

COMMISSION No. 41

HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY (HISTOIRE DE L'ASTRONOMIE)

PRESIDENT J. A. EDDY

The 20th General Assembly of the IAU was held in Baltimore from 2 to 11 August 1988, and commission 41 held six sessions in all. The retiring President, J. A. Eddy, conducted a business meeting at which new officers for 1988-91 were installed:

President:	J. D. North
Vice-president:	S. Débarbat
Organizing Committee:	A. A. Gurshtein D. H. De Vorkin J. A. Eddy Xi Ze-Zong

A report on the present state of the General History of Astronomy was presented by O. Gingerich: there was one volume (4A) published, a second (2A) was in press, and a third (1A) was likely to be ready to go to press in 1989. Volume 3 should be ready by the end of the same year.

S. Débarbat raised the question of library and archive conservation, and noted that despite our lamentations in 1967, and similar regrets expressed in 1977 by Commission 5 (Documentation and Astronomical Data), personal papers of great importance to the history of astronomy continue to be dispersed or destroyed. It was resolved that she be invited to act on behalf of the Commission in setting up a working party to explore the problem, jointly with Commission 5.

Those present at the business meeting learned with regret of the deaths of two valued members of Commission 41, Z. Horský and E. V. Douglas. Short addresses commemorating their work were given, respectively by O. Gingerich and E. S. Kennedy.

Themes addressed in papers presented at the sessions that followed included: the solar eclipse of July 8 1842, as described in Austrian scientific literature and novels (M. Firneis); coordinates of the stars as extracted from the Hipparchus commentary (J. Brunet); the Ford Foundation and the European Southern Observatory (F. K. Edmonson); the guest star of A.D. 185 (Y. Huang); a chronology of Chinese astronomical records (T. Kiang); pre-telescope sunspot sightings (address by retiring President J. A. Eddy); astronomical alignments at Newgrange (T. Ray); the observatory of Jai Singh (J. Saad-Cook); the great Copernicus chase (O. Gingerich); the U.S. Navy corps of Professors of Mathematics (C. J. Peterson); use of eclipse records of ancient China, Japan and Korea in the study of the Earth's palaeorotation (L. Zhisen); the history of astronomy as a means of disseminating astronomical knowledge (S. Débarbat); a French-Canadian text of the sphere (E. S. Kennedy); and the globe from Matelica (A. Carusi).

The two sessions held on 6 August were given over to a series of formal papers followed by a round-table discussion on issues in the history of space astronomy, organized by D.H. de Vorkin. An examination was made of the state of modern astronomy and how it has been influenced by access to space, whether from balloons, sounding rockets, satellites, space probes, or manned spacecraft. The historians taking part were R. Doel, B. Hevly, R. Smith, J. Tatarewicz, and C. Waff, while W. E. Brunk, K. G. Henize and H. Friedman provided a critical commentary based on personal involvement and experience. The moderator of the sessions was M. Harwit. These sessions were highly successful: not only were the papers of high quality, but they were tightly knit and formed a coherent whole, and well illustrated the virtues of organizing meetings along thematic lines.

It is perhaps worth recording that all sessions were usually well attended, with occasionally as many as 75 in the auditorium, and rarely fewer than 50.

In closing the final session, the new President, J. D. North, obtained the approval of members present for the Commission's support of a motion by Commissions 19 and 31 that a history be prepared of the Bureau International de l'Heure and the International Polar Motion Service. The rider was added, that the two authors proposed (B. Guinot and S. Yumi) to obtain the services of a professional historian of astronomy, to advise and assist where possible.

The names of four historians were announced as new members of the Union at the closing assembly: D. King, M. Yano, E. S. Kennedy, and J. L. Lankford.