

THE MINOR PLANET BULLETIN

BULLETIN OF THE MINOR PLANETS SECTION OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF LUNAR AND PLANETARY OBSERVERS

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EDITORIAL: THE MINOR PLANET BULLETIN AT 50

With this issue, the *Minor Planet Bulletin* and the Minor Planets Section of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers commemorate their 50th year. (Official founding was in mid-1973.) At this milestone for our field, we are extremely fortunate to receive a continuing retrospective from the Founder, Professor Richard G. Hodgson. Commensurate with this milestone, Professor Frederick Pilcher, Minor Planets Section Coordinator since 1982 (formerly titled as “Recorder”) shares in this issue his recollections “A Lifetime with the Asteroids.” Professor Pilcher’s essay is a treasure trove of thoughts that are most gratefully received.

As an *MPB* subscriber since Volume 1 (and Editor since Volume 10), I simply note the personal and professional pleasure of interacting closely with these individuals over an entire half-century. But the greatest pleasure and satisfaction comes from connecting with and encouraging new and seasoned observers worldwide. It is simply “giving back” for the encouragement I received as a student entering the field. The enterprise of the *Minor Planet Bulletin* would not be possible without the dedicated volunteer service of Associate Editor Brian Warner, Assistant Editor David Polishook, and the diligence of our Producer Pedro Valdés Sada. Gratitude also to Melissa Hayes-Gehrke as the Distributor, with a hearty nod to past Producer Bob Werner (35 years of service) and to the late Derald Nye, Distributor and benefactor for 37 years.

Above and beyond the names above, the true credit for success of our endeavor goes to the observers who fill these pages with their observations that fuel the science of understanding these small worlds. May the passion and curiosity of their study never end.

Richard P. Binzel, Editor

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE MINOR PLANET BULLETIN

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The founding of the Minor Planets Section and The Minor Planet Bulletin are recollected, including their earliest sense of purpose and aspirations.

Early in 1973 the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) under the leadership of its Director Walter Haas decided to establish an Asteroid or Minor Planets Section. In the year or two prior I (and I suspect several others) had been urging formation of such a section. I was delighted to receive Walter’s invitation to head it up as Recorder – the position now titled as Coordinator. (I had previously been Mercury Recorder.) In those days the then-known smaller, non-comet, non-satellite Solar System objects were called “asteroids” and “minor planets” interchangeably in English. Americans tended to use “asteroids” more frequently; Eurasians inclined more to “minor planets.” Thinking more globally, and influenced by the publication *Minor Planet Circulars*, I chose the name “Minor Planet Section.” Under the old astronomical definition of the time (prior to the 2006 IAU revision) anything that orbited the Sun and was not a comet could be properly called a planet – size did not matter. You will note this steady usage of “planet” in Section papers.

Shortly after becoming Recorder, I decided if we were to stimulate member interest, we needed to make reports not only in the *Strolling Astronomer* (*Journal of the A.L.P.O.*), but also rapidly and frequently in a separately subscribed section journal. In the latter, appeals for observations of individual minor planets, and resulting observations of seldom-observed, or long lost, or newly-found objects could be rapidly reported and discussed. By 1973 May 30, a letter offering subscriptions to ALPO members was circulated. I chose to call the new section journal the *Minor Planet Bulletin* (“*MPB*” for short). The name and initials would not conflict with any existing astronomical institution or journal. Volume 1, Number 1 of *MPB* appeared as a quarterly in 1973 July. The rest was exciting history!