



Stuart Robert Pottasch

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Stuart Pottasch was born in New York in January 1932. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Engineering Physics at Cornell, and a Master's degree at Harvard. He was awarded his PhD in 1958 at the University of Colorado for a dissertation entitled "The Nova Outburst"; R.N. Thomas was his supervisor. In between, 1954/1955, he spent one year at the Leiden Observatory where he worked with H.C. van de Hulst on dark objects ("elephant trunks") seen against nebulae of ionized gas. Probably even more important to him was the fact that in Leiden he met his first wife, Anna Maria de Groot, with whom he was happily married until she died in 1989. After his PhD Pottasch spent periods of one to two years at the US National Bureau of Standards, the Paris/Meudon Observatory, the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton and the University of Indiana. In 1963, after wandering around for thirteen years and staying in nine different places, he accepted the new position of professor of Astrophysics at the University of Groningen and stayed there for the next 34 years.

Stuart arrived in the Netherlands during a period of prosperity for the universities and the sciences. Everywhere in the Western world people had high expectations about the future of higher education and scientific research. In Groningen this was particularly true for astronomy. There, at the end of the fifties, the Board of the University decided to revitalize the Kapteyn Laboratory after many years of stagnation and decline and for that purpose engaged a new, dynamic director: Adriaan Blaauw. Budgets and staff were continuously increasing, and new and exciting possibilities were coming within reach: space astronomy was beginning and a new organization called the European Southern Observatory was thinking of building a 3.5 m (!) telescope in the southern hemisphere (probably in South Africa). Linked with this new, optimistic spirit was the fermentation of new ideas concerning the way society was organized: dissatisfaction arose among the increasing numbers of students about the old-fashioned way in which politics, public administration and the universities were run. This dissatisfaction was felt all over Western Europe and in the USA. In Europe the tension came to a climax with the student revolt in Paris in May 1968. For the students at the University of Groningen Stuart Pottasch represented the changes they desired; his informality, his dislike of stuffiness and his insistence that even normal people could become professors were all new and pleasing phenomena: in the Netherlands each professor was still considered to be a supernatural being to be respected at all times and in all circumstances. Just imagine, he even asked the students to call him by his first name! New also was his refusal to be responsible for the research done by his students: he was and has always remained an adviser, never a director of research. Added to this, he started to teach subjects never taught before in an institute where the daily routine was still strongly influenced by Kapteyn and where astronomy continued to be a subject different from astrophysics. Of course, Blaauw, as the scientific director, wanted and

initiated many of the changes but he found in Stuart the personification of several modern aspirations. (Another weird idea of this young American was his prediction that in the not so distant future the University would have to deal with parking problems. Never before had we encountered anyone with such foolish thoughts).

During the first years in Groningen, Stuart's scientific interest focused on HII regions, abundance determinations and a variety of other subjects. But then this wandering from one scientific topic to another disappeared. When Paul Wesselius asked him to take part in the preparations for the construction of the first Dutch scientific satellite, ANS, Stuart chose planetary nebulae as possible targets, and thereafter he never deviated from that subject. After ANS came IRAS and now there is ISO. In between these projects he worked with many other astronomers, often much younger than himself, many coming from scientifically emerging nations.

When Stuart started his work on planetary nebulae it was a more or less "stand alone" subject "owned" by a limited, well established number of aficionados. Luckily for him this was also the time when observational possibilities and theoretical understanding were expanding very quickly, largely as a consequence of space-based astronomy, radio astronomy and infrared astronomy, and, thanks to more powerful computers, which provided better insight into the late stages of stellar evolution. Stuart contributed to these breakthroughs by using the UV observations of IUE and ANS, infrared observations with IRAS and ISO and radio observations with the Very Large Array. More than once he was the most cited participant at symposia on Planetary Nebulae. Perhaps his most outstanding quality is that he is always quick to recognize how new observational means can be put to work on scientific questions old and new. He proved to be full of practical ideas. This originality typifies Stuart more than the results that he obtained from his observations.

He deserves yet another word of praise as founding father, together with J. Steinberg, of the journal "Astronomy and Astrophysics". In 1968, a remarkable year, the two of them convinced leading astronomers in almost all West European countries to give up their national astronomical journals and have them replaced by one European scientific journal. Steinberg and Pottasch then became editors of this journal. In 1976 Stuart switched from being editor of the Main Journal to being Letters editor, and has remained in this position until today.

When in a happy marriage one partner dies, the probability that the other partner will marry again happily is rather high. Although there are few statistics to support this statement, it is true for Stuart. May he and Greet have a long, satisfying and happy life together!

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Paul Wesselius, Harm Habing, Henny Lamers.