

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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Deadline is two months prior to the month of issue.

Editorial

Members will notice some changes in the masthead of this issue. At its meeting in June, your Council accepted the resignation of Norman Green as Editor of the *NATIONAL NEWSLETTER*. Norman has worked hard for the Society for many years and so it was with a deep sense of regret that his resignation was accepted. However, he has expressed a willingness to continue to serve on the Editorial Committee, for which we are grateful.

As your new Editor, I can assure you that we shall try to provide an interesting and informative publication. But we are running short of suitable material for future issues. Hence, articles dealing with items of interest to our members will be appreciated.

We would also like to hear more from the Centres about their current activities. It would be of great assistance if each Centre would send a copy of its newsletter to William Peters at the address on the masthead.

Finally, like all publications, we have a deadline to meet. The *NEWSLETTER* is published six times per year, in February, April, June, August, October and December. Please have material to us two months before the date of issue for which your copy is intended. Hence, material for the December issue should reach us no later than October 1.

Dues Due

All members are reminded that their 1975 fees are due October 1, 1974. Members of Centres should remit directly to their Centre's Treasurer; unattached members should send their fees to the National Office, 252 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R7. Please include your new postal code.

Fees are \$12.50 regular and \$7.50 for students *under the age of 18 years* as of October 1. As well, some Centres have special fees in addition to the above. Consult your local Treasurer for details.

Treasurers of Centres are reminded that all membership fees received up to December 31 must reach the National Office by January 15 in order to permit membership lists to be updated in time to mail the February *JOURNAL*. It will not be possible to retain membership and receive the publications of the Society unless such fees are received by January 15.

General Assembly at Winnipeg, June 28–July 1, 1974 R.A.S.C.-A.A.V.S.O. Joint Meeting

June 28 was a beautiful day in Winnipeg, reminiscent of the warm weather the writer had enjoyed during the 1966 General Assembly in the same city. Registration was efficiently handled by Miss Ella Dack and Mrs. Florence Shinn, in University College of the University of Manitoba. Almost 200 registrants were welcomed, about one-quarter of these from the A.A.V.S.O. Each received a name tag on the Manitoba

tartan and a case containing information on the meetings, the University, the city and Province as well as meal tickets, etc. The previous joint meeting of our Societies took place in Toronto in 1965.

The first item on the agenda was Council meetings of the R.A.S.C. and A.A.V.S.O., respectively. Later in the afternoon, buses transported members and guests to the reception of the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba at gracious Government House. This was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone including the Right Honorable W. John McKeag and Mrs. McKeag who received us so warmly, together with Dr. J. L. Locke, and the lively time was appreciated by all. From there we were taken to the dining room at Pembina Hall to partake of a Copernicus Festival, complete with Polish food (prepared by six members of the Polish community), a display of artifacts and costumes and entertainment by a Polish singing and dancing troupe. A great beginning to the 1974 General Assembly!

This year the Papers Session was divided into three groups chaired by Mr. Donald D. Davis, Dr. Donald Kytton and Mrs. Janet Mattei, respectively. Each of the following papers was delivered in professional style – and the youngest author was only 13 years of age! The movie “Algol, the Demon Star” depicted a unique way of teaching the student in astronomy; it was computer developed – a new step in movie production. Other papers included:

“Relationships – Waldmeier Grouping, Solar Flares” by Mary Jane Taylor, A.A.V.S.O.

“2800 MHz Solar Noise Observations for the Major Gradual Rise and Fall Burst of June 15, 1972” by A. E. Covington, Ottawa Centre.

“A Possible Correlation between Jovian Decametric Bursts and Io Sodium Emission” by Nathan Cohen, A.A.V.S.O.

“Observation of the Outer Atmosphere of Saturn” by Glen Reed and F. John Howell, Calgary Centre.

“New Elements for Some Eclipsing Binary Stars II” by Marvin E. Baldwin, A.A.V.S.O.

“SS Cygni – From Discovery to Present” by Mrs. Janet Akyüz Mattei, A.A.V.S.O.

“Eight Cepheids in CAS” by Bruce F. Small, A.A.V.S.O.

“Variable Stars as Observed in Infrared and Visual Radiation” by Edwin B. Weston, A.A.V.S.O. (read by Mrs. Mattei in abstract form).

“Animated Algol” by Michael Mattei, A.A.V.S.O.

“The Suspected Variability of HD 33162” by K. E. Chilton, Hamilton Centre.

“Newly Revised Catalog of Preliminary Charts” by Clinton B. Ford, A.A.V.S.O.

