

Minutes of the XXII International Scientific Instrument Symposium  
The Mariners' Museum  
Newport News, Virginia  
29 September 2003 – 4 October 2003

President: Paolo Brenni  
Secretary: Sara Schechner  
Treasurer: Marian Fournier

### **1) Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Robert Anderson, Shaw Kinsley, Eftymios Nicolaïdis, Peter de Clercq, Alan Simson, York, David Bryden, Alan Morton, Gerard Turner, Neil Brown, Robert Fox, Will Ryan, Derek Robertson, and Madge Webster

The Scientific Instrument Commission recognized the passing of Professor I Bernard Cohen, who had been instrumental in establishing and documenting Harvard's Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments.

### **2) Review of Minutes from Last Meeting in Athens, 2002**

The Minutes of the 21st Plenary Session, held in Athens at the National Hellenic Research Foundation in September 2002 were circulated, reviewed, and accepted.

### **3) SIC Finances**

The Treasurer reported that the Commission was in sound financial health. It held 1874 euros last year; the current balance this year is 2576 euros.

Receipts:  
\$1900 from the IUHPS

Expenses:  
\$1000 appropriated to cover the expenses of the Symposium in Newport News  
\$900 appropriated for miscellaneous expenses, including maintenance of the SIC website.

### **4) Report of Ongoing Commission Activities**

*The SIC Bibliography* continues to be compiled by Peter De Clercq. It is now online on the SIC website, and updated twice a year.

Paolo Brenni announced that plans were underway to reorganize the bibliography in order to integrate all the sections and make the whole into a searchable, online database. Shaw Kinsley has agreed to undertake this project. It was proposed that SIC pay Shaw an honorarium for his work. Charles Mollan asked about costs. Paolo said that SIC would pay Shaw about \$500-700. Jim Bennett asked if Peter could enter the future updates directly into the online database. Dana Freiburger reminded us that Shaw's output should be compatible with Peter's computer system if this were to be possible.

### *Transit of Venus Project*

Reporting on behalf of the Transit of Venus Committee (Stephen Johnston, Sara Schechner, and Steve Turner), Stephen described progress made towards the development of an online, historical database that interconnected past Transit of Venus expeditions, instruments, astronomers, makers, and institutions. Last year, the committee put together a list of scholars willing to contribute data to the project. With knowledge that there was strong interest in the project, Stephen worked with the Instructional Computing Group at Oxford to develop the website and database structure. Members of the committee will upload data to a skeleton version of the website in order to test it later this fall. Once the website is streamlined, the committee will solicit further contributions from scholars by means of announcements on Rete, the SIC website, and elsewhere. Members of SIC interested in participating are urged to contact a member of the committee.

IAU C41 liaison—Sara Schechner added that the International Astronomical Union's Commission 41 (History of Astronomy) is also planning activities for the upcoming Transit of Venus. As a member of that commission, she has agreed to serve on the Transit of Venus Working Group in order to relay information between the IAU and SIC and to coordinate the efforts of the two societies.

## **5) Publications**

*Nuncius* will continue to publish selected papers presented at SIC meetings. In its second volume of 2002, the journal published papers from "The Making of the Spectroscope", a workshop on the history and sociology of spectroscopy, held at the Deutsches Museum in Munich, Germany, on 1-2 September, 2001. *Nuncius* will publish a second installment of spectroscopy papers in its second volume of 2003.

Topics for future issues of *Nuncius* were announced. It was agreed that for 2004, the SIC Board would ask a guest editor to select four to five papers presented in Athens and Newport News. In 2005, SIC would publish papers from the special meeting to be held at Dartmouth in June 2004 on "Scientific Instruments Collections in the University."

It was desired that these minutes recognize that SIC formally thanks Charlotte Bigg and Klaus Staubermann for editing the spectroscopy papers for publication, and Paolo Galluzzi for providing SIC this opportunity to publish them in *Nuncius*.

Charles Mollan asked *how* papers are chosen for *Nuncius*. Jim Bennett answered that they are chosen through the following editorial process. An editor—either one who is invited or volunteers—proposes contents for an issue of *Nuncius* to the SIC officers. When the concept is approved, the editor invites authors to submit papers. These papers are refereed and edited before publication.

Jim Bennett volunteered to edit the papers for the 2004 issue of *Nuncius*.

Are offprints available? The publisher of *Nuncius*, the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza in Florence generously gives the Commission of 100 copies of the relevant section of the journal. Authors get about 30 offprints of their papers.

The Commission has approximately 50 copies left of the *Nuncius* issue with papers on the “Archives of Instrument Dealers and Collectors.” Those wanting copies should contact Jim Bennett. Postage will be covered by the Commission.

## **6) Future Activities and Meetings**

### *A. Scientific Instrument Symposia*

2004 Dresden

Peter Plaßmeyer handed out a flyer detailing plans for the XXIII Scientific Instrument Symposium in Dresden. The event will be held on September 6-11, 2004 at the Mathematisch-Physikalischen Salon (MPS) in the Baroque Zwinger and in the city's Technical Collections.

The following proposals for sessions have been received:

- Suzanne Débarbat: Instruments for Weights and Measures.
- Roland Wittje, Acoustics: On the Threshold Between Scientific and Musical Instruments
- Peter Plaßmeyer, Central European Instruments of the 16th-18th Centuries.
- Sven Dupré and Michael Korey, Scientific Instruments in Kunstkammer and Court Collections.
- Anita McConnell on count Brule?

