

Data Collecting: Its History, Its Importance and Its Unsung Heroes

by Frank C. Clifford

In order to develop our interpretive and forecasting skills and test our hypotheses, we astrologers must have accurate horoscopes with which to work – it is our primary consideration before we begin research. We learn much of our astrology from historical examples, celebrity case studies and the charts of family and friends.

Data collections (in books, online and in software programs) have expanded the scope of astrological research and practice. Without access to charts from data collections, which provide examples of how planetary configurations have worked in the lives of others, our study is purely theoretical. A wealth of biographical information and the vast collections of accurately timed horoscopes now available to our community afford us the privilege of learning to observe how a series of symbols in similar horoscopes has a spectrum of possible interpretation, and how these symbols might play out in the life and character of each owner.

We expand our astrological vocabulary and build an arsenal of keywords and associations when we investigate the person *behind* the birth chart. Our understanding is enriched with a biography in one hand and an accurately sourced horoscope in the other. But when we base opinion on – or develop astrological interpretation from – speculative or rectified charts, we risk perpetuating presumptions as to what ‘should’ be present astrologically from such a life.

History: Data Recording and the Emergence of Collections

During the twentieth century, two changes occurred that would shape the field of data collecting: (i) an increase in recording birth data on official documents, and (ii) the publication of collections based on accurate and sourced information. The legal requirement to record birth information (including birth times) would give astrologers the opportunity to obtain data from official sources and cast natal charts with greater accuracy, while the availability of data collections ensured that astrologers could develop their techniques from a wide range of example charts and be more aware of where the birth information originated.

Both of these developments would ensure that using accurate (or, at the very least, sourced) astrological data would become a fundamental part of professional practice among astrologers.

(i) Birth Time Recordings

Some European countries began listing birth times on certificates as far back as the late 18th century (France and much of Germany in 1792, Belgium and the Netherlands from 1793, Naples and Sicily from 1820 and Italy from 1866, Scotland from 1855).¹ But there is little evidence, however, of astrological authors using these official sources to build collections or test findings until the middle of the twentieth century. At this time, there was an increase in the number of countries and states recording birth times on official documents, and those that had already begun this practice were now doing so with greater (sometimes to-the-minute) precision. And only after statisticians Michel and Françoise

Gauquelin began a huge undertaking to find correlations between eminence in profession and planetary placements did astrologers begin to take advantage of the vast amount of verified data available and carry out their own research projects to ‘prove’ astrology or to analyse individual charts.

But not all countries had birth times recorded officially. Even now, only birth times of twins are required on certificates in England, and this is to comply with Succession Law. As in many other countries, obtaining a birth time is dependent on contact with the person in question who might have access to a hospital tag, family note or anecdote. If astrology was once a luxury in England for the privileged few – those born to the purple – then the availability of birth times of historical figures reflects this: only births (such as new additions to the royal family) considered important or newsworthy were recorded and published, most notably in *The Times*.

The fifty states of America vary as to when birth times (if at all) began to be recorded with consistency, but most states blocked public access to these records. (For the launch of *Astrodatabank*, I called every state’s principal Vital Records office in the US to determine the years that birth times appeared on birth certificates – see http://www.astro.com/astro-databank/Astro-Databank:Handbook_chapter_07.) From the early 1980s to late 1990s, when data collecting was at its peak with a network of dedicated collectors, access to registries in California, New Jersey, Ohio and Texas proved invaluable and such states were mined constantly. But at the present time, increased security measures as well as issues of personal privacy and data protection have seen these few remaining states implement stringent regulations that restrict access.

(ii) The Publication of Data Collections

There is some evidence of early data collecting with books that included small collections of birth data. From the 1970s, there was a move by the Gauquelins and astrologers (most notably Lois Rodden) to publish large collections of birth data for the astrological community. More importantly, these collections began to list the sources of their information (for example, ‘data from birth certificate’). Prior to this, most astrologers did not question the reliability of published data, and so few verified birth data were available of public figures that collections (few and far between) were often indiscriminate compilations of speculative, rectified and unsourced data. Much of the data presented in Alan Leo’s *1001 Notable Nativities* (1917), Maurice Wemyss’ *Famous Nativities* (1938), Evangeline Adams’ *Astrology: Your Place Among the Stars* (1930), and Marion Meyer Drew’s *101 Headline Horoscopes* (1941) and *101 Hard to Find Horoscopes* (1962) were later invalidated by contradictory reports or were considered unverifiable because of the absence of sources. Stephen Erlewine’s *The Circle Book of Charts* offered 1302 hand-drawn, mostly Solar charts, and much of Marc Penfield’s volumes *An Astrological Who’s Who* (1972) and *2001: The Penfield Collection* (1979) were later corrected and updated in Lois Rodden’s *Astro-Data* series.

