

July 18, 2003

Draft Report to the AAPT Committee on History and Philosophy of Physics, for the meeting of August 5, 2003:

Invited Sessions

At the Boise meeting, last summer, committee members requested two invited sessions for the Madison meeting, with suggested speakers. Five of the six named accepted, and the sixth suggested an alternate since he expected not to be in Madison at this time. Both sessions were scheduled; at this remove, they seem to be headed for success.

Field Trip

The committee requested a field trip to Yerkes Observatory. After some negotiation, during which it seemed that the Observatory would admit visitors only during the weekend before the papers sessions, arrangements were made for Monday morning. However, we now have a conflict with one of our invited sessions. It will be rather interesting to note the attendance in each case.

Plenary

The request for a plenary session with a noted Madison historian of old-era physics was the victim of some hush-hush dealings such that we were left hanging. Even at the Austin meeting my inquiries were met with enigmatic avoidance. That meant that I kept our invitee on the hook for months. Finally, in May (approximately), word went out to all chairs and organizers that the last plenary was committed: John Marburger, Science Advisor to the President had at last been able to accept. I can understand that these arrangements were necessarily confidential, but the higher-ups couldn't bring themselves to clue me in, at least to the extent of confiding that something confidential was in the works. Had they done so, my communications with our invitee might have been worded differently. It was then left to me to apologize to him, and he never bothered answering.

My request for an official apology, in the name of AAPT, was ignored. I then had several email exchanges with Jim Nelson, whose apologies to me rang rather empty. I told him that this was not a matter of him and me personally, but rather a situation in which the officers treated a duly constituted committee with condescension bordering on contempt. He didn't answer further. It will be interesting to see how he greets me in Madison.

Call for papers

As can be seen in the Announcer, our call for papers brought in a long list, and the session will go all afternoon on Wednesday. And as requested, philosophy leads in the topics this time. This suggests that we should have a Call for every meeting, without fail.

Miami Beach

As my last action as H&P Chair, during Programs II in Austin, I caucused with Betty Preece, Chair of the Committee on Women in Physics, and we planned two invited sessions for mutual co-sponsorship. One, as a follow-up of (or take-off on) the Seniors' Committee retrospectives on great physicists, will be titled "My Life as a Scientist" with Esther Conwell, Mildred Dresselhaus, and Vera Rubin. All have accepted. We are requesting the morning of Tuesday, January 27. The other, for the same afternoon (we hope), will be titled "Women Leaders in Physics" with APS President Myriam Sarachick, President-Elect Helen Quinn, and Executive Officer Judy Franz. They have all accepted.