

## The AAVSO Widow—or Should We Say Spouse?

**Thomas R. Williams**

9505 Northpointe Boulevard, Apt. 9304B, Spring TX 77379; trw@rice.edu

*Presented at the 100th Annual Meeting of the AAVSO, October 5, 2011; received April 4, 2012; accepted April 4, 2012*

**Abstract** In past discussions of AAVSO observers over our first century of progress, the familial consequences of membership received little attention. However, non-astronomer friends commonly ask AAVSO observers, “But how does your wife feel about your spending so much time at the telescope and not in bed with her?” Although our Directors have not all been “observers,” they too are forced to keep unusual office hours, answer telephones in the middle of the night, and so on. This paper attempts to portray the many surprising ways in which the AAVSO spouse (not all observers are male nor directors female!) responds to their partner’s pre-occupation with variable stars.

### 1. Introduction

While thinking about individuals who had been inadequately recognized as part of the AAVSO’s centennial celebration, it occurred to me that one whole class of individuals who had been almost completely ignored were the marital partners of AAVSO members. Some spouses of members actually not only attend meetings, but also participate actively in AAVSO work, either as observers, or in other direct support to the Association. AAVSO has been one of the corners of astronomical history in which there have been active participants of both genders. In turn, that recognition led to another realization—the AAVSO director’s spouse seems always to be on call but receive little recognition for their sacrifices.

One should consider whether or not the spouse always has a choice in the matter. Some spouses accepted the problem by agreeing to marry someone already actively committed to the AAVSO. Furthermore, the problem might be complicated by consideration of other variations on the theme. Did an AAVSO member’s or director’s spouse really have an option that could be exercised? Well, if the marriage came before the involvement in variable star astronomy, then the answer is “probably so.” Under those circumstances, the potential spouse is only confronted with the problem after consummation of the marriage. If on the other hand, a career in astronomy is already under way, the avocational or vocational involvement should be evident to the potential partner and should be a consideration. But in every case, there are later decisions to be made involving the degree of commitment; those judgments drastically influence the outlook and productivity of the astronomer whether an observer

or administrator. Thus, the impact (positive or negative) of the spousal attitude on the degree of a participant's commitment to astronomy is a real concern to be recognized as part of this centennial.

So for this paper, I categorized spousal reactions to variable star astronomy as follows:

- The Director's Spouse
- The Active Participant
- The Cheerful Supporter
- The Variable Star Widow
- The Black Widow

This paper will discuss a few examples in each category. I hope to convince all AAVSO spouses that we members mean well, though we may not express it as well as we might from time to time as we walk out the back door for another session of observing, or spend hours on the on the computer in internet meetings and on discussion lists. My hope, then, is to make this paper a token of our appreciation for the sacrifices our spouses make to support us.

## **2. The Director's Spouse**

This paper begins by honoring those whose spouse served as the leader of the AAVSO at any given point in time (Figure 2). The Association has been blessed with strong supporters in every case, and it is a good thing. The job of the Director, Recorder, or in Olcott's case, the Secretary, always proved to be time consuming and called for a great deal of sacrifice in the family. It is evident that this is the case because, whether by choice or accident of physiology, only one of the spouses involved was actually involved in parenting. Even there, four of the five Campbell children were born before Leon accepted full-time responsibility for the AAVSO. Thus, the AAVSO was spared the resulting distractions of its leadership by the extra issues related to children in the family.

### **2.1. Clara Olcott**

On their wedding day, neither William Tyler Olcott nor Clara Hyde knew what lay ahead of them in terms of the AAVSO. Tyler displayed no interest in astronomy; that would come later. After being initiated to the beauty of the night skies by one of Clara's friends, Tyler Olcott's interest in astronomy slowly expanded until variable stars captured his attention. His subsequent founding of the AAVSO, with all the work that entailed, had to be balanced with a busy social life with Clara and her family. They lived among the social leading lights in the community of Norwich, Connecticut. World War I imposed major new work loads on both Clara and Tyler. She volunteered to work as a leader of the

local American Red Cross while Tyler took on a full-time job as Secretary of the Norwich Draft Board. The burden was more than Tyler could stand physically. Under this pressure he neglected variable star astronomy somewhat during the war, leading others to take more responsibility for AAVSO. Eventually this led to the incorporation of the AAVSO in 1918. After incorporation, the new AAVSO by-laws provided for elections and a full slate of officers to ensure the continuity of the organization.

