

NEWSLETTER 20 HISTORICAL ASTRONOMY DIVISION AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

August 1991

-- Annual Report 1990

In June 1990 the Historical Astronomy Division co-sponsored a session on archaeo- and ethnoastronomy at the 176th AAS meeting in Albuquerque. This session, organized by Michael Zeilik, was well attended and attracted the attention of the local media, who gave wide publicity to a paper by Robbins and Westmoreland dealing with a possible representation of the 1054 AD supernova on a plate from southern New Mexico. Four other papers were also presented in this session, and all will be published in the Astronomical Quarterly. [See Volume 8, #1; #2, 1991 - ed.]

In January 1991 the HAD met with the AAS in Philadelphia. Two sessions were held on Monday, January 14, with about 35 people in attendance at the morning session and about 50 in the afternoon. In all, nine oral papers and two posters were presented.

The annual business meeting was held at 1 p.m. on January 14, with about 20 members attending. Steve Dick reported on plans for publishing obituaries of astronomers in the Bulletin of the AAS. Present plans are to publish a brief death notice for all deceased AAS members, and longer obituaries (up to two pages) for selected individuals. An Obituary Editorial Board, chaired by the HAD Vice-Chair, would decide on these; this Board will consist of two HAD members, plus a member appointed by the BAAS editor, and one by the President of the AAS.

The new officers of the Division (for 1991/1992) are as follows:

Chair: John Lankford

Vice-Chair: Steven J. Dick

Council Members: Dorrit Hoffleit, Peggy Kidwell

Plans for future meetings include a special session in Seattle in May 1991 (see below), organized by Woody Sullivan, on the opening of the electromagnetic spectrum. The HAD will also meet in Atlanta in January 1992 with the AAS (see below), and hopes to find a local host. There are also plans for a June 1992 meeting at the Adler Planetarium, co-sponsored by the Division of Dynamical Astronomy, and plans for meeting at the Huntington Library in Pasadena in June 1993.

As a working policy, the HAD will always meet with the AAS at the winter meeting, but not in the summer unless we receive an invitation, which may or may not coincide with an AAS meeting.

David DeVorkin continues as our able Secretary-Treasurer and editor of the Newsletter [until December 1992 -ed], and Ruth Freitag's Bibliography continues to be a most valuable part of that Newsletter.

Katherine Bracher
Retiring HAD Chair
May 7, 1991

-- Seattle Meeting

Don Osterbrock reported to John Lankford that the Seattle meetings, organized by Woody Sullivan, "were excellent." The papers by Ron Brashear, Woody, Rich Jarrel and Steve Dick all were very engaging and interesting presentations. At the peak, some 50 people attended, and the dinner after the talks, again arranged by Woody, was much

appreciated and it was a great setting, overlooking the lake. Joe Tenn's poster paper on Monday was also well-received, Don stating that it was "extremely good."

-- *Atlanta Meeting (1): AAS Preliminary Announcement*

The AAS Executive Office has informed me that the Preliminary Announcement for Atlanta will be mailed on August 30, and the Abstract deadline is set at October 11. If any HAD member fails to receive the Prelim by the second week of September, please contact Sharon Savoy, Membership Coordinator, at the AAS Executive Office at (202) 328-2010. If for some reason you cannot get through to their office, call me at (note new temporary phone) (609) 734-8073.

-- *Atlanta Meeting (2): HAD Activities*

Monday, January 6, 1992 is the HAD's big day at Atlanta. As plans now stand, Robert Smith will be presenting a HAD/AAS Invited Discourse at 8:30 am to the entire AAS membership. Most definitely he will be providing interesting and provocative historical perspective on Space Telescope, based upon his book of the same name, which recently won the History of Science Society's Watson Davis Prize. The HAD day will then continue with regular morning and afternoon paper sessions, poster sessions if requested, and, of course, a business meeting to be held one hour before the afternoon paper session, as per usual practice. Exact times will be provided in the next HAD Newsletter. Also, as per usual practice, the contributed paper sessions are wide open, to HAD members, but will be filled on a first come first served basis, so keep the abstract deadline noted above in mind.

As of now, no one local to Atlanta has come forth to organize special sessions or activities, even though John Lankford scoured the southeast for volunteers. The HAD membership lists do not, in fact, identify any member as residing in Atlanta. Nevertheless, this meeting should prove attractive, not only because of Robert's talk, the generally high quality of the contributed papers, and the mild January weather in Atlanta (not guaranteed!), but because of the annual HAD Business Meeting...

-- *Atlanta Meeting (3): Business Meeting*

There have been a number of important issues raised in the past few months that will be addressed at the business meeting in Atlanta. Those that can be articulated now are:

- o- A new dues structure, and rectifying the dues cycle to agree with the AAS cycle on a yearly basis (see note below on Dues Rectification).
- o- Possible HAD concern over the continuation of observatory reports in the B.A.A.S. (See letter, DeVorkin and Lankford to Boyce, below).
- o- Report from the Obituary Committee (Steve Dick, present chair), to include membership and activities during the year.
- o- As always, we will be very interested to hear if the HAD is meeting the needs of its membership, and of proposals for future activities. A number of suggestions made during the Washington and Philadelphia meetings have been acted upon.

