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OBITUARY

GRACIELA GONZÁLEZ
1928–2006

An inevitable reference date for contemporary Mexican astronomy is the 17th of February 1942, when Mexican president Manuel Ávila Camacho inaugurated the Observatorio Astrofísico Nacional on a small hill next to the town of Tonantzintla, Puebla. Luis Enrique Erro became its first director, leading a handful of people to the professional study of astronomy. Guillermina González was among the original Tonantzintla staff and, through her recommendation, her sister Graciela joined the observatory a couple of years later. She was assigned to the archive of astronomical plates, and in the following years she was active as valuable assistant to Guillermo Haro in the search for flares and transients in the Tonantzintla plates. She discovered a large number of flare stars and co-authored several papers with G. Haro, L. Rivera-Terrazas, E. Chavira, E. Parsamian and W. W. Morgan, dealing with flare stars in Orion, the Pleiades, Praesepe, Cygnus and other regions mapped with the legendary Tonantzintla Schmidt camera.

In more recent times, Graciela González became the curator of the Tonantzintla collection of plates, the unique archive of hundreds of astronomical images taken with the Schmidt camera during the 1950s and 60s and spanning a sizeable fraction of the Northern and Equatorial skies. She took excellent care of them, ensuring that whoever consulted the plates followed all due precautions, and she participated in their digitalization. This quiet and smiling woman, the unassuming last survivor of the Observatorio Astrofísico Nacional de Tonantzintla, died unexpectedly on the 24th of September 2006. She had served astronomy with love and devotion for over sixty years and took with her the last memories of a pioneering era in Mexican astronomy.

Alberto Carramiñana