A History of AAVSO's Headquarters

Michael Saladyga
AAVSO, 49 Bay State Road, Cambridge, MA 02138

Presented at the 95th Annual Meeting of the AAVSO, October 28, 2006; received March 5, 2007; revised March 17, 2008; accepted March 17, 2008

Abstract This paper is a survey of the physical locations from which the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO) has operated since its founding in 1911, with discussion of the circumstances surrounding each of the AAVSO's headquarters relocations.

1. Introduction

During the first ninety-five years of its history, the AAVSO has had only four addresses, all located in Cambridge, Massachusetts (a fifth location was announced at the time this paper was presented; see Table 1). With each of these locations there is a trail of little-known facts pertaining to the establishment and growth of the AAVSO which are worth knowing as AAVSO history. These facts also provide insight into how benevolence and opportunity, dedication and determination, interest and indifference, as well as luck and serendipity, have always been a part of that history.

2. Ostensible and virtual Headquarters

The AAVSO had no physical headquarters when it published its first annual report of October 10, 1911, other than the address of Corresponding Secretary, William Tyler Olcott, 62 Church Street, Norwich, Connecticut (Figure 1). Indeed, during the first eight years of the AAVSO's existence, neither Olcott nor anyone else gave any thought to the matter. The early correspondence (and AAVSO Recorder Leon Campbell's recollection of this time) shows only a concern with the primary goal of the association, which was to provide observations of variable stars to Edward C. Pickering, Director of Harvard College Observatory (HCO), and—to this end—to aid volunteer observers with charts and advice (Campbell 1931).

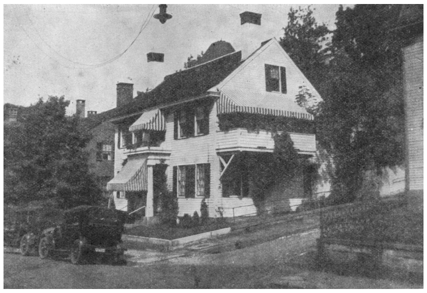

Figure 1. The first, unofficial, home of the AAVSO was the Olcott residence, 62 Church Street, Norwich, Connecticut. The dome of Olcott's octagonal observatory is visible between the chimneys. This photo was made probably in 1921 when the dome was built. The photo is from an article by Olcott in *Popular Astronomy*, January 1930.

In addition to the ostensible AAVSO Headquarters in Norwich, a list of virtual headquarters can be made: the monthly *Popular Astronomy* reports of AAVSO Variable Star Observations; the location where the first meeting of the AAVSO was held on April 8, 1914, "a restaurant on the south side of Forty Second St. a few doors west of Madison Av. New York City" (Olcott 1936); and meetings held at HCO and other institutions and members' residences (see AAVSO 1993).

Even by the time of the November 1917 Organizational Meeting "held at the Harvard College Observatory," it seems that the AAVSO felt no need to pursue the matter of establishing a home of its own since its reason for being was simply to support the variable star work of HCO.

3. The AAVSO's own room

Two events marked the first steps in the ongoing maturation of the AAVSO as an independent organization. The first was that on November 18, 1918, the AAVSO was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; the second was the death of HCO Director E. C. Pickering on February 3, 1919.

Whether it was because of the AAVSO's formal organization during 1917–1918, or a response to the death of Pickering, or both—it is not known why—the acting HCO Director, Solon I. Bailey, offered the AAVSO its own room at HCO. This is the first mention of a physical space for the AAVSO—announced at the November 8, 1919, Annual Meeting of the AAVSO. According to the general meeting minutes:

"Professor Bailey extended a cordial invitation to the members of the Association to visit Harvard College Observatory, and stated that a room in the Observatory had been set apart for the use of members of the Association" (AAVSO 1919).

4. The E. C. Pickering Memorial

4.1. The AAVSO's Pickering Memorial

At the same time as Solon I. Bailey provided the AAVSO with its own room, the AAVSO Council—most likely at the urging of Olcott—wished to express their admiration and gratitude to Pickering for his support and guidance of the Association. At the AAVSO's annual meeting held at HCO on November 8, 1919, an AAVSO Pickering Memorial Committee comprising Annie J. Cannon, Anne S. Young, W. T. Olcott, and Charles E. Barns, presented a resolution honoring Pickering. This was published by the AAVSO in the form of a memorial booklet (AAVSO 1920)—the place of publication being Olcott's home, Norwich, Connecticut.

Shortly after the memorial booklet appeared, Olcott proposed that a more enduring memorial to Pickering be established in the form of an observatory building. Professor Anne S. Young, of Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass., mentions this in a December 10, 1920, letter to Leon Campbell:

> I am, of course, very much interested in the proposal for a memorial for Prof. Pickering. The suggestion that an Observatory be built and endowed with a sufficient sum to pay for expenses and the salary of a Director sounds rather ambitious, but perhaps there are people who can give large sums. We would have to have from $75000 to $100000 for such an undertaking, wouldn't we? (Young 1920)

Olcott's proposal is also mentioned in a letter written on December 21, 1920, by Leon Campbell, to AAVSO member/observer Stephen Crasco Hunter:

