

Report to the CASCA Board

Heritage Committee, 2004/06/23

Following consultations with Richard Jarrell, Jim Hesser asked me if I would be willing to assume the Chair of the Heritage Committee. I have agreed to do so, and thank Richard for his efforts as Chair during extremely busy times for him at York University. I know I can count on his continued advice and support and, indeed, he has agreed to be my backup in my absence.

I realize that the Board of Directors is concerned that the Heritage Committee pursue a vigorous plan of action to preserve the memories of astronomers. Many of them have been working since the dramatic growth of the discipline in Canada beginning in the 1950s and 1960s and corresponding with the inauguration of the space age and, in some respects, corresponding to the "professionalization" of astronomy and astrophysics. I have raised this project with some members of the Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association and there appears to be interest in jointly undertaking an organized aural history project possibly with the assistance of an American Institute of Physics grant. With the 2009 World Year of Astronomy approaching, this would appear to be an attractive target and one that should be achievable to complete interviews with a significant number of astronomers. Perhaps it can draw upon, and complement, the aural history that Liz Bryson has been compiling for the CFHT.

There has been discussion about a possible project to complement that at Harvard to digitize photographic plates. Given Canadian astronomers' achievements in astrophysics, there seems little doubt that such a contribution and database created from our historical plate files will contribute in a very real way to future discoveries, analysis and understanding. There is some urgency to begin such a project since:

- (a) there are fewer people still around to form the knowledge bridge between the photographic era and the present,
- (b) the material is slowly degrading,
- (c) the longer the plates are unused, the more likely they are to be destroyed either by choice or by accident, and
- (d) suitable equipment with the requisite characteristics (i.e. the PDS at DAO) still exists.

Given the potential scientific value, this project should be eligible for financial support. A workshop to discuss and plan this project is worth investigating and might be considered as a component of the LRP Mid- Term Review and/or be held as part of the CASCA 2005 meeting.

With the assistance of the Committee's members, we will endeavour to keep the Board and CASCA members advised of the Committee's activities and to develop historical resources that may be of interest, as well as to assist in preserving our rich heritage. Regular reports will be provided for e-Cassi.

We would also like to see Heritage resources and links find a permanent place on the Society's web site.

The membership of the Committee appears to have not been formally re-established in Waterloo. At this time I recommend that Roy Bishop and Eugene Milone be thanked for their long service on the Heritage Committee. In selecting a slate of members of the committee, I have expanded the membership. With Richard and I as historians and as the anchors, we hope we will be able to tackle some of the urgent problems with enthusiasm and in a manner that will be effective and fruitful. Taking into consideration the Board's desire that the end date of the terms of new committee members be staggered, I would propose the following membership and terms beginning in 2004:

Richard Jarrell (term to end in 2005)

(designated as the second to be consulted if necessary when the Chair cannot be reached)

Elizabeth Griffin (2004-2006)

Vic Gaizauskas 2004-2007)

Paul Feldman (2004-2006)

Nathalie Martimbeau (2004-2007)

Randall Brooks, Chair (2004-2006)

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Chair, Heritage Committee

Rbrooks@technomuses.ca

Brooks@iStar.ca