-- *Future Meetings:*

- o- *The Adler joint DDA/HAD meeting*, tentative date range: three days during week of June 15 to 19. As presently conceived, there will be two days of DDA papers and two of HAD papers, with one day overlap where papers will be of special interest to both

HAD and DDA members. We also hope to have a banquet on the evening of the combined day, and at least three invited talks; LeRoy Doggett, Steve Dick, and Noel Swerdlow have been approached for special invited talks. Swerdlow, who is very well known for his work on Copernicus and Ptolemy, is thinking about discussing how Newton derived his *System of the World*.

We are waiting for word from the Adler's new director, Paul Knappenberger, about specific dates and about what will be possible, but should have everything better in hand by the time of the next Newsletter, or certainly by the time of the Atlanta meeting.

-o- *The Huntington Library* meeting after the June 1993 Berkeley AAS meetings: plans are progressing since Ron Brashear reports that over 40 HAD members indicated definite interest in such a meeting. There will probably be a formal request to the HAD for consideration at the Atlanta Business Meeting.

-- *Dues Rectification: First Notice (David DeVorkin)*

In 1992, the Executive Office of the AAS will take over dues collections for all Society Divisions, including the HAD (Hooray!). We therefore have some major overhauling to do in the next several months, primarily to work out a method of rectifying everyone's dues to the cycle set by the Society itself. A first thought, one I like because it minimizes work for me, is to ask each member to "donate" the excess remaining in their membership after the close of the fiscal 1992 AAS dues cycle. Those in arrears, of course, would be expected to pay up at the old rate, pro-rated to the end of the cycle. Further, I expect that we will have to establish a new dues rate for all categories, to reflect the slightly increased administrative cost this change will create (using the services of the AAS costs money, but overall it should result in desirable efficiencies) as well as increased administrative costs across the board, such as entertaining two meetings per year and the increased cost of postage. If any HAD member has creative thoughts on the matter, feel free to contact me before the end of the year. I will bring the matter up at the Atlanta Business Meeting.

By the way, while we are on the subject, the AAS Executive Office now handles all content matters for the AAS Membership Directory. If you want anything changed, contact the office directly, but let me know too!

-- *The Future of Observatory Reports to the B.A.A.S. (David DeVorkin)*

Directors of several major American observatories (NOAO, NRAO) have decided to cease submitting observatory reports to the BAAS and have been urging their colleagues to do the same, in the hope that it will reduce their workloads. The argument given at the Seattle AAS Council meeting last May was that "There was vanishingly small support for the usefulness of the reports."

Acting in our personal self-interest, John Lankford and I wrote Peter Boyce to express our concern with this situation. The content of our letter is meant to represent personal opinion and not HAD opinion. However, if this issue strikes any HAD member as being important enough to respond, pro or con, please feel free to write Peter Boyce, John, or me on the matter. John and I will be particularly interested to hear if HAD members feel a collective statement is needed. We very much appreciate that, for the larger observatories, preparing the observatory reports has become an onerous task, but the product is a valuable one to us, and one well worth preserving, possibly by developing guidelines for what information is most useful to historians. One thought would be for the AAS to create a computerized formatted questionnaire that would be circulated to all observatory

directors each year that would ask for specific items. These might include bibliographies of all the other reports they constantly have to prepare for NSF, NASA, DoD and their own institutional overseers. In that way, historians would know at least where the information is stored.

The text of our letter to Peter Boyce follows:

Both John Lankford and I share your concern that the yearly observatory reports provided by observatory directors to the BAAS (and before the BAAS to the AJ, and Popular Astronomy) be continued. The practice not only helps to keep a sense of community alive, but it provides a record of that community which historians generally find valuable.

Speaking personally, our research has benefited greatly by being able to scan staff changes, instrument development, trends in observatory support and practice, trends in research focus, and so forth, not only in a time scale of years, but decades. Directors like Struve prepared especially helpful reviews of research that help historians appreciate what priorities were in past time. Whole histories of observatories and of sub-specialties in astronomy have been revealed by this accumulated evidence. The bibliographies, even if unannotated, provide not only an indication of staff productivity, but of institutional and of contemporary interests. And if they are annotated in the text of the report, as they often are, we are provided with a contemporary interpretation that throws the research into its best light.

Astronomers have sometimes complained to historians that not enough is being preserved about their work, and that historians tend to study only the super-stars. Although we agree with the former observation, we argue that the latter contention is an artifact of the enterprise; it is wholly dependent upon the nature of the record that is preserved. If we fail to give proper credit to the contributions of a large fraction of the community, it is because there is no material available with which to assess their impact and accomplishments. The published scientific record is simply not enough. It must be supplemented by the unpublished and semi-published record as much as possible, and this includes the added dimension of the "Reports of Observatories."

