

**A REPORT ON IAU COLLOQUIUM NO. 98, VARIABLE STAR DAY IN LEIDEN,
AND THE JULY MEETING OF THE BRITISH ASTRONOMICAL ASSOCIATION**

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Abstract

The first IAU Colloquium dedicated to "The Contribution of Amateur Astronomers to Astronomy," held in Paris, France, between June 20 and 24, 1987, in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Societe Astronomique de France, Variable Star Day, held in Leiden, the Netherlands, on June 27, 1987, and the July Meeting of the British Astronomical Association, held in London, England, on July 1, 1987, are described.

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IAU Colloquium No. 98, Paris, France

Between June 20 and 24, 1987, 250 amateur and professional astronomers representing 27 countries from five continents gathered in Paris to join in the 100th Anniversary celebrations of the Societe Astronomique de France. This colloquium of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) was also sponsored by the Societe Astronomique de France, the AAVSO, British Astronomical Association, International Occultation Timing Association, and Societe Royale Belge d'Astronomie. It was the first colloquium dedicated by the IAU to the topic "The Contribution of Amateur Astronomers to Astronomy."

Very informative and interesting papers covered the fields of comets, variable stars, occultations, novae and supernovae, planets, astronomical instrumentation, and the popularization of astronomy. Amateur astronomers are playing an important role and making impressive contributions to these fields. Sophisticated instruments such as image intensifiers, Charged Coupled Devices (CCD), slitless spectrographs, stratospheric balloons, and videotapes as well as several large telescopes in professional observatories at Pic du Midi in the French Pyrenees and Jungfrauoch in Switzerland are made available to amateur astronomers.

Visits to the famous and historic Paris and Meudon Observatories, in addition to a reception by the Mayor of Paris at the Hotel de Ville (Paris City Hall), were some of the highlights of the meeting.

Variable star observers around the world were well represented at this meeting. One evening about 30 of us from 11 countries gathered for a group photo under the Arc de Triomphe (see Photograph 1) and then enjoyed each other's company over a delicious French dinner.

We had another memorable gathering at the home of Dr. Dominique Proust, the Scientific Secretary of the French Variable Star Observers (AFOEV), and a real friend of the AAVSO. Emile Schweitzer, Joel Minois, Michel Verdenet (President, Treasurer, and Secretary of AFOEV, respectively), Storm Dunlop, the President of the British Astronomical Association (BAA), and I met together for the first time. We had very productive discussions on furthering collaboration and cooperation among our associations, and raised a toast to variable stars, as well as to this memorable gathering (see Photograph 2).

During the Colloquium, the Societe Astronomique de France honored twelve people around the world for their contributions to astronomy by presenting them with centennial medals. Robert Evans and I were among the twelve who received one of these beautiful commemorative medals.

Variable Star Day, Leiden, Netherlands

Members of the Variable Star Section (Werkgroep Veranderlijke Sterren - WVS) of the Netherlands Association of Astronomy and Meteorology arranged a Variable Star Day in Leiden on July 27, to provide an opportunity for the variable star observers in the Netherlands and Belgium to meet each other and for them, Thomas Williams, AAVSO President, Jan Hers, Director of the Astronomical Society of South Africa, and me to meet together. See Photograph 2. The meeting was held in Leiden Observatory, which has a very impressive history as the site of the major astronomical research of such world-renowned astronomers Ejnar Hertzsprung, Willem de Sitter, and Jan Oort.

Before attending this meeting, I visited Hendrik (Henk) Feijth, the Recorder of WVS and an AAVSO member who lives in Goutum, a small, quaint town in the northern part of the Netherlands. I was much impressed to see Mr. Feijth's fine observatory, located 20 feet from his house, in the middle of his flower garden. A large pair of wooden shoes, with booties tucked inside, drew my attention (see Photograph 3). He commented that those are his warmest observing shoes, and in fact this particular new pair was a gift from the observers of the WVS on the occasion of his making 50,000 observations.

I spent a very productive evening with Henk Feijth, Georg Comello, the Chairman of WVS, and Reinder Bouma, an active variable star observer, discussing the activities of our Associations and comparison star sequence problems in finder charts. This was an excellent prelude to a very informative and enjoyable meeting that followed the next day in Leiden. For details of this Meeting see Theo Jurriens' article on page 139.

British Astronomical Association Meeting, London, England

At the invitation of Mr. Storm Dunlop, the President of the British Astronomical Association, I attended the monthly meeting of the British Astronomical Association (BAA) in London after the Leiden Meeting. AAVSO member Dr. Brian Marsden, Editor of the **IAU Circulars** and a member of the BAA for over thirty years, was also there for the occasion. Dr. Marsden had just come from a visit to John Hosty, the visual discoverer of HS Sagittae (Nova Sagittae 1977) in Marsden, Huddersfield. One highlight of this meeting for me was meeting many colleagues with whom I have been corresponding or who have sent in observations. I was particularly pleased to meet Melvyn Taylor, an active variable star observer for both the BAA and the AAVSO, and Guy Hurst, who does an excellent job in alerting both the English and the European observers to the discovery of a nova or the unusual activity of a star.

