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Guide to the George Van Biesbroeck Papers 1904-1980



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.VANBIESBROECKG

Title Van Biesbroeck, George. Papers

Date 1904-1980

Size 8.25 linear feet (11 boxes)

Repository Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract George van Biesbroeck (1880-1974) astronomer at The University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory 1914, 1917-1945. . Van Biesbroeck's research included comets, double stars, asteroids, and Einstein's theory of relativity. The collection includes correspondence, observation records, published papers, handwritten work, interviews, articles, clippings, photographs, albums, and diaries, including material compiled by Faye Larson for an uncompleted biography of van Biesbroeck.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Baldrige, Cyrus Le Roy. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Georges Achilles van Biesbroeck was born on January 21st in Ghent, Belgium to Pharailde Colpaert and Louis Pierre van Biesbroeck, a well-known sculptor. He graduated from Ghent University with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1902, and went on to study astronomy at Uccle, Heidelberg and Potsdam. He worked as an engineer at Brussel's Department of Roads and Bridges until 1905, before turning his attention strictly to astronomy in 1908 when he took an adjunct position at the Royal Observatory in Belgium.

Van Biesbroeck married Julia Sterpin in 1910 and the two had three children: Simone (b. March 25, 1911), Micheline (b. May 6, 1915), and Edwin (b. July 26, 1922).

In 1914, while in the then German occupied Belgium, van Biesbroeck was offered a temporary position at The University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory. Van Biesbroeck returned to Belgium briefly after this position ended. However, he immigrated permanently to the United States in 1917 and moved to Williams Bay, WI having accepted an associate professorship at Yerkes. He received full professorship in 1926. While in Williams Bay, van Biesbroeck was an active member in the local school board, the Boy Scouts, and the Walworth Historical Society. Moreover, he was known for opening his family home for boarding to visiting astronomers and students at Yerkes. He retired in 1945.

Van Biesbroeck is known primarily for his research regarding double stars, comets, and asteroids. In 1964 "Comet P/van Biesbroeck 1954 IV" and later in 1973 asteroid "(1781) Van Biesbroeck" were both named after him. Beyond this, the scope of his work included minor planets, solar eclipses, Einstein's theory of relativity, and satellites. In 1953, he was awarded a medal of honor by The National Geographic Society. In 1958, he was awarded the James Craig Watson Medal for Scientific Achievement.

Van Biesbroeck was instrumental in the founding of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) in 1919 and the MacDonal Observatory in Texas in the 1930's. He remained active in both after retirement. In this post retirement period, he also conducted a variety of Solar Eclipse Expeditions to Brazil (1947), Korea (1948), and Sudan (1952), as well as a site survey trip to the Congo for the Belgian Government from 1949-1950.

In 1963, van Biesbroeck moved to Tucson where he remained the rest of his life. There he continued research at Kitt Peak National Observatory as a research associate at the University of Arizona alongside Dr. Gerald Kuiper. In 1972, he began working with Faye Larson on a biographical project.

George van Biesbroeck died on February 23rd 1974 in Tucson, AZ.

Scope Note

The Van Biesbroeck papers are organized into four series: Series I: Correspondence; Series II: Research and Writings; Series III, Faye Larson Biographical Materials; and Series IV: Photograph Albums and Negatives.

Series I: Correspondence, contains van Biesbroeck's incoming and outgoing correspondence arranged first topically, then chronologically. It includes both personal and professional correspondence. Additional correspondence can be found throughout Series III in the Faye Larson Biographical Materials organized by topic.

Series II: Research and Writings, contains materials directly related to Van Biesbroeck's work, including his observation records, handwritten notes, published papers, and grant information. Additional work can be found throughout Series III in the Faye Larson Biographical Materials organized by topic.

Series III: Faye Larson Biographical Materials, contains materials compiled by Faye Larson for a biography of George van Biesbroeck. The papers remain organized much in the same manner Larson had intended in her research- with the purpose of preserving the narrative she hoped to convey. They are roughly chronological in accordance with the files found in Larson's Chronology in Subseries 1, Box 3, Folder 5; and clustered more broadly according to the Outline also found in Subseries 1, Box 3, Folder 7. Subseries 1: Larson Biographical Project, includes materials directly related to the formation of the biography as well as some original content from Larson's research such as notes from interviews, and correspondence Larson conducted. Subseries 2-5 then contain manifold materials on van Biesbroeck's life and career as compiled by Larson for the purpose of her writing.

