the works of Brahe, Galileo and Copernicus. It was a fine setting for our first paper session.

The Sunday session included one invited (by David Evans) and six contributed talks (including one late paper). Among the biographical offerings we heard about characters, collectors, observers and institution builders showing that it takes all types to make a scientific discipline.

The Monday paper sessions (Modern History; Ancient and Archaeoastronomy) included one dozen papers ranging from a thoughtful reassessment of the British reaction to the prediction and discovery of Neptune and a fascinating description of specialized slide rules for astronomical computations in the morning session to continuing studies of calendrical artifacts in New Mexico's Chaco Canyon and a method of predicting first visibility of the lunar crescent.

A quite special and unique presentation in the form of a panel discussion on the first century of the Lick Observatory ended official activities for the HAD at the Austin meetings. After a brief review of the observatory's early years, Donald Osterbrock orchestrated a discussion between D. M. Popper, S. Vasilevskis, G. Preston, R. Kraft and J. Miller, all of whom were either students and/or staff at the observatory in the past or at present. Interspersed with their responses to Osterbrock's questions about each of their experiences at Lick and impressions of life at the observatory were taped responses to those questions from G. Kron and G. Herbig and written responses from N. Mayall. Beyond asking how each came to the Observatory and what their research programs were, Osterbrock posed thematic questions which brought out very valuable commentary on the move of the observatory staff to Santa Cruz in the mid-1960s, the importance of the 120-inch in revitalizing the research strength of the observatory, and the present status of the 36-inch refractor's lens. Comments from the audience by F. Whipple and H. Weaver helped to make this a most fascinating session.

\* HAD Business Meeting -- *David DeVorkin*

The HAD Business Meeting, held prior to the afternoon paper session, was attended by 20 members. After the financial report they addressed a number of issues of interest to the Division:

1) Expanding relations with other divisions: After an extended discussion prompted by a letter from Don Yeomans there was a consensus that we should explore ways to become more aware of the historical activities of other divisions and seek a means of informing other divisions of our activities. We should also consider meeting in conjunction with other AAS Divisions, especially when they are planning extensive historical paper sessions which might benefit from HAD cosponsorship. Osterbrock suggested that he write to each division chairman with a proposal that we set up committees of HAD members who are members of other AAS Divisions, to act as liaison groups informing the HAD of historical activities planned or desired by other divisions, and that the HAD do likewise. This suggestion was approved.

2) HAD Nominating Committee: Osterbrock informed the membership that an election was required this year by the by-laws for a vice-chair, secretary/treasurer, and committee member. He is now collecting suggested names for the nominating committee for the fall election, with E. Krupp, past HAD Chairman, as the chair of the Committee, in keeping with the by-laws.

3) Reduction of meeting registration fees for Affiliates: Concerns pro and con were aired. Affiliates who wish to attend but who do not give papers find the fee daunting; present affiliates actually pay a \$20 surcharge (\$105) to attend; the AAS does underwrite the considerable cost of the meeting for the HAD when the HAD meets with them. The consensus was that we should prepare a request to the AAS Council for a reduction of 50% (of the total charge plus surcharge, a nominal \$50) in registration fees for affiliates who attend only the HAD meeting, and that affiliates desiring the reduction be required to apply to the AAS Executive Office before a deadline the Office sets to obtain the reduction. This is over 50% of the regular registration fee, yet the normal two-day HAD meeting (one day when the AAS is in session) is less than 50% of the AAS meeting time itself. DeVorkin is preparing a proposal to the AAS Council for their consideration at the June meetings in Kansas.

4) Plans for Future Meetings: Osterbrock identified future meeting sites as Boston (January 1989) and Ann Arbor (June 1989) passing up Kansas (June 1988). These meetings were decided upon after invitations were received from local hosts who are preparing historical celebrations of observatories at those sites.

