

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AAVSO

1981 marks the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the AAVSO. The 70th Annual Meeting of the AAVSO was held in October in Cambridge and Waltham, Massachusetts. Several events helped to make our 70th Anniversary Meeting a special one. On Friday afternoon, we heard a wonderful account on William Tyler Olcott, co-founder of the AAVSO, by Walter Scott Houston. Also, we heard talks on the visit of Ernst Mayer to our member Jaroslav Kruta in Czechoslovakia, the presentation of the AAVSO Nova Award to George Alcock by Elizabeth Waagen this summer in England, and a summary of astronomical meetings that I attended this summer.

We were warmly received at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center For Astrophysics (CFA) for a reception. Dr. Harvey Tananbaum, representing the CFA, pointed out in his welcoming address the valuable contributions of the AAVSO to variable star astronomy.

Following a buffet dinner, we had a special program which was filled with reminiscences. Our Master of Ceremonies was Dr. Peter Millman, a prominent astronomer of the National Research Council of Canada, and an AAVSOer since 1924. Peter shared with us his memories of how he became involved with astronomy by observing variable stars as a young boy, and he reminded us never to take for granted the spark of interest and curiosity in or the inquiry of a child. We thoroughly enjoyed Newton Mayall's article, read by Elizabeth Waagen, titled "What Makes the AAVSO Tick" - a warm and wonderful montage of Newton's recollections of prominent AAVSOers. Dorrit Hoffleit paid tribute to "The Four Helen's" - the four valuable assistants of the AAVSO named Helen. Newton's article and Dorrit's talk are reproduced below. Margaret Mayall shared with us some wonderful letters received from our members/observers over the years. The letters showed the immense interest and wonderfully diverse potential of our members/observers - the treasures of the AAVSO. Carolyn Hurless read a poem on the AAVSO, the contents of which are even more relevant today than when written by David Pickering way back in 1920. This poem is also reproduced below. Clint Ford shared, through slides, his reminiscences of AAVSO and AAVSOers.

It was a delightful evening filled with nostalgia for the past and hope for the future.

J. A. Mattei

WHAT MAKES THE AAVSO TICK?

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What makes the AAVSO tick? That is the easiest question to answer. It is the people who make up the AAVSO. From its very beginning, the AAVSO was bound to become a success, for the professional saw what the amateur could do and encouraged him. It was obvious that amateurs could keep better track of variables than could the professional with his limited time and few locations. From a relative few we have grown to over 1100 members, scattered all over the globe, and the intermingling of amateur and professional still exists. Because of this relationship, we have been a happy group, and I would like to share with you some vignettes of the earlier days.

My first visit to Harvard was made in the spring of 1918. I met a short, somewhat pugnacious man sitting behind a large desk in the corner room of the old Building A. He was surrounded by books - on the wall, the desk, and the tables. At first, I guess I was a little bit scared because of his seemingly gruff manner for I was just a kid at the time, but I found him to be a kindly soul. His name was Leon Campbell, which didn't mean much to me then. Well, the upshot of the whole thing was that he got me interested in variable stars and told me how to observe them. In fact, he loaned me a 3-inch telescope that had been given to the Association by Signor Lacchini, of Italy, who was one of the first observers.

Leon Campbell was the first Recorder of the AAVSO (his real title was Recording Secretary). He gathered the observations, supplied charts, trained people in observing, and managed many other details. Just as our Director is today, he was a very busy man and a very much overworked person, but he seemed to enjoy his work.

Between 1911, when the AAVSO was founded, and 1922, when I joined, it had grown in numbers of observers. At my first annual meeting there were about 20 - 25 members present. I was a boy among men, neither shy nor forward, but one thing I learned about these men and women was that they would talk to me and seemed interested in what I was doing. They never shoved me aside, as much as if to say, "What's that kid doing around here?" This congenial spirit that pervaded the members has always interested and impressed me. Therefore, I would like to describe some of them to you.

First, there was William Tyler Olcott. It was he, with Edward C. Pickering, the Director of Harvard College Observatory, who really started the AAVSO. Olcott had a telescope, and before 1910 he had written several books on astronomy, including his famous Field Book of the Skies. In 1909 he visited Harvard, and saw an exhibit of light curves of variables that Harvard had under observation. These curves intrigued him, and he later wrote to Pickering and asked if he could become a variable star observer. In January, 1910, Pickering gave Campbell permission to go to Norwich, Connecticut, to initiate Olcott in "the art of observing variable stars." His first observations were made in February, 1910, and in the March, 1911, issue of Popular Astronomy he published what was probably the first article of its kind, under the title, "Variable Star Work for the Amateur with a Small Telescope." In it he gave detailed instructions for locating and observing variable stars, together with charts. Shortly after that he got busy, and the first report of the AAVSO was published in the November, 1911, issue of Popular Astronomy. Thus was the AAVSO born.