Series IV: Albums and Photographs, contains five photo albums documenting Van Biesbroeck's expeditions to Texas, Brazil, Korea, the Congo, and Sudan; as well as an assortment of glass eclipse plates.

Subject Headings

- Van Biesbroeck, George, 1880-19741
-
- University of Chicago. Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics
- University of Chicago. Yerkes Observatory
-
- Van Biesbroeck Comet
- Astronomical observatories
- Astronomy
- Astrophysics
- Telescopes
-
- Astrophysicists

INVENTORY

Series I: Correspondence

Box 1

Folder 1

Arizona, 1963-1980

Box 1

Folder 2

Astrographic Catalogs, 1963-1965

Box 1

Folder 3

Catalina Site Coordinates, 1963-1964

Box 1

Folder 4

Comets. I, 1963-1967

Box 1

Folder 5

Comets. II, 1968-1974

Box 1

Folder 6

Comet van Biesbroeck, 1964-1966

Box 1

Folder 7

Criterion, 1965-1973

Box 1

Folder 8

Miscellaneous, 1960-1965

Box 1

Folder 9

NASA, 1964

Box 1

Folder 10

Swings, Pole, 1946-1977

Box 1

Folder 11

Tumamoc Hill Site, 1964

Series II: Research and Writings

Series II, Research and Writings, includes observations, figures and tables, notes, photographs, handwritten work, and published articles by Van Biesbroeck, dating for the most part between 1948 and 1970 and encompassing a variety of research topics. When strict chronology could not be achieved the subseries are arranged by topic, mostly alphabetically.

Subseries I, Observation Records, includes work on Nereid, Satellites, Parallax Factors and a variety of smaller topics. Box 2, Folder 1 contains dissertation "The Satellite Systems of Uranus" from 1949 by Daniel L. Harris III at the University of Chicago.

Subseries II: Miscellaneous, includes handwritten work unable to be clearly identified or situated within larger projects.

Subseries III: Published Papers, includes work on Double Stars, Comets, Position of Pluto, Galilean Satellites of Jupiter, and Uranus' Satellite Miranda while at Yerkes, as well as work on Micrometric Measures of Double Stars, Comets, Minor Planets and Satellites while at Kitt Peak National Observatory.

Series IV: Grant Information, includes correspondence with National Science Foundation, The University of Chicago, University of Arizona, and W.J. MacDonald Observatory, as well as reports by van Biesbroeck and Kuiper on their work.

Subseries 1: Observation Records

Box 1

Folder 12

Nereid - Old Equations, undated

Box 1

Folder 13

Nereid - Circular Orbits, 1949

Box 1

Folder 14

Nereid - Computation, 1949-1955

Box 1

Folder 15

Nereid - First Solution. I, 1950

Box 1

Folder 16

Nereid - First Solution. II, 1950

Box 1

Folder 17

Nereid - Observations, 1949-1969

Box 1

Folder 18

Jupiter Satellites, undated

Box 1

Folder 19

Mars Satellites, 1956

Box 2

Folder 1

Uranus Satellites. I, 1948-1970

Box 2

Folder 2

Uranus Satellites. II, 1948-1970

Box 2

Folder 3

Uranus Satellites. III, 1948-1970

Box 2

Folder 4

Uranus Satellites. IV, 1948-1970

Box 2

Folder 5

Parallax Factors - Catalina, undated

Box 2

Folder 6

Parallax Factors - Mt. Locke, undated

Box 2

Folder 7

Parallax Factors - Yerkes, undated

Box 2

Folder 8

Alger Zones, undated

Box 2

Folder 9

Catalina Site Coordinates, 1919-1957

Box 2

Folder 10

Parabolic Motion, 1955

Box 2

Folder 11

Proper Motions, 1955

Box 2

Folder 12

Micrometer Information, undated

Subseries 2: Miscellaneous

Box 2

Folder 13

Double Stars, undated

Box 2

Folder 14

Jupiter, undated

Box 2

Folder 15

Miscellaneous, undated

Subseries 3: Published Papers

Box 3

Folder 1

Published Papers. I, 1960-1966

Box 3

Folder 2

Published Papers. II, 1966-1976

Subseries 4: Grant Information

Box 3

Folder 3

Grant Information. I, 1962-1965

Box 3

Folder 4

Grant Information. II, 1966-1972

Series III: Faye Larson Biographical Materials

Series III, Faye Larson Biographical Materials contains materials gathered by Larson as well as original Larson content- curated with the hopes of publishing a biography of George van Biesbroeck. Larson began the project in 1972 and it appears to have been abandoned shortly after van Biesbroeck's death in 1974.