> Has Olcott written to you of the proposed Memorial to the late professor Pickering which the Association is thinking of launching? It may seem to be a big bite for us at present, but I think it can be put across if we all put our shoulder to the wheel. Olcot[t] has started it with an offer of $5000 and a site if we should decide to build a separate E. C. Pickering Observatory of the AAVSO. It might take the form of the erection of a good telescope at some existing observatory, if deemed best. The plans are still in the making. We welcome suggestions from any of our members. (Campbell 1920)

Although publicized with notices in the *New York Times*, and other papers (Anon. 1921; Campbell 1929), the concept of a separate observatory building was not realized; and the offer of $5,000 and a site from Olcott never materialized; Olcott's total donation to the Memorial fund was $1,000 (AAVSO undated-a). Instead, the more practical idea of erecting a telescope at an existing observatory was taken up. HCO seemed to be the logical choice—an observatory dome for this purpose already existed in HCO's Building A. No firm decisions were made at this time, however.

A further development must have helped to crystallize Olcott's vision of a memorial observatory in the minds of the AAVSO Council: In a letter to Leon Campbell (June 17, 1921), AAVSO member Arthur C. Perry mentions Olcott's acquiring a telescope from the Charles A. Post estate for use as part of the Pickering memorial. The 6-inch refractor was donated to the AAVSO by the widow of Charles A. Post of Bayport, Long Island (Perry 1921).

Olcott's proposal for a memorial observatory was formalized at the November 4, 1921, AAVSO Council Meeting:

> The Secretary outlined a plan for a Memorial to the late Professor Edward C. Pickering, that the Association inaugurate a movement to secure funds to erect finance and endow an Observatory, that should be the headquarters of the Association. It was proposed that the sum of $100,000 be raised for this purpose and that the proposed Observatory be erected in the vicinity of Cambridge. (AAVSO 1921)

The Memorial Committee was expanded, and now consisted of Henry Norris Russell, Annie J. Cannon, Anne S. Young, Charles Y. McAteer, David B. Pickering, Michael J. Jordan, Edwin B. Frost, and W. T. Olcott, Chair.

Very quickly, the idea of an independent observatory was given up in favor of using some existing site on the HCO grounds. Later in 1921, a circular by the Memorial committee announced that: "The advice of the noted astronomers has been sought, and it is universally agreed that any memorial to Professor Pickering should be, in some way, closely associated with the Harvard College Observatory.... Acting on this advice, tentative arrangements have been made with Dr. Harlow Shapley...whereby the necessity of an independent observatory to establish this memorial has been obviated."

The circular further states, "The [HCO-sited] Observatory would provide the necessary quarters for offices and a dome in which the six-inch telescope, so generously donated by Mrs. Charles A. Post, can be suitably mounted. These rooms would be considered the headquarters of the Association, at which place all matters pertaining to the organization could be handled and to which its members would feel free to come for advice and help.... This arrangement would leave the memorial fund free to be devoted almost entirely to research" (including "acquiring the services of a professional astronomer") "in the study of variable stars, to increasing a popular interest in astronomy, and to furthering the work of the Association" (Russell *et al.* 1921). Announcements of the establishment of the Pickering Memorial Observatory at Harvard College Observatory, and descriptions of the work of the AAVSO were written by Professors S. A. Mitchell and Henry Norris Russell, and published in *Science* (Mitchell 1922) and *Scientific American* (Russell 1922).

The observatory/headquarters was located in HCO's Building A (Figure 2). First light of the 6" C. A. Post Memorial Telescope at the new AAVSO observatory took place on September 16, 1922, when Leon Campbell tested the lens in the region of V Her. He recorded in the Post Logbook: "Var susp.—13.4 distinctly seen" (probably the star observed was the one now known as HZ Her; AAVSO 1922).

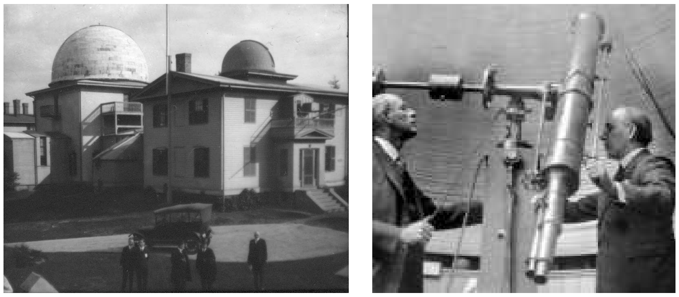

Figure 2. Left: Harvard College Observatory's Building A (right foreground). On the first floor to the right of the stairs was Leon Campbell's office, and AAVSO HQ. Right: AAVSO President David B. Pickering (left) and AAVSO member/observer Morgan Cilley of Lewisburg, West Virginia (right), examine the AAVSO's C. A. Post Memorial Telescope in the dome on Building A. *AAVSO Archives.*

4.2. Harvard takes control

During the period 1921–1924 HCO's Director Shapley, Professor Solon Bailey, and AAVSO Secretary Olcott—with the aid of AAVSO member/observer Tilton C. H. Bouton—independently set out on a series of Pickering Memorial lecture tours in an effort to raise money for the Memorial (Campbell 1921, 1922).