The Gauquelin Effect

Astrology enthusiast Michel Gauquelin (1928–1991) began to collect accurate birth data in 1949 to look for correlations between personality/behaviour and horoscopes. A few years later, he was joined by statistician Françoise Schneider (1929–2007), who became his wife. By using very large samples of birth data, they uncovered correlations between eminent sportsmen, scientists, politicians and writers and the diurnal positions of up to

five planets in their horoscopes (the Moon, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). The areas in the horoscope that were statistically significant (essentially the cadent houses using a rough-and-ready version of the Placidus house system) were named ‘Gauquelin Sectors’ (or Zones). The couple would later study planetary heredity as well as character traits. The Gauquelins’ trip to the US in 1980 resulted in *The Gauquelin Book of American Charts* (ACS, 1982), a collection exclusively from birth records comprising charts and character trait keywords of high-profile Americans. After their divorce, Françoise took over the task of correcting data from their collection and addressed on-going data and statistical issues in *Astro-Psychological Problems*, her journal from 1982. Sadly, Michel Gauquelin ordered his collection of birth records and character traits to be destroyed upon his death, which came in 1991.

Their six-volume data collection (published in 1970) was unique in its enormity (14,247 data) and that all the data had originated from birth certificates. Although it seems the tenacious Gauquelins were thorns in the sides of both the astrological and scientific communities as a whole, their enormous collection of research is not only an example of working within a scientific framework and protocol but also a rich source of the data of eminent professionals for further research.

The Philosophy of Accurate Data: the Impact of Rodden

Astrologers seek truth in the evidence of the lives of those whose charts we study. For over a decade we have turned a critical eye on those charts, finding that much of our data have been hearsay, and worse, unstated speculation. Through exposing data to the harsh clarity of public scrutiny, we have multiplied not only our databank, but also our sophistication. We are more skeptical today, and more demanding of an accounting of accuracy of source.

Lois M. Rodden, Astro-Data IV (AFA, 1990)

The 20th century’s fascination with celebrity and personality captured the interest of astrology authors and lecturers, who used examples of lives that would be familiar to their audience. Indeed, it was a profile of the infant Princess Margaret in 1930 that prompted the growth of Sun Sign astrology in British newspapers. Yet rectified charts and speculative birth data – arguably reflecting the astrologer’s own set of astrological considerations, education and sensibility – persisted in books and presentations, usually without reference to the fact that the data had been manufactured.

In no area of science are professionals or academics able to present findings without verifying their sources and data. Why, in 1979, were astrologers so far behind? It was clear that a stringent system of data classification and use was required urgently. Canadian astrologer Lois Rodden was about to make it her life mission to raise our standards. Her complaint was not with the use of rectified or speculative charts, *if they were presented as such* (although basing theories on inaccurate charts was cause for concern).² The issue was (and remains) the lack of referencing of source data in astrological literature and presentations.

In her first data volume, *Profiles of Women* (AFA, 1979), she wrote, ‘I implore astrologers everywhere to record the data source on every chart... Accuracy of data is

essential to sound research, as well as to skillful delineation... Speculation and rectification are valid techniques in our business and, used skillfully, may constitute brilliant displays of astrological expertise. However, presentation of rectified data that are not designated as such is careless or presumptive and is an insult to the intelligence of our community.' *Women*, she later said, was 'the book that turned the corner between the naiveté of the early 20th century about our data and the awareness of the 21st century astrologer, approaching our data as educated professionals.'³

A recently divorced mother of five, Lois Rodden walked into the Church of Light in 1962 and started astrology classes that afternoon. She was always a collector, beginning with index cards and files that read 'family', 'politicians', 'movie stars', and so on.⁴ Following the publication of her first data book, *Profiles of Women*, Rodden became the central source for collectors to send in their contributions and exchange data, and for astrologers to retrieve data. Recognizing that data are volatile and subject to correction (even birth certificates can be error-prone), her newsletter, *DataNews*, became a means to present new finds, bring information up to date and for her to connect with astrologers in twenty-four countries. With tenacity and diplomacy, Rodden was able to set standards of excellence in data collecting, and encourage writers and publications to adopt professional levels of reporting and data etiquette.

