

Heritage Committee: Annual Report May 2010

Present Membership:

	Term	Affiliation
Elizabeth Griffin Chair	2009--12	HIA/NRC
Vic Gaizauskas *	2007--10	HIA/NRC
Randall Brooks	2009--12	Canada Science and Technology Museum
Paul Feldman	2009--12	HIA/NRC
Richard Jarrell	2008--11	York University
Nathalie Martimbeau *	2007--10	Harvard University
David Turner	2009--12	Saint Mary's University

* Term ends in 2010

Future membership:

Nathalie Martimbeau (new affiliation: Montreal Planetarium) will serve from 2010--2013. A decision by Dr.Gaizauskas is still awaited.

Committee Activities:

Video interviews: In furtherance of our ongoing project to record interviews with senior Canadian astronomers, videos were made of (1) Georges Michaud (in Montreal on September 24 2009) by NM and EG, (2) Ermanno Borra (in Quebec City on September 25 2009) by RB and EG, and (3) Jack Locke (in Vancouver on October 21 2009) by EG and Jim Hesser. John Landstreet, David Gray and John Percy are to be interviewed in late September. We are always open to suggestions or recommendations for other interviewees.

Individual Activities:

RJ read a paper to the HAD (AAS, January 2010) on "international cooperation in radial velocity research" and featuring J.S.Plaskett's activities. The full text is to be published. An article on Peter Millman and the early years of Canadian meteor research is now in print (Journal of Astronomical History & Heritage, 12, 224, 2009).

DT contributed to a Discovery channel's "Daily Planet" programme about the painted stars on the ceiling of St. John's Church, Lunenburg (NS) that were uncovered during restoration.

EG has formally proposed to CODATA (the international Committee of ICSU on Data for Science and Technology) that a new Task Group be created on "Data At Risk", its objective being to document the whereabouts, volume and status of all scientific data which face risk of a serious nature. For astronomy that implies its photographic observations; a rescue programme means high-fidelity

digitization, and that is being pursued at the DAO, slowly and by volunteers. A Special Session on "Data at Risk" has also been proposed for CODATA's AGM in October. A White Paper entitled "Time Domain Astronomy and Data At Risk", discussing a rescue for Canadian astronomy's heritage data, was submitted to the LRP in February, and an article "Preserving our Astronomical Heritage" was published in *Cassiopeia*, March 2010 issue (No.144). An AAS grant was awarded for scanning historical plates of epsilon Aurigae archived at Mount Wilson.

Other Matters:

1. A History of Astronomy Division?

The activities of, and interest in, astronomy's history and heritage are necessarily rather slender because they are energized only by active astronomers who have both the time and that extra specific interest. On the other hand, there is a much broader, active Canadian community of historians of science who would be interested in the activities of the Heritage Committee, and who could both contribute usefully and inspire substantially. In the AAS the History of Astronomy Division is an energetic entity, independent of the AAS but linked to it. Membership of the HAD does not require membership of the AAS, while AAS members can become regular HAD members; non-AAS scientists who are members of a relevant professional society can become affiliate HAD members. We would like to propose the creation of a similar arrangement for Canadian scientists, and to broach discussions with the RASC in the first instance if CASCA sees a benefit in our pursuing this.

2. Awareness-raising within CASCA

The AAS has a strong presence within US astronomy, but the presence of CASCA within Canada seems to be rather weaker even though the annual dues to both societies are now the same. Could (or should) Committee Chairs be enabled to meet at CASCA meetings (or, say, every other one) as a means of raising awareness about what (and who!) is current in Canadian astronomy?

I submitted a White Paper on "Time-Domain Astronomy, and Data At Risk" for the Long-Range Plan. The paper is (I believe) still available via the CASCA Website.