

Robert Sutton Harrington

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Robert Sutton Harrington (October 21, 1942 – January 23, 1993) was an American [astronomer](#) who worked at the [United States Naval Observatory](#) (USNO). Harrington was born near [Newport News, Virginia](#). His father was an [archaeologist](#). He was married to [Betty-Jean Maycock](#) in 1976, with two daughters, Amy and Ann.^[1]

Harrington worked at the USNO. Another astronomer there, [James W. Christy](#), consulted with him after discovering bulges in the images of [Pluto](#), which turned out to be Pluto's [satellite Charon](#).^[1] For this reason, some consider Harrington to be a co-discoverer of Charon,^[2] although Christy usually gets sole credit. By the laws of [physics](#), it is easy to determine the [mass](#) of a binary system based on its orbital period, so Harrington was the first to calculate the mass of the Pluto-Charon system, which was lower than even the lowest previous estimates of Pluto's mass.

For much of his career, he proposed the existence of a [Planet X](#) beyond Pluto and supported searches for it, collaborating initially with [T. C. \(Tom\) Van Flandern](#).^[1]

Harrington died of [esophageal cancer](#) in 1993.^[1] The [asteroid 3216 Harrington](#) was named in his honour.

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Planet X could not be confirmed six months before he died[[edit](#)]

Six months before Harrington's death, [E. Myles Standish](#) had used data from *Voyager 2*'s 1989 flyby of [Neptune](#), which had revised the planet's total mass downward by 0.5%—an amount comparable to the mass of [Mars](#)^[3]—to recalculate its gravitational effect on [Uranus](#).^[4] When Neptune's newly determined mass was used in the [Jet Propulsion Laboratory Developmental Ephemeris](#) (JPL DE), the supposed discrepancies in

the Uranian orbit, and with them the need for a Planet X, vanished.^[5] There are no discrepancies in the trajectories of any space probes such as *Pioneer 10*, *Pioneer 11*, *Voyager 1*, and *Voyager 2* that can be attributed to the gravitational pull of a large undiscovered object in the outer Solar System.^[6] Although most astronomers agree that Planet X, as Lowell defined it, does not exist,^[7] as of January 2016 there is speculation concerning *Planet Nine*.

References^[edit]

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- [^] [Betz, Eric \(2015-06-09\). "An interview with Jim Christy: How "defective" images revealed Pluto as a double planet". *Astronomy.com*. Retrieved 2016-06-26.](#)
- [^] [Croswell \(1997\), p. 66.](#)
- [^] [Myles Standish \(1992-07-16\). "Planet X – No dynamical evidence in the optical observations". *Astronomical Journal*. **105** \(5\): 200–2006. *Bibcode*:1993AJ....105.2000S. *doi*:10.1086/116575.](#)
- [^] [Tom Standage \(2000\). *The Neptune File: A Story of Astronomical Rivalry and the Pioneers of Planet Hunting*. New York: Walker. p. 188. ISBN 978-0-8027-1363-6.](#)
- [^] [Littmann \(1990\), p. 204.](#)
- [^] [Tom Standage \(2000\). *The Neptune File*. Penguin. p. 168. ISBN 0-8027-1363-7.](#)

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- [BAAS 25 \(1993\) 1496](#)

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