

REMEMBERING ERIC AND SYLVIA LINDSAY DURING THE WAR YEARS

Donald S. Nicholson

*Associate Deputy Director for External Affairs, Mount Wilson Institute,
2124 Linda Flora Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90077, USA.*

E-mail: dnich@alumni.caltech.edu

Abstract: Don Nicholson recalls his WWII service in Northern Ireland and time spent in Armagh with the Lindsays discussing astronomy and enjoying their hospitality.

Keywords: Eric Mervyn Lindsay, Sylvia M. Lindsay, Armagh Observatory, WWII

During WWII I spent from July 1942 to July 1943 in Northern Ireland as a member of the United States Army Air Force. For much of that time I was stationed as a liaison officer with the RAF at Stormont Castle in Belfast. There was, in Belfast, a facility run by the American Red Cross. Since I could have mail delivered there I became acquainted with many of the volunteers. One of them was Sylvia Lindsay, the American-born wife of Dr Eric Lindsay, the Director of the Armagh Observatory. My father, Seth Nicholson, was a member of the staff of the Mount Wilson Observatory and known to Dr Lindsay through their mutual friend, Harlow Shapley. A connection with the Lindsays was quickly established and I was invited to spend as much free time as I had at the Observatory. During those days free time was hardly a common commodity so it was not very often that I was able to get down to Armagh. When I did, however, the Lindsay's hospitality was like an elixir to me. We spent many hours talking astronomy and remembering our many shared friends. I would bring the Lindsays up-to-date with developments at Mount Wilson and they would counter with stories of the tribulations of doing astronomy under wartime restrictions, which stories I could pass back to my parents. I remember vividly the

beautiful Observatory buildings and the surrounding park-like grounds. However tenuous it was, a direct connection between astronomy on each side of the Atlantic did exist for a short time during that difficult period. The fortunes of war, however, found me transferred to England and later to the Soviet Union. It was not until some years later on a visit to Ireland with my wife that I was able to meet again with the Lindsays and to enjoy again their gracious hospitality. They will be long remembered by those who knew them and by others who have been influenced by their example.

Donald (Don) Nicholson, a retired optical engineer, is currently Associate Deputy Director for External Affairs of the Mount Wilson Institute and President of the Mount Wilson Observatory Association. He is a Fellow Emeritus of the Optical Society of America. The son of Dr Seth B. Nicholson of the Mount Wilson Observatory he has had a life-long association with that Observatory. During WWII he served with the United States Army Air Force in the European Theater including a year in Northern Ireland. His present interests are with the history of astronomy in the twentieth century and the encouragement of public interest and participation in astronomy.