

INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMY MEETINGS LIST: ITS ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

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Abstract. The author tells the origin and evolution of the International Astronomy Meetings List, a service hosted by the Canadian Astronomy Data Center (CADC).

In 1983, I attended my first Special Libraries Association meeting held in New Orleans, Louisiana. At that time, I became acquainted with the Physics-Astronomy-Math (aka ‘PAM’) Division, a division that was to become my professional lifeline for the next twenty-eight years.

The Astronomy division was my initial introduction to the ‘Giants’ of the PAM network : Joyce Watson, Ellen Bouton, Sarah Stevens-Rayburn, and Brenda Corbin were among the names I remember. The special ties with our colleagues were essential in those pre-internet years. In addition, I oversaw a library located in Hawaii, Earth’s furthest archipelago from a continental land mass. From the onset, I ascertained that acquiring and disseminating current, scientific data and information was going to be a formidable task.

At the time, there were a number of recurring library concerns, including how to keep abreast of the many astrophysics meetings that were held every year. This matter was particularly troublesome for events occurring in countries requiring a Visa or special travel arrangements. Oftentimes, conference announcements would arrive at Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope (CFHT) after the deadlines required for applicants to register and attend an event.

One day, in 1987, I was discussing this dilemma with Robert “Bob” McLaren, CFHT’s Executive Director, and he recommended I start a monthly compilation of all meetings, conferences and workshops. I con-

curred and began a small distribution to other astrophysics libraries. The idea grew, and before I knew it, I was copying and mailing the list every month to over 600 observatories and libraries! By 1991, *The Observatory* took notice and began publishing the list and at the same time, with the advancements of computer technology, I offered access to the list via ‘ftp’ and other current electronic distributions.

By 1993, Doug Simons and Dennis Crabtree joined me to produce a revolutionary version of the meetings list available via NCSA Mosaic, which enabled filling out a registration form, downloading maps, browsing abstracts, etc. This service caught on quickly and encouraged meeting organizers to take advantage of the newest available technology.

From the onset, CADC has provided the server for the meetings¹. This love match has been successful because Liz was the care taker and compiler of the information and CADC provided the maintenance and upgrade of a complex computer system. To date, CADC maintains the meetings list, archiving as far back as 1996.

Besides the hosting web server, CADC supplies access to the SYBASE database as well as the RSS and iCal feeds and the older email distribution list.

There were about 280,000 visits to the meeting list in 2011, from almost 30,000 unique IP addresses. The numbers were similar in 2010.

Now that I have retired, I have left the meeting legacy to David Bohlander and Daniel Durand, who are intent on keeping this worthwhile service on going. This is a wonderful example of a program that has evolved and kept apace with the current needs of our community.

¹<http://www.cadc-ccda.hia-ihp.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/meetings/>