By January 1930 it became evident to all that the huge sum of $100,000 could never be raised through individual contributions or subscriptions alone (Fisher 1930). The Great Depression had begun, and consequently, expectations were lowered. In a concession to reality, or perhaps in desperation, the AAVSO Council in June 1930 unanimously approved a plan—suggested by Shapley—"to turn over to the Harvard College Observatory the Edward C. Pickering Memorial Endowment" (AAVSO 1930). Under this plan, HCO would control the endowment, and the Harvard Corporation would arrange to add the necessary funding to bring the endowment total to $100,000. The AAVSO had raised a total of $6,356.76 for the AAVSO Pickering Memorial Fund by May 25, 1931, when the last of four installments of this sum was paid to Harvard (Fisher 1931; Harvard College 1931).

At the October 16, 1931, AAVSO Council meeting Dr. Shapley reported for the HCO Pickering Memorial Fund Committee and presented a list of suggestions for how the Memorial Fund was to be distributed. Among them were "That Mr. Leon Campbell receive the title of 'Pickering Memorial Astronomer', and a clerk be appointed to assist him"; and "That a room in the Observatory be equipped and set apart as Headquarters of the Association...." (AAVSO 1931) The AAVSO Council minutes also noted: "Mr. Campbell suggested that his room in the Observatory be equipped as the Headquarters of the Association. The suggestion was approved."

What was left for the AAVSO after all of this was the Post Telescope—still mounted in the dome of Building A, the provision and outfitting of an AAVSO room—which was already Leon Campbell's office—the southwest corner on the first floor of Building A (Gingerich 2006, Hoffleit 2006), a wall plaque, and funding for variable star research—mainly in the form of a salary for a "Pickering Memorial Astronomer" who was already a paid staff member of HCO.

In terms of physical property, for all of the proposals, procedures, and proclamations, nothing really new had been done for the AAVSO, and nothing at all had been changed since Solon Bailey's 1919 invitation to use a room at HCO. Even Leon Campbell's suggestion that his office at HCO be equipped as the AAVSO Headquarters did not advance the AAVSO in terms of its physical presence, since Campbell had been informally assisting the AAVSO there since 1915, and had assumed the duties of the Recording Secretary since Howard O. Eaton's resignation of that post in December 1924 (Campbell 1924, 1925). About the only thing that Harvard gave freely, and the AAVSO gained, in this bargain was a certain amount of "prestige."

4.3. Harvard College Observatory's AAVSO Headquarters

On January 5, 1932, William Tyler Olcott wrote to congratulate Leon Campbell on his "suggestions for the renovation of our room at the H.C.O." adding: "the suggestions are very good and should make the room very attractive, and a real Headquarters of the A.A.V.S.O." (Olcott 1932).

In the letter Olcott reiterates his original vision in which a truly meaningful AAVSO Memorial to Pickering would be in the form of an observatory building, but acknowledges that an endowment would be more fruitful in the long run. However, it is clear in this letter that Olcott's esteem for Pickering is quite separate from, and more important than, the mundane and practical matters of a headquarters room:

> A hundred years from now a visitor at the H.C.O. gazes at the tablet and it means nothing to him whatsoever. If we had erected an Observatory it would have been known then world over as the A.A.V.S.O. Memorial to Professor Pickering[.] Because we have wisely chosen to embody the Memorial in a Fund is no reason why the facts should not be as widely known.
>
> I think the Memorial tablet should adequately and in a dignified way express the actual facts. They are facts that all who contributed may well be proud of. (Olcott 1932)

However, Leon Campbell's response to Olcott (January 14, 1932) diminishes even that noble sentiment: Campbell reminds Olcott that "Although we have not lost sight of the fact that the A.A.V.S.O. did start this memorial to Professor Pickering, on the other hand only about one sixteenth was raised by the Association and the remainder from other sources. For this reason it might not be the best idea to call the Memorial a straight A.A.V.S.O. Memorial to Professor Pickering" (Campbell 1932)—thus shifting the place of the AAVSO (which originated the idea of the Memorial) to that of a minor contributor.

Further correspondence between Olcott and Campbell eventually resulted in a simplified tablet inscription in which the AAVSO is named, which would be mounted on or near the door to the AAVSO room.

In her account of the AAVSO's October 1932 meeting, AAVSO member/observer Lois T. Slocum describes the new Headquarters:

> This is the room in Building A of the Observatory which has been turned over to the AAVSO. Here Mr. Campbell, Pickering Memorial Astronomer and Recorder has his desk. One wall is lined with files in which the record sheets of the individual observers and the curves for the various stars are kept. On another are the books belonging to the association all well arranged and easily accessible to anyone desirous of using them. From the west wall Edward C. Pickering looks down on the new home of the society in which he was keenly interested. Under his portrait there has just been placed a bronze tablet with the following inscription:

> *In Memory of Edward Charles Pickering Founder of the American Association of Variable Star Observers Attesting the establishment in 1931 of the Pickering Memorial Fund to promote the study of Variable Stars.* (Slocum 1933)

5. Towards an independent Headquarters

The symbiotic relationship between the AAVSO and HCO lasted for forty-two years. That the AAVSO and HCO felt so much at home with one another was largely because of the benevolence of HCO Director Harlow Shapley. The work of the AAVSO was in all respects the work of HCO at this time, culminating in the preparation by Leon Campbell of "mean light curves and the dates of maxima and minima from 1921 to 1942, for all the AAVSO long period variables" (Campbell 1955). Campbell continued this work (interrupted by World War II) to include data from 1942 to 1949. The seemingly constant and comfortable niche the AAVSO had found at HCO was in fact undergoing changes all of the time: W. T. Olcott retired to Florida, then died in 1936 while giving a talk on astronomy in New Hampshire; Leon Campbell retired in 1949, and died in 1951; Shapley asked one of his HCO assistants, Margaret Walton Mayall, to take over the duties of AAVSO Recorder in 1949; and then Shapley himself retired in 1952, succeeded by Donald Menzel as Acting HCO Director, who then became Director in 1954.

