



Minding the Heavens: The Story of our Discovery of the Milky Way

By *Leila Belkora*

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Today, we accept that we live on a planet circling the sun, that our sun is just one of billions of stars in the galaxy we call the Milky Way, and that our galaxy is but one of billions born out of the big bang. Yet as recently as the early twentieth century, the general public and even astronomers had vague and confused notions about what lay beyond the visible stars.

Minding the Heavens: The Story of Our Discovery of the Milky Way is about how scientists discovered that we lived in a galaxy, in fact, a universe full of galaxies. This fascinating story of the discovery of our own and other galaxies is told through the lives of seven astronomers: Thomas Wright, William Herschel, Wilhelm Struve, William Huggins, Jacobus Kapteyn, Harlow Shapley, and Edwin Hubble. Each contributed greatly to our present understanding of where we live in the cosmos. Through the science and lives of these seven people, each shaped by their family, friends, and contemporaries, we follow this amazing story of discovery. From the mid 1700s with Thomas Wright through to the mid 20th century with the more familiar names of Shapley and Hubble, each character bringing us nearer to our present understanding of the Universe.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The book is extremely good. It treats the subject matter in an unusual way and I learned a good deal from it! There are dozens of books about Herschel and Hubble, but not Wright or Kapteyn, and all the way through the author has unearthed little-known facts. The result is an engrossing picture of the way in which our knowledge of the Milky Way has been built up. The text is very authoritative and easy to read, it will appeal to both newcomers and specialists. The material has been well chosen. I have not the slightest hesitation in recommending the book...." -Patrick Moore "In this interesting and well-written book, Belkora traces the evolution of our concepts by highlighting the careers of seven scientists who made fundamental contributions to the study of the Milky Way. The survey chapters at the beginning and end of the book are helpful in describing why Belkora focused on these particular individuals and in presenting the current view of the Milky Way. The chapters on the scientists offer a stimulating blend of scientific endeavor and personal idiosyncrasies, leaving readers with a deep sense of the scientists and their times. A popular overview of the development of a critical component of modern astronomy . . . Highly recommended." - D.E. Hogg, National Radio Astronomy Observatory in CHOICE, May 2003 "A terrific blend of the science and the history." - Marth Haynes, Goldwin Smith Professor of Astronomy, Cornell University "An easily read collection of histories of key astronomers who contributed to our understanding of our galaxy....Filled with illustrations and color plates that are explained in detail and in relation to the text, the book is a treat. *Minding the Heavens* is nota book for beginning astronomers to learn about our galaxy. Rather, it is akin to a series of good home movies that show us how we came to know our galaxy." - Peter Hepburn, E-Streams "Crisp and precise in conveying astronomical information... a helpful and refreshing account of what is out there and, more particularly, how we have come to find out about it." - Colin Cooke, The Observatory Magazine "This gem of a book guides the reader on a journey of discovery; the realisation that we live in a vast star city, an island universe called the Milky Way, which is in turn only one of countless galaxies which inhabit the universe ... She gives a wealth of detail, in the most accessible language ... I have no hesitation in recommending '*Minding the Heavens*' to all those, both students and tutors alike, interested in the history of astronomy and in particular the discovery of our Milky Way ... This book is a proud addition to my library. - Dr Kevin P Marshall, lecturer with the University of Cambridge's Inst of Continuing Eduation "The book is easy to understand, full of little known facts about the astronomers and their personal lives, peppered with quotes from their personal journals. Everyone will learn something in this mixture of science and history, which Belkora does really well. She knows her stuff, and plies it well with relevant illustrations and well-described colour plates." - Sharon Hough, member of Astronomy Ireland" . . . Ripping good stories of how parallaxes were first measured, the gaseous nature of some of the nebulae demonstrated, existence of other galaxies proven, and much else." - Virginia Trimble, UC-Irvine and University of Maryland, History of Physics Newsletter, Volume IX, No. 1

From the Publisher

Readership: Historians of science; general science readers with an interest in astronomy and cosmology.

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