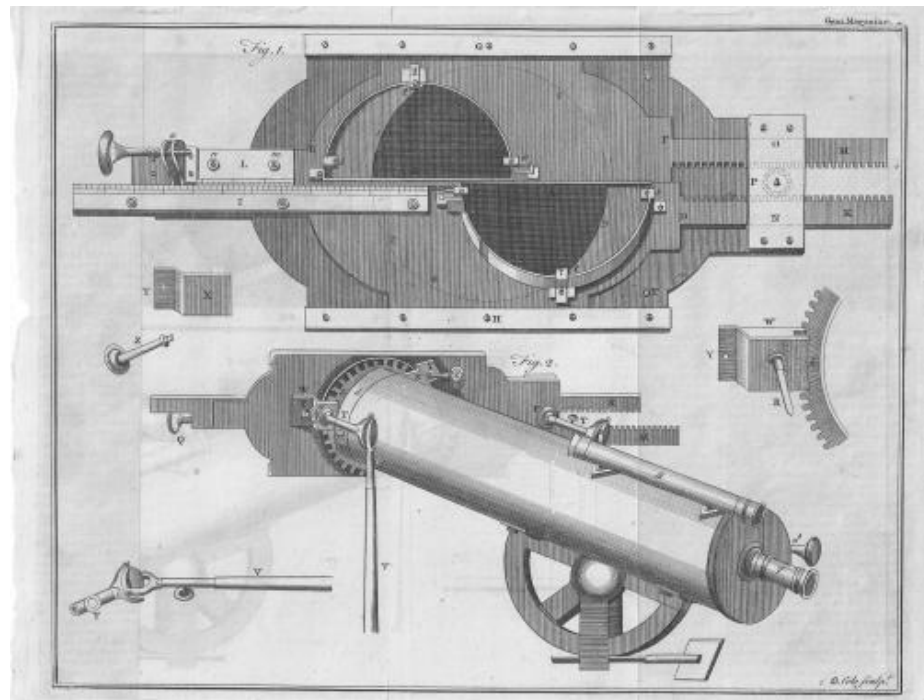




RASC History Committee



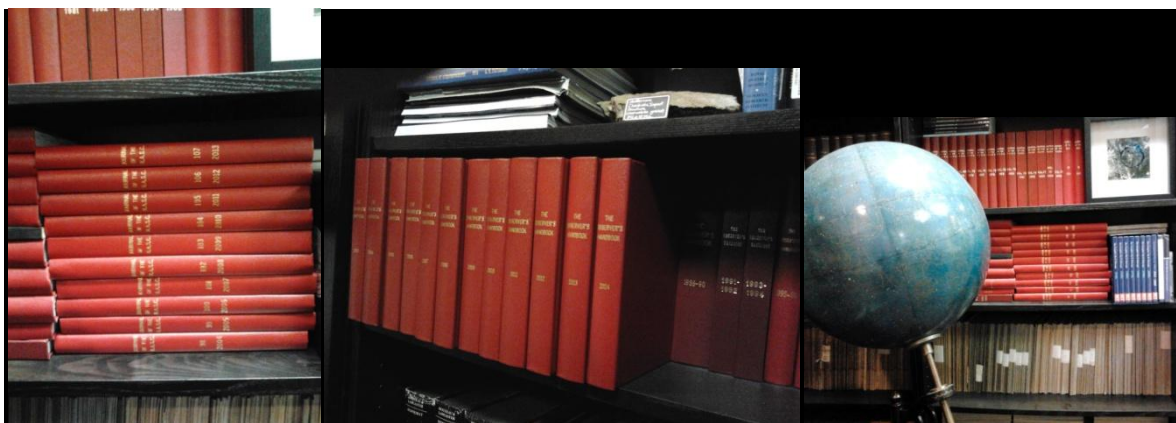
# [2014 JANUARY 31 COMMITTEE REPORT]

- \* completion of modern binding project
- \* two significant donations enter Archives
- \* big ideas for big anniversaries