Menzel came under pressure from the Harvard Corporation to rationalize the operation of HCO. This set in motion a series of queries, reports, deliberations, debates, and pleas throughout 1953, in which HCO at first asked the AAVSO to justify the value of their work, and then—on October 5, 1953, the President and Fellows of Harvard College (on the recommendation of the HCO Council, led by Menzel) declared that the study of variable stars was no longer as important as it was when the E. C. Pickering Memorial endowment was established at HCO in 1931 (AAVSO 1920–1954; Harvard College 1953). With this proclamation, the Recorder's salary and the AAVSO's operations and office space would no longer be supported, and only the income from the original $6,356.76 contribution towards the Pickering Memorial fund would continue to be paid to the AAVSO.

In a final, terse memo of December 8, 1953, to Margaret Mayall, Menzel announced that Building A would be torn down, and that the AAVSO would have to vacate the premises by January 1st (Menzel 1953). A small group of AAVSO members and friends rallied to help with the move on January 2, 1954 (Anon. 1953).

The numerous letters, minutes, and circulars that were written during this time clearly show how stunned—and soon outraged—were Margaret Mayall, her staff, the AAVSO's Council, members, and friends. Margaret Mayall took action on several fronts: she dealt with Menzel, HCO, and the Harvard Corporation's representatives—such as dean McGeorge Bundy; she worked with the Council and responded to members' concerns; she looked to the astronomical community for support; and she explored and pursued sources of income wherever she could find them. At the same time, she had to find a new location for AAVSO's operations (AAVSO 1920–1954).

At this point, AAVSO Headquarters was once again of no fixed address, leading a virtual, administratively fragmented, existence. A space could not be secured on such short notice; consequently, books and records were stored at several locations, including the homes of director Margaret Mayall, administrative assistant Helen Stephansky, and secretary Clinton B. Ford (Stephansky 1954).

Indicative of how comfortable the AAVSO was with having been under the wing of such a large institution as Harvard, Margaret Mayall's first thoughts of a new Headquarters location gravitated towards academic institutions. In October 1953, Margaret was relieved to receive an offer from Boston University's Physics Research Laboratory (AAVSO 1953). Unfortunately, the offer was withdrawn on January 6, 1954—but only, according to Stephansky, after BU officials had spoken with HCO's Menzel (Stephansky 1954).

Symbolic of the deconstruction of an earlier dream—the AAVSO removed its Post Telescope from under the dome of HCO's Building A on January 4, 1954, and sent it to Brown University for use by the Skyscrapers astronomy club. (The Post Refractor was eventually purchased by collector and AAVSO member Robert Ariail.) The final logbook entry by Margaret Mayall (AAVSO 1954)—surprisingly neutral in tone under the circumstances—reads:

> Jan. 4, 1954
>
> 6" Post dismantled for temporary storage. Building A, HCO to be demolished to make way for new building.
>
> Work on 6" Post done by Walter Locke & Margaret Harwood.
>
> Margaret W. Mayall, Recorder

6. The first office of an independent, non-profit, organization

In January 1954, the AAVSO Headquarters left its academic cocoon and thrust itself into the commercial and business center of Cambridge.

Finding herself and the AAVSO without any sort of institutional safety net, Margaret Mayall desperately secured a lease on a one-room office (405 square feet) at 4 Brattle Street in Harvard Square (Figure 3), about 0.6 mile east of HCO.

On January 15, 1954, AAVSO administrative assistant Helen Stephansky described the new office to chart curator Richard W. Hamilton:

> Our office here is quite a place. We managed to get all the books in, having bookcases built from floor to ceiling all along one wall. The other wall is packed from door at one end to window at other with eleven filing cabinets! (Stephansky 1954)

Brattle Street was only a few hundred feet from the main campus of Harvard University, but it was a very different world altogether. No longer working amidst benevolent and understanding astronomy colleagues, the AAVSO was now just another business enterprise occupying one room in an old-fashioned office building on a very busy street; furthermore, no one in the neighboring offices had any idea what "AAVSO" was—passersby only saw a room crammed full of books and papers (Figure 3).

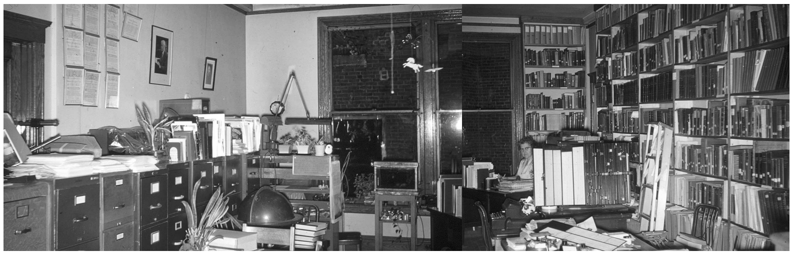

Figure 3. A composite image showing the AAVSO's one-room Headquarters at 4 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, sometime after 1954. AAVSO Director Margaret Mayall is seated at her desk in the right background.

