

JOURNAL OF THE LACKAWANNA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
KJC Observatory, Fleetville, Pa. Everhart Museum, Scranton, Pa.

Vol. 4 No. 2

SUMMER SOLSTICE

June 1976

IN MEMORIUM

On April 29, 1976 the LAS lost a good friend and member in George Marhevka. In the late 1950's, Mr. Marhevka was one of the original group of amateur astronomers who became the LAS. In the ensuing years, he served the LAS well as member, treasurer, and vice president.

Since Mr. Marhevka was experienced in mirror grinding and telescope making, he was one of the guiding lights during the construction of the society's 12½" reflector. George was well known as an active observer and photographer of sky objects.

The LAS has greatly increased its membership lately, so many of the newer members missed the chance to know George. The veteran members, however, will miss his experience and good practical advice a great deal.

MESSAGE FROM THE HISTORIAN

As appointed historian of the Lackawanna Astronomical Society, I would like to ask the members for some help.

If anyone has photos, news clippings, etc. of the Society's special events, trips, or meetings of the past and wishes to donate them to the LAS, please contact me. It seems that our oldest records were mislaid or lost, and the job of correlating the bits of information of the past is a hard one. The time of 1959 to 1966 being the most important years of which I have no records. I would also be interested in talking with individuals who were with the group since its beginning. I can be contacted at my home or at the meetings.

Thank you.

James W. Filipski

REQUEST FROM THE BUILDING COMMITTEE

Jim Filipski, head of the building committee, wishes to take this opportunity to beg and plead with all members to scout around for these materials for the 12½" telescope's mount and the observatory building. He emphasizes that the LAS's budget requires that these materials be either donated (free) or used (cheap). This is no time to be proud.

The material specifications are given below. For a more complete list, for quantities, and to check to see if others have already picked up the same materials, contact Jim at 489-5407. He will be waiting by the phone.

½" or ¾" or 1" steel plate

2" steel axles

pillow blocks

2" roller bearings

¾" to 1" aluminum plate

OBSERVING COMET WEST

By

John Sabia

Expectations of a bright comet in the morning skies aroused enthusiasm in members of the LAS. For weeks before the event telescopes and cameras were being prepared -- what film? which camera? color? or black and white? telephoto or not? All these questions were debated by Ken Mason and Jerry Zawislak. In the meantime, Chuck Lonaberger and Jim Filipski worked on a setup for a 7" Aero-ektar camera and attached it to the declination shaft of a 6" reflector which served as the guiding instrument. I myself brushed up on comet observing techniques, and magnitude determinations. This time photography came second to recording visual observations along with estimations of tail lengths and position angles.

Schedules had been set for time on the 9" Clark Refractor and the Society's 12½" reflector. Some of the programs dropped at the last minute for one reason or another. The first weekend of March was met with mostly cloudy skies and very sleepy amateurs. The morning of the 7th was no different with broken clouds that moved rapidly eastward. After most had dozed off and called it quits again, I continued to stick it out with a small hope. Then in the late twilight Altair was seen in a large clearing and in a little while Comet West appeared against the light blue sky. After arousing my companions with a loud scientific yell, I trained the 4" f5 refractor on the coma. The atmosphere was extremely turbulent even at the low magnification I used, but central condensation was definitely noticed in the small comet by Richard Brakefield and I. The tail extended for 5°. That was the first of ten observations of Comet West. Some were with friends, some alone, and one with a total stranger.

The next morning a perfectly clear sky had finally arrived. Comet West was observed to have a 15° broad dust tail arcing slightly northward, and a straight narrow ion tail. The view with the 5" f/5 refractor and its 4½° field of view was a memorable sight. Eminating from the coma, the broad tail had a distinct red tinge for ½°. A bright starlike central condensation in the coma gleamed with a blue white hue. The tail split about 5° from the nucleus. A view Jim Filipski and I were impressed with. Bill Speare and George Marhevka also had a great view with binoculars at their site. For the most part I observed with the Clark refractor until horizon clouds crept up to obscure it in early twilight.

