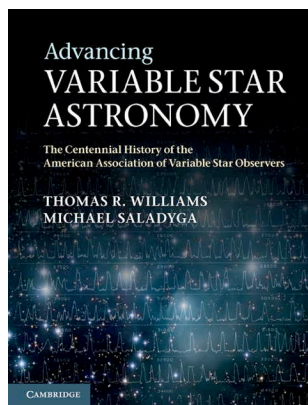


BOOK REVIEWS

***Advancing Variable Star Astronomy. The Centennial History of the American Association of Variable Star Observers*, by Thomas R. Williams and Michael Saladyga (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), xvi + 432 pp., ISBN 978-0-521-51912-0, AU\$130:00 (hardback), 195 × 252 mm.**

During my teenage years I was an avid variable star observer, and the late Ignace Debono, Director of the Variable Star Section of the New South Wales Branch of the British Astronomical Association in Sydney, religiously sent my monthly magnitude estimates of stars with northern declinations to the AASVO while those from the southern sky went to the late Frank Bateson and the Variable Star Section of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand. These two organisations were highly respected internationally, and were charged by the IAU with co-ordinating amateur variable star astronomy worldwide. It is particularly appropriate, therefore, that we now have a history of the AAVSO published on the occasion of its centenary.



This weighty tome is divided into six Parts, which in succession deal with “Pioneers in Variable Star Astronomy Prior to 1909”, “The Founding of the AAVSO – The William Tyler Olcott Era”, “Recording and Classification – The Leon Campbell Era”, “The Service Bureau – The Margaret Mayall Era”, “Analysis and Science – The Janet Mattei Era” and “Accelerating Observational Science – The Arne Henden Era”. Apart from Part 1 (with just two chapters), these titles and the associated 20 chapters clearly identify the ways in which the nature of variable star astronomy evolved within the AAVSO over the time-span of five successive ‘Directors’ (or ‘Recorders’ as they were initially called).

These twenty chapters contain a wealth of information on the development of variable star astronomy internationally and through the AAVSO, and on the ever-changing and sometimes volatile relationship between the Association and the Harvard College Observatory as individuals with very different personalities and motives played their respective hands. The changing relationship between amateur astronomers and their professional colleagues is also discussed, as is the changing role of instrumentation as photoelectric photometry gradually came within the financial means of the amateur. All of these chapters are well illustrated, and it was a pleasure finally to be able to put ‘faces’ to many of the names that have been so familiar to me for so long. Another illustration that particularly caught my eye was Figure 8.8 on page 101 which plots the “Annual totals of variable star observations received by the AAVSO, 1911-1951”. While it appears that WWI hardly dented the ardour of the international ama-

teur variable star fraternity, WWII did have a major impact.

After Chapter 22 there is a 2-page Epilogue that looks—albeit briefly—at the AAVSO and the future of variable star astronomy. This is followed by seven different Appendices, which collectively span 20 pages. These include recipients of various AAVSO Awards; AAVSO Officers; Council Members; and people who held other leadership roles on committees, etc.; plus lists of the top visual and photometric observers, where the international support the AAVSO receives is very apparent. For example, of the top 100 visual observers listed, 8 are from Australia; Belgium, Canada, France and Germany each contribute 5; nations with 4 observers are Hungary, New Zealand and South Africa; while Poland has 3 observers; Argentina, England, Greece, the Netherlands and Romania each contribute 2 observers; and Croatia, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Slovakia and Spain all have a single observer. Thus, collectively non-US observers account for 61% of the top 100 observers, demonstrating clearly that the ‘American’ in the AAVSO name is somewhat of a misnomer! And for those who are wondering, the top-ranking observer is Albert Jones of New Zealand with 448,449 observations as of the 2007-2008 financial year, followed in second place by the late Dannie Overbeek of South Africa with 292,711 observations. For the record, the final observer in the ‘Top 100’ list, Belgium’s Hubert Hautecler, has 28,426 observations.