There were only a few observers, and Olcott took over the task of receiving and publishing the observations, for Campbell was being sent to Peru. Olcott did this until Campbell returned in 1915 and took over the work.

Olcott was a lawyer. The older members used to refer to him as "the idle rich," because he didn't work at the profession. His love was the stars. He was a tall, thin man, well-dressed, clean-shaven, and sharp-featured. He was the first Secretary, a position he filled until 1936.

Another quite congenial and impressive man was Ernest Yalden, professor of mathematics at Brooklyn College. He was also a tall, thin man. His large brown beard and constant pipe gave him the nickname, "The Baron." He had an interest in navigation, was very much enamored of sundials, and was always conjuring up mathematical formulae.

In any group you should have a doctor present. We did in Dr. Charles Godfrey, a physician and surgeon from New Haven, Connecticut. He was a quiet man with a beautifully clipped grey beard, which certainly gave him the air of a gentleman - which he was. Godfrey's beard did not provoke a nickname as did Yalden's.

We had a railroad engineer, too. His name was Charles McAteer. Our library is named after him for his generous gift of many volumes on astronomy. I remember him as the man who always came to meetings in a dark suit, starched wing collar, and black tie. He was a quiet man, and our first librarian.

Then there was Charles Elmer, a court stenographer. He was a portly gentleman, wearing his hat askew, always joking. They used to say that his astronomical life was 99% enthusiasm and 1% experience. He had more telescopes than anyone else, but his one observation was always a source for humor. Later he became one of the founders of the Perkin-Elmer Corporation.

Elmer never could do anything unless Olcott, Yalden, and Campbell were around. This trio went to Southold, Long Island, where Elmer had his summer home, to set Elmer's telescope. Olcott was forever writing poetry. Here is a short excerpt from the poem Olcott wrote about Settin' Elmer's Glass:

"What are they goin' to do tonight?"
 Remarked the simple soul.
 "Just set the glass, just set the glass,"
 Replied the Baron droll.
 "What do they want to set it for?"
 Remarked the simple soul.
 "Nobody knows and he won't tell,"
 Replied the Baron droll.

For they're settin' Elmer's telescope,
 And no one knows just why,
 The owner just admires it, and prefers
 to save his eye;
 So the experts keep adjustin', and they'll
 get it by and by.

David B. Pickering was a jeweler, and no relation to Edward Pickering. He was bald and bow-legged, and had a pipe-organ voice that could be heard from the Observatory to Harvard Square. When he began to talk, you listened. No one could compete with Dave. He was our first President, 1917 - 1918, and initiated the Nova Award for the visual discovery of a nova.

Professor Ernest Brown of Yale was famous for his moon tables, and was a jovial man. He took part in every discussion, and was an inveterate chain smoker. Yalden and he were always arguing or discussing his tables - all in good fun.

These six men - Olcott, Yalden, Godfrey, Elmer, Brown, and Pickering - were often referred to as "The Old Guard."

Ralph Buckstaff was a furniture manufacturer from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. In addition to his work for the AAVSO, he kept records of the weather. Several years ago he was given a medal by the National Weather Bureau upon his attainment of 50 years of service.

We have a few record-breakers. Cyrus Fernald racked up over 118,000 observations between 1937 and 1973. Not only were they of great quantity but they were also of excellent quality. He had a way with his 8-inch Springfield telescope, in Maine, that no one would

believe until they saw him operate. He could make an observation in a minute or less.

Then there was Reginald deKock, of South Africa, who had been an outstanding observer for 40 years. His fine observations, numbering 160,777, covered the southern skies for us.

We can't leave out Leslie Peltier, who made more than 132,000 observations. He made monthly reports, without interruption, from March, 1918, on. In addition he was a comet seeker who found many that bear his name. His is a record that is hard to beat.

Eugene Jones was another equally adept at the telescope. He was a top observer for several years. His hobby was that of illuminating manuscripts, and painting. He made the Merit Awards for many members, copies of which hang on the wall at Headquarters. Although not a true record-breaker, he provided us with 44,763 observations in the few years of his retirement.

One thing these record-breakers have in common is that they used 6-inch or 8-inch telescopes, and went after and provided us with much-needed observations. Those of us today should bear that in mind, and go after those stars that need observing. Don't go off on a tangent just to build up observations for the sake of becoming a top observer. Quality and not quantity is what is needed.

