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ANDRÉ-LOUIS HIRSCH (1899-1962) - A SPONSOR FOR EARLY ASTRONAUTICS IN FRANCE

Abstract

André Louis-Hirsch (often referred to as André Hirsch), the son of an important Parisian banker, Baron Hirsch, showed interest in science from an early age (he joined the French astronomical society Société Astronomique de France at 13). During World War I in January 1918, as a 19 year old, he applied for a patent for a secret long-distance telegraphy technique using infrared radiation. The scientific reputation of Hirsch had made him a close friend of French engineer Robert Esnault-Pelterie. André Louis-Hirsch is well known for organising with Esnault-Pelterie a dinner for several prominent French men on 26 December 1927, in order to discuss the future of the emerging science of space travel. The guests decided on a plan to establish an annual award in astronautics: the REP-Hirsch International Astronautics Prize, or Prix REP-Hirsch. Hirsch and Esnault-Pelterie provided funds, 5000 francs annually for three years, to the French Astronomical Society. The guests also discussed the name that should be given to the new science of spaceflight: the word astronautique (astronautics) proposed by the science-fiction writer J.H. Rosny the elder, was adopted. The Prix REP-Hirsch was awarded for many years and Hirsch remained a strong sponsor for astronautics. He was a wise counselor for another French pioneer, Alexandre Ananoff, when he started to promote astronautics in the 30s. He participated in the first International Astronautical Congress Ananoff organized in Paris from 30 September to 2 October, 1950. The purpose of our paper is to present a complete biography of André Louis-Hirsch (probably for the first time) and particularly his contributions to early astronautics in France, from 1926 until his death in 1962.