The other Appendix that I found particularly fascinating is the first one, which in a mere 2.5 pages tries “... to correct some mistaken views of the history of the AAVSO that have developed over a number of years.” (p. 331). Most of these relate to the founding of the association, where Olcott’s true role has been downgraded in various ways—both intentionally and unintentionally—by a number of astronomers. This makes for entertaining reading!

After the Appendices come 58 pages of Notes that provide vital references for and comments on the text. Most of the information readers will require for any follow-up studies or investigations is here, which adequately explains the trim 4-page Bibliography that follows. Finally, the book ends with a very detailed and useful 20-page Index.

It is hard to quibble about a book like this which is packed with a wealth of worthwhile astronomical reading, but perhaps in Chapter 1 the authors could have used the AD 1054 supernova (SN) to mark the ‘founding date’ of variable star astronomy instead of the SN of 1572. While there were earlier probable SNe, the 1054 spectacle was widely observed and documented in Asia. Although Stephenson and Green (2002) were not able to plot a light curve, with the passage of time the marked change that occurred in its magnitude was noted. By all accounts then it was the first widely-recognized and widely-documented ‘variable star’.

This fact aside, *Advancing Variable Star Astronomy* is a well-researched, carefully-written and beautifully-illustrated volume that will long remain a classic in the history of variable star astronomy. It informs on far

more than the AAVSO and deserves to feature on the bookshelves of all those with an interest in variable stars. And in a world of ever-escalating book prices, at just AU\$130 it is still affordable.

Reference

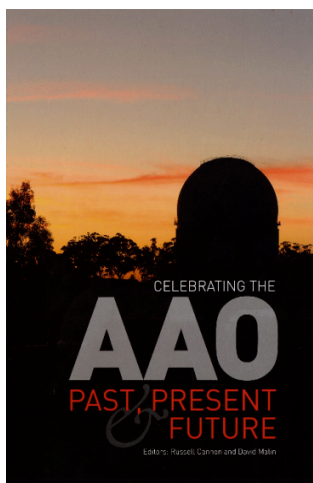
Stephenson, F.R., and Green, D.A., 2002. *Historical Supernovae and their Remnants*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

**Associate Professor Wayne Orchiston
James Cook University, Townsville, Australia**

***Celebrating the AAO: Past, Present and Future: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Coonabarabran June 21-25, 2010, to Commemorate 35 Years of the AAO and its Transition to the Australian Astronomical Observatory*, edited by Russell Cannon and David Malin (AAO Associates), (Canberra, Australia Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, 2011), pp. xii + 353, ISBN 978-1-921916-04-5, \$A45.00, 175mm x 250mm.**

This book is not a definitive history of the Anglo-Australian Observatory (now the Australian Astronomical Observatory), but rather a collection of papers highlighting the scientific results and technical achievements, along with the people involved, of Australia's premier optical observatory. For those readers interested in the history of the AAO's formation and the building of the Anglo-Australian Telescope, *The Creation of the Anglo-Australian Observatory* by Ben Gascoigne, Katrina Proust and Malcolm Robins (CUP, 1990) may be of more interest. However, *Celebrating the AAO: Past, Present and Future* provides an excellent (although of necessity, brief) overview of the vast contribution to astronomy that the AAO has provided over the past 35 years as well as looking to the future of the observatory.

In June 2010 the AAO held a conference in Coonabarabran to celebrate 35 years of scientific observations and the final withdrawal of the UK from the Anglo-Australian collaboration that had birthed and operated the AAO. Over 50 papers were presented at the conference and are reproduced in this book, with numerous historical photographs scattered throughout (many more photographs were provided than could be included in the book, and the editors are in the midst of creating an electronic archive of these). The papers cover a wide range of topics, from the Observatory's scientific and technological achievements, through to the role of the people involved and the future of the Observatory. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is that almost every paper is given by people directly involved with the topic in question, thus providing their own personal account of events, with a



number of authors providing fascinating anecdotes. Many of the papers are not overly scientific and even the science papers often deal as much with how the science and technology came about as the actual results obtained.

