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CLINTON BANKER FORD, 1913 - 1992

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Many years ago Clinton Ford told me he had three main interests: the AAVSO, his music (he was an able violinist and violist), and the stock market. Thanks to his expertise in the latter, he was able to build upon his inheritance and become a philanthropist contributing generously to the success of the other two. He was associated with the AAVSO for 65 years, 1927-1992, as a member for 64 years, and Secretary for 44, 1948-1992. When the AAVSO was evicted from Harvard in 1953 with an endowment of only about $6000, it was Clint who anonymously contributed to the expenses of the Association. Without his support, despite the valiant efforts of Margaret and Newton Mayall, it is questionable whether the organization could have survived. Few of us were aware that it was Clint who continued throughout the remainder of his life to support the AAVSO with yearly contributions toward salaries and other needs. In his will he left the AAVSO several million dollars in order to assure its continued success. And, of course, the long-cherished hope that after years of survival in crowded rented quarters, the AAVSO would have permanent quarters of its own was fulfilled in 1986 by his gift of the Clinton B. Ford Astronomical Data and Research Center, the Headquarters building of the AAVSO. He had hoped to buy the building outright, but the seller wanted a mortgage to provide for himself a regular income for at least a decade. The final payment was to be made on Clint's 80th birthday, an event to which he was eagerly looking forward. Alas, for him that was not to be. He had suffered from diabetes, but not adhered too strictly to the restrictions that disease demanded. After losing his leg to gangrene he seemed to lose all interest in life and died on September 23, 1992, exactly 65 years after his first recorded variable star observation (September 23, 1927) and nearly half a year before that critical birthday. At the 81st Annual Meeting of the AAVSO, friends gathered during the open house on Friday, October 23, to look at photographs, awards, observations, and other personal items of Clint's and share their thoughts about the man who had left such a lasting impression on everyone he met. A full memorial service will be held on February 27, 1993, near what would have been Clint's 80th birthday.

Clinton's first interest in astronomy was stimulated at an early age when his father (mathematics Professor Walter Ford, University of Michigan) told of seeing the spectacular Comet of 1881 as a small child. He showed Clint a copy of the painting of the comet by E. L. Trouvelot at the Observatory of the University of Michigan. Clint contributed his first variable star observation, of R Scuti, to the AAVSO before he was old enough to be eligible for membership; the following year at the Spring Meeting at Vassar he was elected as the youngest member, at age 16. Since then he contributed over 62,000 observations.

In the fall of 1928 the Fords spent the professor's Sabbatical year traveling in Europe, Jerusalem, and Egypt. Clinton kept a fascinating diary of his experiences. In Paris he was given lessons in French and the violin. Wherever they traveled he made a point of meeting as many astronomers as possible, including Hertzsprung, DeSitter, and Ritchey. He also asked for permission to observe variables through as many telescopes as possible and sent his observations to Leon Campbell.

Although his major interests had always been music and astronomy, he entered

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Carleton College in 1931 and majored in English, having found a fascination for completing the unfinished version of Coleridge's *Christabel*. But by his junior year he switched to astronomy, and then for his senior year transferred to the University of Michigan, where he also obtained an M. A. in 1936. Then music again became the major interest and he sought relevant employment in Chicago. Being unsuccessful, he took further instruction on the violin. There he met another gifted musician, Alice Guernsey, whom he married in 1940. For twenty years they enjoyed giving performances together and playing in the same chamber music and orchestral groups. But again astronomy prevailed and he found jobs teaching at Brown University and later at Smith College (1941-42), where Emilia Pisani was the only astronomy major and a brilliant student. (Later he was proud to note that as "Lee" Belserene she became the Director of the Maria Mitchell Observatory on Nantucket from 1978 to 1991.) Then wartime activities intervened. He became a lieutenant in the Navy, with various assignments, including teaching navigation. Whatever his primary appointments, he always participated in musical events, and observed variable stars as often as he could.

His first marriage having ended in divorce, in 1961 he married Eleanor D'Arcy, who was not a musician but supported his interests, and he was very fond of her three children; this marriage also ended in divorce. They acquired property in Wilton, Connecticut, where he built his own observatory housing a 12.5-inch reflector. Two years later he was instrumental in erecting another observatory at an elevation of 7,500 feet in Wrightwood, California, to house Claude Carpenter's 18-inch reflector. For his contributions, the observatory was named the Clinton B. Ford Observatory. It is intended especially for amateur observers. In 1966 Ford was elected to the Board of Ithaca College, which in 1983 awarded him an honorary Doctor of Science degree.

As the time of the 75th anniversary of the AAVSO approached, when the new Clinton B. Ford Astronomical Data and Research Center was to be dedicated, Clinton was persuaded to write his memoirs, *Some Stars, Some Music*. In its opening paragraph he wrote: "Most citizens of the USA are unaware of it, but an important event for them took place on March 1, 1913, the date when the first permanent peace-time federal income tax took effect. A simultaneous unimportant event was my birth; I came in with the income tax." His final statement reads, "I came in with the income tax. I'd like to say that when I go out, I'll take it with me. Some things really are impossible." However, he came close! A high percentage of his assets he left to tax-free institutions, including the AAVSO, the American Chamber Music Players Inc., Ithaca College, and The Center for the History of Physics of the American Institute of Physics, for a Clinton B. Ford Endowment to be devoted to projects in the history of physics and allied sciences with preference for projects in the history of astronomy.

[Author's note added in press: The AAVSO did indeed hold a memorial service at the celebration at AAVSO Headquarters on February 27, 1993, close to the date of Clint's 80th birthday. It was attended by numerous members, friends, and family, who paid tribute to his memory in words, poetry, and song. Letters sent by those unable to attend and by organizations around the world were read and displayed. Helen Kim, a young musician whose education Clint had sponsored, played some of Clint's favorite violin selections. Everyone celebrated Clint's 80th birthday with cake, champagne, and the burning of the mortgage on the Clinton B. Ford Astronomical Data and Research Center.]

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Figure 1. Clinton B. Ford, 1913-1992.

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