

Minutes of the XXVI International Scientific Instrument Symposium  
Harvard Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments  
The MIT Museum  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
6-11 September 2007

President: Paolo Brenni  
Secretary: Sara Schechner  
Treasurer: Marian Fournier

The Scientific Instrument Commission held its twenty-six annual symposium on 6-11 September 2007 in Cambridge where we were hosted by the Harvard Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments and the MIT Museum. Over 100 people attended the meeting.

### **1) Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Ewa Wyka and David Pantalony.

### **2) Review of Minutes from Last Meeting in Krakow, Poland, 2006.**

The Minutes of the 25th Plenary Session, held at the Jagiellonian University Museum in Krakow, Poland on 10-14 September 2006 were circulated and approved.

### **3) SIC Finances**

The Treasurer, Marian Fournier, reported by mail that the Commission had €3500 on 1 August 2006 in its bank account. The current balance on 1 September 2007 is €4150, which does not yet take into account the expenses for the Harvard Conference

#### *Receipts:*

€1125 transferred from IUHPS in February 2007 representing a grant of \$1300  
€ 400 from erasing the bank account of the former treasurer of the SIC

#### *Expenses:*

€775 (\$1000) for the symposium in Krakow, Poland, September 2006.  
€100 running costs bank account

### **4) Report of Ongoing Commission Activities**

#### *A. Online Resources and Initiatives*

**SIC website, [www.sic.iuhps.org](http://www.sic.iuhps.org)**

The SIC website continues to provide links with relevant outside resources. These now include the *Websters' Instrument Makers Database*, the *Online Register of Scientific Instruments (ISIN)*, and important collections of digitized trade catalogues of instrument makers. The links are updated frequently and expanded.

The SIC Bibliography is available online at our website. We also use our website to communicate news of upcoming meetings and reports about past events. In addition, the electronic mailing list, *RETE*, provides a useful and fast way for all members of the "instrument community" to communicate with each other. (One may subscribe at: <http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/rete/>).

The Commission formally thanks Dana Freiburger for his work as webmaster of the SIC site and the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford for its support.

***The SIC Bibliography***

Since 1983 the SIC has produced an online bibliography of the most relevant articles and books concerning the history of scientific instruments. This bibliography is constantly updated thanks to the generous collaboration of the Museum Boerhaave in Leiden and today includes about 3400 titles. This bibliography is posted on the Commission's website: [www.sic.iuhps.org](http://www.sic.iuhps.org). The bibliography was compiled this past year by Harry Leechburch, the librarian of the Boerhaave Museum. He will continue next year. The Commission formally thanks him.

## **B. SIC Publications**

Between 2001 and 2004, the Commission published a selection of papers read at its symposia or presented at conferences or workshops held under its auspices. Thanks to an agreement with the IMSS in Florence and to the generous support of a private sponsor, the SIC papers will appear in a new yearly publication, *Scientific Instruments and Collections: Studies Published under the Auspices of the Scientific Instrument Commission*. The first issue of this publication, entitled *European Collections of Scientific Instruments, circa 1550-1750*, will be printed at the beginning of next year. It will include a selection of papers presented at the 2004 SIC symposium in Dresden. Giorgio Strano is the editor-in-chief.

## **5) Future Activities and Meetings**

### **A. Scientific Instrument Commission Symposia**

2008 Lisbon

The XXVII SIC Symposium will be held in Portugal on 16-21 September 2008 with the sponsorship of the Museum of Science and Centre for the History of Science at the University of Lisbon. For details and registration, please visit the conference web site at <http://chcul.fc.ul.pt/sic2008/>.

2009 Budapest

The XXVIII SIC Symposium will be part of the XXIII International Congress of History of Science and Technology, which will be held in Budapest from July 28 until August 2, 2009. Details will follow later this year.

### **B. Other Future Meetings**

*Colloque Patrimoine scientifique et technique, culture et société*

Musée des arts et métiers

Paris, France 13-14 March 2008

For details, please visit the website for the conference:

<http://www.arts-et-metiers.net/musee.php?P=214&id=195&lang=ang&flash=f>

## **1) Commission News**

Rich Kremer reported on the meeting, SICU2, and inserted the following report in the minutes:

A second International Workshop on Historic Scientific Instrument Collections in the University (SICU2), co-sponsored by the Scientific Instrument Commission and the University of Mississippi, was held from 21-24 June 2007 in Oxford, Mississippi at Ole Miss. Thomas Marshall and Maribeth Stolzenburg of the University of Mississippi's Department of Physics & Astronomy and Albert Sperath, Director of the University Museum, organized the meeting, advised by a steering committee comprised of Jamie Day, Antonio Garcia Belmar, Rich Kremer, Anne McMahon, Dave Pantalony, Sara Schechner, and Steve Turner.

