

Bill Albrecht 1917 - 2009

By Gerry Samolyk

A long time MAS member, Bill Albrecht, passed away on Apr 25 at age 91. The MAS would like to extend our condolences to Bill family. Bill was a very warm and friendly person who was very dedicated to astronomical studies and the MAS. Bill joined the MAS as a high school student in 1933. There he met Ed Halbach and began a friendship that lasted over 75 years. Bill was involved the construction projects at the observatory for many years. He used to joke, "Sometimes, astronomy was something that was done with a shovel and a wheelbarrow". Bill was a talented designer as well as fabricator. The A and B domes along with the MAS portascopes are among the many projects he was involved in. Much of the mount on Z scope is based on designs Bill made shortly after the mirror blank was donated.



After serving in the US Navy during WWII, Bill returned to Milwaukee. He continued to participate in the observing projects with the MAS. Bill spent many nights studding auroras at the observatory. (The picture at the left is from the National Geographic showing aurora observations from the observatory around 1940. Bill is standing with a photometer measuring the aurora's brightness.) While total solar eclipse expeditions took him to

some unusual parts of the world. He participated in most of our grazing occultation expeditions and was always interested in any opportunity to observe any unique event. One of the many events that I observed with Bill was the occultation of Epsilon Gem by Mars in '74. It was fascinating to watch the star fade in the atmosphere before the occultation. It was like watching a sunset on Mars.

Much of Bill's life involved the observatory, so it was only fitting that he met his wife, Anne, at one of the public nights held there. Anne later served at the MAS treasurer. In addition to all the work that Bill did for the MAS, he also provided financial support. When the Z scope project was in its infancy, Bill donated a sum of money to get the telescope fund started. Much more recently, Bill donated \$1000 to start a fund so the MAS can someday purchase a darker sky observing sight. That fund is now called the Albrecht Fund.

In the late 1970's, Bill and Anne moved to Pahala, HI. Bill had an old 11" Celestron set up in his backyard. Because of his latitude (19 degrees N) Bill had to install a wedge and counterweight so he could reach the southern horizon without the scope hitting the fork. From this location Bill made over 80,000 variable star observations, working both with the AAVSO and the RASNZ. Being located in the middle of the ocean, Bill was often the only observer in position to make a critical observation. Bill did engineering work in support of the CFH observatory and had several nights per month on a 24" scope on top of Mauna Kea allocated for his personal use. In addition to astronomy, Bill spent much of his time in HI doing volunteer at the volcano observatory at Kilauea.



When Anne passed away in 2001, Bill moved back to WI. At that time, a whole new generation of MAS members got to know Bill as he attended meetings and picnics. The Albrecht Observatory (located between the A and B domes) was dedicated to the service that both Bill and Anne gave to the MAS. Although the building was built in 2000, the original pier footing, installed by Bill in 1936, is still in place.



Bill Albrecht received the AAVSO Directors Award at the spring 2002 meeting in HI.