In 1921, Dr. Harlow Shapley became Director of Harvard Observatory. He became directly involved with the AAVSO, and was one of our Presidents. Probably some of the older members twisted his arm for he, throughout his tenure as Director, invited us to hold our annual meetings at the Observatory, and what is more, he and Mrs. Shapley provided bounteous teas for us on Saturday afternoons. They always seemed to look forward to our annual visits.

We still have many professional astronomers as members. Perhaps it is because of their belief in us and our will to produce that we have gone so far and have observers scattered all over the globe.

The ladies have always been a vital part of our Association, either as wives, members, or professional astronomers. Among the professionals were two that I want to mention - Annie J. Cannon and Anne S. Young.

Miss Cannon was on the staff at Harvard, and was an early member. Her love was the spectra of stars. She was full of fun and was always doing something for us. Her love of the AAVSO was second only to her love of spectra. We had many good times at her home on Bond Street, which she called "Star Cottage."

Miss Young was Director of Williston Observatory at Mt. Holyoke College. A tall, slim, gentle person, she did much to help and encourage young people. An avid observer of variables, she was our third President.

Among our Presidents have been Alice Farnsworth, Director of Williston Observatory, Mt. Holyoke; Harriet Bigelow, Director of Smith College Observatory; Caroline E. Furness, Director of Vassar College Observatory; Helen Sawyer Hogg, David Dunlap Observatory; Marjorie Williams, Director of Smith College Observatory; Martha Stahr Carpenter, University of Virginia; and E. Dorrit Hoffleit, Director of Maria Mitchell Observatory. All have gained prominence nationally.

Of course our Presidents have included many amateurs as well. While we are on this subject I might bring out one point. There has

been only one Secretary who is a professional astronomer - Clinton B. Ford. He became Secretary in 1948. For his devotion and loyalty to the Association we owe him a deep debt of gratitude. We have had only one professional astronomer as treasurer - Willard J. Fisher, at Harvard, who served for one year. But in our 70 years we have had only three Directors - all three professional astronomers.

What I am trying to point out here is that the AAVSO is really run by and for the amateur astronomers, with a little parental guidance from the professional thrown in here and there. That is the way our founders wanted it.

I have mentioned how the AAVSO got started, but Olcott's article in 1911 really spread the word, for it was not long after that that we had members on the west coast, in the midwest, and Lacchini in Italy. There was J. H. Skaggs, who printed our Variable Comments for many years; D. F. Brocchi, whom most of you know as D.F.B. on your charts; C. F. Barnes, also on the west coast, another printer who contributed much to our publications, as well as the general guide to the skies which he authored.

Not many ever saw these far-away observers, but through their letters they made lasting friendships.

Margaret and I have traveled widely, and we always try to meet with our members in foreign lands. In this way we bring the AAVSO to them. This is very important. The warm greetings we have received were always heartwarming, showing a great deal of goodwill toward the AAVSO. We have met with some of our German members several times at the home of Manfred Durkefälden in Hannover. Members came from as far away as Berlin. We won't forget Mrs. Durkefälden's graciousness and her bounteous meals. AAVSOers everywhere are a wonderful and enthusiastic group of people.

Margaret Mayall retired as Director in 1973, after 24 years of devotion to the AAVSO, and through many difficult years. She, with the help of Clint Ford, has brought us to the point where we are recognized throughout the world. More and more requests are being made by the professional. Where else can they get the answers?

Those of us who are getting older must look to younger men and women to continue the work of the AAVSO. When Mr. Campbell retired, it was said, "The old era has passed, but a new and brighter era lies ahead for the AAVSO." When I look at all those machines and punch cards in our expanded Headquarters, that statement seems even more applicable today.

Our new Director, Janet A. Mattei, is a professional astronomer with Masters degrees in astronomy from Ege University, Turkey, and the University of Virginia. She is young and enthusiastic, and is making full use of our computer system. It is interesting to note that a visitor from a foreign land, after many hours spent in the office, was astounded at the volume of work and the great number of cards we have punched. He said, "I can't believe it! It seems impossible!" We have now nearly 4.5 million observations in our data bank. In a way, it is unfortunate that so many members have little conception of the work that is carried on at Headquarters.

A young man, after attending his first meeting, wrote to Mrs. Mattei and said he was "apprehensive about meeting so many strangers, but everyone was so friendly and I enjoyed the meeting." I wonder if he could have read the poem by Mr. Anonymous, who I suspect was Olcott:

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