**B**y way of opening, it gives us great pleasure to announce an honour accorded to two of the long-standing members of our committee. Late last year, Dr. Roy Bishop (Halifax Centre) and Mr. Peter Broughton (Toronto Centre) were among the very select inaugural cohort to be made Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (FRASC). In both cases the award is richly deserved. One could argue that their gracious acceptance does as much honour to the award as it confers distinction on them. It may be mere coincidence that two thirds of those so honoured are members of this committee, but if so it allows the rest of us to feel we are in good company. Their citations can be found at [http://www.rasc.ca/sites/default/files/Bishop\\_Fellow.pdf](http://www.rasc.ca/sites/default/files/Bishop_Fellow.pdf), & [http://www.rasc.ca/sites/default/files/Broughton\\_Fellow.pdf](http://www.rasc.ca/sites/default/files/Broughton_Fellow.pdf), respectively.

### *Archives heritage binding project*

We have finally got caught up with the rather significant backlog of over a decade in the library binding of the *Observer's Handbook*, and *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, a situation which this committee had inherited. This is an established practice most of the Society's former Librarians (up to and including the tenure of Mr. Andrew Oakes) had followed according to the canons of proper collections management, to ensure the proper preservation of "copies of record" of our flagship publications. It is a task the final holder of the office of Librarian, Professor Robert Garrison, wanted the Society to resume. The Committee was able to negotiate a very good price for the work, which came in significantly under the budgeted estimate, and the work was completed to the highest professional standards just before last Christmas.



The other part of this project, involving the exploratory conservation of our rare books, is still under trial. When our copy of the 1778 6<sup>th</sup> edition of Ferguson's *Astronomy Explained Upon Sir Isaac Newton's Principles* returns in its new fitted clamshell box we can assess that particular

solution. It may be that phase boxes are a simpler, more flexible, and more economical archival solution. They would have the added advantage of being able to be manufactured at the Society Office by the Archivist.

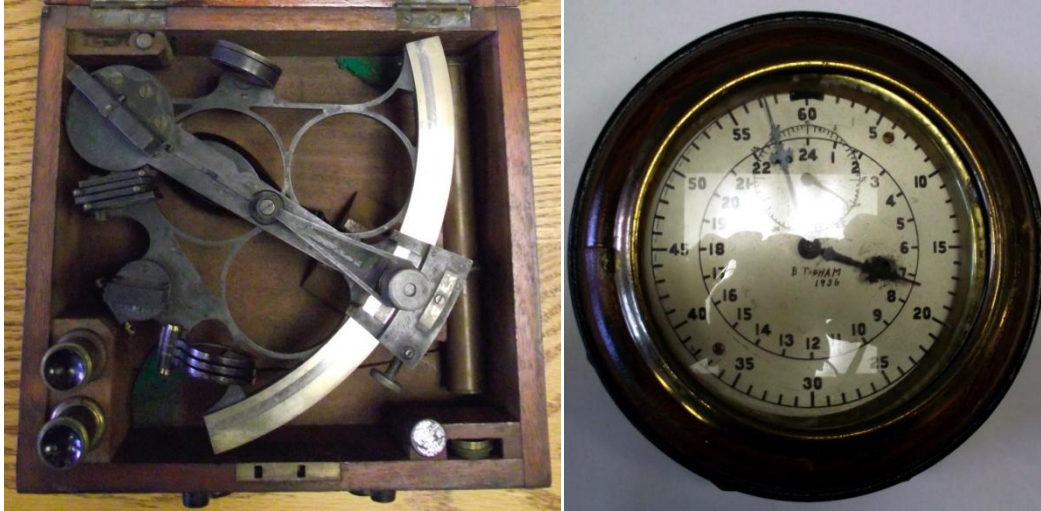
### ***Increased display capacity***

Thanks to the combined efforts of Melissa Mascarin, Renata Koziol, and Deborah Thompson of the Society Office (aided somewhat by the Archivist) we have now more than doubled the secure display space in the Archives (in light of the very limited room at the Society Office, the Archivist finds this rather miraculous). This has enabled the Bert Topham's sextant and sidereal clock to be exhibited. It also provides space to finally showcase the other meteorites donated by our anonymous benefactor (the Archives now has 200% more space rocks than previously; they'll be placed on display after the Archivist catalogues them). Nor do those acquisitions exhaust the space available.

