

Setting Up the ESO Historical Archives

Now that ESO has reached the age and status at which interest in its early beginnings is growing, it is desirable to set up an organized system of documentation that should allow historical studies. For that reason, steps have been taken by the Director General to establish the ESO Historical Archives, henceforth to be abbreviated EHA. These archives are meant to serve two purposes:

- to form a natural framework for the incorporation and classification of documentation that may be relevant to the study of the history of ESO; and
- to provide students of ESO's history with the necessary basic references, accessible at the discretion of the ESO Directorate.

At this moment – fall 1988 – a beginning has been made with the creation of the EHA by means of some quite valuable collections of documentation, pertaining mostly to the earliest decades, that is from the year 1953. They originate from persons who have been intimately involved in the creation of the Organization. The origins and the nature of this documentation can be recognized in the global descriptions in the box ESO Historical Archives accompanying this note.

For the arrangement and numbering I have chosen a system which clearly shows the origin of the documents and which, moreover, has a structure allowing in a natural way the incorporation of additional documents without any manipulating. Eventually, a more sophisticated system may have to be introduced, but for the moment the present, simple one should suffice. The arrangement also allows the description of the documentation in the inventory to be done in as much detail as appears desirable.

This arrangement discriminates first of all between documentation originating from outside ESO, category I, and documents from within ESO, category II. As things stand at the moment, it would seem that category I will be the richer one. Within category I, I have discriminated according to the source of the documents: category I.A. refers to

ESO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

Inventory per December 1988; Overall Contents

I. Documents received from outside ESO.

I.A. Archives J.H. Oort.

I.A.1. Documents donated by Oort to L. Woltjer, former Director General of ESO.

I.A.2. Documents donated by Oort to A. Blaauw around the year 1976 and transferred by him to ESO Historical Archives.

I.B. Archives J.H. Bannier.

Documents donated in 1987 to H. van der Laan by the Dutch organization ZWO for sponsoring scientific research, pertaining to the directorship of J.H. Bannier of this organization.

I.C. Archives A. Blaauw.

I.C.1 Documents pertaining to the Secretariat of the ESO Committee (which preceded the ESO Council) with the exclusion of those concerning the site-testing expeditions.

I.C.2. Documents pertaining to the Secretariat of the ESO Committee, concerning the site-testing expeditions.

I.C.3. Documents concerning the ESO Working Group for Buildings, 1963–1965.

I.C.4. Other documents before 1968.

I.C.5. Documents pertaining to the ESO Scientific Directorship, 1968–1969.

I.C.6. Documents pertaining to the ESO General Directorship, 1970 through 1974.

II. Documentation originating from inside ESO.

II.A. Documents from the file marked "ESO Allgemein", of the period 1961–1964.

documents originally belonging to J.H. Oort, category I.B. to those originating from the Dutch organization ZWO, category I.C. to documents transferred from my archives at the Kapteyn Laboratory at Groningen to the EHA. Clearly this arrangement invites extensions I.D., I.E., etc. for documents which, hopefully, may be received from other persons or agencies that were involved in the early history of ESO.

Within each of these categories, further subdivision introduces more and more refined classification. The first stages of these are indicated in the accompanying Inventory. Further ones are used in the more extensive descriptions of the EHA now in the making. As an illustration, let me mention the subdivision I.C.2.8. which pertains to the dealings of the Secretary of the ESO Committee (which preceded the ESO Council) with the Marseilles objective-prism radial velocity project as part of the site testing operations, and of which the subdivision I.C.2.8.a. contains the correspondence with Ch. Fehrenbach.

In connection with category II, it

should be mentioned that, of course, apart from the contents of this part of the EHA, there are in the ESO Headquarters (and perhaps also in Chile?) many documents of interest for the study of the ESO history which, however, still are part of the body of documentation occasionally used for the regular operation of ESO. Of particular significance appear to be the extensive files kept by the ESO Head of Administration, which contain virtually complete sets of the minutes of the ESO Council and its predecessor, the ESO Committee, minutes of Finance Committee, the series of Council-Meeting Documents, etc. Naturally, access to these documents is also at the discretion of the ESO Directorate. In my articles on the early history of ESO I refer to these documents as FHA (Files Head of Administration).

Finally, mention should be made of the collection of old photographs and slides belonging to the Photographic Department of ESO, which also are of historical interest, but still to be classified.

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Groningen from June 22 to 27 [2]. It was during this stay that, between Baade and Oort, the idea arose of a joint effort by some European countries with leadership in astronomy [3].

The suggestion was followed up by Oort immediately. At his invitation a group of astronomers discussed it on

June 21, 1953, the day before the Groningen conference [4]. They were Baade, Bourgeois, Danjon, Heckmann, Lindblad, Oort, Oosterhoff and myself. Most of them participated in the Groningen conference [5]. Also present on June 21 was J.H. Bannier, director of the Dutch national science foundation (ZWO) and at that time President of the

Council of CERN, the joint European effort in nuclear research. Over the years, the ESO effort would greatly benefit from Bannier's experience. The participants at the meeting represented five "continental" countries. After the meeting Sir Harold Spencer Jones, Astronomer Royal of Great Britain, and Richard Stoy of the Cape Observatory,