

Come join the A.A.V.S.O. and have a glorious time;
 To watch the stars requires no sense
 Or intellectual eminence
 Or scholarship sublime.
 For Jonesey's records give us hope
 Made with one six-inch telescope.

You need not have ten telescopes
 As Charlie Elmer has,
 Who with his instruments galore
 Does nothing in particular,
 And does it very well.
 For Peltier's comets give us hope
 Found with one six-inch telescope.

Our elders have so aptly expressed it many times. It is the congenial atmosphere, the unity of members, the encouragement given to the younger members, and a love for the stars - that is what makes the AAVSO tick!

FOUR HELENS

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Abstract

A fine administrator owes much of his reputation to his unsung secretaries and assistants.

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"Behind every great man there stands a great woman." This adage used to be quoted freely before the days of "woman's lib" and was usually applied to the wife. Leon Campbell certainly gained great support from his wife, as well as from his three daughters, two of whom from time to time pinch hit as his secretaries. But today I'd like to mention the usually unsung women who seldom get their due credit, namely the assistants and secretaries. Among a few others, Mr. Campbell had four in particular, all named Helen. I looked this name up in a version of Webster's Dictionary that has a section on "Common Christian Names - with their derivation, signification and diminutives, or nick-names." Here I find that Helen stands for light! So appropriate for an astronomer's assistant, I wonder if this could have guided Mr. Campbell in his choice of personnel!

The first Helen I knew to work for Mr. Campbell was Helen Popkavich, a Radcliffe student of considerable dignity and bearing. At that time Mr. Campbell had charge of the Friday evening open nights for school children. Helen, although not an astronomy student, wanted to give one of the lectures, and was granted this opportunity. Her speech was well organized and appropriate for her audience. When Helen left the observatory she became the feature writer for the women's column of the Boston Post, one of the six daily newspapers published in Boston in those days.

The second Helen was my Radcliffe classmate, Helen Lewis Thomas. She worked with Mr. Campbell from about 1934 to 1937. Besides looking after the usual chores in the Headquarters office, Helen took on the task of re-classifying the books of the Charles McAteer Library of the

AAVSO, a contribution of lasting value. Later, for a time Helen helped the Gaposchkins in their Milton Bureau work, estimating the magnitudes of variables on the Harvard patrol plates. She gave a paper on one of these, "TW peg - an Irregular Variable" - at the 1940 annual meeting. But there is one important contribution for which Helen deserves far more acclaim than she has enjoyed. In 1948 she became the first woman to receive a doctorate in the History of Science from Radcliffe (now Harvard). Her topic was the "Early History of Variable Star Observing to the XIX Century." We have at last succeeded in obtaining a Xerox copy for the McAteer Library of the AAVSO.

Not only was Helen Thomas the first woman to get a PhD in this field, but also, only two men at Harvard preceded her. One was the now very famous I. B. Cohen, who received his degree the year before she did, in 1947, for his dissertation on Benjamin Franklin.

The third Helen was the wife of Charlie Federer, Editor in Chief of Sky and Telescope, and herself the Managing Editor. Helen Spence Federer worked for Mr. Campbell little more than a year, but brought to her position quiet reserve and a great deal of editorial know-how, always a valuable asset at Headquarters. She also wrote up the meeting at New Haven in June, 1942, for Variable Comments.

Finally we come to Helen Stephansky, friendly, outgoing, and industrious. She came in 1944 and stayed not only until Mr. Campbell's retirement in 1949, but continued to be Margaret Mayall's right hand until 1957. She experienced the traumatic time when the AAVSO was evicted from Harvard Observatory, its birthplace and home for over forty years, with only annual membership dues and the income from a munificent \$6000 (yes, six thousand) endowment to support itself. This was hardly the type of appointment to offer a young woman security and advancement. Yet, like Margaret and Newton Mayall, Helen faced the situation with loyalty and the confidence that somehow the hard times would be surmounted. Because of the devotion of people like these, the AAVSO found the "blessing in disguise" hidden in all its troubles.

Without the challenges to its very survival, it is doubtful that the AAVSO could ever have achieved the tremendous self-reliance, independence, and world-status it now enjoys. Probably the AAVSO would have continued to have been looked upon as a subsidiary of Harvard Observatory, unquestionably prestigious, but not really independent. And independence is one of the strongest ingredients of greatness.