

H-A-D NEWS

The Newsletter of the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society

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From the Retiring Chair

Steven J. Dick

fter a spectacular meeting in Tucson, HAD is ready to move on to Pittsburgh in June '95 and San Antonio in January '96. The meetings in Tucson were very gratifying, from Ed Krupp's lecture (350 people crammed into the 250-seat auditorium of Steward Observatory) to the History in Astronomy Education sessions, and the contributed papers sandwiched in between. To all those who made these sessions a success, Ray White and Dan Brocious, LeRoy Doggett, Mary Kay Hemenway and Owen Gingerich, and all the contributors, my sincere thanks.

This meeting marked the end of my tenure as HAD chair, a time that has been very rewarding for me. I wish to thank HAD officers Woody Sullivan and LeRoy Doggett, and HAD Committee members Sarah Schechner Genuth and Ron Brashear for their essential help during the last two years. And I am very pleased with the ongoing work of the International Relations Committee (Bob McCutcheon, chair) and the Obituary Committee (Woody Sullivan, chair). I believe HAD continues to serve the needs of the Society and astronomy in general.

Finally, my hearty congratulations to our new officers, Woody Sullivan (chair), David DeVorkin (vice chair) and to the HAD Committee, Barbara Welther and Dick Walker. With the approach of the AAS Centennial in 1999 and the establishment of the HAD Prize (which will be discussed in the May newsletter), they have their work cut out for them!

Battle of the Centuries

Ruth Freitag and LeRoy Doggett

When the encyclopedia of human folly comes to be written, a page must be reserved for the minor imbecility of the battle of the centuries — the clamorous dispute as to when a century ends. The source of the confusion is easy to discern; in our lifetimes, we have dated our documents with years beginning with the digite 19. Obviously, when we must begin to date them starting with 20, we have embarked on a new century! Haven't we? No, we have not; we have merely arrived at the last year of the 20th century.

In the "historical" system for measuring time, there is no year 0. In fact, there has never been a system of recording reigns, dynasties, or eras that did not designate its first year as Year 1. The first century of our era ran from A.D. 1 through A.D. 100. By extrapolation, the twentieth century is A.D. 1901–2000.

This, of course, should be obvious to astronomers and historians, but there are those who are unwilling to accept the clarity of simple arithmetic. Feeling strongly that there is a hole in that logic, they have developed impressively convoluted arguments to promote their point of view.

Astronomers have been blamed for some of the confusion. In his *Tables of the Sun and Moon* (1740), Jacques Cassini introduced a dating system in which A.D. 1 is preceded by 0, -1, -2, ... However, the argument had begun before that. You may wonder that a year 0 had not been introduced earlier. However, the monastic tradition of

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History of Astronomy Workshop

University of Notre Dame, June 22-25

The second biennial Notre Dame History of Astronomy Workshop is coming up. Workshop is an apt word, in this case. Papers tend to be discussed rather than read, and the discussions can get pretty lively, carrying on into the wee hours. If this sounds like a great way to spend a summer weekend, call one of the organizers, Mike Crowe (219–272–3426; michael.j.crowe.1@nd.edu) or Steve Dick (202–653–1541; dickzst@ariel.usno.navy.mil). The Notre Dame Workshop is sponsored jointly by the History of Science Society's Astronomy Interest Group and HAD. The program follows.

Thursday, June 22

8:00-10:00 pm: Welcoming Reception—Notre Dame Center for Continuing Education

Friday, June 23

8:30 am: Greetings and Introductions: Mike Crowe and Steve Dick (Co-chairs of the Workshop)

9:00-11:30 am: The Politics of Historical Interpretation

Chairs: Marc Rothenberg and John Lankford

Marc Rothenberg (Joseph Henry Papers): The Anti-Anti-Science Movement in History of Astronomy John Lankford (Kansas State U.): The Politics of Historiography and the History of Astronomy Joseph Tatarewicz (NASA): What Makes for Good History of Astronomy?