Tyler's health never quite recovered from the wartime stress, but Clara aptly sailed through the war effort smoothly while continuing to support and care for Tyler. For the next two decades, Tyler's health required that they spend winters away from Norwich, either in Florida or Arizona. Unfailingly supportive, Clara was usually seen by the AAVSO membership, hanging on Tyler's arm, helping him through his sickness and the press of AAVSO duties as well as other work. Although Tyler's health failed and he died in 1936, Clara lived until 1951. In an amazing coincidence, she passed away on exactly the same day that Leon Campbell died.

## 2.2. Frederica Campbell

We know a lot less about Frederica Campbell than we do about Clara Olcott. Born (and educated) in Columbia, Connecticut, in 1881, Frederica met Leon early in the twentieth century. Columbia is located between Hartford and Waterbury, and even today claims a population of only a few thousand citizens. Thus, it seems very likely that Leon met Frederica through some church activity; Columbia is otherwise a long way from Cambridge. They married in June 1905 and established their home in Cambridge. Their first child, Leon Jr., was born in August 1906, followed by their first daughter in January 1908. Some older AAVSO members will remember her as Florence Bibber (she later was Margaret Mayall's assistant for many years). A second son, Malcolm, arrived in January 1909. Another daughter, Ruth, was born in Peru while their last daughter, Ellen, was born when they returned to Cambridge from Arequipa. Thus, as a busy mother, Frederica limited her participation in AAVSO events out of necessity; it is clear that she had her hands full for most of the first thirty years of their marriage. Small wonder, then, that she shows up with Leon in so few of the pictures we have of him involved in various AAVSO activities over more than forty years.

## 2.3. Newton Mayall

The extensive support given to Margaret Mayall by her husband Newton over the many years of their lives together is yet another example of the importance of the spouse to the AAVSO, whether as the observer's spouse or the director's spouse. Newton joined AAVSO before he ever met Margaret; it was through Newton's work as a variable star observer that they became acquainted in 1924 at her first AAVSO meeting.

Newton was born in 1904 in Waltham, Massachusetts. As the son of a commercial designer, Newton's professional career as a civil engineer focused on design more than on construction. Sundials were a hobby for Newton and Margaret. Professionally his most prominent project was likely the sundial at front of the entrance to the National Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C. In contrast to many of our director's spouses, Newton served actively in the AAVSO leadership as well. He served on the Council for twenty-two years, including six years as Treasurer during some of the AAVSO's toughest financial times. Newton also designed a headquarters building for the AAVSO; his design featured an observatory on top. Perhaps someday, if Arne Henden lives long enough at his current pace, we will see Newton's dream of a rooftop observatory realized on top of the present building.

#### 2.4. Michael Mattei

Mike Mattei, like Newton Mayall, met his future bride and AAVSO director at an AAVSO meeting. Born in 1940 and educated in New Haven, Connecticut, Mike quit school before graduating, but learned carpentry during a year in a trade school at his father's suggestion. Night school helped him finally earn a high school diploma, but in the meantime he also apprenticed as an eyeglass lens grinder and became a skilled optical worker. After doing quite a bit of reading about astronomy, Mike discovered the New Haven Astronomical Society. David Dunham, then a graduate student at Yale, insisted that Mike accompany him to Nantucket for the October 1966 AAVSO meeting. Mike not only joined AAVSO at that meeting but learned of openings for night assistants at the Harvard College Observatory's Oak Ridge Station. Eventually his work at Oak Ridge played out, but in the meantime Mike attended the 1969 Fall AAVSO meeting, again at Nantucket, where he met and later began to court Janet Akyüz. Eventually, Mike went back into precision optical work and finished his career as a specialist in that field. As a long term member of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers, Mike specialized in observation of the clouds on Venus. So while Mike has been a long-time variable star observer, he is far better known as an amateur planetary astronomer. Mike served on the AAVSO Council from 1972 to 1976, and as the Clerk from 1979 to 2007.

