

After Dinner Address

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It was exactly 22 days before Cuno Hoffmeister's 65th birthday when I began my work at Sonneberg Observatory, following my studies at the University of Jena. In those days, all Sonneberg astronomers were busy preparing scientific papers which they were going to dedicate to their leader, with the exception of myself. I was not able to write a scientific paper in such a short time.

And I was quite ashamed when on the 2nd of February 1957 I had to offer my birthday congratulations empty-handed. But I distinctly remember how extremely happy he looked. Hoffmeister was near the zenith of his scientific career. New buildings and domes were planned or under construction, and the Zeiss company of Jena had promised to loan a 40 cm astrograph in compensation for the loss of a telescope to the Soviet Union as part of the reparations agreement of 1945.

Today, too, I am a little embarrassed. However, this time by your noticing the coincidence of this colloquium and the completion of our, Wolfgang Wenzel's and mine, 65th year of our lives. Also, by turning this mere coincidence into an occasion to bestow honors on us, while to Hoffmeister, whom we take as a shining example still today, an international conference in Sonneberg was denied at his time.

We did not find 10,000 variables, as Hoffmeister did, but we made an effort to continue the time honored tradition of the systematic sky patrol and the field patrol. To some the word "tradition" has become discredited; following a tradition is often regarded synonymous with desperately clinging to antiquated and out-of-date things. But one easily overlooks the fact that there are traditions which should be continued because they are essential, as is the case for continuous monitoring of the sky. For example, in the weather service nobody would conceive it as a "bright idea" to close all weather stations because 150 years of world weather record is sufficient! During guided tours through Sonneberg Observatory I could make every child realize the necessity of a permanent sky patrol. But to convince a politician ...

Sometimes I can't help thinking that there are also some astronomers who believe it possible to predict the next Tunguska event or the appearance of the next Galactic supernova by means of a computer.

Exactly 69 years ago, in December 1925, Cuno Hoffmeister, a son of the

town of Sonneberg, founded the observatory on the mountain Erbisbühl, 640 m above sea level and 260 m above the city of Sonneberg. There was a close co-operation with Ernst Hartwig and Ernst Zinner at Bamberg and with Paul Guthnick at Babelsberg. Thus, from 1930 to 1945, Sonneberg Observatory was a branch of the Berlin-Babelsberg University Observatory, 350 km away from Sonneberg. Nowadays, in the era of modern traffic and electronic communication, it is sometimes claimed that Sonneberg is too far from the nearest university. But there are quite a number within a distance of 100 km!

The principal work at Sonneberg Observatory has been the study of variable stars in connection with the sky patrol (observation of the whole sky) and the field patrol (observations of selected fields with a deeper limiting magnitude in order to get a larger sample of different classes of variable stars for statistical investigations).

Furthermore, since the early fifties photoelectric measurements have been carried out in order to observe objects of special interest. For example, multiple-periodic pulsating stars like AC And, extraordinary X-ray binaries like HZ Her and TT Ari, or the quite exclusive He-flash star FG Sge. Before the fall of the wall, these measurements were adapted to the technical possibilities of that time, now one of our 60 cm telescopes works with new CCD camera technology.

In addition to variable stars, the research program at Sonneberg also covered such diverse areas as interplanetary matter and upper atmospheric phenomena, including studies of asteroids, comets, meteors and meteor streams, zodiacal light and gegenschein, airglow, noctilucent clouds, and luminous bands.

It should be remembered that Hoffmeister investigated, in the early sixties, the angle between the tail of a comet and the radius-vector from the sun. He concluded that there must be a particle flow from the sun. Thus, independent from Ludwig Biermann, Hoffmeister discovered the solar wind.

For some time, extragalactic research was performed at Sonneberg as well.

When, after the Second World War, Sonneberg Observatory was separated from Berlin-Babelsberg, the only way for the institution to survive was an affiliation with the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Owing to this affiliation it became possible that, in the early sixties, Sonneberg could start a modern sky patrol, which stood the test of time.

Although, in later years modern equipment was lacking, good results were achieved. Hoffmeister's wisdom "in the long run it is not the size of the means that is decisive for success but the impetus behind it" proved to be correct.

In 1961 our work was further complicated by the incorporation of Sonneberg into a restricted area along the Iron Curtain and, as a consequence, by strict prohibition of any contact with scientists in western countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany. Only now and then, astronomers from the eastern countries received permission to visit Sonneberg Observatory. Worst of all were the reprisals taken against Cuno Hoffmeister by the communist firebrands of the Academy, which finally were the cause of his death in 1968.

In appreciation of the work at Sonneberg Observatory it is indispensable to remember the late coworkers who essentially shaped the character of the

institute. I refer to Paul Ahnert, Nikolaus Richter, Johannes Hoppe, Sergej Gaposchkin, Heribert Schneller, Rudolf Brandt, Otto Morgenroth, Artur Teichgräber, Hans Huth, and many others. Also to be mentioned are the coworkers who had to leave the Observatory after the reunification of Germany.

Now, some words have to be said about the observers at the sky patrol and field patrol. Year in, year out, and night in, night out they left their more or less sympathetic wives alone at home at night and, rather than winning gratitude, were criticised whenever they were not on deck on time, while frequently it were others who reaped the fruits of their labor. – I think, it is the late Sonneberg astronomer Hans Huth who holds the world record in the number of sky plates taken by one person.

When Hoffmeister, who was an enthusiastic hobby-seaman, became aware that one of the observers was not on deck, i.e., not at his telescope, the delinquent never had to fear violent words. But the ironical comments of the captain could be very painful. Occasionally, it was claimed that Hoffmeister was a misogynist. I cannot confirm this, but certainly Hoffmeister was not a man who appreciated flirtation. But he did get along very well with his female collaborators, especially if they spoke English. But whenever one of his male collaborators were visited by ladies during working hours or even during observation periods, Hoffmeister stated very angrily: Nymph aboard! In this respect Hoffmeister kept a close watch on Sergej Gaposchkin, who liked ladies. But finally Gaposchkin emigrated from Germany to America in order to marry Cecilia Payne, and both are known to have become famous scientists. Hoffmeister attributed great importance to his collaborators' taking good care of fixtures and fittings. When one morning he was told that one of his people had dropped from the observer's ladder, Hoffmeister was horrified and said: I do hope nothing happened to the instrument!

Concerning present and future work at Sonneberg Observatory I think I need not say much because you are learning a lot during this conference. I only want to remind you of the working group ASPA. Projects in progress are the search for optical flashes of gamma-ray bursts and the optical identification and classification of ROSAT X-ray sources.

In conclusion, I would like to tell you that near the end of my official career as an astronomer I am delighted to see a long-cherished wish of mine coming true: one day to enjoy a great international colloquium in Sonneberg. My wish is fulfilled. Thank you very much.