

PREFACE

In June 1983 the Astronomical Institute of the State University of Groningen, founded by Kapteyn about 100 years ago, celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary. At the suggestion of its Chairman, R.J. Allen, the Kapteyn Institute invited the International Astronomical Union to mark the centenary by holding a Symposium on "The Milky Way Galaxy". The purpose of the Symposium was to review recent progress in the study of our Galaxy, to define current problems, and to explore prospects for future development. The Symposium programme would emphasize the large-scale characteristics of our Galaxy, and highlight both the historical development of our understanding of the Milky Way Galaxy and the importance of studies of external galaxies to this understanding.

The Symposium was sponsored by four IAU Commissions: 33 (Structure and Dynamics of the Galactic System), 28 (Galaxies), 34 (Interstellar Matter) and 41 (History of Astronomy). The Scientific Organizing Committee, listed on page xviii, represented a broad range of nationalities and of expertise, including two historians of science. A meeting of the Committee, held during the IAU General Assembly at Patras, provided an excellent opportunity to discuss plan and format of the Symposium, topics and speakers; thereafter, the Committee was regularly consulted by letter and telephone.

IAU Symposium 106 was held at Groningen on 30 May - 3 June 1983, in the new building occupied by the Kapteyn Institute since January 1983. There were about 200 participants, coming from as many as 25 countries. Thus, the meeting was a full order of magnitude larger than IAU Symposium No. 1, "Coordination of Galactic Research", held at Vosbergen near Groningen in June 1953 with 27 participants. The Symposium coincided with the anniversary of the Bosscha Observatory at Lembang, Indonesia, and this fact was marked by an exchange of congratulation telegrams.

The historical component of the programme - which occupied 4 hours out of a total of 27 - featured four major scholarly reviews, given by professional historians of science; these lectures were highly appreciated and provoked considerable discussion. In the remainder of the programme, observational aspects were given rather more time than theoretical aspects, in view of the fact that an IAU Symposium on Dynamics of Galaxies had just been held, at Besançon in 1982. Throughout the programme, results of research on external galaxies were blended with discussions of our own Galaxy.

Because of the breadth of the subject and the large number of participants, emphasis was placed on Reviews and Invited Papers. These two categories of papers, together numbering 43, took about 70 percent of the Symposium time. Among the very many Contributed Papers offered, 25 were selected for (in some cases very brief) oral presentation. About 80 papers were presented as posters, and the arrangements for these - which were administered by Mr. P.J. Teuben - proved highly effective. Considerable time (about 20 percent) was set aside for Discussions, and these were often very lively.

On Monday evening, participants were guests at a reception by the President of Groningen University, Dr. J. Borgman. This reception was followed by a visit to an exhibition about the History of Astronomy at Groningen University, featuring the work of Kapteyn and Van Rhijn; Professor A. Blaauw gave an introductory lecture to this exhibition. Dr. M.A. Hoskin gave a Public Lecture on "The Milky Way from Antiquity to Modern Times" in the University Aula on Tuesday evening. The Wednesday afternoon was spent on an excursion by boat on the Frisian lakes, followed by a buffet dinner at "Lauswolt" in Beetsterzwaag and an after-dinner lecture on "Life in the Galaxy?" by Dr. G.S. Shostak. A Salon Concert was given on Thursday evening.

The local arrangements were very competently handled by the Local Organizing Committee, headed by R.J. Allen, and the Conference Secretariat; these committees are listed on page xviii. Much help was also given by a number of young astronomers from Groningen and Leiden. The Partners' Programme was arranged by Mrs. Ria van Woerden. Financial support by IAU, by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, by the State University of Groningen, and by several private foundations - again listed on page xviii - contributed to the success of the meeting through travel grants to key speakers and to young astronomers.

I wish to record my great gratitude to all members of the Scientific Organizing Committee for their help in the preparation of the meeting. In particular, I wish to thank Michael Hoskin and Elly Dekker for their advice on historical matters, and my colleagues Butler Burton and Tjeerd van Albada for detailed consultations and discussions throughout the period of preparation. Martien de Vries held a key position in administering our files of correspondence, participants and papers.

The Kapteyn Institute is grateful that so many astronomers came to share in its jubilee, and that both speakers and participants made the Symposium so informative and stimulating.

Hugo van Woerden

Chairman,
Scientific Organizing Committee