Unlike Newton Mayall, Mike's contributions to AAVSO were, for the most part, behind the scenes; he never got involved in office or council politics directly. However Janet relied upon Mike as a sounding board with whom she could discuss problems and possible solutions. Anyone close to Janet knew of the enormous insecurities that plagued her all her adult life, though she gave little evidence of her concerns to anyone except her closest friends and associates. In an oral interview, Mike revealed that she suffered a recurring concern that she would not live past age 60, and frequently expressed her desire that they should grow old together. Her concern first surfaced shortly after they were married, and again about every ten years according to Mike. So in fact

Mike's support of Janet behind the scenes facilitated the substantial progress made by AAVSO during her tenure as director.

### 2.5. Linda Henden

Our present Director's spouse, Linda Henden, presents an amazing contrast in styles compared to all of her predecessors. Mike Mattei remained quietly in the background, constantly available to Janet as an advisor on the home front. In vivid contrast, Newton Mayall, had his thumb in much of what happened in the AAVSO. In Linda we find yet another model of spousal behavior, a constant, quiet, and immensely supportive presence in what goes on around the office.

Born on Long Island, New York, in 1950, Linda Horn moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her family. There, she attended junior and senior high school and studied biology at the University of New Mexico. While at the university, she met and began dating an astronomy graduate student by the name of Arne Henden. After they both graduated in 1968, she married Arne in 1971 and thereafter committed herself to the life of an astronomer's wife.

I said a lot less about all contemporary spouses in this presentation by design, but I can't ignore Linda's steadfast support to AAVSO as well as Arne, during their time in Cambridge. I spent a lot of time in Headquarters over a two year period; during that time Linda and Arne were present and working almost every hour, in Linda's case either at a desk doing bookkeeping and accounting for the association, or with a paintbrush in her hand. I was frankly amazed at the energy and dedication they both exhibited in fixing up 49 Bay State Road, but then Linda says it seems like she has spent most of her life fixing up homes, so I guess her current situation is part of a life-time trend.

## 3. The Active Participant

A few of our observers' spouses participated actively in amateur astronomy if not in variable star observing or other aspects of AAVSO (Figure 3). There may be many more, but here are just a few examples:

### 3.1. William Maybrick Kearons

The Rev. William Maybrick Kearons, was very well known in astronomical circles, more so than his variable star observing wife, Winifred Crossland Kearons. They lived in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, where Rev. Kearons served for over twenty-five years as the Rector of Episcopal Parishes. Born in Liverpool, England, in 1878 William Kearons immigrated to the United States in 1907, where in 1914 he married Canadian native Winifred Crossland.

Rev. Kearons mastered the art of photographing projected images of the Sun's surface in which he captured excellent pictures of sunspots. He provided Harvard astronomer Donald Menzel with daily images of the Sun for every

clear day for a number of years; his pictures of sunspots are featured in Menzel's book *The Sun*, and also in *Scientific American* and *The Telescope* magazine in the late 1930s.

### 3.2. Winifred Kearons

Though I don't plan to do this in most cases, I would also like to say a word or two more about the actual variable star observer in this family, Winifred Kearons. Too little attention has been paid to her separate career as an amateur astronomer. For quite a number of years Winifred Kearons' observing totals led all female and many male observers of variable stars in AAVSO. During the 1930s and early 1940s, Mrs. Kearons also observed the Sun on a daily basis. But in contrast to her solar photographer husband, and perhaps reflecting her more scientific inclinations, Winifred counted sunspots and reported the counts on a monthly basis to the international solar astronomy center in Zurich, Switzerland. When the AAVSO organized its Solar Division, the charter members included both Winifred and William Maybrick Kearons. Using her 3-inch refractor, and reporting observations as KR from 1925 to 1951, her total amounted to 9,769 variable star observations, by no means an insignificant contribution. Winifred also served as a member of the AAVSO Council for four years from 1939 to 1943. At the time of her death in 1957, Winifred Kearons ranked as the leading woman variable star observer and placed well up on the list of all variable star observers for the first forty years of AAVSO history. It was not until the early 1970s that Diane Lucas, and later Carolyn Hurless, both of Ohio, surpassed her total.

