

**FERDINAND HARTMANN - A COMMENTARY**

CHARLES A. FAUSEL  
Lost Horizon Observatory  
700 N. Johnson  
Bay City, MI 48708

Received 20 May 1988

**Abstract**

A commentary on Ferdinand Hartmann, an AAVSO member and observer for 33 years, is presented.

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1983 my wife, Suellen, and I attended the AAVSO Annual Meeting on Nantucket Island. At that meeting, Charles Scovil, Chairman of the AAVSO Telescope Committee, announced that the Association had a 5-inch Clark telescope for sale. We decided to look at the instrument in Stamford, CT, and we subsequently bid on and purchased the telescope.

I did some research on the Clark with the help of Estelle Karlin at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics library, but I was unable to find any useful information on this telescope, dated 1881.

Later in the following year, we met AAVSO member Jack Welch, a former Chairman of the Telescope Committee, and purchased a Clark mounting for the telescope from him. Jack was able to recall that the telescope had come from an old observer in New York who had donated both the Clark and a 4-inch Fitz. With that, and for five years, I discontinued my search.

Then, this past March at Headquarters, Janet Mattei showed me the AAVSO records containing the reports of previous meetings. Here, she told me, would be a record of the telescope's donation. This is what a little persistence turned up: On page 8 of the 1964 Annual Report in the Director's section I found the following paragraph: "Ferdinand Hartmann, a regular observer for over 30 years, who holds 5th place in our list of all-time top observers, is giving the AAVSO his 4-inch Fitz and 5-inch Clark telescopes. But we hope he will continue to use them himself for many more years." This page was signed by Margaret W. Mayall, Director.

Now I knew who had donated the instrument, some 24 years ago. What else besides his observing total was known about him? More importantly to me, how did he acquire the telescope?

Janet listened to my questions and led me to the AAVSO Archives, a small room crammed with file cabinets. From one she produced membership applications, alphabetically ordered by member. The first one in the file for Mr. Hartmann was dated 1932. He was listed as an electrician residing in Brooklyn, NY, age 43, perhaps older than most of us when we started observing for the AAVSO. His application was sponsored by Messrs. L. Smith and H. B. Webb.

It appears that Mr. Hartmann always used a refractor, as he claimed to have started with a 3-1/4-inch Fitz.

The next membership form in the file was dated 30 years later, placing Mr. Hartmann in St. Albans, NY, with an increase to Sustaining Membership.

Now I was really curious. Janet showed me some wooden file

cabinets stuffed with manila folders. One was labeled "F. Hartmann - Chart Curator." In that folder were many letters written in fountain pen in a clear, firm hand, signed by Ferdinand Hartmann. I must admit, the more I read, the more I became intrigued.

I am going to share some examples of this correspondence, which was probably written, in most cases, as cover notes accompanying his submission of observations to Headquarters. For example, in an early letter, dated March 13, 1942, he wrote: "It is not in my province to complain, but among other duties we must all share in these times, it does not help star observing, when they shove 'daylight saving' on us, a loss of an hour means to me approximately about 100 observations a month, I can well imagine this will cut down observations with other observers also."

Obviously this is a fifty-year-old star observer's reaction to the reinstatement of daylight savings as a part of the war effort. But what struck me more was the greeting and salutation in this and most of his other letters. Each opened with "My dear Mr. Campbell" and concluded with a wish for the addressee's good health.

All this was interesting, but another letter written April 1, 1947, really caught my eye: "I would like to put in a bid for the scope (Brocchi's), but I doubt that I could do it justice, also I have my eye on a 5" refractor, and if all goes well, you will be hearing of it." The next letter I hoped would reveal the prior owner's identity. But it did not. It is distinctive in that it abandoned all the pomp and formality of the prior and later epistles. Perhaps that is due to a boy-with-a-new-toy syndrome? The letter is not dated. A note, presumably by Campbell, shows a reply sent December 8, 1947. Mr. Hartmann opened with, "Mr. Campbell, Dear Sir, kindly send me a few more report sheets,..." and continues: "...criticism will be helpful on this report, as it is the first I have used the 5" Clark for observing, seems to be a fair glass, the rating on U Gem < 13.3 seems to (sic) high for this glass, but it is what I see, if far-fetched, you have a good blue pencil no doubt. With Sincere Regards, F. Hartmann."

