

OUR DIRECTORS ----- PAST AND PRESENT

The AAVSO passed a major milestone in its history in October 1973, with the Council's election of Mrs. Janet Akyüz Mattei as its new Director. Since the founding of the Association in 1911, its principal executive office had been held by only two predecessors, its co-founder Leon Campbell from 1915 to 1949, and Mrs. Margaret W. Mayall from 1949 to 1973. Mrs. Mayall has now retired but remains on the staff at Headquarters in the capacity of Consultant to the Director.

Mrs. Mattei officially took office on November 1, 1973, and she comes to her job with eminent qualifications. Born in Turkey, she came to the United States in 1962, is a graduate of Brandeis University, and holds a Yüksek Lisans (Turkish M.S.) degree from Ege University, and a Master's degree in Astronomy from the University of Virginia. Her research work includes parallax determination with the 26-inch Clark refractor at Virginia; resolution of double stars with the Brandeis 12" reflector, and theses on UBV photometry and the T-Tauri phenomena. She has published papers on eclipsing and RR Lyrae stars and long period variables. In 1971 she was an astronomy instructor at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City, and during 1972 and 1973 she served as Mrs. Mayall's able assistant at AAVSO Headquarters.

The Director of the AAVSO must be a person with substantial astronomical background, and also with experience and ability in public relations in the general field of science. Mrs. Mattei is well qualified in this area, both as a teacher of astronomy to a widely varied list of student groups, and as a devotee of the role of the amateur in astronomical research.

The officers and general membership of the AAVSO have greeted Mrs. Mattei's election with enthusiastic applause and with confidence in her ability to carry the Association forward with a devotion and purpose to match that of her predecessor, Mrs. Mayall.

Leon Campbell, the AAVSO's first full-time executive officer (then called the Recorder) wrote the following in his last official report, dated October 15, 1949:

"At the close of this meeting your present Recorder will turn over the active duties attendant to that title to a new Recorder. Over the thirty-five years during which he has been closely identified with the activities of the Association, and nearly forty years, if one reckons from the time he first initiated William Tyler Olcott into the intricacies and fascinations of variable star observing in January 1910, your retiring Recorder has counted many AAVSO members in this country and abroad among his closest and most intimate friends. His parting wish is that the present and future members in our ranks will be as loyal to the new Recorder as they have been to him, and that the fame and renown of the Association as a worthwhile adjunct in the field of observational astronomy will continue to grow, and grow, and grow...."

The new Recorder (later Director) Mrs. Margaret W. Mayall took over in late 1949, with her characteristic energy, ability, and enthusiasm. However, the prophecy of "grow, and grow, and grow...." was doomed to some very rough sledding within a short time. Mr. Campbell died in 1951, and in 1952-53 Harvard University diverted its long-standing endowment support of the

AAVSO to other astronomical projects. The AAVSO's Headquarters office was eventually removed from Harvard College Observatory, and the Association was faced with either complete dissolution or the dismal prospect of finding a new home, drastically curtailing all programs, and operating under very trying and difficult financial circumstances.

A person of normal stamina and determination might well have "thrown in the towel" at this point ---- but not Margaret Mayall. She and her husband R. Newton Mayall instituted an entirely new Endowment Fund for the AAVSO, and successfully rallied other AAVSO members and friends to contribute to it. A new and smaller office was found in Cambridge, Mass., but in order to defray the rent and other expenses, the Director went completely without pay for many more months than she will currently admit.

In time, the new Fund grew slowly, and thanks to Mrs. Mayall's persistence and her prestige in the scientific community, various astronomical research grants from federal government agencies helped to bridge the gap in the budget. The AAVSO survived those difficult years (1950's) in spite of pessimistic statements by many well-known astronomers that it was "through and a thing of the past".

The AAVSO that we see today, a thriving and financially independent organization still devoted to its original aims and purposes, would delight Leon Campbell. We are now assured that the Association will indeed "grow, and grow, and grow...", thanks above all to the determined efforts and unfailing devotion of its retiring Director Margaret W. Mayall.

Clinton B. Ford