

THE R.A.S.C. *OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK*

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Except for two years, 1909 and 1910, the *Observer's Handbook* of The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada has been published every year since 1907. It was founded by Clarence Augustus Chant, who also was responsible for the founding at the University of Toronto, of Canada's first and largest department of astronomy, and who established the David Dunlap Observatory, which contains the largest optical telescope in Canada. In addition, Chant served as Editor of the *Observer's Handbook* for 50 years, which is the main reason I am only the fourth editor since 1907. I should mention that John Percy, Chairman of the Scientific Organizing Committee of this Colloquium, was the third editor.

The sales of the *Observer's Handbook* provide a major source of financial support for The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, a non-profit, educational organization that is devoted to the advancement of astronomy and allied sciences. The RASC is similar to the Astronomical Society of the Pacific or the British Astronomical Association in that its membership is composed of people from all walks of life, from children to professional scientists.

All of the twenty-nine contributors to the *Observer's Handbook*, including the Editor, are volunteers. Their time, effort, and expertise represents an enormous contribution by these individuals and their institutions to The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and to astronomy in general. Although the Handbook exists primarily for the benefit of the 3500 members of the Society, about 11000 copies are sold to non-members in Canada and in many other countries. The use made of the *Observer's Handbook* is as diverse as the membership of the RASC. The Handbook is found on the bookshelves of schools and major libraries; in the eyepiece cases of amateur astronomers; and beside the control consoles at many professional observatories. It is an invaluable reference for astronomy teachers at all levels, from elementary schools to universities.

The 1907 edition contained 108 pages. The 1989 edition, the eighty-first, is the largest ever, with 224 pages. Each edition is published for the following calendar year and contains predictions of astronomical phenomena, plus much other information that is relatively static from year-to-year, although each year significant revisions are made to approximately three-quarters of the pages. The Handbook is organized into eleven major sections, with symbols in the left-hand margins to facilitate rapid locating of each section. The material presented is in various forms: maps, star charts, text, diagrams, tables, lists, and graphs. Many of these maps, charts, *et cetera*, have been expressly created for the Handbook and make it a unique resource for anyone interested in astronomy.

The *Observer's Handbook* represents a labor of love by many volunteers for over

three-quarters of a century. For thousands of astronomers and astronomy teachers in many countries, this modest publication from Canada is a valued companion.

## Discussion

H.S. Gurm: *I wonder if it is the right time and place to raise an issue. When it comes to the prices of the slides, posters, the Observer's Handbook of the RASC, and shipping these in small units to the third world even in the case of India, the local currency leads to a situation where it becomes difficult to make purchases. So there is a problem.*

R. Bishop: Regarding the difficulty teachers in underdeveloped countries have in obtaining educational materials (due to problems in sending money out of the country, or even finding the money to purchase materials), in the case of the RASC's *Observer's Handbook I* offer three comments:

1. Although the single-copy price of *Observer's Handbook* is \$10.95 U.S. (ppd) (\$13.50 overseas airmail), bulk rates are available involving savings of about 35 per cent (contact the RASC for details).
2. The RASC *will* send single free copies to educators in underdeveloped countries in cases where it is not possible, due to currency restrictions, to send the usual payment. Requests of this sort must be well documented.
3. If it is not essential to have the latest edition, after September 1 (and if copies are available) the RASC will consider requests for bulk orders of the expiring edition (possibly at the cost of shipping in the case of underdeveloped countries).

To facilitate processing of special requests, please write directly to the Editor (Roy Bishop, Avonport, N.S. B0P 1B0, Canada).

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