Sincerely,

John Lankford
HAD Chairman

David DeVorkin
HAD Secretary

-- *Late Breaking News: Astronomers are burned out at IAU Meeting in Buenos Aires!*

Report from Buenos Aires -- Steven Dick

The 21st meeting of the IAU General Assembly was held in Buenos Aires from July 23 to August 1, 1991, the first time a General Assembly took place in a Latin American country. The meeting was opened by President Menem, and thereafter was filled with the activities of the many Commissions, joint discussions and invited discourses. We heard the latest results from satellites such as the Gamma Ray Observatory, ROSAT, COBE, Hubble Space Telescope and HIPPARCOS; were tantalized by Jodrell Bank's announcement of a planet of 10 Earth masses around a pulsar (!); and in general heard of the whole range of research from the solar system to the galaxies.

My purpose here, however, is to pass on to HAD members the activities of Commission 41 (History of Astronomy). The four sessions of Commission 41 were presided over by John North (President) and Suzanne Débarbat (Vice-President). Though papers were given on many topics, the main theme was "The preservation and conservation of astronomical archives and instruments." Suzanne Débarbat (Paris) began with a summary of past discussions on astronomical archives; her long-standing interest in the subject provided the continuity for current discussions. Edoardo Proverbio (Italy) presented the results of the Italian Astronomical Society's survey of the state of archives and instruments at 12 Italian observatories. His conclusions undoubtedly hold true for much of the rest of the astronomical world: a great amount of material exists, but little of it has been catalogued and it is therefore not very accessible to researchers. Other archives could be actively sought out, and may be in danger of destruction if not preserved. S. Dick spoke about safeguarding the history of a national observatory, in particular the archival efforts at the U. S. Naval Observatory. E. S. Kennedy brought to our attention his discovery of a substantial body of the papers of G. B. Airy in Canadian archives. Kevin Yau gave an overview of astronomical records for the pre-telescopic era. Other papers dealt with the archives of Henri Chrétien, the program to preserve the Observatory of Jai Singh at Delhi, the preservation of astronomical instruments in Romania, and three centuries of astronomy at Marseilles.

These papers and subsequent deliberations ended with a Resolution from Commission 41 including the following points: 1) that a Register of Astronomical Archives be established; 2) that the IAU impress on institutions their responsibility for maintaining and preserving astronomical archives; and 3) that a search be undertaken for an institution that will allocate funds and space to maintain and publish such a Register. The Resolution was passed by the General Assembly, and it is hoped that it will support those now engaged in attempts to preserve archives at their institutions, and encourage others to do so. There was general agreement that institutions should make a start, no matter how small; that professional archiving procedures are desirable, but not absolutely necessary if they hinder action; and that volunteer help from dedicated amateurs could be an effective means for carrying out archival programs in an era of tight budgets. Débarbat, Dick and Proverbio were appointed to a Working Group on Astronomical Archives and Instruments, and will be joined by two members from Commission 5 (Documentation). If HAD members have any suggestions or comments on this project, please write me directly.

A second theme of the Commission 41 meetings was archeoastronomy. John North (Netherlands) gave a paper on the Bush Barrow Lozenge - a small 18cm square artifact associated with observations of the Sun and Moon. Maria Luisa Aguilar (Peru) spoke about the preservation of Peruvian archeoastronomical sites. And one of the highlights was a lengthy video showing the work of Peter Parodi and Horacio Tiganelli (Argentina) on astronomically-oriented monuments in Tawanacu, Bolivia. Aguilar announced a meeting on archaeoastronomy to be held in Peru in 1992. For more information contact her directly at Av. Arica 830, Lima 5, Peru.

At the Business meeting Suzanne Débarbat assumed the Presidency of the Commission, and S. M. R. Ansari (India) became Vice-President. S. Dick and John North were elected to the Organizing Committee. Brief eulogies of Karl Fischer and Vic Thoren were given. Frank Edmondson proposed that minor planet 3717 be named Thoren, and Commission 41 endorsed this proposal. The commission also gave its support to a conference to be held in Tartu, Estonia in 1993 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of W. Struve and J. Mädler, to cover broad aspects of 19th century astronomy. Those interested should contact either John North or Professor Eelsalu in Tartu directly. Finally, the Commission discussed the IAU Executive Committee's interest in having the IAU history written, but no final decisions were made.

The IAU meeting ended somewhat in disarray when the Convention Center caught fire with 1.5 days to go for the meeting, causing severe smoke damage. Some meetings were relocated, others cancelled, but those of us in Commission 41 were quick to point out that this was an historic first. Overall I think most of us will have pleasant memories of successful meetings, reunions with colleagues, and the considerable cultural offerings of Buenos Aires. The next meeting will be held in The Hague, Netherlands in 1994.