The conference hotel is in walking distance and convenient

2005 Beijing

The XXIV Scientific Instrument Symposium will be held as part of the IUHPS Congress in Beijing, China. “Globalization and Diversity: Diffusion of Science and Technology throughout History” has been selected as the theme for this Congress, and more information can be found on the congress web site at <http://2005bj.ihns.ac.cn/>. The Congress dates span July 24-30. The Commission will be allotted up to 2 days within that period, and will attempt excursions to the old Jesuit Observatory and relevant collections.

2006 Florence

Paolo Brenni proposed that the XXV Symposium be held in Florence at the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza, and reported that the director of the Istituto, Paolo Galluzzi, is onboard with this plan. The last time that the Commission had its annual meeting in Florence was 1986—twenty years ago.

Commission members present approved Florence for 2006.

2007 Cambridge, Massachusetts

Sara Schechner invited the Commission to hold its XXVI Symposium in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 2007 at the new facility of the Harvard Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments. Field trips could be arranged to the Peabody Essex Museum, the MIT Museum, and other relevant collections.

Commission members present approved Cambridge for 2007.

Willem Morzer-Bruyns suggested Coimbra, Portugal for a future meeting. We will look into this idea.

### *B. Other Meetings*

Scientific Instrument Collections in the University  
Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire  
24-27 June 2004

David Pantalony reported on the international meeting, "Scientific Instrument Collections in the University," to be held at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire in June 2004. He described the conference themes, issued a call from papers, and announced that many curators planned to travel from Europe and Australia to the meeting. David described the conference as part of a long term project to get university collections involved in SIC and to help show how these collections might be used in teaching and research. The conference is a pioneering effort.

The organizing committee includes Rich Kremer, David Pantalony, Frank Manasek, and Sara Schechner. More information can be had at the conference website, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sicu/>.

Autumn 2008, Holland

Sara Schechner reported that the Commission may join forces with the Antique Telescope Society to organize a meeting in 2008 to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invention of the telescope. The officers of the Commission had received a letter from Pieter Louwman on this matter and were following up with the ATS. More news would follow.

## **7) Online Register of Scientific Instruments**

Stephen Johnston reported that Online Register of Scientific Instruments continues to be supported by the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford with the Commission, and has grown in size. Its web address is <http://www.isin.org>. The Museum has renewed the domain name for five years.

Stephen apologized for the recent technical problems in Oxford, which may have delayed some submissions to the Register. If people experience trouble writing to the email contact address on website, they may contact Stephen directly for help.

The Commission formally thanked the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford for their support.

Klaus Staubermann formally thanked Jan Deiman for entering the Utrecht instrument collection into the Register.

## **8) Other Online Resources**

SIC website, <http://www.sic.iuhps.org/>

### *online trade catalogues*

Last year, the Commission discussed the possibility of having links on the SIC website to other institutions with online trade catalogues of instrument makers. These institutions include:

Max Planck Institute –“virtual laboratory” of experimental psychology and physiology  
Astronomical Observatory of Palermo  
Smithsonian Institution–catalogues of instrument makers, 1800-1914

Steve Turner reported that the Smithsonian online catalogue will shortly have 10,000 scanned pages, with another 50,000 pages of trade literature to be processed.

Rand Evans reported that the “virtual laboratory” of the Max Planck Institute is adding more catalogues and links to published sources.

Now the Commission formally asks Dana Freiburger to help us input these changes. Formal thanks were offered to Dana for his all his webmastering help.

### *thesaurus of instrument names*

Last year Paolo Brenni opened discussions with Steve Turner and Roland Wittje about the possibility of a thesaurus of instrument names. Steve reported that a thesaurus is being created as of the indices to the trade literature are being generated.

## **9) News from Members**

Klaus Staubermann reported on the following:

- Transit of Venus exhibition in Utrecht focusing on the 1874 and 1882 transits.
- “Science in the European Periphery”–a meeting on instrument practices on the periphery or in colonial settings. Klaus is looking for those interested in this topic
- 20<sup>th</sup> century instruments–what should be collecting policy? Conservation? Display needs? Perhaps there is interest in holding a workshop.
- Experience with the deaccessioning of scientific instruments. Klaus has to dispose of about 600 things in next three months, and seeks advice.

The topic of collecting and preserving 20<sup>th</sup> century instruments generated a lot of discussion:

Diederick Wildeman of the Scheepvaart Museum in Amsterdam remarked that he is thinking of meeting on how to preserve electronic devices.

Jan Tapdrup said that he is working with conservation specialists at the Danish National Museum and separately with Paolo Brenni on this problem too. Perhaps one could develop a European Union project, Jan suggested.

SIC members agreed that it would be appropriate to devote a meeting to these issues.

Ronald Smeltzer remarked that a number of United States institutions already are concerned with the problems of the preservation of 20<sup>th</sup> century materials. One is the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia. Marvin Bolt seconded that US astronomy centers have been concerned with the problems of collecting space exploration gear. It was agreed that such groups should be included in any formal plans to have a meeting on this topic.

Sara Schechner proposed that a SIC working group be formed on 20<sup>th</sup> century artifacts and their special issues. Those interested in being part of the group should contact Paolo Brenni.

#### **10) Any other Business**

There was no other business raised by members.

#### **11) Thanks to the Mariners' Museum**

Formal thanks was given to the Mariners' Museum for hosting the Symposium. Paolo Brenni expressed the feelings of the Commission when he said that the hands-on session was a "moment of joy for everybody."

Respectfully submitted by  
Sara Schechner  
SIC Secretary