The AAVSO stayed at 4 Brattle Street for eleven years, seeing its 50th anniversary come and go in 1961. Throughout this time the organization did whatever it took to keep afloat: Margaret volunteered her services as Director; she sought out sources of funding—both institutional and individual, and she applied for grants—including some that had only a peripheral connection, or none at all, with variable star astronomy.

On June 26, 1963, Margaret Mayall received a letter from the landlord of 4 Brattle Street stating that a rent increase from $80 to $90 per month was unavoidable. To add insult to injury, the letter concluded:

> Also, it has become necessary for me to ask you to keep your door closed during business hours or ajar. It is not that the personnel is not unattractive but the great mass of papers, books, etc. takes away from the appearance that your next door neighbor tries to create (Dow 1963).

It was nearly time for Headquarters to move once again.

7. The Headquarters that never was

With Headquarters still at 4 Brattle Street, discussion at the May 21, 1965, Council Meeting turned to the topic of the AAVSO's Endowment Fund. The Treasurer, Richard H. Davis, reported that "unless new research contracts...or other income sources...were forthccoming, the General Fund would be 'in the red' starting about February 1966." He further informed the Council that the endowment would have to be doubled "in order for its income to provide the major portion of the Association's operating budget..." (AAVSO 1965a).

Yet, on the very next day, the Finance Committee ended its meeting with a discussion of the "long-range possibility of instituting a new Fund to be called the Building Fund, devoted to eventual purchase or construction of a permanent building or office for the Association's headquarters." The minutes add that, "The Director pointed out that the present office space in Cambridge has been inadequate for some time, and that rental rates there would probably be increased again in the immediate future.... Mr. Mayall agreed to sketch tentative plans for a new building..." (AAVSO 1965b).

Possibly inspired by the opening of the Schoonover Observatory in Lima, Ohio—constructed and operated by amateurs, through a philanthropic gift of $38,000 (Ford 1964a)—the recent progress being made in construction of the Ford Observatory on Mount Peltier, California (Ford 1964b), and the dedication of a telescope at the Stamford Museum in Connecticut (Ford 1965), architect Newton Mayall (the AAVSO Director's husband) by October 1965 drew an ambitious set of plans for an elaborate three-story office building (plus basement), including an observatory dome to house the Post refractor. Surprisingly, Newton Mayall drew a second set of only slightly less elaborate "Alternate Plans" in May 1966 (Mayall, R. N. 1965, 1966).

Featured in the plans were: (main floor) an elevator; loading dock; library (800 feet of shelving); "computing center;" two staff offices; a file room, a "stock, mimeo, and collating" room; Director's office; reception/secretary room; conference room, chart room; (second floor) a 150-seat auditorium, with stage and projection booth; an exhibition hall; equipment room; lounge; record room; (third floor) observatory dome; photo lab; darkroom; radio and time room; equipment and storage room; and two office rooms. Left off of the "alternate plans" were a basement "garage for staff" and a machine shop.

The three floors (not including the basement) would have covered an area of ~66' × 75', ~14,850 square feet.

These plans, and the "building fund endowment" were apparently never discussed again; and this grand vision of AAVSO Headquarters never materialized.

8. At the foot of Observatory Hill

The Director's prediction made at 4 Brattle Street held true: on July 1, 1965, Margaret Mayall wrote to Secretary Clinton B. Ford that she and her staff were about to move:

> I am moving the office from 4 Brattle to 187 Concord Ave. in the block just beyond HCO. After a dreadfully time-consuming couple of weeks, I found this place and decided to take it. It is 1st floor, apartments over it—large room approx. 18 × 28 and a private office 11 × 11, plus some

> alcove space. Rent is $160/mo., much better than anything else of comparable size, location and type of building. (Mayall, M. W. 1965)

The AAVSO's third official Headquarters (Figure 4) was only 600 feet west of HCO. A happy convenience in that it brought Margaret and her staff close to the Harvard astronomers, the astronomy library, and the Sky Publishing Corporation offices (publisher of *Sky & Telescope* then located in HCO's Building D).

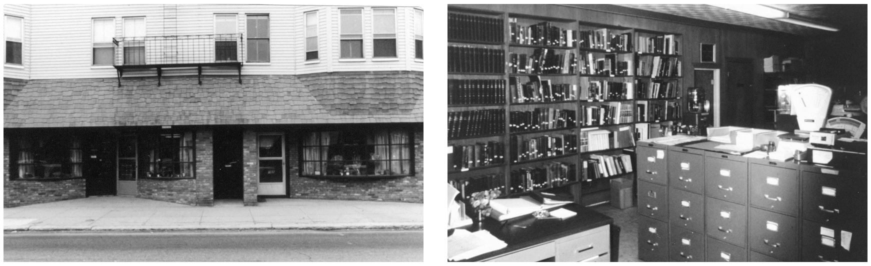

Figure 4. AAVSO Headquarters at 187–189 Concord Avenue comprised adjacent storefront offices (shown on the exterior photo at left). The "front office" (shown at right) was accessed via the right-hand storefront.

