Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin

Astronomer Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin was the first woman to become a professor at Harvard University. She proved that stars were made up almost entirely of hydrogen and helium - one of the fundamental theories of stellar astrophysics. Nevertheless, her claim was rejected until 1929, when the man published a paper on the subject.

Cecilia Helena Payne-Gaposchkin was born on May 10, 1900 in Wendover, England. Her mother, Emma Leonora, Helena, came from Prussia from a very respected family, and her father, Edward John Payne, was a London lawyer, historian and musician. Cecilia had a younger brother, Humfry, who became an archaeologist, and a sister, Leonora, Florence Mary.

From an early age, Payne dreamed of becoming a scientist. She was particularly interested in botany. Unfortunately, without the right books and the help of good teachers, her dreams were slowly fading away.

She loved physics. She was completely enchanted by mechanics, dynamics, electricity and magnetism, optics, thermodynamics and the basics of astronomy.

She studied physics and mathematics, making chemistry and botany. However, over time, she found botany disappointing. After one year of study, she devoted herself entirely to studying physics.

In 1934, she became the first laureate of the newly created Annie J. Cannon Award in Astronomy. In 1976, the American Astronomical Society awarded her with the Henry Norris Russell Lectureship. The asteroid (2039) Payne-Gaposchkin was named after Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin.

She had three children with the astronomer Sergei Gaposchkin Edward, Katherine and Peter.

In August 1979, the scientist was diagnosed with lung cancer. Four months later, on December 7, Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin died peacefully in her home.