### ***Significant donations***

In the period covered by this report we have received two important donations. The first consists of artifacts associated with one of our most important amateur scientists, Bert Topham (1893-1962). Bert was a significant contributor of accurate magnitude estimates to the AAVSO, a noted aurora observer during the International Geophysical Year (IGY), an instrument builder, and preserver of historical documents (<http://www.rasc.ca/bert-topham>). Lynn Kirk, who owes her present interest in astronomy to Bert's kind mentoring, has generously donated Bert's antique sextant, his sidereal clock, and his chant medal to the Archives. This is *the* original Chant medal, the first ever awarded.





The second generous donation was received from Denise Sabadini, the spouse of Leo Enright (1943-2009). Leo played a major role in the life of the Society, and was the founding author of our *Beginner's Observing Guide* (<http://www.rasc.ca/leo-enright-logbooks>). The originals of Leo's entire run of log books, containing many, many hundreds of pages of details on observations he made over the decades, are now part of our Archives. This is the first major logbook collection which has entered the Archives in its entirety, and the second we can make available to the worldwide community via the internet. It is fitting that Leo's observational records join those of David Levy, in light of their long friendship. To mark the digitization of Leo's records, David has written a wonderful piece on the cultural significance of Leo's logbooks, and on Leo as an observer, friend, and proponent of astronomy. Leo's books and David's essay can be found at the URL given above. The logbooks of amateurs are a legitimate source stuff for the history of astronomy. Surprisingly few of these, be they of the 18th, 19th, or the 20th century, are online anywhere in their entirety.



If further proof is needed that the Committee's (and Walter's) digitization efforts are not wasted, among other enquiries, we have received requests for archival images from the European Space Agency (ESA), and the Urania-Postepy Astronomii (Poland). The first concerned <http://www.rasc.ca/tov-reflector-heliometer-1760s-1770s> (see report cover), which has now appeared in <http://sci.esa.int/gaia/53197-seeing-and-measuring-farther/>, and the second was a request to reproduce <http://www.rasc.ca/sunspot-sketches-1892>. Placing our Archival material on the internet allows us to raise our profile within the international astronomical community, and to be of service to the astronomical world beyond our borders. It should also be noted that the



RASC astrosketchers' page (<http://www.rasc.ca/astrosketchers-group>), a resource sponsored by the History Committee, has received over 25,000 hits to date. This resource is a prime example of the service historical materials can perform in enriching the contemporary experience of observing (as per the work of both Stephen James O'Meara and Richard Baum). This annotated list is one of the most frequently visited of all pages on rasc.ca. Our historical resources are a major part of the Society's web presence.

### *The stuff of history as the stuff of commerce*

The Archives recently aided the Society Office staff in the development a new product. The latest addition to the Society's line of "promo wear" features a t-shirt the design of which is based on a late-Georgian engraving from our Archives, namely the striking "Full Moon & Earth's Shadow" plate from Sir Richard Phillips, *The Wonders of the Heavens Displayed, in Twenty Lectures... with numerous engravings* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1821). The story behind the image is presented at: <http://www.rasc.ca/wearable-archival-art>. The Committee Chair is not in favour of libraries, archives, and museums being re-orientated and retooled to become revenue generators first and foremost, for the destructive distortion that causes to their proper *raison d'être*, but he is not adverse to such institutions using reproductions of their holdings to generate income for research and EPO programs. (And the t-shirts are rather attractive: [https://secure.rasc.ca/rasc/RASC/Store/Store\\_PROMOWEAR.aspx](https://secure.rasc.ca/rasc/RASC/Store/Store_PROMOWEAR.aspx)).