Reading through this book as an ex-AAO employee (who was unfortunately unable to attend the conference) I was most impressed by the common theme that comes through very strongly in the book. That is, the success of the AAO has been (and still is) very much due to the remarkable people who have been involved and the passion and drive that they brought to the Observatory.

Overall I feel that the book is a good read for those who have an interest in the scientific history of Australian and UK astronomy and the remarkable impact the AAO has had on astronomical research. The format of the book (as a collection of short papers) does not lend itself to a flowing read and does not go into any topic in real depth, but as an overview of the remarkable achievements of the AAO, *Celebrating the AAO: Past, Present and Future* does an admirable job. I look forward to the future of the AAO (as a now wholly Australian operated entity) being as productive and interesting as the past.

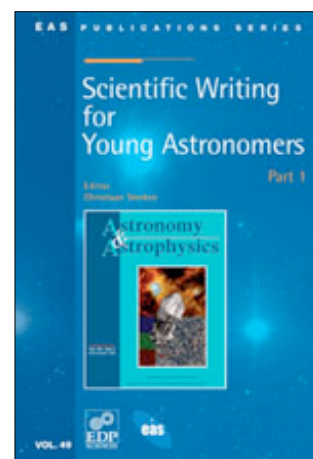
**Dr Stephen Marsden
James Cook University, Townsville, Australia**

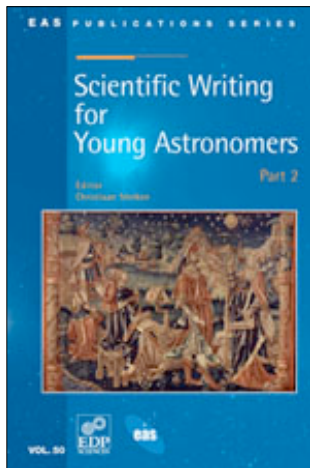
Editorial Note: The following incomplete book review was the last contribution that our late Associate Editor, Hilmar Duerbeck, was preparing for *JAHH* when he died. We therefore decided to include it in this issue of the journal without any editorial changes, as his last formal publication in the *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, and as our salute to him for his years of dedication to our journal.

***Scientific Writing for Young Astronomers, Parts 1 and 2*, edited by Christiaan Sterken (Les Ulis, EDP Sciences, EAS Publication Series Volumes 49 and 50), pp. 185 and 298, ISBN 978-2-7598-0506-8 and 0639-3, US\$29.95 and €32.05, 35 x 155 mm.**

These books originated in lectures given at two 'schools' for young astronomers, held in the sea-spa of Blankenberge, Belgium, and may at first glance be of little interest to historians of astronomy. But this is not the case: it is at least a quarry for historians of modern astronomy, offering an insight into the strata of a major journal: *Astronomy and Astrophysics*. The first

volume consists of seven contributions by various authors. They describe the review process and its evolution, the production line following an article 'from acceptance to publication' as seen through the publisher's eyes. The next two sections describe in detail the language editing, in general that is sponsored by,





as well as a guide for clear writing. The last two sections describe astronomical libraries and the astronomical databases Simbad and Vizier (also covering ADS, arXiv, search machines, open access journals, etc.).

The three sections of the second, more substantial volume were all written by the editor of the set, Christiaan Sterken. They come to the core of writing a

scientific paper. The first section deals with the writing process and its ‘products’ (p. 1-63): regular papers, letters, reviews, data and instrumentation papers, invited, contributed and ‘ticket’ papers from conferences, and products like ‘salami papers’, hoaxes, or duplication papers.

The editorial process [...]

The second section (p. 61-170) is a very erudite discussion of another side of preparing a scientific paper, “communication by graphics”.

The final section (p. 173-282) [...]

Professor Hilmar W. Duerbeck
Centre for Astronomy, James Cook University