

## Introduction to the History Paper Sessions

**Thomas R. Williams**

*9505 Northpointe Boulevard, Apt. 9304B, Spring TX 77379; trw@rice.edu*

The AAVSO Centennial celebration occurred in many parts over the year 2011. But importantly, both the Spring and the Annual meetings (held in May and October, respectively) afforded opportunities to enlarge upon the general themes of the AAVSO's history presented in *Advancing Variable Star Astronomy* (AVSA; Williams and Saladyga 2011). In writing an institutional history like AVSA, it is difficult to incorporate as much detailed information about a large number of people who were active participants in variable star astronomy but not a part of the main flow of the AAVSO's history. Thus "people" became the primary focus for the history sessions in the semi-annual centennial meetings.

That keen interest in presenting more information about little known as well as major players in the history of the AAVSO actually stimulated plans for two separate series of papers: A series on women in the history of the AAVSO, and another series on important variable star astronomers. For these sessions, we solicited papers from our members and from well-known historians and other parts of the academic community where we knew interest in the individuals we wanted to highlight was high. Part of our strategy for the latter section was to couple the biographies with the history of stellar evolution and variable star astronomy to the extent possible.

It was particularly gratifying that the Women in AAVSO History section produced several nice surprises. One of those was the discovery that a biography of Helen Sawyer Hogg was being written and that the author, Maria Cahill, was willing to present a paper for the centennial meeting. Hogg had served as AAVSO president, but also provided important support to the AAVSO in other ways over her lifetime. Another surprise came when Kate Bracher volunteered a nice paper on Anne Sewell Young, another feminine figure from the earliest days in AAVSO history about whom too little was known. The grandest surprise of all, however, was that Kristine Larsen, who agreed to find out what she could about Martha Stahr Carpenter, not only did that but also discovered that Carpenter was alive and could attend the meeting. It was delightful to meet Martha Carpenter, the only president of the AAVSO to serve three consecutive terms in that position. During her term as president, she resisted attempts to relocate the AAVSO out of Massachusetts at the time the association was evicted from Harvard College Observatory (HCO). Carpenter thus preserved an important aspect of our heritage, the location of our headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near HCO.

The history of variable star astronomy received additional emphasis from historians and astronomers who considered various aspects of the discipline from its origins to modern times. Historian Robert Hatch debunked previously

well-accepted understandings about the discovery of Mira as the first known variable star with an appropriate corrective discussion of “discovery” from the historian of science’s perspective. That complete paper will appear in two parts in a future volume of *JAAVSO* and appears here only in the form of an abstract. Astronomer Linda French enriched the well-known story of Goodricke and Pigott’s searches for, and studies of, variable stars, while historian Matthew Stanley explained in his paper on Arthur Stanley Eddington how surprisingly important the evolution of pulsation theory was to the entire development of stellar evolution theory. Steve Kawaler then carried the story of stellar evolution to modern times. Photoelectric photometry (PEP) received its share of attention when Barry Beaman summarized the earliest work of Joel Stebbins as he developed the equipment and techniques involved, and made important discoveries using them, while John Percy reviewed the history of the AAVSO PEP Committee.

Yet another theme in which we were interested involved the organization of variable star astronomy, recognizing that the AAVSO was by no means the only organized effort in this discipline. Representatives of other well-known associations of variable star observers were invited to participate in the centennial celebration with papers summarizing the history of their own organizations. We were pleased that many of these important associations accommodated our request. John Toone (BAA-VSS), Josch Hamsch (BAV and GEOS), Patrick Wils (WVS), and Stan Walker with Albert Jones (RASNZ-VSS) contributed to these presentations from other organizations, while David Williams reviewed the history of eclipsing binary observation as promoted by others, and eventually as an organized part of the AAVSO’s program.

Finally, we were aware that many longer-term members of the AAVSO had stories to relate regarding their vso-ing friends who have passed from the scene. Roger Kolman chose to express those memories of many friends through his own story as a member for nearly a half-century, while Tony Hull focused on just one friend, Clint Ford, as an early supporter of a child’s interest in astronomy. Charles Scovil recalled Ford as well as many other members with whom he had contact over his extended service to the AAVSO. Gerry Dyck, on the other hand, recalled an important variable star observer, Frank Seagrave, who was observing well before the founding of the AAVSO but never joined after William Tyler Olcott established our organization a century ago.

I hope you enjoy reading these and many other papers presented in these history sessions as part of the AAVSO’s centennial celebration.

## Reference

- Williams, T. R., and Saladyga, M. 2011, *Advancing Variable Star Astronomy: The Centennial History of the American Association of Variable Star Astronomers*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge.