

## **DIVISION XII / COMMISSION 41 / WORKING GROUP ARCHIVES**

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### **TRIENNIAL REPORT 2006 - 2009**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Working Group *Archives* deals with all aspects of the identification and preservation of astronomical archives. In 2009 the IAU will celebrate its 90th anniversary, and on this occasion the WG is taking action toward preserving the archival materials related with the history of IAU. An institution must keep memory of its own past and, as the centenary of IAU is approaching, for the 2006-2009 triennium the WG *Archives* has started evaluating the archival collections related to the establishment of IAU, in order to check their extent and the current conditions of preservation and conservation of such documents.

#### **2. Working plan**

Following the suggestions from S. Débarbat, a Working Plan, entitled *IAU Archives* has been proposed by I. Chinnici to the WG members. The document can be downloaded from the Commission 41 web site <[www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/WGArchivesPlan2006-09.pdf](http://www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/WGArchivesPlan2006-09.pdf)>.

The archival documents linked to the establishment of the IAU has been divided into two classes:

A. Documents held at the IAU Secretariat in Paris

B. Documents held in the countries which founded the IAU.

No urgent action is required for class A documents, thanks to the sorting already made by Blaauw (1994), even though it is room for improvements, as suggested by Chinnici (see Working Plan).

In contrast, the lack of information on the extent of class B collections calls for a stronger effort in this direction, before the uncatalogued documents are lost. Archives of the astronomical institutions located in the nineteen countries founders of the IAU must be searched for the 1919- 1922 period. It has also been considered the possibility to check for IAU documents in countries which initially were not IAU members.

Moreover, in 1919 thirty-two Commissions were created within the IAU, and it is possible that more archival documents can be found in the fonds of the Commission presidents.

### 3. Ongoing action

In order to distribute the work, Chinnici has proposed that each WG *Archives* members identifies reference persons in existing archives and make contact with them, in order to set up survey works in the following geographical areas:

Débarbat: France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland

Chinnici: Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Vatican

Corbin and Green: USA, Canada

Jung-Bok: Far East Countries

Matsuura: Latin America

Orchiston: Australia, New Zealand

Perkins: UK, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland

Simonia: Eurasian Countries and Middle East Countries

As the African countries are not covered, a WG member for this area will be decided in the near future.

It is important to say that the WG met with difficulties in contacting people in some countries and/or in obtaining collaboration for the survey work; this could be due to the voluntary nature of this kind of research, which appears as a lengthy task. Therefore, the WG has recently decided to create some sub-committees, formed by people corresponding with the WG members in the several countries, to stimulate their collaboration. The creation of these sub-committees is ongoing.

### 4. Current results

At present, the most advanced survey work has been carried out in Latin America, thanks to the intense and fruitful effort of Oscar Matsuura. Countries in this area which affiliated to IAU in chronological order are: Mexico (1921), Brazil (1922), Argentina (1927), Chile (1947), Venezuela (1953), Uruguay (1970), Peru (1988), Bolivia (1998), Cuba (2001).

Matsuura has presented two reports to the WG, in 2007 and 2008, illustrating the results of his actions:

(i) in founder countries (Mexico and Brazil), the identification of class B documents is advancing and, particularly in Brazil, the WG task has been embedded in a research program of history of astronomy - what seems to be a good model to reproduce elsewhere.

(ii) in non-founder countries, the work has progressed in Venezuela, Cuba and Uruguay; a contact has been recently established in Argentina, while other contacts are still needed in Chile, Peru and Bolivia. See Matsuura's report for 2008 in the web site, <[www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/](http://www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/)>.

A report about selected astronomical archives in USA and Canada has also been prepared by B. Corbin. In these countries, as in many others, astronomical archives are not centralized in one or two locations but held in many places. This is one of the main difficulties of a survey work.

Therefore, Corbin asked for summary guides from seven major institutions in the US and one in Canada in order to give a first representation of archives in those countries. These institutions are: Harvard University (Cambridge, MA); National Radio Astronomy Observatory (Charlottesville, VA); Niels Bohr Library and Archives (American Institute of Physics, College Park, MD); the Observatories of the Carnegie Institution of Washington (Pasadena, CA); Smithsonian Institution (including Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Washington, DC); U. S. Naval Observatory (Washington, DC); Yerkes

Observatory (Archives now at The University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL); and, in Canada, the University of Toronto. In USA and Canada the search for IAU archival documents is ongoing.

In Europe, the situation shows similar difficulties and complexity, because of the spreading of these documents among many institutions and private archives. To give the WG some idea of what the Greenwich Observatory collection holds, relating to the IAU, as well as other Cambridge institutions including the Churchill College Archives Centre and St. John's College, A. Perkins has made a Boolean search of on-line catalogues available for 'International+Astronomical+Union' after 1900. The result is a fifteen-page word file which does reflect how dispersed and general in nature the material is.

S. Débarbat has sent a short report about IAU Archives in France. There, the work appears to be simplified because of the classification work already done by Blaauw at the IAU Secretariat, at the Institut d'Astrophysique and at the Observatoire de Paris. Nevertheless, other documents concerning IAU are to be searched in the fonds of astronomers occupying positions at the IAU in the past.

Work is also in progress in Italy, while in other countries no contacts have yet been established.

All reports of the WG members, at authors' agreement, are coming soon on-line on the Commission 41 web site <[www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/](http://www.le.ac.uk/has/c41/)>.

## 5. Next steps

In the near future, the WG goals are the full establishment of the sub-committees, the identification of possible contacts in other countries and the reminder for the missing reports. Such an important work is inevitably slow and it is only the beginning of an effort which hopefully could be achieved – and published – before the centenary of IAU.

The WG-Archives therefore invites all astronomers and historians wishing to collaborate in the surveying of IAU archival documents in their own countries, to contact the corresponding WG members above indicated.

Ileana Chinnici  
*Chair of the Working Group*

## References

Blaauw, A. 1994, *History of the IAU. The Birth and First Half-Century of the International Astronomical Union*, pp. 281-284.