

MAINTAINING THE HISTORICAL RECORD

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The session on CONSERVATION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS covered preservation of library materials and historical instruments, and included an account of how one observatory set up a state of the art conservation laboratory and program. Mark Roosa of the Library of Congress told us in a very lively way what we should be doing to preserve current and rare library materials. Perhaps many of us knew some of these basic principles, but it was good to be reminded of them so that we can more actively apply them in our libraries. Janet Dudley (formerly of the Royal Greenwich Observatory) described the magnificent conservation project which was set up at RGO a few years ago. It would be ideal if such projects could be undertaken at all astronomy libraries which have rare books and archival materials. However, it is apparent that finding funds for conservation is very difficult in many institutions. Magda Vargha of the Konkoly Observatory described the conservation of historical instruments, and reminded us of the terrible things which can happen to these instruments if they are not considered within the historical perspective of the institution.

In the later discussion on archiving of correspondence and unpublished documents, the problem of getting astronomers to save personal papers was presented. Suzanne Debarbat and Anne-Marie Motais de Narbonne (both of the Observatoire de Paris) suggested that perhaps the IAU could set up a joint working group sponsored by Commissions 5 (Documentation and Astronomical Data) and 41 (History of Astronomy). This working group could determine the criteria for selecting material to be archived. Astronomers would then have guidance from the IAU indicating which personal papers should be saved and the types of working papers that are important. This problem was then presented by S. Debarbat at the August 1988 meeting of the IAU in Baltimore. The President of Commission 41 (North, 1989), noted that "...personal papers of great importance to the history of astronomy continue to be dispersed or destroyed." He then appointed S. Debarbat "to act on behalf of the Commission in setting up a working party to explore the problem, jointly with Commission 5."

In this overview of maintaining the historical record, I would like to comment briefly on the proposal to preserve 19th century observatory publications via an optical disk project (Corbin, 1988). This project was first discussed by the Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics group within

Special Libraries Association, but at that time archival microfilming was considered as the primary means of preservation. Later the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society joined in planning the project. When it became evident that new technology was becoming available, we decided to put the project on hold until it was feasible to use optical disk technology. We now hope that this project can begin within the next few years.

In the session on CONSERVATION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS, we learned that we must do everything possible to make sure materials in all different formats survive. However, I would like to note that in the future when absolutely everything is available on optical disk, magnetic tape, or any other electronic format, you can be sure that the U. S. Naval Observatory Library will still have one hard copy of everything (if hard copy still exists), just in case all systems for accessing this material break down!

REFERENCES

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