Unsung Heroes

The databases of the Gauquelins, Lois Rodden, Edwin Steinbrecher, Sy Scholfield and Grazia Bordoni provide instant access to tens of thousands of accurate data. The data now available to astrologers online and in books were collected by a worldwide community of researchers who have, for many years, found ingenious ways of tracking down and double-checking correct birth information. These astrologers have sniffed out rare data finds by writing to celebrities and Vital Records offices, wading through excerpts from obscure interviews, sidestepping 'résumé' ages, and examining numerous badly handwritten birth records.

David Fisher spent twelve years compiling and updating the British Astrological Association's data collection card index (some 5742 data), while Tom and Thelma Wilson and Stephen Przybylowski contacted Vital Records offices where access is generally closed. Much-loved, ardent collector Frances McEvoy of Boston accessed data in person from the state bureau in Massachusetts. Fastidious researchers Grazia Bordoni (Italy), the late Edwin Steinbrecher (Los Angeles) and Sy Scholfield (Australia) have tapped remarkable veins of hard-to-get data for astrologers worldwide: Bordoni culled an eclectic series of verified natal and mundane data, published over 20 volumes; Steinbrecher wrote meticulously to birth registries in the US and Europe to collect thousands of additional newsworthy data (from celebrities to war criminals) and published his collection on the *Pathfinder* program; while today's most proactive collector, Sy Scholfield, has accumulated data on various websites (see www.syscholfield.com) and created a new collection for *Solar Fire*. Dana Holliday (Hollywood) amassed hundreds of serial killer and crime data by corresponding incognito with inmates, while media/celebrity astrologers Lynne Palmer, Fredrick Davies (*Signs of the Stars*, Prentice Hall, 1987) and Shelley Ackerman opened their files to share rare data. In Edinburgh, Caroline Gerard and Paul Wright provided direct access to timed

birth records in Scotland and created monumental works. We ‘data freaks’,⁵ as Rodden labelled us, have enjoyed this unpaid astrological labour of love for many years.

Techniques: The Rodden Rating System

Rodden’s campaign to cite sources led to many magazines (such as *The Mountain Astrologer*) accepting articles that were based only on accurate, sourced data. In addition to culling the work of many collectors into her files, by 1980 Rodden had also created and developed a simple system to rate the integrity of data. Her classification system would become data collecting’s most significant and enduring contribution to astrological practice today. The letters below are now instantly recognized and widely used to indicate a ‘shorthand’ of data accuracy, as well as a writer’s awareness of data etiquette and willingness to meet the professional standards set out by Rodden.

AA – Data from birth certificate, hospital, church or governmental birth record, notes from the Vital Statistic Registry Offices, notations in a family Bible, baby book or family written record. Although birth times may be rounded off or, on occasion, information may be in error, this is the best evidence of data accuracy.

A – Data from the person, family member, friend or associate. Also included are newspaper birth announcements, as well as birth times given within a ‘window of time’ of thirty minutes (e.g. ‘between 3.30 p.m. and 4.00 p.m.’) from any of these sources.

B – Data from biographies, autobiographies and personal websites, where no other source is given.

C – Caution, data not validated. No source; vague, rectified/speculative data, ‘personal’ ambiguous sources, approximate birth times (e.g. ‘early morning’, ‘around lunchtime’).

DD – Dirty Data. Two or more unsubstantiated quotes of time, place or date. Any unverified data that are contradicted by another source.

Text from *The Astrologer’s Book of Charts*, Frank C. Clifford (2009)

Hans-Hinrich Taeger and Thomas Siegfried of Germany would later create an alternative 10-tier rating system and a four-volume collection of 7600 data and charts. They were part of the first meeting of the short-lived Association of Professional Data Collectors, which took place in Brussels on May 30, 1997.

Mundane Collections

Prolific researcher and writer Doris Chase Doane followed her *Time Changes* series of worldwide time zone lists with *Accurate World Horoscopes* (AFA, 1984, 1990), 173 horoscopes of countries and territories. But a mundane reference book with full sources came in 1988 in the form of Nicholas Campion’s meticulously researched and sourced volume, *The Book of World Horoscopes*, with 471 charts of national, world and political horoscopes. Well researched volumes from Marc Penfield (*Stars Over England*, etc.) have followed in quick succession in recent years.