On the next clear morning, March 12, the group was out in full force and the schedule, while in effect, was rearranged. Chuck was successful in obtaining three photos with the 7" Apo-aktar camera that were excellently guided. My observation showed for the head of Comet West a small central condensation elongated slightly in position angle 192° surrounded by a coma that blended with the tail. This made coma measurement difficult, but I estimated 3 minutes of arc. Two bright jets of 3 to 5 minutes of arc emanated from each end of the condensation. It was Jim who first spotted the four distinct nuclei after photographing the coma. In the twilight most of the bright coma dissappeared enabling the nuclei to stand out. They were situated in the central condensation almost neatly arranged into a trapesium figure. Three of them (A, B, and D) were equal in magnitude roughly estimated at ninth. Nucleus C was more nebulous and much fainter than the rest. From carefully drawn sketches, the position angles were determined as $B = 326^\circ$, $C = 293^\circ$, and $D = 353^\circ$. Dawn approached and, unfortunately, so did the beginning of another typical "work day". But who could keep his mind on work when just three hours earlier one had seen something so spectacular and extremely rare.

In the next three weeks that followed I continued observing Comet West, watching the progress of the tail as it became as small as 3° long and smaller when observation was restricted to that from the city. I watched with intensity the four nuclei of the comet to detect any change in position angles and separations. On March 24 nucleus C was no longer seen; five days later nucleus A had decreased in magnitude to now almost equal faint nucleus D. Total magnitude measurement showed West fading down to $+4.6$ on March 29, and $+5.4$ by April 3, but a tail was still present. The magnitude of the nucleus were below the charts and atlases in my possession, but a good estimate puts them at eighth or ninth magnitude.

Along with the drawings that I made at the telescopes used, I also made sure that I took a photograph sometime during the observation. Tri-X film was used in my camera and exposures were for no longer than 30 seconds. The normal 50 mm f/1.4 lens was used, tripod mount.

Not that all of this early morning rising and highway traveling in the middle of the morning to the observatory "just to see a comet" was to go without reward. On the morning of the 24th I walked out into the middle of a "major geo-magnetic storm," an aurora that lit up the north with glowing pulsating curtains of red, green and blue. And for the first time in ten years I observed the corona, pulsating as the particles entered the atmosphere. But the treat culminated as the aurora continued to sparkle in Scorpius and Virgo.

I did not concentrate on my work that morning either.

