



# WORKSHOP ON A NATIONAL PLAN FOR PRESERVING ASTRONOMICAL PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA

Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute  
1-3 November 2007

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **A. Recommendations to the astronomical community**

*Recommendation 1. Given the eventual need for a database of astronomical photographic data, a census of North American astronomical photographic plates should be carried out. This would be done by conducting a survey of observatories and other institutions known or expected to hold plates.*

- a. The committee charged with this (which may be expanded to cover all aspects of a survey):  
McCluskey, Castelaz, Griffin, Osborn, Patterson*
- b. Recommended date by which the census should be completed: March 1, 2008*
- c. Expected release of the survey findings: June 2008 AAS meeting*

*Recommendation 2. Given its extensive available physical space and support facilities, PARI's Astronomical Photographic Data Archive (APDA) should be developed as an astronomical photographic data repository.*

*Recommendation 3. PARI should be designated as collection point for orphan plates, defined as those plates an observatory holds that are from some other institution, and will arrange for return or file them, as appropriate. Astronomers with plates they no longer need should return them to the appropriate observatories; if an observatory is unwilling to accept them, the astronomer should contact PARI about archiving.*

*Recommendation 4. A special session on “time-domain astronomy” should be proposed to the American Astronomical Society for the January 2009 meeting.*

*Recommendation 5. Institutions with collections of astronomical photographic plates are encouraged to compile a computer-based catalog of their holdings.*

## **B. Recommendations to those engaged in plate archiving efforts**

*Recommendation 1. Those engaged in plate archiving should emphasize the importance of this work for “time-domain astronomy research” well as for ensuring the preservation of historical records.*

*Recommendation 2. When transferring plates from their home institution to an archive,*

- a. the receiving organization should obtain a letter or agreement, on letterhead and signed by Department chair or other designated person of the transferring organization, authorizing the transfer and listing conditions, if any;*
- b. the storage cabinets and the associated log books and other records should accompany the plates whenever possible; and*
- c. a catalog of the transferred plates should be prepared, preferably by the donating institution but otherwise by the recipient as soon as possible.*

*Recommendation 3. In general, plates from the same origin should be stored together. Subsets of a collection may be kept separately, but should be cataloged so it is clear where each portion of the collection is housed.*

*Recommendation 4. The importance to astronomy of these historic data should be brought to the attention of those conducting the next decadal survey and the astronomical community in general.*

- a. A summary of the workshop should be prepared for the AAS newsletter.*
- b. A press release related to the workshop should be prepared and released to science-focused publications (e.g., *Sky and Telescope*).*
- c. The AAS Historical Astronomy Division (HAD) should receive a report on this workshop at their January 2008 meeting and the AAS Working Group on the Preservation of Astronomical Heritage (WGAH) should discuss endorsing PARI as an astronomical photographic data archive..*
- d. The IAU or its Task Force for the Preservation and Digitization of Photographic Plates (PDPP) should be encouraged to recognize PARI as an astronomical photographic data archive.*

*Recommendation 5. Catalogs of plate collections should include as much information as necessary to adequately describe their content. For direct plates, records should conform to the Wide-Field Plate Database (WFPD) template; spectroscopic ones should follow the template developed by the IAU Working Group for Spectroscopic Data Archives.*

- a. Catalog information for direct plates should include at a minimum the plate number (and observatory series), equatorial coordinates (equinox), object (if relevant), date and time of exposure (time system used), and length of exposure. Other useful information includes the emulsion type, filter, plate size, area photographed, and if there are multiple exposures.*
- b. Catalog information for spectroscopic plates should include the plate number (and observatory series), equatorial coordinates (equinox), object, date and time of exposure (time system used), length of exposure, approximate central wavelength and dispersion. Other useful information includes the camera focal length, emulsion and grating characteristics.*
- c. On-line catalogs should be available through Vizier and associated with the Wide-Field Plate Database (WFPD) when appropriate.*

*Recommendation 6. The archiving of both photographic and paper records should adhere to accepted archival standards as far as possible.*

*Recommendation 7. In order to acquire the necessary financial resources needed for archiving it is necessary to identify and explore every reasonable source of revenue.*

### **C. Recommendations to PARI**

*Recommendation 1. Given its available physical space and support facilities, PARI's Astronomical Photographic Data Archive (APDA) should be developed as an astronomical photographic data repository.*

*Recommendation 2. PARI should carry out a study of what will be needed to operate APDA in a professional manner. This would include personnel (e.g., an archivist) and the financial resources.*

*Recommendation 3. PARI should consider forming an advisory group charged with providing advice on photographic archiving issues.*

*Recommendation 4. PARI should work on establishing an endowment for plate archiving.*

*Recommendation 5. In order to attract funding, a priority for PARI should be to have some demonstrated uses of the plates it has in astronomical research.*

*Recommendation 6. To increase the plate archive's visibility to the astronomical community, PARI's website should have a direct link from the main PARI page to the plate archive portion (it presently is not easy to locate on the web site).*

*Recommendation 7. PARI is encouraged to organize regular meetings at which the progress of plate archiving can be assessed.*