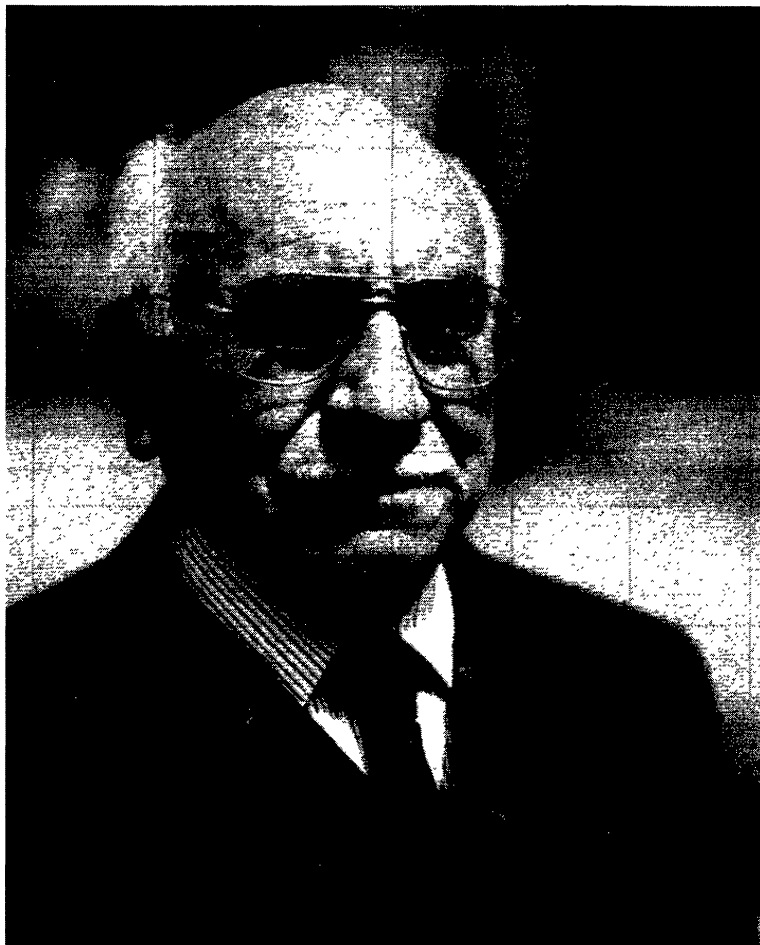


OBITUARY



ENRIQUE CHAVIRA NAVARRETE
1925-2000

During the twentieth century, Mexican astronomical observatories migrated from Tacubaya —a suburb of México City— towards the province; first to Tonantzintla and from there to the selected mountain sites of San Pedro Mártir and Cananea. In Tonantzintla Mexican astronomy progressed from cosmography to astrophysics. There, during the fifties and sixties, Guillermo Haro used the Schmidt camera to place México in the astronomical map. Instrumental to this process was Enrique Chavira, whose scientific life almost exactly matched the second half of the century which has just finished, going from the pioneer times of the Tonantzintla Astrophysical Observatory to the fully developed Mexican astronomy of the dawn of the XXI century.

Enrique Chavira died unexpectedly 38 days before the turn of the century. Even though his heart had shown past weaknesses, his daily presence in the corridors of the Tonantzintla Institute somehow led us to believe he would always be here. Chavira was the most senior of the astronomers at Tonantzintla and, though he never entered the decision circles, he always had an opinion, frequently ironic, about the main problems of the Instituto. I do remember more than one occasion Alfonso Serrano asking for the advice of Chavira, seeking the experience of the former assistant of Don Guillermo Haro.

Born and raised in México City, Chavira eventually moved to Puebla, the closest large city to Tonantzintla, following the steps of Mexican observational astronomy. Without concluding his formal studies, Chavira managed to adjudicate for himself the title of “astrónomo”, earning it with his skillful handling of the Schmidt camera and the photographic plates. Over the years he took over 8000 astronomical plates, which is a little

more than half of the precious Tonantzintla collection. Even though Chavira was aware of his limitations, his ability in photographic astronomy made him a recognized astronomer. The list of his co-authors includes, apart from Guillermo Haro, other renowned astronomers like Manuel Peimbert, Luis Felipe Rodríguez, and Lee Hartmann. He worked in the study of stars with emission lines, flare stars, FU Orionis stars, infrared stars, mainly in the Orion region, and —more recently— in classifying blue galaxies found in the Tonantzintla plates.

Perhaps the closest step to immortality made by Chavira was the co-discovery of comet 1954K which bears the joint name Haro-Chavira, a tacit recognition to the doublet of observers of the golden years of Mexican astronomy. Chavira, witness of the transition from Tacubaya to Tonantzintla, of the overlap of both observatories and the birth of the Instituto Nacional de Astrofísica, Óptica y Electrónica, survivor of the hardest times of this institute to see it finally blossom, stood with a calm mixture of humility, enthusiasm and humour. When the interest of the community for the use of Schmidt cameras decayed, when photographic plates were substituted by photoelectronic detectors and the urban light-pollution damaged the skies of Tonantzintla, Chavira went into the careful examination of astronomical plates, dedicating part of his time to attend the frequent visitors who arrive to the “Observatorio de Tonantzintla”. He proudly showed to the public the Schmidt camera, telling witty anecdotes, often colored with a touch of fantasy.

He stayed always close to astronomy and went to the Institute in an almost religious manner until the last day that life allowed him to do so.

Alberto Carramiñana