Technical Advances

Perhaps more than any other branch of astrology, data collecting has been affected by the development of astrological programs for personal computers. These programs have eliminated the need to hand-draw horoscopes and created an opportunity to store, retrieve

and analyze data. In 1985, Rodden committed to putting the astrological community's collection onto disk. The RID (Rodden/ISAR Databank) arrived in 1988 and morphed into IDEA (International Data Exchange for Astrology), sponsored by NCGR and ISAR, programmed by Lee Lehman, with 305 categories on over 15,000 people and events. The project had come to a grinding halt by 1993, but the entrance of computer whiz Mark McDonough into Rodden's life on July 3, 1996 led to the development of the *Astrodatabank* program. McDonough built the program to test various astrological theories and Rodden, with a team of writers, created biographies and categories for over 25,000 public individuals and many anonymous data for research. The program was pioneering in that it enabled astrologers to search the database to filter and weigh a variety of astrological placements, aspects, rulerships and phenomena, and to test-run hypotheses with control groups. Later, the project was passed to Pat Taglilatelo, an apprentice of, and named successor to, Rodden.

With the development of sophisticated astrological calculation programs came the need to provide data collections for buyers. Astrolabe offered *Contemporary American Horoscopes* and *The Blackwell Collection*, and later, in 1997, came my own project for Solar Fire, *The Clifford Data Compendium*, which was followed by Sy Scholfield's extensive collection. The emergence of *Astrodatabank* proved a blessing for astrologers but there were political difficulties to resolve, as numerous collectors (who for so long engaged in the unpaid labour of love) objected to the sudden issue of data ownership and the right to sell and profit from a community's donations. This, coupled with the death of data's doyenne Rodden in 2003, led to an apathetic response and far fewer contributions of new data in the new millennium. The sale and conversion of *Astrodatabank* to a free service at the commercial site www.astro.com have raised similar ownership issues but the sourced data and categories have established a central access for astrologers worldwide to find accurate and sourced charts of public figures.

Yet despite the efforts of collectors, many books and articles still published do not give sources or references (such as the online site Astrotheme, which poaches data without source or credit, Io Edition software and numerous magazines). The reader has no idea whether the information is correct, may naively trust and regurgitate charts based on unverified data or, worse still, latch on to a chart because it 'fits' assumptions of what such a person should 'look like' in horoscope form (often a rectification courtesy of the astrology writer). And, interestingly, the move to raise standards and ensure published charts are based on accurate, sourced data has, on occasion, led to a backlash: some astrologers, keen to give weight to their assertions, have falsified source notes and presented speculative or rectified data as accurate. Speculative or contradictory data (e.g. the birth times of Kate Middleton and Michael Jackson) regularly do the rounds of astrology schools, find their way into magazines, and are often accepted as fact.

Some Final Thoughts

Most importantly, the last sixty years of data collecting, storage and sharing have enabled student and working astrologers to have access to accurate, verified information. With this, we can build our astrological vocabulary, test our own theories, and avoid falling into a derivative pattern of regurgitating the work of other astrologers or reinforcing stereotypes from past generations without question or update. Such data collections have

also given lecturers and writers the *opportunity* to present observations and findings from accountable, verified sources – the lifetime wish and goal of many data collectors worldwide. But how many of us are using this resource to inform our practice? At UAC before Rodden’s death in 2003, *Astrodatabank* partner Mark McDonough said, ‘We as a community are blessed that Lois Rodden’s life’s passion has given us a cornerstone for rebuilding the respect that astrology so richly deserves.’ It is now up to us, as a community, to take advantage of this gift and build upon it.

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Notes and References

1. AstroDataBank, Reference Manual, 1999, page 164.
2. In many countries, it is now standard practice for astrologers to fine-tune data – to rectify charts *from an existing record* – as it is accepted that birth times are sometimes rounded off or still may be listed incorrectly. There is also astrological debate as to what constitutes the precise moment of birth; an enquiry not aided by a past lack of interest in documenting the birth time.
3. Rodden, Lois M., *Astro-Data I: Profiles of Women* (Data News Press, 1996), p.1
4. ‘A Conversation with Lois Rodden’ by Tom Bridges, *The Mountain Astrologer* (November 1995). Other information comes from personal correspondence with Rodden, 1992–2003.
5. Due credit must go to the generous contributions over the years of US collectors T. Pat Davis, Victoria Shaw, Eugene Moore, Tashi Grady, Robert Paige and Linda Clark, and international colleagues André Barbault (France), Jany Bessiere (Belgium), Marcello Borges (Brazil), Luc De Marre (Belgium), Didier Geslain (France), Michael Mandl (Belgium), Peter Niehenke (Germany), Ivan Nilsson (Sweden), Patrice Petitalot (France), Hans-Hinrich Taeger (Germany), Geirtje Versavel (Belgium), and many more.