“Inner Sanctum Techniques with Small Telescopes” by Ernest H. Mayer, A.A.V.S.O.

“An Amateur Solar Telescope for Direct Observation” by Robert Pike, Toronto Centre.

“Some Observations of Comet Kohoutek” by J. B. Newton, Toronto Centre.

“Some Comments on Astronomical Education for the Schools and for the Public” by John R. Percy, Toronto Centre.

The group photograph was taken on the campus grounds immediately after the Sessions.

During the afternoon, the Annual Meeting of the Society was held in Room 240 of University College (page 215 in this JOURNAL) followed by a Council meeting chaired by our newly-elected President, Dr. J. D. Fernie. During the same period, the A.A.V.S.O. held a business meeting in Room 244.

Buses again were used to take the group to Monty’s Warehouse where a delicious banquet was served and enjoyed. Afterwards we repaired to the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature Planetarium Auditorium to hear a fascinating and well-delivered talk by Dr. Paul W. Hodge of the Department of Astronomy, University of Washington, entitled “The Six Steps”. Dr. Hodge was introduced by Dr. Fernie and thanked by Dr. Percy on behalf of the audience. It must be noted that Dr. Hodge was well chosen to be the second Ruth Northcott lecturer.

Following the lecture, Service Award citations honouring Dr. Ian Halliday (Ottawa Centre) and Mr. F. A. Williams (Victoria Centre) were read. The medals accepted with thanks by Dr. Halliday and by Mr. George Ball (in lieu of Mr. E. E. Bridgen, who was indisposed) for Mr. Williams, who was unable to be present.

An excellent planetarium show was given afterwards and we were privileged, too, to have Mr. Shinn describe and explain the working of the solar and lunar telescope, combined with a TV monitor. A happy group returned to the University about 11:30 p.m.

On Sunday morning the displays and telescopes were given a thorough examination. A fine multi-media show on the '73 eclipse from the ship "Canberra" was presented by several members of the Toronto Centre, followed by a planetarium show in University College, given by Robert Miller.

The highlight of the day was the very enjoyable lecture by Mrs. Carolyn Hurless of the A.A.V.S.O., "Music of the Spheres" – and we learned that many astronomers use their hands for more than the operation of telescopes! Later in the evening, awards were presented for Centrascope '74 winners and congratulations go to D. Halbach (USA) whose 10" was judged best for originality of design, to Moody Kalbfleisch (Toronto) who walked away with three "bests" – for optical performance, mechanical excellence and telescope accessories – and to Doug. Beck (Saskatoon) for best telescope by a junior member. Congratulations, too, to the winners of the display awards – Saskatoon Centre and Winnipeg Centre. Afterwards, about 150 people (and ten million mosquitoes) had fun at the wiener roast held at La Barriere Park outside of Winnipeg. About 15 telescopes were set up there and clear skies were on hand for good viewing.

Another most enjoyable, well-planned General Assembly officially ended on Monday after approximately thirty members gave a last look at Winnipeg from the deck of the cruise boat "River Rouge".

Thanks must go first of all to Dr. Richard Bochonko for the spadework he did in the preliminary arranging and directing of the '74 meetings. It was too bad he could not be present to see the results. Mr. B. F. Shinn, Mr. R. Miller, Mr. Del Stevens and their committees must be congratulated for the excellent job they did in making all of us feel so welcome and for the planning and hard work that went into making the joint meeting of the R.A.S.C. and A.A.V.S.O. this year such a resounding success. So, on behalf of the members of the Society and of the A.A.V.S.O., appreciation is extended to the Winnipeg Centre for their hosting of another memorable General Assembly. A heartfelt "thank you" to you all! Hope we meet again next year in Halifax.

MARIE FIDLER,
Ass't. to the Editor

Some Recollections of Mr. van B

The Society was saddened recently by news of the death of one of our Honorary Members, Prof. George van Biesbroeck. Following is a personal recollection of this astronomer by one of our members who knew him, Dr. John F. Heard. The article first appeared in the DAVID DUNLAP DOINGS for March 26, 1974, and is reprinted here with the permission of the Editor.

