How did the Space Telescope Science Institute come to Johns Hopkins?

The AURA executive committee, led by John Teem but also including Art Code and Margaret Burbidge, weighed its options very carefully and decided against picking Princeton. At the time AURA’s reputation was mixed because of management problems it had had in running the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona. To overcome this negative impression the committee believed they needed to make their bid as unique and outstanding as possible. Thus, choosing Princeton would leave their proposal indistinguishable from all the others.

Instead they considered finding a site close to Goddard. When they approached the University of Maryland at College Park, they were told, no, the university was already being courted by USRA. It was then that

Teem and Art Code, who was going to be the institute’s acting director under their bid, talked to astrophysicist Arthur Davidsen at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Davidsen’s first reaction was mixed. “It would be great fun and wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing, but we are way too small to have any chance.” Very quickly, however, Davidsen changed his mind, especially when others in the Johns Hopkins astrophysics department became enthusiastic over the idea. As a result, Johns Hopkins became AURA’s choice, with Art Davidsen taking a leading role in writing its proposal to NASA.23

The scientists at URA, meanwhile, had liked Spitzer’s and Bahcall’s pitch and had recommended that Princeton be named in their proposal. However, their managers overruled this recommendation, insisting that they wanted the institute located close to their main base of operations at Fermilab in Illinois.24

The remaining three bidders, AUI, USRA, and Battelle all picked Princeton. In fact, the Princeton proposal was so good that it convinced