Another highlight was the tour given by Peter Hingley, Librarian of the Royal Astronomical Society Library located in Burlington House, which also houses the BAA. I marvelled at the enormous collection of astronomical literature going back many centuries - 2800 books published before 1850! In the archival room I had the privilege of studying the original variable star observations of J. Baxendell (1815 - 1887) of Manchester, who in 1863 advocated an **Association For the Systematic Observation of Variable Stars**. An impressive portrait of John Goodricke hung over the fireplace in Mr. Hingley's office. On the mantle a small piece of wood in a glass case attracted my attention. I was told that this was a very famous piece of wood as it came from the tree that bore the apple that inspired Isaac Newton by its fall!

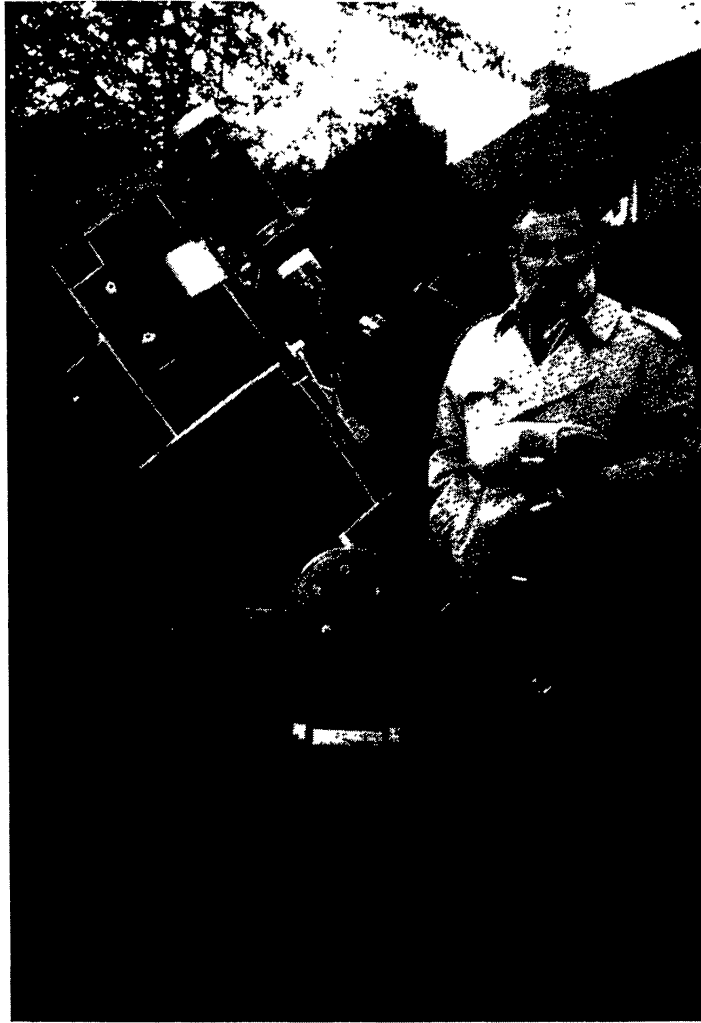
It was extremely rewarding to meet so many dedicated amateur astronomers and to be representing the AAVSO at these meetings. I am grateful to the SAF and the AAVSO for providing the funding for me to attend these meetings.



Photograph 1: An informal gathering under the Arc de Triomphe of some of the variable star observers attending IAU Colloquium 98 in Paris. From left to right, top row: Storm Dunlop (England - BAA President), Thomas Williams (USA - AAVSO President), Peter Serne (Netherlands), Wim Nobel (Netherlands), Marco Cavagna (Italy), Sandro Baroni (Italy), M. Danie Overbeek (South Africa), Janet A. Mattei (USA - AAVSO Director), Mark De Groot (Ireland), Michel Grenon (Switzerland); bottom row: David Valls-Gabaud (France), Jean Gunther (France), Angel Gomez-Roldan (Spain), Emile Schweitzer (France - AFOEV President), Diego Rodriguez-Perez (Spain), Jose Prieto (Spain), Jose Ripero-Osorio (Spain), Enrique Velasco (Spain), Michel Dumont (France), Joseph Remis (France), Ennio Poretti (Italy), Zdenek Kvis (Australia), Jose A. Pastor (Spain); kneeling: Roland Boninsegna (Belgium), Pedro Velasco (Spain), Niel Nelson (Netherlands). Photo by Janet A. Mattei.



Photograph 2. An informal gathering during IAU Colloquium 98 at Dr. Dominique Proust's home. From left to right: Emile Schweitzer (AFOEV President), Dominique Proust (AFOEV Scientific Secretary), Janet A. Mattei (AAVSO Director), Joel Minois (AFOEV Treasurer), Michel Verdenet (AFOEV Secretary), Storm Dunlop (BAA President). Photo by Michel Verdenet.



Photograph 3. Henk Feijth in his observatory with his famous wooden shoes. Photo by Janet A. Mattei.