

# THE ECLIPTIC

Lackawanna Astronomical Society

Volume 24 No. 1

March - April 1998

## Officers for 1998:

President - Jo-Ann Kamichitis

Vice-President - John Sabia

Secretary - Carol Leola

Treasurer - Joe Kamichitis

Jr Vice-President - Adam Basalyga

At-Large Members - Joe Krott, Ron Murazzi, Jim Spangler

## Calendar of Activities:

March 3	7:30	Regular Meeting
March 7	8:30	Club Night
March 10	8:00	Board Meeting (Joe & Cindy's)
March 18	7:30	KCO Public Nights begin
March 27-28	7:30	Messier Marathon Nights
April 7	7:30	Regular Meeting
April 11	9:00	Club Night
April 14	8:00	Board Meeting (Joe & Cindy's)
May 5	7:30	Regular Meeting
May 9	9:00	Club Night
May 12	8:00	Board Meeting (Joe & Cindy's)

All activities are held at the observatory unless noted otherwise.

## Reasons To Party:

March 14, Albert Einstein born - 1879

March 20, Spring begins 2:55 pm

March 27, New Moon 10:14 pm

March 29, Olbers discovers Vesta - 1807

April 23, Close approach of Jupiter, Venus, and Moon - Dawn

April 25, HST in orbit - 1990

April 26, New Moon - 7:41 am.

## NEW CLUB SCOPE?

A major project we've talked about at the last two or three meetings is replacing the 12 1/2" newtonian in the club's observatory with a telescope the might be more manageable and more useful. After discussion, catalog perusing, and a trip to Pocono Mtn Optics, the Board believes that a 12" Meade Schmidt-cassegrain tube assembly will fill the bill and still be affordable. When Ron Murazzi first suggested replacing the club's scope at the November board meeting I was struck by two things - what a great idea! and why was it never suggested before?

First, why do I think it's a great idea?

The LAS observatory is used very little. There may be a month or two of interest then most of a year might go by with not much more than an inspection tour. Why is this?...

a. The newtonian is big and heavy. It has a 16" diameter fiberglass tube about 6 feet long and needs about 60 pounds of counterweights just to balance it. We've been plagued with vibration for as long as I can remember and nothing we've done seems to remedy the problem. As big as the mount is, the scope simply weighs too much.

b. It's difficult to use. A ladder is required most of the time. The eyepiece and finder get into nearly impossible (even dangerous) positions. The tube can be rotated but...

c. Rotating the tube is a pain in the neck and is pretty much a two-person operation.

d. Except for photos of the moon, astrophotography with the LAS scope is seldom done because of vibrations and being also a two-person project - one on the ladder operating the camera and another on the ground getting the guide star and working the drive correcter.

Replacing the 12 1/2" newtonian with a 12" S-C tube would eliminate virtually all of these problems at a negligible loss of aperture.

a. Vibration would be minimal since the tube is lighter (less weight) and shorter (less torque).

b. It would be much easier to use. A ladder would not be needed. A bad eyepiece position could be instantly fixed simply by rotating the diagonal. A second finder may, however, still be necessary.

c. Rotating the tube would not be required at all.

d. With a few accessories, astrophotography could approach the piece-of-cake level. We'll have a piggyback adapter attached probably at all times so fairly long unguided exposures can be made almost effortlessly by any member. With a focal reducer and off-axis guider deep-sky photos would be easier with everything within arms reach.

So why wasn't this great idea thought of years ago? The 12 1/2" telescope predates the club. The club was actually formed around the grinding of the mirror at the Everhart Museum back in the late 50's. The scope is not just something the club purchased years ago. The LAS observatory was built specifically to house the 12 1/2". So the scope and the LAS share a common history and it's hard for long-time members to think of one without the other and the thought of actually replacing it would simply never arise. That's why it took a new-comer, a young up-start like Ron to suggest the heretical idea of taking the 12 1/2" down and putting a different scope in its place.

Not that anyone has ideas of getting rid of the 12 1/2". With the simple addition of two side bearings it can used on a spare base made for a Coulter 13.1". The tube assembly itself will remain intact and as a Dobsonian it may end up being used more than ever. Realities of budget limit us to considering a tube assembly only instead of also buying a modern electronically controlled equatorial mount. If we can do that in the future, the 12" S-C tube can easily be adapted to it. Just the tube is a major purchase. It, along with a few accessories, will cost close to \$2500 - most of our entire treasury. Some fittings, attachments, and accessories can be built or loaned by members to hold down the immediate cost and there's always the possibility of actual monetary donations by individual members that will help as well.

We hope to vote on this important undertaking at the April meeting.

Joe Kamichitis

## SPRING WORK PARTY

The LAS Observatory building itself is in pretty good shape after the work we did on it last year. General cleaning, a little more painting, and maybe a bit more roofing work might be in order. With luck, the family of copperhead snakes that moved in last year may decide to move on. If not, we'll have to solve that problem ourselves. I hope they're not on anyones endangered species list.

The main project this year is cutting the "grass" to about halfway between the LAS building and the KCO courtyard fence. We want to do this as early as we can before the grass gets too much of a head start. This probably means the last part of April if it's not too wet.

Our plan here is to get members to park and observe near the LAS observatory. This means using the LAS scope as well as setting up your own instrument. Splitting up the observing areas will give everyone more room and take the pressure off the courtyard which lately has turned into a mini Stellafane with people bumping into scopes and tripping over observing chairs.

We should have a date for the work party at the April meeting.

Joe Kamichitis

## MESSIER MARATHON 1998

The Club will hold its third annual Messier Marathon on Saturday March 28 beginning about 7:30 PM at the observatory. As usual, since we need an unobstructed view of the western sky, we will set up our scopes along the west side of the parking lot so if possible park your cars on the east side. Once we polish off the objects in the west we can stay in the parking or move into the courtyard.

We'll have check-off lists available with the M-objects listed in the recommended search order. It's especially important to "bag" the objects low in the western sky before they set. We'll have coffee available and maybe even some cookies and doughnuts but you're welcome to bring some serious food for yourself.

This is scheduled to be an all-night observing session. If the previous night, Friday, is clear we will almost certainly be at the observatory too but maybe not as early and maybe not all night. Call if you have any questions.

We consider the Messier Marathon to be an enjoyable learning experience, not a cut-throat competition. There are no prizes given for the most objects found. Sorry.

Joe Kamichitis

**NORTHEAST  
ASTRONOMY FORUM**

This 7th annual show put on by the Rockland Astro Club will be held on Sunday May 3 at the Holiday Inn in Suffern NY. Over thirty vendors and astro clubs will be there with telescopes and equipment, computer software, and books, as well as swap tables. Speakers include Roger Sinnott and Phil Harrington. Admission at the door is \$12 but you can pre-register for \$10. This event has gotten bigger and better over the years and has proved popular with LAS members (meaning that 3 or 4 people have actually attended). You can get more details at the March and April meetings.

**Dues for 1998**

Dues for 1998 are due now. Many of you have paid already and for that we say "Thank You" and we have tried to not send a dues notice to you along with this newsletter. If there's a slip-up, then, our apologies, just ignore it.

If you haven't paid, you should find a dues notice enclosed along with the new dues rates.

**KEYSTONE COLLEGE OBSERVATORY**

Public Nights begin on March 18 at 7:30 PM and will continue every Wednesday through May 27. LAS members are invited on those nights for another chance to observe and help with the public.

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