The adjoining storefront at 189 Concord became available and was also rented. The Concord Avenue location must have seemed enormous: there were two large storefront rooms connected by a small hallway, and two smaller back rooms—one of which served as the Director's office. This was a ground-floor flat having large windows which admitted plenty of light at the front of the rooms. Above the office in this wood-framed building were three floors of apartments (AAVSO undated-b).

In 1967 the AAVSO took the first steps towards using computers in the processing of its monthly observations—at the time this involved entering data on punch cards (there was some use of the cards as early as 1962). By the 1970s, with two punch card machines at Headquarters and the growing number of boxes of cards, the AAVSO was once again finding it difficult to operate efficiently.

Margaret Mayall retired in 1974—and Janet A. Mattei was elected Director. AAVSO Headquarters remained at 187 Concord for twelve more years. All the while more books, journals, papers, and punch cards accumulated.

9. 25 Birch Street

On August 6, 1986, the AAVSO formally opened its new Headquarters at 25 Birch Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The building was dedicated as the Clinton B. Ford Astronomical Data and Research Center in honor of the AAVSO's long-time Secretary. This was the fulfillment of a dream—especially after thirty years of renting office space—that one day the AAVSO would own its Headquarters site.

As the AAVSO's operations and staffing grew through the 1970s and 1980s, the rooms at 187 Concord became more crowded. Fears of fire damage and loss of data and other records became very real in that old wood-framed structure.

The AAVSO Council and Director Janet Mattei decided that it was time to find a new location. Then Second Vice President Keith Danskin went on a search for suitable office space that might be leased—and he found it (Figure 5), right next to the Sky Publishing Corp. offices (which had also moved away from HCO by then). Here is where Secretary Clint Ford stepped-in: after intensive deliberations with the owner, Clint persuaded him to sell the Birch Street property to the AAVSO, with Clint generously providing the necessary funding for the purchase.

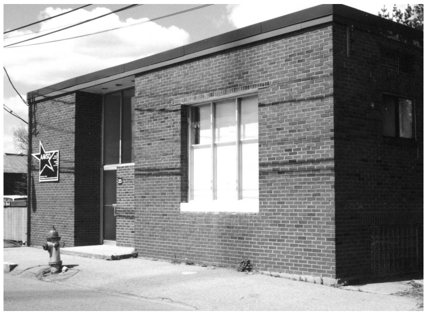

Figure 5. AAVSO Headquarters, 25 Birch Street , Cambridge.

The building on 25 Birch Street in Cambridge was purchased October 30, 1985. The hard-working Headquarters staff had two months to prepare for the move, but the actual packing of books, records, and office equipment was accomplished in just ten days. There was also time spent at the new headquarters to paint, clean, and make things ready. This included the construction of shelving and work areas by a carpentry crew consisting of AAVSO members Roy Lee, Ed Halbach, Keith Danskin, and Mike Mattei. The move was made in one and a half days, on Saturday, January 25, and on Tuesday, January 28, 1986. The entire staff helped the professional movers at both ends of the journey. Sadly, on Tuesday all were stunned on hearing the news of the space shuttle Challenger disaster.

It took the entire spring to settle into the new office space. The staff were not only kept busy with unpacking and setting up shop (particularly the 500-plus boxes of computer cards), they also had to attend to the daily business of the AAVSO.

Things gradually took shape: the first Council and Financial Committee meetings were held at the new headquarters in March, 1986, and the staff smoothly shifted gears from coping with the labor and disarray of the move to making preparations for the 75th Anniversary Meeting. A succession of visitors came to see and take delight in the new building over the next few months, including: former Director Margaret Mayall; astronomers Helen Sawyer Hogg, George Wallerstein, Dorrit Hoffleit; Frank Bateson, Director of the Variable Star Section of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand; and former AAVSO staff assistant Florence Campbell Bibber (AAVSO Recorder Leon Campbell's daughter). The parade of professional astronomers, and legendary amateur observers coming to Headquarters grew as the meeting date drew near—perhaps the most noteworthy of these was the amateur turned professional who was then the last living charter member of the AAVSO, Dr. Willem J. Luyten.

Everyone, especially the staff, marvelled at how much more room was now available for storage and work areas; these well-lighted, open spaces were a welcomed contrast to the dingy, dark, and cramped storefront headquarters with the sagging wood floors. There was even space for a refrigerator, a microwave oven, and a dining table; there were now a separate mail/copy room, separate storage/stock rooms, more library shelf space than could be filled, a computer room, an archive room, a large, open, meeting room, and three rest rooms.

In August 1986, the AAVSO felt on top of the world with a bright future ahead. Indeed, the new headquarters saw a quick succession of important technical improvements, new astronomical research and educational opportunities, and the fast growth of the International Database—including the computerization of 1.8 million archival observations.

10. Another new era

After twenty years of progress and growth at the Birch Street headquarters, the AAVSO found itself once again needing to economize office space. The 500-plus boxes of computer cards were finally declared redundant and were discarded, but network servers, stock publications, supplies, and more filing cabinets took their place; the library and serials shelves were filled to capacity, the spacious meeting room became the location of five computer work stations, and any remaining floor space was given over to archival storage. Furthermore, anything kept in the building's lower level—especially archival material—was subject to flooding damage: during the twenty years of occupancy, there were two "ten-year storms" during which two to four inches of water accumulated faster than it could be pumped out. Water damage to papers and equipment was minimal—most being on pallets or raised shelving—but much staff time and labor was expended in moving boxes, shelves, and equipment, so that the floor, carpet, and lower walls could be dried and sanitized. Aside from all of this, there were many ongoing maintenance issues which any owner of an older home would recognize: roofing and plumbing problems, replacement of one of the two furnaces, and so on.

