

The Going of Andrew

by R.M. (Bert) Petrie (former Director of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory)
(with apologies to Longfellow)

This humorous poem describes Andrew McKellar's activities in preparation of attending a symposium at which he was to give a paper. The symposium to which McKellar was invited was held at Yerkes Observatory during the celebration of the supposed semi-centennial anniversary of the AAS (Dates: September 3-6, 1947).

A copy of this poem was given to Beverly Lynds, while she was living in Victoria, BC in 1959, by Bert Petrie (then Director of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory). Dr. Lynds states "I have enjoyed this poem over the decades and appreciate the fact that it gives a glimpse into how 'astronomy was done' in the 1940s."

From the land of the Dakotas
From the Big Chief Otto Struve
Went the message to the westward,
To the land of mighty forests,
To the place where rushing waters
beckon home the shining salmon.
Came the summons from the Yerkes.
"Come and sit with us in council
At the Pow-wow in September
On the shores of Lake Geneva.
All the braves have smoked the peace pipe
Squaws and wise men have foregathered
Even from the place called Harvard."
To this summons Andrew answered,
Answered by the white man's airmail,
Seven cents it cost to send it.
"I will come and sit among you,
Round your campfires tell the magic,
Of the stuff above the heavens.
All the secrets of the red stars,
Isotopes and carbon thirteen."
Potent was McKellar's magic,

In the darkness he would labor,
Silently he worked in darkness,
Perched for hours upon a ladder,
Muttering forbidden phrases
To the beast that eats up starlight.
Coaxing from the glass-that-gathers,
Secrets to confound the wise men.
But a madness seized McKellar
Many moons he dilly-dallied,
Said there was no rush about it,
Said there was no bloody hurry,
He would turn the sand glass backward,
He would stop the sun god's progress
As Jehovah did for Israel.
At the ending of the eighth month
In the dying days of summer,
Suddenly the madness left him
Just a week before the meetings.
All the tribe was quickly gathered
to the wigwam on the mountain.
Awful was McKellar's hurry
Awful was the darkroom's frenzy,
Awful was the deep disorder
Of his notes upon the table.
"Hell," cried Andrew, "ere the sun god
Comes once more to bring daylight
I will have the paper written,
And the typist will be tortured
Till the manuscript is copied.
There's no need to study tracings
I will look upon the spectra

With an eyepiece from my pocket.
With the pictures in my briefcase
I can tell a wondrous story."
Hurriedly he wrote the opus
On the backs of purchase orders.
Hurriedly the typist hammered,
Blew her nose and cursed all wise men.
Hurriedly the plates were garnered,
cut, and stuffed in little boxes.
Hurriedly he left the mountain,
All his wisdom placed about him,
Writ on little scraps of paper.
Hurriedly he caught the ferry
With his briefcase crammed with knowledge.
Thus departed A. McKellar.