### 3.3. Emily Fernald

Moving forward in time to the 1950s, Cyrus Fernald, already "the ace observer" in AAVSO according to none other than Leslie Peltier, married for the first time at the age of forty-nine years. His bride, Emily Parsons Sanborn, a school teacher and accomplished organist, was ten years younger. It will come as no surprise that the Fernald's marriage produced no children. After their marriage, Emily, or Em as Cy used to refer to her, picked up on his astronomical interest, perhaps as a form of self-defense. She contributed about a hundred variable star observations but became, along with Cy, a regular solar observer and contributed sunspot observations to the AAVSO Solar Division and to Zurich. Cy claimed Em had a lot better eyes than he did and always saw more spots than he could. She made 900 observations of sunspots over her observing career.

But Em's real contribution was through her support of Cy as one of the leading variable star observers in the AAVSO as well as a council leader during the eviction from HCO. In addition to astronomy, the Fernalds shared another passion as avid birdwatchers. In fact, in decades from the 1950s through the 1970s, a number of other couples in AAVSO shared the hobby of bird watching

with the Fernalds, including Leslie Peltier and his wife Dottie, and former president Ralph Buckstaff and his wife Annie Laurie. In those pre-internet days of inexpensive gasoline, these couples made driving visits to each other for purposes of bird watching as well as socializing.

### 3.4. Other forms of participation

Two other active couples of note include the Wilkersons and the Beamans (Figure 4). Carmen and Winston Wilkerson both served on the Council of the AAVSO, and in Carmen's case, she also served as the AAVSO Auditor for a number of years. Joint participation in AAVSO also characterized the efforts of Carol and Barry Beaman. Both observed variable stars and both participated regularly in AAVSO meetings. While Barry served on the Council, the Beamans organized an AAVSO Spring meeting in their hometown of Rockford, Illinois. After decades of service to the Astronomical League as well as the AAVSO, the Beamans rank among the strongest supporters of amateur astronomy in the United States.

## 4. The Cheerful Supporter

Now in many cases, equally important spousal support rendered to AAVSO observers and leaders did not involve active observing or participation in the leadership of the Association. I chose to separate these spousal supporters into a slightly different but no less important category. In these cases, it is frequently more difficult to find out something about the spouse, but that should not diminish their importance to the AAVSO (Figures 3 and 4).

### 4.1. Lillian Pickering

Three years older than jeweler David Bedell Pickering, his wife Lillian raised their five sons, which in itself is a life-time of work for most women. She also played an important role in the early years of the AAVSO, even before its incorporation. Lillian and David hosted the earliest large meetings of the AAVSO in their home in East Orange, New Jersey. Those successful meetings eventually led to the incorporation of the AAVSO, but outgrew the capacity of the Pickering home.

### 4.2. Margaret Yalden

Almost the same might be said of Margaret Yalden, the spouse of another member of "The Old Guard" (charter or very early AAVSO members), Born in 1865 in Pennsylvania, Margaret Lyon remained unmarried in New York City until she met J. Ernest G. Yalden, an Englishman who came to the United States in search of opportunities. They married in 1895, and by 1900 had settled in Leonia, New Jersey, in what was to remain their home for the rest of their lives. Five years older than Ernest, Margaret maintained a stable home



for him and supported his extensive involvement in variable star observing and other forms of astronomy, especially his lunar occultation work for the AAVSO. The Yaldens frequently entertained other Old Guard members in their home. In May 1925, the Yaldens hosted the Spring meeting of the AAVSO, the last formal meeting to be held in a private home as the AAVSO outgrew such intimate surroundings.

#### 4.3. Jane Halbach

Wisconsin native Jane E. Roth met Ed Halbach at church and they married in 1942. This happy marriage produced a family of six children. In spite of the parenting difficulties involved with such a family of six children, Jane worked full-time selling advertising for the Yellow Pages Telephone Directory. Verbally eloquent, persuasive and successful in her job, Jane had a way with words. For example, she wrote radio jingles for which she won many prizes. Most *AAVSO* readers may not remember musical jingles as a sales technique, but in the days in which radio advertising was the most direct route to consumer awareness, jingles played a major role. Through it all Ed continued his full-time employment and his full-time service to astronomy as well, as a founder and observatory director of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society, eclipse chaser for the National Geographic Society, observing grazing lunar occultations for IOTA, and photographing aurorae for Cornell University. Ed served as founding President of the Astronomical League, in addition to observing variable stars and raising his wonderful family with Jane. Those important contributions could not have occurred without Jane's support; she loved to travel, so as often as possible, she accompanied Ed to meetings of both the Astronomical League and the AAVSO.