At the time of the purchase of 25 Birch Street, it was understood that the city would allow the construction of a third floor, if it was ever needed. The idea surfaced from time to time, but it was never acted upon.

After the death of Janet Mattei in 2004, and the election of a new Director in 2005, the problem of space at Headquarters again became an issue: the stock of publications grew; more computer work stations and work tables were established as more staff, student assistants, and visiting astronomers were added; and there were several bequests and gifts of books and archival material received, in addition to the thirty years of papers and files accumulated during the Mattei era which now were to become part of the AAVSO's archives.

The new Director, Arne Henden, was quick to make note of the lack of space and the limited facilities, and the woeful lack of room for expansion of any kind. Options were considered: the third floor idea was raised again; contractors and architects were consulted in order to hear their opinions about what we could and could not do to increase our space either vertically or horizontally.

At about the same time, Sky Publishing announced that it would be relocating its operations to offices about one-half mile from their present location. Their three buildings were put up for sale—two were purchased by housing developers. The AAVSO expressed interest in the main building, but a preliminary offer was rejected in favor of a higher bidder. A few months later, as it turned out, the potential buyer withdrew, and Sky Publishing asked if the AAVSO was still interested. This time, the offer was accepted, and the Council gave its approval to go ahead with the purchase.

So, in early 2007—the AAVSO's 96th year—another address will be added to the historical list. The building at 49 Bay State Road, Cambridge, Mass., is only about 100 feet—just across the street—from 25 Birch. It consists of three structures, all connected with internal access. The main part has two floors of office space; the second part is one floor of open space (formerly used by Sky Publishing as a stock and shipping area) which also contains several side rooms of offices, a kitchen, shower facility, and utility rooms; the third part is a smaller two-story structure which is also divided into office spaces. The total area is roughly 12,000 square feet, about twice the size of 25 Birch Street.

Like all of the AAVSO's previous locations, this newest Headquarters is a symbol of the hard work, loyalty, and support of the AAVSO's members and observers throughout the ninety-six years of its history.

11. Conclusion

There have been five AAVSO Headquarters locations during the lifetime of the organization, but the AAVSO did not enjoy the first of these until 1931–1932 when the terms of the Harvard Pickering Memorial Endowment were proposed and accepted by the AAVSO Council. In other words, even though the AAVSO membership was always welcome at HCO—particularly from about 1915 onwards—and the AAVSO was allowed to have a room, and then an observatory dome, for its use during the 1920s, the AAVSO nonetheless operated as an organization without an official Headquarters during the first twenty years of its existence.

That there was never any complaint made about this condition at that time shows how much the AAVSO was focused on its mission of helping HCO to obtain variable star observations. However, as the organization grew, as the number of observations contributed increased, and as the study and science of variable star astronomy was refined, so too grew the need for a formalized arrangement of administrative, organizational, and scientific offices. This formalization could not have taken place—or at least would have been much more difficult to achieve—had not HCO taken control of the AAVSO Pickering Memorial Endowment so that money would be available to pay for the necessary scientific and administrative help and infrastructure.

When circumstances changed at HCO in 1953–1954, and the Harvard

Corporation withdrew its support of variable star astronomy—and the AAVSO's work in particular—the AAVSO found itself as it was in 1911 as far as not having a real Headquarters. Despite the immediate disruption and hardship this entailed, the AAVSO quickly learned how to become an independent organization, both administratively and scientifically. The succession of AAVSO Headquarters through the years exemplifies the extent of its departure from dependence upon the benevolent but indifferent Harvard College Observatory (and institutions like it), the growth in confidence and determination of its members (most being amateur astronomers), and the emergence and worldwide recognition of its expertise and contributions to variable star astronomy.

References

AAVSO 1919, "General Meeting Minutes," AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1920, *Memorial to E. Charles Pickering: 1846–1919*, AAVSO, Norwich, CT.

AAVSO 1920–1954, AAVSO/HCO files, AAVSO Org. MWM Box 7, 7A, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1921, "Council Meeting Minutes," AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1922, Log of the C. A. Post Memorial Telescope (September 16), AAVSO Org. LC Box 5, HCO Logbooks, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1930, "Council Meeting Minutes," AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1931, "Council Meeting Minutes," AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1953, "Council Meeting Minutes" (October 9), AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1954, Log of the C. A. Post Memorial Telescope (January 4), AAVSO Org. LC Box 5, HCO Logbooks, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1965a, "Council Meeting Minutes" (May 21), AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1965b, "Finance Committee Minutes" (May 22), AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO 1993, *The Story of the AAVSO and AAVSO Observers and Observations 1911–1993*, AAVSO, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO undated-a [probably compiled in 1930 by W. J. Fisher], "List of Subscribers to the Edward C. Pickering Memorial Fund of the A.A.V.S.O." (1921–1922), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECPMem., Folder 1, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

AAVSO undated-b, floor plan of AAVSO Headquarters at 187 Concord Ave., AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Anon. 1921, Newspaper clippings announcing plans for the Pickering Memorial Observatory, AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 1, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Anon. [probably H. Stephansky] 1953, "Friends of the AAVSO!!!" (bulletin board posting), AAVSO Org. MWM Box 7 AAVSO/HCO Group 1, Folder f, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1920, letter to S. C. Hunter (December 21), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 4, S. C. Hunter, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1921, letter to A. S. Young (November 19), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 8, A. S. Young, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1922, letter to A. S. Young (April 1), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 8, A. S. Young, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1924, *Pop. Astron.*, **32**, 639.