Word of the death of Prof. George van Biesbroeck in February, at age 94, brought back memories of my acquaintance with that distinguished and lovable American astronomer.

van B, as he was known to his peers (Mr. van B to the students) was born and educated (Ph.D. astr.) in Ghent, worked for six years in the Engineering Department for Roads and Bridges in Brussels (strange start for an astronomical career!), then for a year at Potsdam Observatory, a year at Heidelberg and seven years at the Royal Observatory at Brussels. In 1915 he came as visiting professor to Yerkes and stayed on staff there until, and for 18 years after, his retirement. In 1963, at 83, he became so upset at Yerkes' refusal to let him continue observing with the 40-inch that he accepted a research assistantship at the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory at the University of Arizona where they had no such silly age restriction. When I saw him last, in 1967, he was still grumbling bitterly about the Yerkes treatment but still observing his visual binaries at Arizona as assiduously as ever. I suppose he continued until nearly the end.

Mr. van B must have been the original bearded astronomer of this continent – or

almost. His beard was short and neatly trimmed to a point, but his ample moustache so concealed his mouth that any facial expression short of a very broad smile was apparent only in the crinkling of his eyes. And they crinkled often.

Mr. van B and his charming Belgian wife were extraordinarily kind people. In 1934–35 when I was at Yerkes they made it a point to seek out any new graduate students, invite us to dinner, give us little gifts and make us feel at home in that rather isolated environment. After Mr. van B's official retirement in 1945 I understand that they converted part of their home into sleeping quarters and an overgrown dining room where they housed and fed nearly all the students – partly, no doubt, to supplement his meagre pension, but more, I suspect, to play the mother and father role which was part of their nature. One day in 1937 my wife and I answered a knock at our door in Richmond Hill and were amazed to find Mr. and Mrs. van B, smiling broadly and explaining that they were on a motor trip to Northern Ontario and decided to pay us a call. In other respects it had been a bad day; our baby had been screaming for hours, as she had been for some days, with an apparent bellyache which the doctor hadn't yet diagnosed, and we were at our wit's end. The van B's noted and shared our concern, but began to tell us about the illnesses that their children had suffered and within an hour had convinced us that the bellyache probably wouldn't be fatal after all. Even the baby, fascinated no doubt by van B's beard, settled down in his arms and went to sleep. As they left they made us promise to write to them about the baby; we were glad to tell them a few weeks later that the trouble had been found and she was improving.

The Yerkes students used to tell a wonderful story about van B which I have often told my students when describing the old 40-inch refractor. In the pre-1940 days the control for the rising floor (75 feet in diameter) was an enormous rheostat near the pier with a great brass handle like the control of an old-fashioned street-car. It was often a fairly long walk from the breech-end of the telescope to the rheostat, and if the telescope was west of the meridian we would be inclined to stretch up to the eyepiece as long as we could before raising the floor. van B, it seems, had a habit of going even further: if his observation (of a double star with the filar micrometer) was nearly finished he would chin himself with one arm and complete the observation using the other hand on the micrometer controls. One extremely cold night, just after the aged observing assistant, Sullivan, had gone off for his lunch, van B found himself doing his little trick, but the observation was a difficult one and by the time he had completed it he discovered that his beard was firmly frozen to the eye-piece housing and that no amount of tugging with his free hand would free it. Indeed the harder he worked, the firmer became the attachment. There was nothing to do but to hang there until finally Sullivan arrived back, brought the floor up to him and got some warm water to defrost his beard and release him. In 1967 I told van B this version of the story and asked him if it was true. His eyes crinkled and he said that it was precisely true except in one detail: it wasn't his beard, it was his moustache. He appeared to attach some importance to this fine distinction.

When I was leaving Yerkes to come to Richmond Hill van B presented me with a hand-drawn version of his nomogram for checking the reduction to the sun for radial velocities. It consisted of a few carefully plotted curves and three weighted threads which hung over the quarter-circular edge of a board. To get the solar correction was a matter of moving vertically from a reading on scale A to the first curve then across to the black thread then down to no. 1 white, then across to scale B – or some such complicated manoeuvre. I never knew quite why it worked, but for 35 years (until we got our I-A terminal) all measurers routinely used it to check the logarithmic computations of the solar corrections and wrote down "van B + 13.5", or whatever, at the bottom of the sheet. van B's original graph wore out eventually, but its re-drawn successor is probably still lying in or near the measuring room.

van B was an extremely modest man but, for all that, he was well aware of the importance of his life-long observations of visual binaries. His greatest concern was that when he stopped perhaps no one would continue to observe the long-period binaries which still lack accurate orbits and which are especially important inasmuch as they include preferentially the low-mass stars. Perhaps this is what kept him alive so long. In any event, his work will live for centuries in the astronomical literature along with that of his famous predecessors, Herschel and Struve and the rest.

J.F. HEARD