

THE IAU TRANSITS OF VENUS WORKING GROUP. 4: PROGRESS REPORT

This Progress Report follows the previous report of the Working Group, which appeared in the April 2004 *ICHA Newsletter* and was published in the June 2004 issue of the *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* (see Orchiston *et al.*, 2004, below).

As we indicated in the 2004 report of the Working Group, various historic re-enactments, lectures, seminars, conferences and museum displays were arranged to link with the June 2004 transit. Sara Schechner's "Festival of the Transit of Venus" at Harvard University not only included an observing program and a museum display featuring instruments used by John Winthrop in 1761 and 1769 but also live performances of John Philip Sousa's "Transit of Venus March" by the Harvard Band and "The Venus Waltz" for banjo, by John Huth, Chairman of the Physics Department at Harvard. An exhibition titled "Chasing Venus: Observing the Transits of Venus, 1631-2004" at the National Museum of American History in Washington was mentioned in the previous Report. Associated with it was a series of five lunchtime public lectures spanning the 1639, 1769, 1874 and 1882 transits, presented by Wilbur Applebaum, David DeVorkin, Steven Dick, Richard Fisher and Jay Pasachoff. The 1 June 2004 symposium at the Museum Sterrenwacht Sonnenborgh in Utrecht (The Netherlands) mentioned in the previous Report featured papers by Hilmar Duerbeck, Jessica Ratcliff, Klaus Staubermann, Albert van Helden and Rob van Gent.

In the previous Report we reproduced a list of existing transit of Venus plaques compiled by Peter Broughton and various international colleagues, and reported on new plaques planned to mark observations of the 1761 and 1882 transits from St. John's (Newfoundland) and Wellington (South Africa), respectively. We have also learnt, through Paul Maley (Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society) and Brenda Corbin (U.S. Naval Observatory Library), of an historical marker that was dedicated at San Antonio, Texas, on 3 December 2004 to mark the site where Asaph Hall observed the 1882 transit of Venus. This historical marker was the brainchild of Paul Maley. He researched the 1882 expedition, located the site of the U.S. Naval Observatory transit station within the perimeter of Fort Sam Houston, and successfully lobbied for the military to approve and fund the historical marker. Maley was also successful in convincing the Texas Historical Commission to erect a separate monument 500 metres to the west, in order to commemorate observations of the transit made by the Belgian astronomer, Jean-Charles Houzeau.

Further to the lists of references that appeared in previous Reports of the Working Group, other transit of Venus references we have noted are:

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- In the previous Report we mentioned the transit of Venus web site of the Scientific Instrument Commission (SIC) of the International Union for History and Philosophy of Science (Division of History of Science). In May 2004, Stephen Johnston reported (via HASTRO-L) that this is now up and running and can be accessed via
- <http://transits.mhs.ox.ac.uk>
- He provides the following information about this web site:
- "The core of the site is a browsable database of historical instruments and images from collections around the world. Institutions and individuals are invited to develop the site by contributing their own material.
- Currently the site displays material from:
- Museo della Specola, Università di Bologna
 - Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, Harvard University
 - Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford
 - National Museum of American History, Washington
 - Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon, Dresden
 - UK Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council
- To take part in this international collaboration, visit the Contributors section of the site. Material is submitted directly online for instant access on the web."
- This site was developed for the SIC of the IUHPS/DHS by Stephen Johnston, Sara Schechner and Steven Turner.
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