

FROM THE CONNECTICUT ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

# Astronomy at Yale 1701-1968

By DORRIT HOFFLEIT

IN THIS BOOK, Dorrit Hoffleit gives the first continuous account of the history of astronomy at Yale from its inception to the end of the Brouwer era about one generation ago. The subject is not just of local interest; astronomy at Yale plays a significant role in the history of astronomy in general.

From the beginning, there were major frustrations for the astronomy department at Yale, yet under the department's successive leaders, both teaching and research reached high standards of excellence. Visual studies of meteors were, until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, the major subject of research. Then between 1893 and 1920 Yale became a pioneer in the photographic determination of meteor velocities.

In 1882 Yale obtained the first and only heliometer in

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America. With it more and better stellar parallaxes were determined than by any European astronomers. During World War I, while the observatory was closed, E. W. Brown pursued his famous lunar theory. Frank Schlesinger, who became director in 1920, introduced photography for determinations of stellar parallaxes and proper motions, for which he was later hailed as "the father of modern astrometry." He was succeeded by Dirk Brouwer, a disciple of Brown in the field of celestial mechanics. This topic had been considered obsolescent at some American institutions; but with the advent of World War II and the subsequent Space Age, celestial mechanics were in great demand. Under Brouwer, the Department of Astronomy at Yale became the world headquarters for training and research in this field.

**DORRIT HOFFLEIT** holds a Ph.D. from Radcliffe College. From 1929 until 1956 she was engaged in research on meteors, variable stars, and the determination of spectroscopic absolute magnitudes at the Harvard College Observatory. Thereafter, until her official retirement in 1975, she held joint appointments between Yale and the Nantucket Maria Mitchell Observatory. At Yale,



she was in charge of programs for the determination of the proper motions of southern stars, and revisions of the Bright Star Catalogue. At the Maria Mitchell Observatory, she initiated a summer program for research participation on variable stars especially by women college undergraduates. She is the author of some 300 articles in astronomy.

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