

May 16, 1995

Sharon A. Stauffer, NCRAL Vice-Chairman
1511 North Church Street
Rockford, IL 61103

Dear Ms. Stauffer:

We are very pleased and proud to submit the nomination of Dr. Harry E. Nelson for the Region Award for 1995.

We first met Dr. Harry Nelson on a very cold evening in January, 1975. We were attending a presentation he was making at John Deere Planetarium at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. We were the last to leave after many questions and were followed out by Dr. Nelson. Much to our dismay, we had a flat tire on our car and found it impossible to remove the wheel because of the cold. Dr. Nelson took us back inside, arranged for a tow and took us to his home for hot coffee while the tire was being changed. We would have to say that he was truly a gracious host to people he had just met. We have been proud to call him friend ever since.

Harry E. Nelson graduated from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois in 1935. He received his Ph.M. from the University of Wisconsin in 1941 and his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1950. His doctoral dissertation was "The Resistance of the Air to Stone-Dropping Meteors". He developed formulae to account for the entire trajectory of meteors of any size as they passed through the atmosphere. His study was of considerable interest to the military as they attempted to predict the behavior of high speed missiles and man-made satellites as they collided with the Earth's atmosphere. Funds from the Office of Ordinance Research of the United States Army supported his study.

Harry's teaching career started as a mathematics instructor at Cambridge, IL High School from 1935 through 1937. He then became professor of mathematics at Luther College in Wahoo, NE from 1937 through 1942. His next position was as professor of mathematics at Gustavus Adolphus college in St. Peter, MN from 1942 through 1946. He then returned to Augustana College in Rock Island as professor of mathematics. He remained at Augustana as professor of mathematics and astronomy and director of the John Deere Planetarium until his retirement in 1988.

During the early years of the National Science Foundation, Dr. Nelson served on five different NSF institutes and established many connections with prominent mathematicians and astronomers throughout the United States. This resulted in a unique opportunity for Harry to serve a two year appointment with the U. S. State Department under its program of Technical Aid to Underdeveloped Countries. The assignment involved teaching mathematics in the graduate school of the University of Indonesia at Bandung, Java and acting as the director of the Bosscha Observatory.

During his years at Augustana, he was instrumental in the development of the John Deere Planetarium and the Carl Gamble Observatory dedicated on the Augustana campus in 1969. The building houses extensive facilities including a spitz A-3-P projector and a 130 mm Zeiss refractor. Also on display are an extensive exhibit of meteorites including a 556 pound iron meteorite, a fragment of the Barringer meteorite from Arizona, which is on indefinite loan from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

Dr. Nelson has always been active in bringing visiting astronomers to Augustana. His list of visiting astronomy and space dignitaries include Harlow Shapley of Harvard University, Jason J. Nassau of the Warner-Swasey Observatory, Frank Edmonson of Indiana University, Karlis Kaufmanis of the University of Minnesota, Bart Bok of the University of Arizona, James Van Allen of the University of Iowa, Wernher Von Braun, rocket scientist, Dr. Edward Olsen of the Field Museum in Chicago, and Neil Armstrong, first man to set foot on the moon. His intent was always to present interesting and understandable programs to the people of the community.

Until his retirement, Dr. Nelson instructed and entertained over 200,000 attendees at the John Deere Planetarium. Many of the attendees were youngsters with whom he immediately seems to establish rapport. He is the most completely dedicated teacher we have known.

The Popular Astronomy Club was founded in Rock Island in 1936 and Dr. Nelson has been an active member and leader for much of it's history. He was vice president in charge of programs from 1946 to 1958 and president from 1958 through 1969. In this capacity, he further promoted astronomy and space science within our community. He remains our most prominent member.

Dr. Nelson's other passion is eclipse chasing. He first traveled to Cumberland, Wisconsin to view the total solar eclipse of June 30, 1954. He formed and headed up the Quad Cities based Eclipse Chasers Club with 65 members from all over the United States. He has traveled to twelve total solar eclipses and has accumulated over 53 minutes within the moon's shadow.

His latest accomplishment is the publishing of a book "In the Astronomy Tradition at Augustana" in 1992. The book chronicles the history of the astronomy program at Augustana along with some information on the history of the Popular Astronomy Club and the Eclipse Chasers Club.

Just one further note; Harry's presentation that cold January evening was on his trip to view the total solar eclipse of June 20, 1974 in Australia. We were so excited that we later traveled to two solar eclipses with Harry and his tour groups. We are also very proud to have in our backyard the Harry E. Nelson observatory.

Respectfully,



Clifford L. and Mary A. Newman
Members Popular Astronomy Club