Subseries I: Larson Biographical Project contains notes, drafts, interviews, tape transcripts, publishing information, contact lists, and miscellaneous correspondence conducted by Faye Larson in pursuing this biographical project.

Subseries: 2-5 contain the materials Larson collected including articles, published and handwritten work by van Biesbroeck, diaries, photographs, clippings, and van Biesbroeck's correspondence. These have been gather by Larson into specific topical groupings, and interspersed with correspondence of Larson herself with those who knew van Biesbroeck, original interviews, and drafts of corresponding sections of her own writing.

Subseries 1: Larson Biographical Project

Box 3

Folder 5

Chronology, undated

Box 3

Folder 6

Tape Transcripts and Interview Material, 1972-1973

Box 3

Folder 7

File Index and Outline, c.1972-1974

Box 3

Folder 8

Drafts and Notes, c.1972-1974

Box 3

Folder 9

References Used, c.1972-1974

Box 3

Folder 10

Publishing Information, 1972-1974

Box 3

Folder 11

Instructors Reference Cards, 1959-1965

Box 3

Folder 12

Correspondence and Contact List, 1972

Box 4

Bibliography and Address Index Cards

Subseries 2: Early Life and Education

Box 5

Folder 1

Belgium, 1915-1974

Box 5

Folder 2

Education, 1972

Box 5

Folder 3

Williams Bay, 1955-1972

Box 5

Folder 4

Boy Scouts, 1972

Box 5

Folder 5

Career - Larson Correspondence, 1972-1974

Box 5

Folder 6

Career - Notes, Drafts, and Articles, 1942-1972

Box 5

Folder 7

Career - Aitken Correspondence, 1920-1931

Subseries 3: Career and Yerkes

Box 5

Folder 8

IAU, 1965-1973

Box 5

Folder 9

Yerkes, 1930-1972

Box 5

Folder 10

Kitt Peak National Observatory, 1969-1973

Box 5

Folder 11

Comets, 1916-1975

Box 5

Folder 12

Double Stars, 1916-1974

Box 5

Folder 13

Technical Explanations used by Larson, 1934-1974

Box 5

Folder 14

Handwritten Papers by Van Biesbroeck, 1947-1973

Subseries 4: Late Expeditions and Life

Box 5

Folder 15

MacDonald, 1938-1973

Box 5

Folder 16

MacDonald/Texas Photos. I, 1932-1933

Box 5

Folder 17

MacDonald/Texas Photos. II, 1932-1933

Box 6

Folder 1

Einstein, 1947-1973

Box 6

Folder 2

Solar Eclipse - General, 1967-1972

Box 6

Folder 3

Solar Eclipse Expedition - Brazil, 1947

Box 6

Folder 4

Solar Eclipse Expedition - Korea. I, 1948

Box 6

Folder 5

Solar Eclipse Expedition - Korea. II, 1948

Box 6

Folder 6

Solar Eclipse Expedition - Sudan, 1952

Box 6

Folder 7

Published Work - Plato and Jupiter, 1963

Box 6

Folder 8

Retirement/75th Birthday, 1945-1955

Box 6

Folder 9

Sculpture, 1966-1972

Box 6

Folder 10

Tucson, 1963-1974

Subseries 5: Generic Biographical Material

Box 6

Folder 11

Biographical - Van Biesbroeck Correspondence, 1963-1972

Box 6

Folder 12

Biographical - Articles and Clippings. I, 1905-1964

Box 6

Folder 13

Biographical - Articles and Clippings. II, 1964-1979

Box 6

Folder 14

Diary, In French, 1909-1966

Series IV: Albums and Photographs

Series IV: Albums and Photographs, contains five albums and a variety of glass eclipse plates. The albums document Van Biesbroeck's expeditions to Texas, Brazil, Korea, the Congo, and Sudan. These albums include photographs of scenery, local community life, team portraits, and a variety of action shots. The Brazil album includes newspaper clippings as well as photographs. The glass plates found here are from Van Biesbroeck's 1952 expedition to Khartoum, Sudan; as well as a few untitled plates with their original box.

Box 7

Texas Photograph Album

Box 8

Brazil Scrapbook

Box 8

Korea Photo Album

Box 9

Congo Photo Album

Box 10

Sudan Photo Album

Box 11

Khartoum, Sudan - Glass Eclipse Plates

Box 11

Untitled Glass Eclipse Plates