

9 May 1967

W. O. ROBERTS

For Damon Room Dedication

This is a moment of great satisfaction to me. It fulfills a dream many years standing -- to recognize appropriately the friendship and support of Ralph Damon to the High Altitude Observatory, to the National Center for Atmospheric Research, and to me personally. Ralph never saw NCAR -- but we talked of building, around the HAO, a center capable of achieving world renown for research that would treat in unified manner the atmospheres of the sun, the planets and the earth. NCAR has become that research center. How Ralph would have enjoyed seeing the dream come true!

It was, in no small part, through Ralph's help and encouragement that we began a research program of this character in HAO in the mid-1950's. He helped me to gain the sponsorship of four Airlines (TWA, Continental, American and United), of the American Gas Association, and of five Oil Companies (Shell, Gulf, Jersey Standard, Standard of Indiana, and Socony-Mobil).

From this nucleus of support grew the HAO's work in terrestrial meteorology and in solar influences on weather and climate. Ed Farthing, here tonight, participated actively in some of that early work. In turn, this program steered my own interests and also some of the work of the High Altitude Observatory in directions that clearly led in 1960, to the creation of the National Center for Atmospheric Research around the focus of research of the Observatory.

*Copy to Prescilla Paine - 21 Jun 67*

I remember so vividly many challenging hours with Ralph - sometimes after he had spent a long, hard day in his office in New York City, when I'd gone to see him in my "pavement pounding" to find unrestricted private financial support for the Observatory, which I deemed ( and also today deem) essential to the health of a research organization like ours.

I spent several fascinating days in the late 1940's with Ralph and Don Menzel of the Harvard Observatory. We flew over the Spanish Peaks, south of here, to photograph the spectacular geological formations caused by a prehistoric volcanic shock, and then continued on to White Sands to watch a V-2 rocket firing - that failed. From White Sands we carried out aerial surveillance of the Sacramento Mountains, which was the prime goal of our trip. The aerial study brought us to the decision on the exact site for the Sacramento Peak Observatory. We flew in an American Airlines research DC-3, piloted by Sam Saint.

I guess I remember most vividly, however, two occasions on which I spent a couple of days with Ralph in visual astronomical work at the Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff. During these visits I watched with satisfaction Ralph's great skill as a visual observer. We peered intently at Mars, one of Ralph's favorite objects for study, at particular favorable times - with E. C. Slipher, the late famous Mars observer assisting us at the large planetary refracting telescope! On one unforgettable evening we watched the clearing of a light patch of Martian fog or haze.

Another vivid memory I cherish is an occasion when we were waiting at a rail crossing (also, I believe, in or near Flagstaff) while a crack passenger train flashed by filled with people eating in diners, looking about at the scenery, etc. This may have been 1947 or 1948. Ralph said, as we waited, that some people believed him a visionary, but he felt that someday, far more people would cross the country by plane than by train, and that they'd be able to do it non-stop in a few hours.

Ralph graduated from Harvard in 1918, and already had his eye on astronomy then. But he was also devoted to aviation as a career. He was later a presidential appointee to the old NACA, the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics, predecessor to NASA. He was a great enthusiast for research in meteorology, and no mean expert in the structure and behavior of jet streams.

I believe I am correct in saying that he served, sooner or later, as president of all the firms with which he was associated: Curtiss <sup>Wright</sup> Airplane Company, Republic Aviation, American Airlines, and Trans World Airlines.

As you all know, he died of pneumonia on January 4, 1956, at the age of fifty-eight, and in the prime of his capabilities.

Though I dearly wish Ralph could have shared personally in the two days of formalities at NCAR that we are now experiencing, I am happy that we can, today, acknowledge the many generous gifts that have been made to our memorial for Ralph Damon. I'm deeply honored that so many members of the Damon Family can be with us, including Ralph's wife, Mrs. Harriet Damon,

and their four children, Mrs. Harrison Rainie, Dr. William Damon, Mr. Edmund Damon and Miss Barbara Damon. Mrs. Damon, we thank you and your family, not only for being with us today, but also for your generous contributions to the Damon Room itself.

I would now like to unveil the portrait of Ralph, and to read a formal citation:

RALPH SHEPARD DAMON

1897 - 1956

Ralph Damon was a staunch friend of research in astronomy and meteorology throughout the world. In no small measure his own personal interest and effort in the mid 1950's enabled the High Altitude Observatory, now a laboratory of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, to augment, through privately contributed funds, its research in solar-terrestrial relationships, and in particular on solar effects upon weather.

We who are assembled here today -- family, friends and associates of Ralph Damon, and friends and associates of the National Center for Atmospheric Research -- dedicate this lounge and conference area as the Ralph S. Damon Room, a memorial to a brilliant pioneer in the air transport industry, a skilled amateur astronomer, and a devoted proponent of basic research in the atmospheric sciences.

There follows a list of the contributors to the Damon Room. One name, that of an old friend of Ralph's, will be added soon, Mr. William Littlewood. I hope you will all have the opportunity to look at it before you leave Boulder. The portrait will be mounted permanently by the entrance door to the Damon Room.

It is my sincere hope that the kind of adventuresome spirit and intellectual fervor that so characterized Ralph Damon will always be with us here in this room.

Walter D. Roberts