#### 4.4. Barbara Kaiser and Elizabeth Dillon

Dan Kaiser and Bill Dillon served as presidents of the AAVSO during one of the most trying periods in our history, when AAVSO Director Janet Mattei fell ill and died. Their exemplary handling of this catastrophe (Dan's during the remainder of his tenure as President, through October 2003 and as Past President through October 2004, and Bill's as his successor through October 2006) stabilized the Association and ensured continuity of its leadership in a critical period. Dan relied heavily on the support of his wife Barbara as a pillar of strength and support while Bill's wife Elizabeth was an incredible source of support throughout his tenure. For that alone Barbara and Elizabeth represent exactly the type of spousal support that this paper intends to celebrate.

But Barbara had another characteristic that makes her memorable; she joined enthusiastically into the spirit of AAVSO meetings to enjoy, and to help others enjoy, the opportunities presented wherever the meeting was being held. A good example of that occurred when the AAVSO met in Houston. Earlier it was mentioned that bird watching had been a second past-time enjoyed by



many AAVSO couples. Barbara and Dan had also been active as bird watchers, and always looked for opportunities to observe birds that neither had on their life-time lists. Birding is now their full time avocation as I understand it. More on that in a minute as I will come back to this story.

#### 4.5. Bruce McHenry

Our long time member Martha Locke Hazen supported the AAVSO in many ways as the curator of the Harvard College Observatory plate stacks. Elected to the AAVSO council, she served as president, eventually resigning the presidency to serve as secretary for a decade as Clint Ford's replacement. An acrimonious divorce left her to raise two children in addition to her employment, but nevertheless Martha was steadfast in her involvement and support for AAVSO. So it was a special delight for everyone, especially those who had survived divorces and remarried, to meet Bruce McHenry as Martha's new spouse. After a career as a senior park naturalist and interpreter for the National Park Service, Bruce and Martha shared interests in many things, including travel and especially their common interest in canals and canal barges as a mode of waterway transportation. They visited modern as well as historical systems deserving of preservation. Quickly accepted as a regular spousal participant in AAVSO meetings, Bruce supported Martha as she switched from being president to secretary and extended her service on the Council. My wife Anna Fay returned enthusiastically from a whale watching trip during one of our meetings on Nantucket Island to describe how Bruce had become the de facto tour guide based on his knowledge as a naturalist and well-developed sense of the drama of nature as well as the nature of drama.

Going back now to the Houston meeting and Barbara Kaiser, Bruce and Barbara struck up a friendship because of his extensive knowledge of birds. During the Council meeting in Houston, the two of them took off on a bird hunting expedition. The Gulf coast is well known as birding territory so such a side trip could be expected. When we gathered for dinner that evening, however, Barbara and Bruce were nowhere to be seen. They eventually straggled in, claiming to have gotten lost following a pink footed whistling duck. A likely story we all laughed, and went on with the party with a sigh of relief that they were safe.

I think that short story characterizes one of the great characteristics of all of the AAVSO spouses I've met over the years—their ability to enjoy the circumstances as they find them. That personality characteristic is certainly necessary when one accepts a spouse who already has an active involvement in an organization like the AAVSO. Bruce joined an honored list of such spouses many of whom are mentioned in this paper, including Lillian Pickering, Emily Fernald, Annie Laurie Buckstaff, and Dorothy Peltier, all of whom bought into variable star observing and the AAVSO as a part of their marriage.

#### 4.6. International associates

Over its history, AAVSO enjoyed support from other countries, most notably Canada. As AAVSO presidents, Canadians Frank DeKinder, Charles Good, George Fortier, and John Percy have all been blessed with spousal support that included regular participation in semi-annual meetings. I would mention especially Maire Percy as a frequent participant in AAVSO meetings, supporting John for thirty years or more of his active participation. Whenever our Japanese member and observer Seiichi Sakuma came to AAVSO meetings his quiet and gracious wife Nobuko accompanied him. It may be that Nobuko spoke little or no English, but she always seemed grateful for our recognition. We honor all wives who travel from other continents at considerable expense in terms of both time and wealth to help their spouses participate in the AAVSO.