### *Presentations*

R.A. Rosenfeld, "David Thompson and the RASC", 2013 June 29, Lakehead University, Advanced Technology & Academic Centre (ATAC), 2013 RASC GA

R.A. Rosenfeld, "Lost in the Realm of the White Squirrel: Plans for the RASC's First Observatory", 2013 September 14, Stirling Hall, University of Madison at Wisconsin, ATS conference jointly held at the Washburn Observatory (University of Madison at Wisconsin) and the Yerkes Observatory (University of Chicago)

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Old Instruments Aren’t Dead—the Case for Experimental Archaeology”, 2013 September 14, keynote address to the ATS conference jointly held at the Washburn Observatory (University of Madison at Wisconsin) and the Yerkes Observatory (University of Chicago)

### ***Publications***

R.A. Rosenfeld, “The Society’s “Royal” Charter”, *JRASC* 107, 4 (August 2013), 162-164

R.A. Rosenfeld, “What to Do When the Astrologer Crashes Your Star Party: Strategies for Making Friends and Influencing Enemies”, *JRASC* 107, 5 (October 2013), 199-202

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Lost in the Realm of the White Squirrel: Plans for the RASC’s First Observatory”, *JRASC* 107, 6 (December, 2013), 264-268

### ***Awards***

*See opening paragraph at p. 2 supra.*

### ***Other activity***

Due to the active encouragement of committee member Bob Duff (London Centre), members of the London Centre, including past-National President Peter Jedicke, and current London Centre President Rick Saunders and his brother Nick were able to effect the repatriation of the historic telescope belonging to Professor H.R. Kingston (1886-1963), cofounder of the London Centre (1922), and RASC National President (1930-1931). This instrument is the gift of Prof. Kingston’s grandchildren John M. Kingston and Molly K. Hoffman of Seattle, WA. The donation is described in Rick Saunders, “A Telescope Comes Home”, *JRASC* 108, 1 (February 2014), 35, and at:

[http://www.physics.uwo.ca/news/2013-14/h\\_r\\_kingston\\_telescope\\_comes\\_home\\_to\\_western.html](http://www.physics.uwo.ca/news/2013-14/h_r_kingston_telescope_comes_home_to_western.html).

The instrument is now on display at The Department of Physics and Astronomy, Western University, where Prof. Kingston spent most of his professional career. It is on permanent loan to Western.

Peter Broughton has been invited to take part in a round-table discussion about The Plaskett Telescope and the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory as one of the major events of the

RASC's 2014 General Assembly in Victoria (June 25-30). The Victoria Centre will be celebrating its centenary. We encourage all members who can make it to attend the 54<sup>th</sup> GA.

### ***Big Ideas for big anniversaries***

The 125th anniversary of the refounding of the Society (1890) will occur in 2015, and the 150th anniversary of the original founding (1868) will fall in 2018. The Committee thinks it appropriate that the Society mark these major events with various commemorative undertakings, big and small. In order to begin the discussion within the RASC we have compiled a few suggestions for activities and programs which could be undertaken:

1) A symposium organized to celebrate either date. Something similar was done to mark the centenary of Canada (1867) and the Society (1868), which offers us an event worth emulating. If this is done, the proceedings ought to be published as they were in 1967 (*JRASC* 61, 5 [October 1967]):

<http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1967JRASC..61..211W>, and in *Astronomy in Canada: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, ed. Ruth J. Northcott [Toronto: Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, 1967]). We may wish to cooperate with the CASCA Heritage Committee on the project, as our heritage for most of that period is theirs as well. We could even consider inviting several non-Canadians with something to say about us to participate. Perhaps some names from among our honorary members might suggest themselves. Such a symposium could be part of a GA, or separate from it;

2) with or without a symposium (or symposia in 2015 & 2018!) we could consider a publication. A new multi-author volume offering a serious look at our astronomical history, our astronomical present, and our astronomical *future* would be useful. Such a work would update the volume produced by the RASC in 1967. This would most effectively be developed in cooperation with CASCA;

