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Women in Science: how the ladies of Harvard observatory took the measure of the stars

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Abstract

Some astronomers were surprised to learn that physicist Edward Pickering had been named director of the Harvard College Observatory in 1877. He certainly instituted changes, first by focusing on the physical properties of the stars, instead of their locations, and second by instituting a program of astrophotography that produced hundreds of thousands of glass-plate images of the night sky over the course of a century. Pickering also increased the observatory work force by hiring a large number of women, several of whom became world famous in their own lifetimes for achievements such as creating a stellar classification system and discerning a means for measuring distances across space.