Campbell, L. 1925, *Pop. Astron.,* **33**, 127.

Campbell, L. 1929, letter to D. B. Pickering (May 3), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 6, D. B. Pickering, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1931, *Variable Comments*, **2**, 45.

Campbell, L. 1932, letter to W. T. Olcott (January 14), AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Campbell, L. 1955, *Studies of Long Period Variables*, AAVSO, Cambridge, MA.

Dow, R. A. 1963, letter to M. W. Mayall (June 26), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 8, M. W. Mayall, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Fisher, W. J. 1930, letter to ECP Mem. Committee (January 23), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 2, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Fisher, W. J. 1931, “Final Report of the Treasurer of the Edward C. Pickering Memorial Fund of the American Association of Variable Star Observers” (May 25), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 1, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Ford, C. B. 1964a, letter to J. Ashbrook (September 10), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 4, Ford, Folder 3, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Ford, C. B. 1964b, letter to M. W. Mayall (October 1), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 4, Ford, Folder 3, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Ford, C. B. 1965, letter to M. W. Mayall (June 13), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 4, Ford, Folder 3, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Gingerich, O. 2006, private communication (August 31).

Harvard College 1931, certificates of gratitude (January–May 1931), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 1, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Harvard College 1953, resolution “At a meeting of the President and Fellows of Harvard College in Cambridge, October 5, 1953,” AAVSO Org. MWM Box 7, A AAVSO/HCO Group 3, Folder i, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Hoffleit, E. D. 2006, private communication (September 15).

Mayall, M. W. 1965, letter to C. B. Ford (July 1), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 4, C. B. Ford, Folder 3, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Mayall, R. N. 1965, “Proposed AAVSO Headquarters” (preliminary plans, October 1965), Planning and Research Associates, Boston, MA , C. B. Ford Coll. Box 4A, AAVSO HQ Plans, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Mayall, R. N. 1966, “Proposed AAVSO Headquarters” (alternate plans, May 1966), Planning and Research Associates, Boston, MA, C. B. Ford Coll. Box 4A, AAVSO HQ Plans, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Menzel, D. H. 1953, Harvard Observatory Memorandum to AAVSO (December 8), AAVSO Org. MWM Box 7, AAVSO/ HCO, Group 1, Folder a, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Mitchell, S. A. 1922, "The Edward C. Pickering Memorial" (reprint from *Science*, LV, No. 1427, May 5, 1922), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 2, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Olcott, W. T. 1932, letter to Leon Campbell (January 5), AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Olcott, W. T. 1936, *Variable Comments*, **3**, 38.

Perry, A. 1921, letter to L. Campbell (June 17), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 6, Perry, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Russell, H. N. 1922, "The American Association of Variable Star Observers—Its Work and Its Needs" (reprint from *Scientific American*, March 1922), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 2, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Russell, H. N., Cannon, A. J., Young, A. S., McAteer, C. Y., Pickering, D. B., Jordan, J. J., Frost, E. B., and Olcott, W. T. 1921, "The Edward C. Pickering Memorial Endowment" (Circular, AAVSO, Cambridge, MA), AAVSO Org. LC Box 1, ECP Mem., Folder 2, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Slocum, L. T. 1933, *Variable Comments*, **3**, 69.

Stephansky, H. 1954, letter to Richard W. Hamilton (January 15), AAVSO Corresp. MWM Box 5, R. W. Hamilton, Folder 1, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Young, A. S. 1920, letter to L. Campbell (December 10), AAVSO Corresp. LC Box 8, A. S. Young, AAVSO Archives, Cambridge, MA.

Table 1: Summary of AAVSO Headquarters locations.

Years	*Location and Notes*
1911–1931	No official Headquarters
1931–1954	Harvard College Observatory, Building A, Room 12, off of Concord Avenue; 1 work room, ~24' × 16', ~384 sq. ft.
1954–1965	4 Brattle Street, in Harvard Square, 0.6 mile east of HCO; 1 work room, ~15' × 27', ~405 sq. ft.
1965–1986	187 Concord Avenue, 600 feet west of HCO; 4 work rooms (plus basement), ~45' × 45' overall, ~2,025 sq. ft.
1965–1966	Plans for a HQ Building and Observatory (never constructed) 15+ work rooms, ~66' × 75', ~14,850 sq. ft. (on 3 floors, plus basement)
1986–2007	25 Birch Street, 0.6 mile west of HCO. 10 work rooms, ~50' × 60', ~6,000 sq. ft. (on 2 floors)
2007–present	49 Bay State Road, 0.6 mile west of HCO. ~12,000 sq. ft.