A brief review of the history of SGR and GRB astronomy

T. L. Cline

"Soft gamma repeaters" (SGRs) are the extremely bright bursts of > 50-keV photons detected from sources in the distant disk of the Milky Way and the LMC, and, as has been recently suggested, possibly from other galaxies as well. The phenomenology of SGRs is fascinating, with their episodic time scales ranging from hours to decades and their 'visual magnitudes' brighter than (but time profiles shorter than) most gamma ray bursts (GRBs). The physics of SGRs and of their 'magnetar' neutron-star origins is thus under understandably intense study. The history of SGR astronomy begins with the discovery by Golenetskii and Mazets, from the Ioffe Institute. Its trace through the late 1970s to the present time, and the relation of SGR to GRB astronomy, will be briefly outlined in this talk. A recent development is the dramatic occurrence of the SGR flare of December 2004, that may be classed as even beyond the scale of the previously record-breaking events of March 1979 and August 1998.