About 70 curators, historians and scientists from more than 12 countries participated in the workshop. Three keynote addresses sketched major themes for the meeting. Marta Lourenço (Lisbon) provided an overview of the political economy of university collections in Europe. Frank Winkler (Middlebury) described an undergraduate physics seminar on instruments that he had taught at Middlebury College in collaboration with an exhibit designer from the college's art

museum that resulted in an exhibition. And Paolo Brenni (Florence, Paris) proposed new ways of designing exhibits, firing up old apparatus for lecture demonstrations, and creating on-line videos of instruments in action, all with the goal of opening university collections to wider publics. Another 40 papers in about ten sessions explored practical problems of collection management; ways of collaborating with university science departments, libraries, archives, art museums; and research that could only be conducted in university collections where the artifacts enjoy richly documented local provenances (so-called "thick instruments"). We also heard reports on several little known university collections, especially from Mexican colleagues.

A final discussion, led by Dave Pantalony, produced a list of suggestions for strengthening the informal networks that are growing among people who care for university collections. Participants agreed that we need to share information about teaching with apparatus, lecture demonstrations, the identification of mystery objects, dealing with hazardous materials, and creating on-line exhibits and videos of working instruments (see Roland Wittje's report below). We also discussed whether the next SICU meeting might be held at a Mexican university.

In addition to visiting the Millington-Barnard collection of philosophical apparatus purchased in the 1850s by Ole Miss from leading Parisian makers, the Barnard Observatory (1859), the Kennon Observatory (1939) and William Faulkner's house, Rowan Oak, all at the University of Mississippi, participants traveled to the Mississippi River delta region, had lunch on a river steamboat, and visited several historic sites in Memphis. Ole Miss demonstrated its wonderful Southern hospitality and hosted a meeting that was both productive and enjoyable. Tom, Maribeth and Albert deserve our heartfelt thanks!

Like the first SICU workshop held at Dartmouth College in 2004, this meeting was funded in part by the U.S. National Science Foundation, which enabled the organizers to provide travel stipends to many of the international participants. The University of Mississippi also generously supported the workshop.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rich Kremer / 20 September 2008

Roland Wittje added the following report on developing a network for the circulation of films featuring scientific instruments:

At the International Workshop on Historic Scientific Instrument Collections in the University (SICU2) 21-24 June 2007 in Oxford Mississippi, Thomas Marshall of the University of Mississippi and Steven Turner of the National Museum of American History proposed a network for the production and circulation of historical and didactic films featuring historical scientific instruments and experiments. We agreed on that the Scientific Instrument Commission might host such a network and that the project should be presented at the Scientific Instrument Symposium at Cambridge, Mass. The network will integrate two main issues:

- (1) To develop a filmography of films, both historical and contemporary, featuring historical scientific instruments and experiments. The filmography will be hosted on the SIC website. It should include contact addresses where to obtain the films and, if existing, a link to a webpage where the films can be viewed.
- (2) To provide a network for cooperation in the production of new films featuring instruments, their makers and their uses. It was noted that commercial sites, such as YouTube, might make it relatively easy to bring together such films for easy access worldwide.

So far the working group for organizing the network includes Paolo Brenni, Rich Kremer, Thomas Marshall, Steven Turner and Roland Wittje. We will soon post a message in Rete where we will ask for information about existing films for the filmography.

Please contact [roland.wittje@psk.uni-regensburg.de](mailto:roland.wittje@psk.uni-regensburg.de) if you have any questions or comments.

Best,  
Roland Wittje / 18 September 2007

**7) News from Members**

(I don't recall any)

**8) New Business**

(I don't recall any)

**9) Thanks**

Formal thanks were expressed to the local organizing committee for the present symposium, including Sara Schechner and Deborah Douglas, and the staff of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments and Department of the History of Science at Harvard University and of the MIT Museum for organizing the wonderful symposium in New England.

Respectfully submitted by  
Sara J. Schechner  
SIC Secretary