

The American Association of Variable Star Observers

We present the third **AAVSO William Tyler Olcott Distinguished Service Award** to

Dorrit Hoffleit

"for her legacy to variable star astronomy through her research, publications, student mentoring, support, and popularization for over 70 years, and for her being such an especially faithful, devoted, and supportive member and friend of the AAVSO since 1930."

Dorrit Hoffleit's relationship with variable star astronomy and the AAVSO began in the 1920's, as she started her career at Harvard College Observatory. In her early years there, she discovered hundreds of variable stars that were later to become the basis for her student research programs.

As her career took its varied path through astronomy and mathematics, Dorrit lived by the maxim she follows to this day: "Work for the work's sake and it will become a part of you."

In 1956, Dorrit accepted a part-time position at Yale University, resulting in a tremendous outpouring of work in variable stars, astrometry, and other areas of astronomy, including the *Yale Bright Star Catalogue*.

At the same time, Dorrit became Director of Nantucket's Maria Mitchell Observatory, where she established a summer research program for female undergraduate students (known as "Dorrit's girls," and the one male student in her last year there, who was, of course, "Dorrit's boy"). These student researchers determined new or revised periods for 225 of Dorrit's Harvard variables. Dorrit not only taught her assistants scientific research principles, procedure, and integrity, she also taught them life skills by having them lead Open Nights at the observatory, and give seminars and public talks on many topics. Most of Dorrit's students gave their results in scientific papers read at AAVSO Annual Meetings, where they were warmly received by their fellow variable star enthusiasts. Inspired by these experiences and by Dorrit's wonderful mentoring, many of them went on to successful careers in astronomy. One of Dorrit's girls in 1969 was AAVSO Director Janet Akyüz Mattei, who presented her RR Lyrae star research results (and met her future husband) at the AAVSO Annual Meeting held at Maria Mitchell that year.

Dorrit hosted five AAVSO Annual Meetings at Maria Mitchell between 1957 and 1977. In addition to overseeing her students' contributions at these meetings, she delivered her own fascinating papers on the history of astronomy, variable star research, and challenges to variable star observers. We are honored—and delighted—that she continues this practice, always enriching our understanding of variable stars and often inspiring us to new efforts in observing or research.

The AAVSO has been blessed to have Dorrit Hoffleit in its family for over 70 years. The association as a whole, and we as individuals, are very fortunate that Dorrit—with her common sense, kindness, sense of humor, curiosity, generosity, and wisdom contributing to our growth—has chosen to be a part of the AAVSO.

The American Association of Variable Star Observers is proud to present the William Tyler Olcott Award to Dorrit Hoffleit—a unique and treasured astronomer, scholar, teacher, mentor, and friend.

Daniel H. Kaiser
President

Janet A. Mattei
Director

*Presented at the AAVSO 91st Annual Meeting
Somerville, Massachusetts, October 26, 2002*