Plans for Boston at present include an invited historical paper session at the Center for Astrophysics on Saturday, January 7 cosponsored by the HAD and the Center for Astrophysics dealing with the history of astronomy at Cambridge to mark the 150th anniversary of the Harvard College Observatory and the 100th anniversary of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory. Tours will be arranged on Sunday, January 8 through the University's magnificent historical instrument collections and possibly to the Agassiz Station. Historical paper sessions in conjunction with the AAS plus our HAD Business Meeting are planned for Monday, January 9. Also, Barbara Welther will give an invited historical lecture to the entire AAS membership on the history of the Harvard College Observatory and the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory.

5) The Question of Expanding the HAD Newsletter and/or HAD Activities: While there was no resistance to the concept of an expanded program, either in the form of a more comprehensive Newsletter or general activities, there was no perceived pressure for it either. DeVorkin received approval to trade the HAD Newsletter with those of other historical divisions within other scientific societies (such as the ASP, AGU, APS, and the RAS) as well as with historical societies (such as the HSS and SHOT), and to utilize this tradeoff as a means of gathering information of potential interest to HAD members. He also will continue to honor any news items from HAD members about upcoming publications, research needs, fellowships and meetings of interest to the history of astronomy.

\* Executive Committee Meeting Minutes -- David DeVorkin

The HAD Executive Committee Meeting was held at 8:00 PM on Monday evening, January 11, in Don Osterbrock's hotel room. Present were Art Hoag, David DeVorkin, Barbara Welther, Kate Bracher and the Chairman. They discussed the same issues as were brought up during the Business meeting earlier that day, and came to a number of decisions:

1) Expanding relations with other divisions: Confirmed consensus established at the Business Meeting that the HAD should explore ways to become more aware of the historical activities of other divisions and seek a means of informing other divisions of our activities. Osterbrock will write to each division chairman with a proposal that we set up individual liaison committees with them, to promote historical interest and keep each other informed of activities. The best prospects to begin with are the planetary and dynamical astronomy divisions.

2) HAD Nominating Committee: Names of possible committee members were discussed.

3) Reduction of meeting registration fees for Affiliates: Approved consensus that we should prepare a request to the AAS Council for a reduction of 50% (of the total

charge plus surcharge, a nominal \$50) in registration fees for affiliates who attend only the HAD meeting, and that affiliates desiring the reduction be required to apply to the AAS Executive Office before a deadline the Office sets to obtain the reduction.

4) Plans for Future Meetings: Confirmed and extended discussion at Business Meeting.

5) The Question of Expanding the HAD Newsletter and/or HAD Activities: DeVorkin received approval to trade the HAD Newsletter with those of other historical divisions within other scientific societies. He also will continue to honor any news items from HAD members about upcoming publications, research needs, fellowships and meetings of interest to the history of astronomy.

\* Nominating Committee -- *Don Osterbrock*

After consultation with the HAD Executive Committee and the members present at the HAD Business meeting in Austin, and on the basis of suggestions I received from several of you, I have appointed the following HAD Nominating Committee, pursuant to our by-laws: Edwin C. Krupp (Chair), Brenda G. Corbin, and Kevin Krisciunas. Ed's address is: Griffith Observatory, 2800 E. Observatory Rd. Los Angeles, CA 90027.

The offices to be filled are Vice-Chairman (two candidates to be on the ballot), Secretary-Treasurer (one or two candidates), and two (Executive) Committee members (four candidates). Please send or give your suggestions to any of the members of the Nominating Committee. We will have our election in the fall, and the new officers and Committee Members will take office on January 9, 1989, at the end of our Business Meeting in Boston. At that time my term will end and, under the by-laws, Kate Bracher, our present Vice-Chairman, will succeed me. Also, David DeVorkin's four-year term as Secretary-Treasurer will end; he is eligible for renomination and re-election for a second term.

The officers (Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary-Treasurer) must be members of the AAS and of the HAD; the Committee members may be members of the AAS and of the HAD, or Affiliate members of the HAD.

\* Auditing Committee -- *Don Osterbrock*

I discovered in Article IV Section 3 of the HAD By-Laws that the Treasurer's accounts must be audited before each yearly HAD meeting. Though it was too late to follow the letter of the by-laws, I did therefore establish a committee of two to audit the accounts for 1987 retroactively. Vera Rubin (Chair) and Steve Dick have accepted as the Auditing Committee.