### **5. The Variable Star Widow**

Moving on to other types of AAVSO spouses, the next to be considered are those strong supporters who do not for the most part participate in AAVSO activities, identified for purposes of this paper as The Variable Star Widows (Figures 4 and 5). There are two clear sub-categories of Widows: The Strong Silent Type and The Complainers. There is no doubt some friction in the marriages of many if not most AAVSO observers, as there is in most marriages. However, the more active an observer becomes the more likely there is to be some friction.

#### 5.1. Barbara Bortle

Of the two types, those who endure in silence and never complain (at least as far as we know), I would cite John Bortle's wife Barbara as one good example. As with the Halbachs mentioned above, the Bortles had a few children and the attention demanded by those children likely provided more than enough distraction for Barbara so that she did not object to John's heavy observing schedule. Their case is a bit more complicated, however. In addition to the limitations imposed by a large family, John and Barbara lived well away from city lights to facilitate his observing, also a disadvantage to her in all likelihood. But then there is also the fact that John's place of work for many years as a fireman in a suburb near New York City was a long way from where he lived. It was an occupation John pursued so he could work two and/or three day continuous shifts at the firehouse, and thereby have longer uninterrupted periods of time at home to observe. That pattern of frequent separations continued for many years until John's serious injuries, suffered when he fell through a roof during a fire, forced his disability retirement. I cite Barbara as an example mainly because I know about the circumstances of her case. The AAVSO is fortunate, I am sure, to be populated with many observers with spouses who were similarly supportive.

### 5.2. Donald Hurless

AAVSO members who visited Ohio, on the other hand, were sure to have met Donald Eugene Hurless, the spouse supporting our most prolific feminine contributor to date, Carolyn Jane Hurless. There were many different reasons why AAVSO observers might pass through north central Ohio, but one was no doubt Leslie Peltier's presence in Delphos, Ohio. Nearly as important in all likelihood was the fact that Lima, Ohio, where the Hurless family lived, was nearby. Informal gatherings in the Lima/Delphos region were a social event for AAVSOers in the central states and for many from outside the region as well.

Don, a piano player, composer, and arranger, played in his own small groups, trios and quartets, for dance clubs, and also led a larger orchestra. Born in Lima in 1928, Don was actually six years older than Carolyn Jane Klaserner, also a Lima native, when they decided to marry in 1959. Don supported Carolyn's hobbies to the extent that he could. As musicians, Don and Carolyn relied on their musical talents for their existence, Carolyn by teaching piano, and Don by teaching as well as by playing local gigs with his various musical groups. Both were also piano tuners; they maintained a comfortable life style that allowed Carolyn plenty of time for her hobbies. At first she engaged in amateur radio, then later switched to variable star astronomy. Don qualifies for the Variable Star Widower category for a variety of reasons. Obviously he and Carolyn shared many interests but astronomy was not one of them. Don came to only one AAVSO meeting that I recall (1983, where he, Clint Ford, and Dorrit Hoffleit's sister Norfleet gave a wonderful evening concert). But so far as I know, Don never complained about Carolyn's separate work as a variable star observer, publisher of *Variable Views* newsletter, or Council member and officer of AAVSO.

### 5.3. The Complainers

Now a different situation existed for those wives who endured their spouse's avocation, but let their unhappiness be known to others. Who knows how many are in this category, we hope not many, but it seems likely that more than a few cases exist. Dottie Nihiser must have known when she married Leslie Peltier in 1933 that she was marrying a renowned amateur astronomer, whose avocation required long hours at the telescope eyepiece at night. By then, Peltier was already well known as a variable star observer, and as a discoverer of novae and comets; Dottie knew that he would be less than fully attentive to her every whim. They did manage to have a family, two sons, Stanley H. and Gordon J. Peltier, so their relationship was one of marital bliss in the early days, as Leslie himself described it in his books.

Dorothy Nihiser was born in the same community, Marion, Ohio, into which Leslie had been born, but almost eleven years later. Privileged to attend some college at Ohio Wesleyan University, Dottie displayed a substantial interest in

archeology. That likely explains the one month honeymoon that she and Leslie took in the southwestern states. There they could camp and study geology and the archeology of ruins to their heart's content.

