

REFLECTIONS
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Bart J. Bok Across a Half-Century

In 1930, when I received my S.B. in Astronomy at Harvard, Bok had already spent a year at the Observatory as Agassiz Fellow, working up the thesis for his Groningen doctorate. His topic was the Eta Carinae region, for which he drew by eye a series of isophotes of the nebula. My earliest recollection of his activities is of a giant plate-viewing frame six or eight feet long, which could accommodate several of his nebular plates simultaneously. The thesis appears as Harvard Observatory Reprint No. 77, 1932, artistically bound in a figured gray cover with title and decoration in bright orange - a refreshing contrast with the typical drab binding of that period.

In 1932 Eric Lindsay of Northern Ireland and I embarked on our doctoral theses under his direction. Thus began the ambitious program of general starcounts for the study of galactic structure that Bok had laid down by 1931. Eric's project was to produce and analyze starcounts to magnitude 13.5 in the southern hemisphere, and mine a deeper study of the Milky Way in Cygnus. Through 1932-1934 Eric and I were stimulated, guided, and occasionally scolded by our mentor. A minor incident in the last category illustrating the customs of a more formal era, was a rebuke when I addressed Eric by his first name within hearing of undergraduates in our introductory laboratory course.

In their earliest Harvard days Bart and Priscilla lived in a graduate student apartment at 24C Shaler Lane, where their subsequently renowned hospitality was soon in evidence. At this time the story was circulated gleefully among the graduate students that, upon settling down in Shaler Lane, Bart reminded Priscilla that Dutch housewives customarily washed the front steps every morning, with a response from her that can be imagined. I do not vouch for any part of this anecdote, but it was the kind of thing we enjoyed telling about our betters.

Bart took an especially active interest in the personal well-being of his students. In 1933 Marie (Dresser) and I

were contemplating matrimony, but I vacillated - my PhD was a year away, Marie was a Radcliffe junior, and job prospects were almost negligible. But, "Go ahead" said Bart, or words to that effect, and we did. Radcliffe took a less benign attitude; it is difficult now to believe what an uproar was caused by a Radcliffe undergraduate getting married!

For 1933-34 we took an apartment in Whitefield Hall, convenient to both Harvard and Radcliffe, and staged our own social events, at which Bart frequently enlivened the evening. On one occasion, he undertook to demonstrate kinematics by whirling a plate loaded with sandwiches up, upside down, and over. I saw an anguished look on Marie's face - the plate was an heirloom - but it survived.

In the spring of 1934 Eric and I passed our doctoral examinations on the same day, and became Bart's first PhD's. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Shapley and Bart, I was appointed assistant professor and sole astronomer at Swasey Observatory of Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Here I tackled the standard post-doctoral task of expanding my thesis and preparing it for publication. In 1937 Harvard Annals 105 (the Tercentenary volume) included my paper, and a long discussion by Lindsay and Bok of Eric's results. The latter acknowledged contributions to the work by Sidney McCuskey, Leo Goldberg and Carl Seyfert who had by then fallen under Bart's spell.

At the end of 1940, the Navy, mindful of my Harvard NROTC commission, ordered me to a Pacific Fleet destroyer, and astronomy and I parted company for five years.

Bart's solicitude for my welfare did not end with placing me in my first job. He was intent on moving me into the main current of post-war astronomy, and with Dr. Shapley's cooperation, provided me with a stipend and research facilities for several months following my return to civil life in 1946. Nor was this all, for Bart went to much trouble to assure me a university appointment. In April 1946 while I was on a visit to University "A", a phone call from Bart told me that I had a firm offer from University "B", and in May he relayed a message from the University of Michigan. And Michigan it was.

If this continued effort on my behalf twelve years after I had received my PhD seems exceptional, it should be remembered that graduate students in astronomy were then less numerous than today; the average annual national production in the preceding decade was 8. Still, not everyone would have taken so much trouble for a 37-year-old ex-student who had been out of the profession for five years!

This was the heyday of Bart's general star-count program. Dr. Robert Baker at the University of Illinois and others were swept into the work by Bart's enthusiasm, and papers on the counts and their analysis continued to appear for some years. My own interest in galactic structure had been on the wane for some time, and I turned to other topics, so my professional

contacts with Bart became less frequent as time passed. From 1959 through 1966 I became increasingly involved in the administration of our Rackham School of Graduate Studies. Bart never expressed his opinion of this aberration, but I suspect that he thought it rather a come-down for me in the academic world.

We last saw Priscilla on November 15, 1975, at a meeting in the Flandreau Planetarium in Tucson; four days later she died. Our last visit with Bart was in his hotel room at the January 1983 A.A.S meeting, when he gave the Russell Lecture. And so ended my half-century of memories of this remarkable man.

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Bart J. Bok in the Late and Middle 'Forties

Back in 1944 as one of the three freshman concentrators in astronomy at Harvard University, I was awarded a precious key to the 8-inch refractor located in the back yard of the "Students' Observatory". Walking with heady pride to the telescope dome shortly afterwards, I was practically steamrollered by a cheerful, solidly-built man around forty who was obviously in a hurry to get from one point to another. Trailing along a few paces behind him came his assistant, Frances Wright whom I had recently met, and then quite a few more paces astern were three or four serious-minded young Naval officers, all obviously highly respectful of the professor whom they were chasing.

"*That is Dr. Bok*", said Joe Gossner who was about to demonstrate the use of the 8-inch to me. He should have used the past tense: Dr. Bok had long since disappeared before the sentence was over.

After my own term of duty in the Navy, I returned to college and in the spring of 1947 had my first chance to see Dr. Bok more or less in captivity. He was to be my professor in an astromechanics course for undergraduates and first year graduate students. Arriving shortly after ten minutes past the hour, the official starting time for courses - the Students' Lab was a considerable distance from the rest of the campus - I experienced a feeling bordering on stark terror: the extra-long