3) new modern observing programs imaginatively using our heritage materials could be developed in cooperation with the RASC's Observing and EPO Committees. These could feature different levels of participation, rather along the lines of what was done for the Transit of Venus, but with more "intentionality", as it were. This would demonstrate that past materials of astronomy, and the people who created them, are worth our attention now, offering different perspectives on what we currently do, enriching our current observing experiences (*à la* Stephen James O'Meara), and being a means to improve our craft as astronomers;

4) heritage EPO materials could be created in cooperation with the EPO and MAP Committees. These materials would be most effective if they are imaginative, visually attractive, and encourage the asking of challenging questions;

5) we could use our heritage (cultural capital) to innovatively increase our reach into parts of the Canadian fabric we do not currently touch. The cultural sector is one. "Contrast and continuity" art installations, or performance pieces imaginatively using our historical astronomical imagery, transforming it, or juxtaposing it unexpectedly with contemporary astronomical images might prove innovatively

effective. We really haven't interacted much with the cultural sector, despite IYA2009 (and most—or all—of those interactions were unchallengingly conventional). Cooperative events between astroimagers, astrosketchers, and their counterparts in the non-astronomical imaging, design, and performance communities could be very effective;

6) other parts of the Canadian fabric most of us don't reach with our EPO are the variously disadvantaged communities (some of us *have* worked to remedy this, such as Remi Lacasse, Jim Hesser, Chris Beckett, and Dave Chapman, to name a few, but the Society as a whole has not). What can the RASC do with its resources to provide intellectual and spiritual enrichment, and push STEM achievement among various disadvantaged groups? Of all initiatives listed here this would be the most challenging to develop, and implement. It could also be the most rewarding, and important. Jim Hesser and Remi Lacasse have done some work up north and among First Nations communities; could we learn from what they have learned? Some ideas we can use may be found in IAU Commission 55 documents. With such initiatives it is always better to work with people who are already working on the ground in communities (as Chris Beckett and Dave Chapman have done), provided that the cultures of the organizations involved are compatible. Alan Batten may also have some wise advice to impart;

7) convince the Royal Canadian Mint and/or Canada Post to produce a commemorative RASC coin, and/or stamp. The people to consult on this are Jim Hesser and John Percy;

8) pitch the idea for a RASC program to CBC Ideas (<http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/submissions/>). Or explore the possibility of other media opportunities for the creation of a RASC documentary, or one on the history of astronomy in Canada (such a thing would necessarily include the RASC). There may also be some "new media" possibilities lurking in the ether...;

9) commission **big** cakes for big 2015 and 2018 GA parties (this has to be done anyway, to prevent Peter Jedicke from being hurt, or hurting someone else).

For 2015 any of the above could be presented within the context of the International Year of Light (IYL2015).

The above list hardly exhausts possible initiatives the Society could consider. Whichever initiatives are chosen must be well-planned, and within our capabilities, but we must be equally careful not to underestimate those capabilities. Some projects could be developed and presented by smaller groups within the Society, while others would be more suited to development at the National level, while others offer good opportunities to initiate closer cooperation with CASCA.



### *Acknowledgements*

We wish to thank the staff of the Society Office for their support for the various initiatives and programs presented in this report. We also wish to acknowledge Walter MacDonald's crucial continuing work in cooperation with the Committee to digitize our Archival holdings to the benefit of the entire RASC.

Respectfully submitted,

R.A. Rosenfeld (unattached), Chair

#### *Committee members*

Dr. Roy Bishop (Halifax)

Eric Briggs (Toronto)

Peter Broughton (Toronto)

Dr. Roger Ceragioli (Vancouver)

Robert Duff (London)

Dr. Chris Gainor (Victoria)

Dr. Robert Garrison (Toronto, consultant)

Renata Koziol (Society Office)

Barry Matthews (Ottawa)

Mary Lou Whitehorne