1:15-3:00 pm: Historical Studies in Astronomy I

Chair: Ron Brashear (Huntington Library)

Bella C. Chiu (Arlington, VA): Was Canton Meant to Be Built near the Tropic of Cancer?

Brother Kevin Ryan (Christian Brothers U.): Kepler's Arithmetic

Elsa L. Gonzalez (Chicago, IL): President de Saron (1730-1794): Astronomer and Mathematician

Louise Golland (Chicago, IL): Highlights in Theoretical Astronomy from the 18th and 19th Centuries

Robert Havlik and Terrence Rettig (U. Notre Dame): The University of Notre Dame, Napoleon III Telescope

Orville R. Butler (Iowa State U.): Directions Towards a Comprehensive Bibliography in the History of American Astronomy—Problems and Prospects

John W. Briggs (Yerkes Obs.): A Note on the New Antique Telescope Society

3:15-5:00 pm: Historical Studies in Astronomy II

Chair: Joann Eisberg (U. California, Santa Barbara)

Deborah Warner (Smithsonian): Bloom and the Time Ball: Joyce's Uses of Astronomy in Ulysses

Pamela Gossin (U. Texas/Dallas): Pulp Poetry: Doing Violence to the History of Astronomy?

Craig B. Waff (Collier's): The Cold War Origin of U.S. Solar System Exploration

Rudi Paul Lindner (U. Michigan): Astronomy in a Cloudy Climate

Jordan D. Marché II (Indiana U.): The Planetarium in America, 1930-1970: A Social History

George Sweetnam (Princeton U.): Putting Physics into Astrophysics

Michael Anderer (St. Charles, IL): Fr. Hagen and the 'Nebulose oscure'

History of Astronomy Workshop

Saturday, June 24

9:00-11:30 am: History of Twentieth-Century Astronomy

Chair: Robert Smith (NASM, Smithsonian, and Johns Hopkins U.)

Robert Smith: Engines of Discovery? Material Culture in the History of Modern Astronomy

Steven Dick (Naval Obs.): The Search for Extraterrestrial Life: The History of Ideas and the Limits of Science

Ron Doel: The State of Community Studies: Prospects and Problems

David DeVorkin (Smithsonian): Commentary

1:15-4:15 pm: News from the Early Modern Period (Formerly, "The Scientific Revolution")

Chair: Owen Gingerich (Harvard U.)

Richard S. Westfall (Indiana U.): Was There a Scientific Revolution?

Owen Gingerich: Copernicus

Ernan McMullin (U. Notre Dame): Galileo

James Voelkel (Williams College): Kepler

James Reston, Jr. (tentative): The Galileo PBS Special

4:30-5:30 pm: Teaching History of Astronomy and Sharing of Syllabi

Chair: Richard Berendzen (American U.)

If you teach courses in history of astronomy, please bring 50 copies of your syllabus to this session.

6:00 pm: Conference Banquet at the Morris Inn on the Notre Dame Campus

Brian Warner (U. Cape Town): The Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope

8:00-11:00 pm: Open Session at the Notre Dame Observatory

Sunday, June 25

9:00-11:30 am Approaches to Ancient and Medieval Astronomy

Chair: LeRoy Doggett (Naval Obs.)

James Evans (U. Puget Sound): The New History of Ancient Greek Astronomy

Bruce Eastwood (U. Kentucky): Doing the History of Astronomy in Early Medieval Europe

Ron Hicks (Ball State U.): Hints of Astronomy in Ancient Ireland

Steve McCluskey (U. West Virginia): Some tentative steps toward a taxonomy of astronomies

11:30-12:00 Business meeting

FSU Journal Fund

We have collected \$300 to purchase subscriptions to the *Journal for the History of Astronomy* for institutions in the Former Soviet Union. To make them as widely accessible as possible, we have chosen libraries in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Further information will appear in the next issue.