Dates of Key Publications (primarily English-language)

- **1662** *Collectio Genituarum, or A Collection of Nativities*, John Gadbury
- **1917** *1001 Notable Nativities*, Alan Leo
- **1930** *Astrology: Your Place Among the Stars*, Evangeline Adams
- **1938** *Famous Nativities*, Maurice Wemyss
- **1941** *101 Headline Horoscopes*, Marion Meyer Drew
- **1951** *L’influence des Astres*, Michel Gauquelin
- **1962** *101 Hard to Find Horoscopes*, Marion Meyer Drew
- **1970** *Birth and Planetary Data Gathered Since 1949* (six volumes), Michel and Françoise Gauquelin
- **1972** *The Circle Book of Charts* (AFA), Stephen Erlewine
- **1972** *An Astrological Who’s Who*, Marc Penfield
- **1979** *2001: The Penfield Collection*, Marc Penfield
- **1979** *Profiles of Women* (AFA), Lois Rodden
Four volumes of data follow: *Astro-Data II* (General, 1980, 1200 data), *III* (Occult, 1986, 700 data), *IV* (Culture, 1990, 750 data), *V* (Crime, 1991, 735 data). *Astro-Data I: Profiles of Women* is later rewritten and expanded, becoming Rodden’s flagship book (1996, 1400 data).
- **1980** *Fowler’s Compendium of Nativities* (Fowler), Jadwiga M. Harrison
- **1982** *The Gauquelin Book of American Charts* (AFA), Michel and Françoise Gauquelin
- **1984** *Accurate World Horoscopes* (AFA), Doris Chase Doane
- **1986** *Data News*, ed. Lois Rodden, first of 100 issues published
- **1988** *The Book of World Horoscopes* (Aquarian), Nicholas Campion (revised 1995, 2004)
- **1989** *Scottish Birth Data* (on Astrocalc), Paul Wright – later incorporated into a larger volume of 2800 data, *A Multitude of Lives* (Parlando, 2009)
- **1990** *Contemporary American Horoscopes* (on Astrolabe), Janice MacKay and Jessica Saunders
- **1991** *Internationales Horoskope Lexikon* (Bauer Verlag), Hans-Hinrich Taeger – the first of four volumes (7600 data)
- **1992** *Nativitas: Astrological Studies* (Triom), James Martin Harvey – the first of three volumes
The House of Commons, Caroline Gerard (revised 1997)

- **1995** *Datanotizie*, ed. Grazia Bordoni, first issue published
- **1997** *The Clifford Data Compendium* (on Solar Fire), Frank C. Clifford
British Entertainers: the Astrological Profiles (Flare), Frank C. Clifford
- **1998** *The Canadian Astrology Collection* (Canadian Astrology Press), John McKay-Clements
A Chronology of American Charts (Poz), Ronald Howland
- **1999** *Astrodatabank* launched
- **2009** *The Astrologer's Book of Charts* (Flare), Frank C. Clifford
Astrodatabank freely available on www.astro.com

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This is an edited and expanded version of an article that appeared in a recent *NCGR Research Journal*.

Frank Clifford – a biography

Data collecting and astrological research have been a passion for Frank Clifford since he began studying astrology in 1989. Contact with Lois Rodden in 1992 began a letter and email friendship and collaborations on Rodden's *Data News* and *Profiles of Women*. Lois provided inspiration (and a foreword) when Frank created *British Entertainers: the Astrological Profiles* in 1997 and 2003, and again when compiling *The Astrologer's Book of Charts* in 2009. His latest book is *Getting to the Heart of Your Chart: Playing Astrological Detective* (Flare, Feb 2012). Frank runs The London School of Astrology (www.londonschoolofastrology.co.uk) and has written and/or edited two dozen books on astrology and palmistry. www.flareuk.com