



# H·A·D NEWS

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*The Newsletter of the Historical Astronomy Division  
of the American Astronomical Society*

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Number 86 \* October 2015



## **Doggett Prize to van Helden**

*Thomas R. Williams  
Rice University*

The Historical Astronomy Division is pleased to announce that Professor Albert van Helden is the tenth recipient of the LeRoy E. Doggett Prize for Historical Astronomy. The Doggett Prize, the history of astronomy's highest honor, is awarded biennially to an individual who has significantly influenced the field through a career-long effort.

[continued on p.7](#)



## **On to Kissimmee!**

*Marc Rothenberg*

The January 2016 HAD meeting at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Kissimmee, Florida will be a full one, with a special session, the Doggett Prize lecture, oral and poster contributed papers, the annual business meeting, and the ninth annual HAD minibanquet.

PLEASE NOTE that the meeting will begin at 1:30 p.m. MONDAY (not Sunday), 4 January, with a special session on “The Centenaries of General Relativity and the Great War,” organized by Virginia Trimble. The speakers include Clifford Will, William Sheehan, Rudi Lindner, Virginia Trimble, and Roger Blandford.

[continued on p.7](#)

## AstroGen Progress

*Joseph S. Tenn, Sonoma State University*

It has been close to three years since the HAD Committee approved my proposal to create the Astronomy Genealogy Project (AstroGen) as a HAD project and since the AAS agreed to host it on the Society's website. Inspired by the highly successful Mathematics Genealogy Project (<http://www.genealogy.ams.org/index.php>), AstroGen is intended to list the world's astronomers with information about their highest degrees and advisors. (In academic genealogy, your thesis advisor is your parent.)

What have we accomplished since then?

A small group (the AstroGen Team) has been working on the project. We have been learning as we go, finding where the difficulties are, and trying to deal with the questions that come up. Unlike the MGP, which relies on individuals entering themselves, we have tried to gather information that is available online to start with. The project has grown to include more than just advisors.

We currently have more than 12,000 "astronomers" in the database, with quite a bit of information about most of them. This includes essentially all who have earned doctorates in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, and most of those in the U.S. (all through 1990 plus many more).

Nearly every item generates questions:

**Who should be included?** So far we have been working in the recent era, where the Ph.D. or equivalent can be used as a criterion for inclusion. This will have to change as we go back in time. We have been including all those who earned doctorates (usually Ph.D.'s or equivalent) with theses (aka dissertations) on astronomical topics, regardless of the name of the degree or department granting it. We also intend to include all academic ancestors of these.

**What are "astronomical topics"?** So far we have included classical astronomy of positions and motions, celestial mechanics, all types of astrophysics, cosmology, planetary science, and instrumentation or software intended for use in astronomy. We have some geophysical theses, dealing with particles and fields surrounding the Earth. We have excluded theses on history and

education. Of course there are grey areas on the boundaries of each of these.

**Name:** We have been entering the current or latest name used, as that is what inquirers are likely to search for. We also list other names used, indicating the one that is on the thesis (aka dissertation). Some have published under three or four different names.

**Years of birth and death:** We include these when we can find them. Our present intention is not to publish birth years of living persons, even though we obtain all of our information from the web or published sources.

**University granting the degree:** For most this is straightforward. For those who have been awarded two or more doctorates with different theses, we list both, even if one was not on an astronomical topic. This includes those awarded an honorary degree, usually a D.Sc., **IF** a thesis was submitted for it. When a degree based on a single thesis is awarded jointly by two universities, we list both.

**Country in which the university is located:** This is difficult. We have been following the MGP practice of listing the country as it is today, not necessarily the one at the time of the award of the degree. Many cities have changed nationality numerous times over the years, and countries are still changing (the breakups of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, the annexation of Crimea, perhaps in the future the independence of Scotland, Catalonia, and others). There are several places where the nationality of a city is hotly disputed.

**Name of degree:** For most of those currently in the list this is Ph.D. or D.Sc. It has been suggested that we just list "Dr" for all for those with equivalent degrees, not worrying about translations.

**Thesis title:** in the original language, perhaps transliterated for those in non-Roman alphabets.

**English translation of thesis title:** We have only translated a few from French so far, but this will become more important as we extend the database.

**Advisors** (aka supervisors, promoters, etc.): We have been listing up to three, but a few people have four. It is difficult to determine the "official" advisors except for those few universities that list them on the theses themselves. We have been reading the acknowledgments sections of those theses which are available to us and discovering

that many students list two or three advisors other than the official one. We generally following what the students say. However, a great many theses are not online or are online but restricted to those associated with the university granting the degree. We need people who can access these and also go into the university libraries and look at those theses only available on paper. As we go back in time this will become more important.

**Thesis availability:** When the thesis is available online, we link to it. This is true of most since early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and of some back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup>. A few universities have scanned all of their old theses and put them online. If access is restricted, we indicate this.

**Other mentors:** Some students list other mentors in their thesis acknowledgments, stating that one is “almost another advisor” or something similar. We list these. As we go back to earlier centuries, most or all will be mentors.

**Sources:** We are linking to web pages of living persons and obituaries of others when we can find them. This is something the MGP has resolutely refused to do because web pages change so often. Nowadays, most new Ph.D.s change locations as many as five times in the first decade as they play the postdoc game of musical chairs. Most change websites each time. Are we foolish to attempt to keep up with them?

By now it should be clear that AstroGen will be a valuable resource for historians of science as well as a source of fun for those who like to look up their academic family trees. A dedicated researcher following links from AstroGen will be able to learn quite a lot about the careers of astronomy graduates of a particular university, country, or era.

**The next step:** Soon we will ask the ace programmers in the IT department of the AAS office to convert our huge Excel spreadsheets (Did you know there is a maximum size? We have found it.) to pages similar to those used in the MGP. Before doing so, we need to make a few more decisions.

We could use some help. Do you have access to the library of a Ph.D.-granting university? Would you be willing to check that university’s graduates, look at the theses that are not available to the general public, and fill in the missing information? or perhaps you would be willing to enter some or

all of the theses from a country whose language and customs you are familiar with? How about helping with the decision-making? One item missing from the above list is the subfield of astronomy. Initially we had planned to include it, as the MGP does (the MGP lists such “subfields of mathematics” as “astronomy and astrophysics”, “mechanics of particles and systems”, “quantum theory”, and “geophysics”.) However, there are many difficulties, both in determining which subfields to use and in assigning theses known only by title. Our present inclination is to skip it.

Do you have comments or suggestions? Are you interested in joining the team? Please contact me.

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