From this, I concluded that between April 1, and December 1, 1947, Mr. Hartmann acquired the Clark. From whom, perhaps I'll never know. But the letters, now, had caught my interest. I continued through the file. Some additional notes on the Clark's performance caught my attention, as well as an ongoing discussion with Director Margaret Mayall with regard to eyepieces. In September, 1954, he wrote: "Enclosed are a few observations, if some seem rather deep for my glass, it is because I am using a new eyepiece, the eyepiece or myself may be over ambitious, the observations were made on a perfect night, which as you know are rare in these parts, well you still have a waste basket."

Then, following a reply from Margaret, he wrote in December of 1954: "You ask what type of eyepiece I use, it is just a simple Mogyey 1" which gives me a field of 0.7 (degrees). When I first started observing years ago, I changed the 1" for a 1/2" but found my ratings were confusing, the 1/2" being used only for stars below 11.5, now I never change, using the 1" for all stars seen in the 5" glass. In my particular case, I do not find variety in eye-pieces the spice for better ratings."

A letter dated July 31, 1956, had an unusual light pollution complaint: "The new searchlights on the Empire State Building have not interfered too much with my seeing, but the building up of the areas to my east have cast an increased illumination in the sky, cutting down minimum values somewhat, but I believe this is a general complaint in a growing world."

Inevitably, I reached the end of the file. The following were

excerpted from the second-to-last letter from Mr. Hartmann to Mrs. Mayall, dated April 25, 1965: "It is with some regret that I write to inform you that I have given up observing telescopic variables..." "Mr. Welch was good enough to come from West Springfield and take the 5" Clark...my hope and wish is that some one may have as much pleasure and enjoyment as I have had over the years." "My 1st observation by telescope (a 3" Fitz) was March 24, 1932 to April 22, 1965; in this interval I clocked 60,714 observations..."

Mrs. Mayall promptly replied on 3 May 1965. A copy of her letter was in Mr. Hartmann's file acknowledging the gift and straightening the record on total observations. A few excerpts from her letter follow: "I certainly am sorry to hear you have given up observing with your 5-inch Clark. We are going to miss your fine observations, for they were always a great joy to record." "I make your total number of observations greater than your count...which makes a total of 61,238." "Thank you ever so much for your generosity in giving your Clark to the AAVSO. I have not yet talked to Mr. Welch about it, but I am sure we will be able to find some one who will make good use of it for many years to come, as well as the 4-inch Fitz you gave us last fall."

Mr. Hartmann's reply to the Director's May 3rd letter was the last missive in his file. Dated May 15, 1965, it opened and closed in traditional fashion with "My Dear Mrs. Mayall" and "Hoping that you keep in good health and have a wonderful summer." In the letter he requested a list of binocular variables and then went on: "I doubt that I will do much observing until Sept., what with milky skies, from our mercury street standards, nature busting out all over with volcanic dust and the World Fair, it doesn't leave much room for seeing, so I'll wait for longer nights and clearer skies."

I put Mr. Hartmann's file back in the wooden file drawer, turned around, and opened one of the steel, fireproof cabinets containing observing records. Here, the last submitted for observer "H" was for May, 1965; actually completed on April 22, two days before Jack Welch came and picked up the Clark. A handwritten note in the corner of the form containing 34 observations read: "Hartmann died June 4, 1965."

This was a sad but inevitable note. Here was a man who observed for 33 years - right up until a month before his death at age 76. He gave the AAVSO 61,238 observations which still places him 15th in totals, and all that done with long, narrow-sighted, bulky refractors.

But, there was one last thing I wanted to find - a picture! Mr. Hartmann only mentioned attending one meeting in all his correspondence, the Spring meeting in 1954 held at Columbia University.

I went to the AAVSO library and pulled out the picture archives. I found a photo from that meeting and it even had a key. Unfortunately Mr. Hartmann was not included in the list. However, there is a gentleman, number 21 on the key, pictured without a name. Is it Hartmann? Perhaps.

Waxing philosophical, it seems that a well-made telescope may have a useful life spanning several generations. Perhaps 50 years from now some one will be asking the same questions about your telescope as they look at U Gem that I did about Hartmann's. From the AAVSO archives, I have had some of my questions answered and, in a small way, have come to know the previous owner of an instrument I now own.

The moral of this story: one of our privileges of membership in the AAVSO is that the organization cares enough to remember you -- and what you have contributed.

Ed. Note: If any reader has or knows of a photograph of Ferdinand Hartmann, please let the author or the Editor know.