\* HAD Liaison with other AAS Divisions -- *Don Osterbrock*

Following discussions at the HAD Business meeting and at the Executive Committee meeting in Austin, and on the basis of suggestions from several of you, I have appointed the following two Liaison Committees: HAD-Division on Dynamical Astronomy Liaison Committee - LeRoy E. Doggett (Chair), E. Myles Standish, and Brian Marsden; and HAD-Division for Planetary Sciences Liaison Committee - Don Yeomans (Chair), David Morrison, and Joe Tatarewicz. I have corresponded with the Chairmen of both these Divisions and have invited them to appoint further members to these respective Committees if they wish to do so.

I have asked both Liaison Committees to make it their special first duties to publicize our two upcoming HAD meetings to the members of their Divisions urging them to attend and participate, and to inform us of their Divisions' upcoming meetings, hopefully with historical sessions in them.

If you are a member of one of the other Divisions, and believe we should set up a Liaison Committee with it, please get in touch with me.

\* News from Publishers:

- \* Special Offer from Reidel: Gerrit Kiers of Reidel has kindly informed us that HAD members may purchase at 25% reduced rate, copies of Alan H. Batten, Resolute and Undertaking Characters: The Lives of Wilhelm and Otto Struve. The publication price is regularly \$64, HAD members may have the book at \$48.00. Contact Gerrit Kiers, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Spuiliboulevard 50, P. O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands.
- \* Pachart Publishing House presently lists a number of titles of potential interest to historians. They include: N. T. Bobrovnikoff, Astronomy Before the Telescope; M. Heller and O. Godart, The Expanding Universe: Lemaitre's Unknown Manuscript, O. Godart and M. Heller, Cosmology of Lemaitre; N. Hetherington, Ancient Astronomy and Civilization. Direct orders and/or inquiries can be mailed to: Pachart Publishing House, Order Department, P. O. Box 35539, Tucson, AZ 85740

\* News of the Profession:

- \* Steven Dick has been appointed Historian of the U. S. Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C. He is planning a full program of archives development, oral history interviewing, institutional research and historical writing.

Note: Steve has a limited number of **FREE** copies available of the proceedings of the 1980 symposium on the history of USNO, Sky With Ocean Joined. Write to him directly (U. S. Naval Observatory, 34th and Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20390) for a copy while they last.

- \* Robert McCutcheon, who normally works on the Hubble Space Telescope project at the Computer Sciences Corporation, spent five months in the Soviet Union beginning last September. Working under the auspices of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), he researched the development of Soviet astronomy from 1917 through 1941. A fluent Russian speaker, Bob conducted his research in Erevan and Moscow as well as at Pulkovo Observatory outside Leningrad. He worked in the archives of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences and recorded oral history interviews with such leading Soviet astronomers as V. A. Ambartsumian, M. S. Zverev, and M. N. Gnevyshev. He will be happy to advise as well as to share his experiences with anyone contemplating work in the Soviet Union. He may be reached at 714 Richmond Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301) 585-2853 (H) or (301) 937-0760, ext 6232 (W).

1988 Herbert C. Pollack Awards

- \* Dr. Kevin D. Pang of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory is the 1988 recipient of the Herbert C. Pollack Award for research in the history of astronomy and astrophysics. The \$10,000 award will help support Dr. Pang's research toward determining an absolute chronology of ancient Chinese solar and lunar eclipse records. A recent example of the early fruits of his research can be found in: Kevin D. Pang, "Extraordinary Floods in Early Chinese History and their Absolute Dates," Journal of Hydrology, 96 (1987), 139 - 155.
- \* Paul Luther and Norris Hetherington won smaller awards for the preparation of a "Bibliography of Nineteenth Century Astronomy in the United States, including Books and Separately Published Pamphlets" and for a "Edition of Edwin Hubble's Unpublished Manuscripts," respectively.
- December 15, 1988 is the new deadline for submission of proposals to the Herbert C. Pollack Award Committee. Contact Dudley Observatory, 69 Union Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12308.