We Want You!

You say you're not a member of HAD? Membership is a mere 4 bucks for AAS members; 10 bucks otherwise. For information, contact LeRoy Doggett, Nautical Almanac Office, U. S. Naval Observatory, Washington, DC 20392 or doggett@ariel.usno.navy.mil. \$\pi\$

Centennial Folly

(continued from page 1)

chronology used Roman numerals, which did not have zero.

That leads us to ask why we call the current year A.D. 1995. The epoch A.D. 1 was introduced by Dionysius Exiguus early in the sixth century in tables for determining dates of Easter. Previous tables had counted years from the Era of Diocletian, an emperor who was notorious for persecuting the early Christians. A previous set of Easter tables had covered the years 153-247, counted from the accession of Diocletian. Dionysius compiled tables for years he called Anni Domini Nostri Jesu Christi 532–627. He explained that he "did not wish to bind the memory of an impious man and a persecutor to our [Easter] cycles. Instead we chose to designate time from the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that the beginning of our hope might stand revealed more notably to us and the cause of the redemption of mankind, namely, the Passion of our Redeemer, might shine forth more evidently.'

It is not exactly clear how Dionysius determined that Anno Domini 532 was equivalent to Anno Diocletiani 248. In his explanation, he outlined computation methods and historical records, with allusions to texts that have not survived. He was following in a tradition of speculation about the birth of Christ. Modern scholarship places the birth of Christ a few years prior to A.D. 1, though there is no way of establishing a definitive date.

Use of the new era was slow in developing; Dionysius himself did not generally use it. It became popular in England in the eighth century, thanks to the Venerable Bede. Bede's writings were circulated on the continent where they promoted use of the Christian era, though again its acceptance was slow. Once established, however, it took on a life of its own.

As for the argument about when the old century ends and the new begins, it has gone on for centuries, as evinced by an editorial in *The Times* of London, December 26, 1799:

We have uniformly rejected all letters, and declined all discussion upon the question of when the present century ends? as it is one of the most absurd that can engage the public attention, and we are astonished to find it has been the subject of so much dispute, since it appears to be perfectly plain... It is a silly, childish discussion, and

ApJ Centennial

To celebrate the centennial of *The Astrophysical Journal*, HAD is sponsoring a session of invited papers at the Pittsburgh AAS meeting. Ron Brashear, who put this together, is serving as chair. The program is as follows:

R. S. Brashear (Huntington Library):

The Astrophysical Jourank A New Journal for a
New Science

D. E. Osterbrock (UCO/LO/UCSC):
Founded in 1895 by George E. Hale and James
E. Keeler: *The Astrophysical Journal* Centennial

H. A. Abt (NOAO/KPNO): Some Highlights of the Astrophysical Journal

Mea Culpa

Yes, this is the February issue, and, yes, it is appearing in mid-June. The May issue will be in your hands in late July, the August issue in late August. Then we'll be back on schedule. Minutes of the January business meeting will appear in the May issue. The editor apologizes for the delays.

only exposes the want of brains of those who maintain a contrary opinion to that we have stated...

A century later, a writer in *Scientific American*, January 13, 1900, took a more philosophical view: "It is a venerable error, long-lived and perhaps immortal."

As our own century approaches its end, hardly anyone who experienced the previous conflict is still living. Thus we are doomed to another round. Already celebrations are being planned. A cruise ship company wrote to the U. S. Naval Observatory asking what point on Earth would be the first to experience the new millennium, i.e., 12:01 a.m., January 1, 2000. Times Square, which admits "there are two opinions" on the subject, is holding a contest for a "BIG IDEA" for their celebration on the eve of 2000. If we play this right, we might be able to attend two millennium parties.

Ruth Freitag is a Senior Science Specialist at the Library of Congress. Her bibliographic efforts are a feature of every *HAD News*. In the past she has published bibliographies dealing with Comet Halley and the Star of Bethlehem.