By the 1960s though, things began to change. At the time of the August gatherings in Lima and Delphos, Dottie's attitudes were clearly on display, and in spite of her apparently cheerful serving of pancake breakfasts at the end of all-night observing sessions, she also was quite vocal in expressing her displeasure about these sessions to those present in the kitchen, always in a tone and worded in such a way that a dual interpretation was possible, that she was both ribbing Leslie but also scolding him and making her displeasure known. Though I never attended one of these gatherings, I get this message from enough different sources that I feel that the contention must have merit. The story is further supported by the fact that the Fitz and Clark lenses for Peltier's two telescopes, instruments that the AAVSO felt belonged to it, were never returned to AAVSO and have apparently disappeared into the family coffers. Dottie died in Delphos in 2008 at the age of 98.

## **6. The Black Widow**

Some marriages break up in situations in which one of the obvious strains in the relationship involves variable star observing. VSOing inevitably infringes on a married couple's time together. It would be inappropriate to identify anyone who might fit in this category. It seems likely that variable star observing is frequently only one of many problems found in a troubled marital relationship, perhaps not even the major problem. But, one can also observe that a large number of our outstanding observers married very late in life, or suffered separations or divorces, in some noteworthy cases multiple divorces or at least very extended separations. It is quite clear in those cases that dedication to the AAVSO and/or to observing played a part in the collapse of the marriage. And of course there is no way of knowing how many would-be or actual variable star observers threw in the towel and stopped observing rather than break up a marriage. It would be unfair to stigmatize the spouses involved in all such cases, but acknowledgement of the possibility serves to reinforce the main thrust of this paper, that is, more frequent acknowledgement of the importance of spousal support to AAVSO success is important.

## **7. Conclusion**

The AAVSO and variable star observing must be considered a family effort, an idea that had more emphasis in the past, and needs more emphasis in the future! Everyone should acknowledge from time to time how important such relationships are for all of us. Perhaps the AAVSO will make a greater effort in the future to make meetings more family-friendly, provide alternatives to

the growing intensity of the science, acknowledging the fact that even those observers who are sleeping with their wives while their automated telescopes grind away through the night have devoted family resources to the project, and time to maintain the effort, reduce the data, and attend meetings.

As the founding father of the AAVSO's photoelectric photometric program, John Ruiz would readily testify that there are always times when only the family can help (Figure 6), and those of us lucky enough to be part of understanding and helpful families need to acknowledge our need and nourish those relationships right along with the science we all value so highly.

## 8. Acknowledgements

This paper is based on the author's historical research, and personal experiences in the AAVSO.

*Editorial comment: Surely one of the most visible and appreciated AAVSO spouses of recent decades has been Anna Fay Williams! (Figure 1) Tom's contributions to the Association have been numerous, diverse, and very significant, and Anna Fay has been there to support him—and occasionally rescue him from medical emergencies. And she's not just an appendage; she has her own scholarly and cultural pursuits, so she doesn't have to come to AAVSO meetings for want of something to occupy her mind. Indeed, her varied talents make her one of the most interesting meeting attendees. Tom and Anna Fay are one of the AAVSO's "royal couples." They help make AAVSO meetings a joy to attend! —John Percy*



Figure 1. Anna Fay and Tom Williams at the dedication of the AAVSO Archives named in their honor during the AAVSO Annual Meeting, October 2011.



Figure 2. From top left: Tyler and Clara Olcott; Leon and Frederica Campbell; Margaret and Newton Mayall; Mike and Janet Mattei; Linda and Arne Henden.



Figure 3. From top left: William and Winifred Kearons; Margaret and J. E. G. Yalden (with W. T. Olcott); Lillian and David Pickering; Emily and Cy Fernald; Jane and Ed Halbach and family.





Figure 4. From top left: Carmen and Winston Wilkerson; Barry and Carol Beaman; Dan and Barbara Kaiser; Bruce McHenry and Martha Hazen; Seiichi and Nabuko Sakuma.



Figure 5. Left to right: Carolyn and Don Hurless; Dottie and Leslie Peltier.



Figure 6. AAVSO observer John Ruiz's family helping him up a steep hill, Puebla, Mexico. From their family Christmas card in 1967.