

IAU SYMPOSIUM 161

'Astronomy from Wide-field Imaging'

23 - 27 August 1993

Astrophysikalisches Institut Potsdam, Brandenburg, Germany

RESOLUTION

The Future of Sonneberg Observatory

Imaging is a fundamental tool of astronomical research — a fact emphasised by the wide-ranging subject matter covered at the conference on 'Astronomy from Wide-field Imaging' (IAU Symposium 161), held under the auspices of the International Astronomical Union at Potsdam in August, 1993. The importance of providing adequate archives for astronomical images to allow for future scientific exploration was particularly stressed.

The participants of this conference are aware that an urgent matter has arisen concerning the future of wide-field astronomy in the Federal Republic of Germany with the threatened closure of the Sonneberg Observatory. With an unparalleled history of 60 years of continuous sky-patrol observations, Sonneberg has amassed a unique collection of 250,000 photographic plates forming a vital resource for many current astronomical research projects, notably the long-term study of variable stars — a subject crucial to our understanding of stellar evolution. The importance of this resource is underlined by the resolution passed at the 1991 IAU General Assembly in Buenos Aires (*IAU Inf. Bull.*, 67, 39, 1992).

Plans for the re-organisation and relocation of astronomical resources in Germany suggest that the Sonneberg archive should be closed and re-housed elsewhere. Such a move, involving the creation of a new archive facility, is both expensive and extremely dangerous for the fragile (and irreplaceable) plates.

In view of the importance of the Sonneberg archives, we, the participants in IAU Symposium 161:

request that the government of the Federal Republic of Germany and other responsible authorities ensure the preservation of these archives in a manner such that they are readily accessible to the world-wide research community;

believe that the most efficient method of achieving this aim is through maintaining the current computer-catalogued facility at Sonneberg; and

considering the past contribution by German observatories to sky patrols and their continued importance for scientific projects,

urge that all means of maintaining a presence in this area of astronomical research be explored.