

LOUISE F. JENKINS, ASTRONOMER AND MISSIONARY IN JAPAN

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Abstract

The activities of astronomer Miss Louise F. Jenkins while a missionary in Japan are described.

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Miss Louise F. Jenkins was born on July 5, 1888, in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in the United States of America. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1911, and received a Master's degree in astronomy in 1917 from that institution.

Miss Jenkins' astronomical work is well known, particularly her research in the trigonometric parallax of stars. But her eleven years of achievement in Japan are not well known. The writer studied her accomplishments from her time in Japan.

A 3-inch refractor telescope belonging to AAVSO member Charles W. Elmer was loaned by him to Miss Jenkins. She used it for the study of variable stars, and carried it from the United States when she came to Japan in 1920.

When Miss Jenkins first came to Japan, she was a teacher at the Women's Christian College of Japan from April, 1921, to July, 1925. She was the first woman observer of variable stars in Japan, and she continued to observe variable stars at Kanda, the central district of Tokyo, using Mr. Elmer's telescope.

Her 164 observations made in Japan were reported to the AAVSO between January 25, 1921, and July 20, 1923. About 50 days after her last observation, the Great Earthquake of 1923 occurred in Tokyo, and the telescope was destroyed. Miss Jenkins was safe because she was staying at Karuizawa, a summer resort place 100 km from Tokyo, but she lost most of her belongings.

After the Great Earthquake, the campus was transferred from Kanda to the western suburb of Tokyo. She lived in the teachers' lodgings there, and became a dormitory proctor. One day, a ruffian invaded the lodgings. She and a colleague fought him, and caught him and he was taken to the police.

She was a leader of the Astronomical Club. Her group used to visit the Astronomical Observatory of Tokyo situated near the college once a month.

Her father died in February of 1925, and she returned to the United States in July of this year.

Miss Jenkins came again to Japan in August of 1926 as a teacher at the Hinomoto Gakuen girls' high school near Himeji, near Kobe. She was a dormitory superintendent, and was just like a mother to the boarding school girls. Miss Jenkins taught English and Bible class at the school. Sometimes she told the students scientific stories concerning astronomy and showed them the heavenly bodies through a small telescope.

School girls at that time, who are now about 70 years old,

recalled Miss Jenkins. It is ever present in their minds that Miss Jenkins would embrace them, saying, "Pretty girl!" Also, they remembered the pleasant times on a boat at sea with her, a wrongly-measured kimono made by the girls as a present, teaching manners on how to behave with seniors, singing a hymn at the Christmas morning services, and so on.

Miss Jenkins stayed at Himeji from 1926 to 1928 and from 1930 to 1932. In 1928 and 1929 she was a teacher at the Shohkei girls' high school at Sendai in northeastern Japan. Her activities at Sendai are not clear.

In 1932 Miss Jenkins returned to the United States and became a staff member of the Yale Astronomical Observatory. She was a co-editor of the **Astronomical Journal** from 1942 to 1958. Many Japanese astronomers who studied at Yale University had great kindnesses shown to them by her.

After 25 years, Miss Jenkins returned to Japan on a memory trip. She landed at Yokohama Harbor at the end of September, 1957. She attended the missionary meeting held at Tokyo and Karuizawa. Also, she visited Tokyo Astronomical Observatory as a professional astronomer on October 3, 1957, just one day before the Soviet artificial satellite launching. Miss Jenkins fell and broke her leg while at the International Christian University, and had to give up her plans to visit Himeji. After one month in hospital, still in a wheelchair, she boarded a plane for home.

From a letter Miss Jenkins wrote to Mrs. Sato Narasaki, we know of her closing days. Mrs. Narasaki was a student of Miss Jenkins' at the Women's Christian College of Japan, and a fellow teacher at the Hinomoto Gakuen girls' high school. Mrs. Narasaki had many letters from Miss Jenkins, sent from 1948 to 1970. In her last letter, written four months before her death, Miss Jenkins wrote, "...Two especial pleasures of my first year here [in the residence] were to see the sometimes wonderful coloring in the sky just before sunrise, while I am still in bed. The other was the coloring of the autumn when the leaves turned such varied coloring when the nights became colder, some stayed green, then nearby would be yellow, red, orange, brown, etc. with each a different color all down the line, at the border of our land. And each day the colors were different from the day before. The beauty of God's world, and His loving care of us is precious to me..."

Miss Jenkins died at 81 on May 9, 1970.