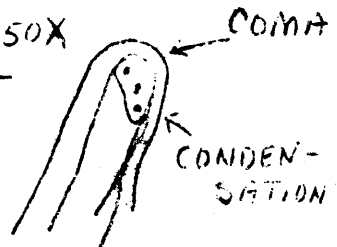
3/12/76

9" f15 150X
10:43 UT
SEEN AT
TWILIGHT

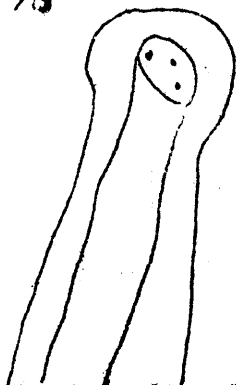


3/24/76

9" f15 150X
9:24 UT
DARK SKY

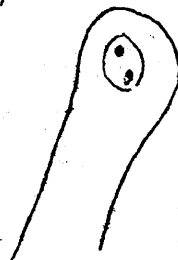


3/29/76



9" f15 150X
9:13 UT
DARK SKY

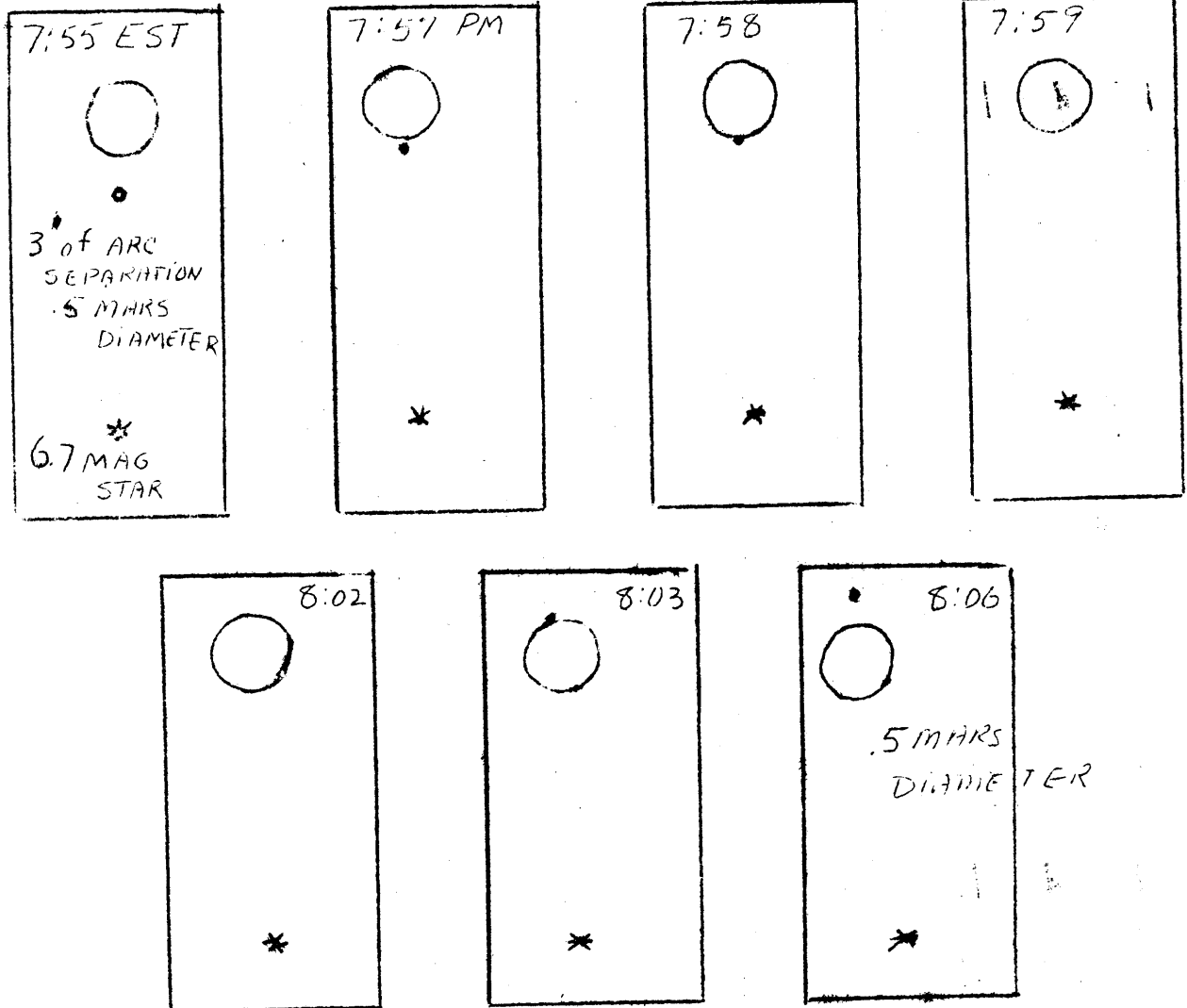
4/10/76



9" f15 150X
8:40 UT
DARK SKY
NO JETS

APRIL 7, 1976
OCCULTATION OF
EPSILON GEMINI BY MARS

Equipment: 4½" Newtonian Reflector 150XX
Conditions: Very clear seeing
Observations by: Frank Adams Jr.

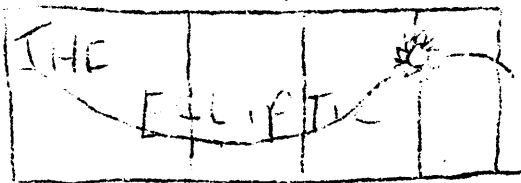


Editor's Note : Frank is an Eighth grade student, yet has been a very active observer for over three years. We're pleased with the interest our junior member have.

AO EDITOR,

Hi ITS ME AGAIN

ITS GREAT TO SEE MY NAME IN



AND NOW I

KNOW THE PUBLIC IS GETTING
AN EDUCATION THEY NEED IT
INCLOSED PLEASE FIND MORE

PS From now on my article will be titled

DE ASTRONIMUS NONSENSICUM
by
Prof. S. A. Yagain B.B.S. of Z.I.T.

Earthshine - liquor distilled on the moon

Radio propagation - art of growing small transistors

Drive corrector - backseat driver

Forbidden lines - my definition of certain words which have been
deleted by the editor

Midnight sun - worst possible problem faced by astrononers; second
only to clouds

Nebular hypotisis - theory that states clouds usually condense out
clear skies

Terminator - dewed lens

Retro grade - my first twelve years of school

Total eclipse - viewing with lens cap on

Ecliptic - medical term for someone so disturbed that he goes around
causing eclipses

Hour angle - short time in which to catch a fish

Polar alignment - performed on the earth when it comes in for its
50,000 year tune-up

Off axis - telescope made by dropping it out of a window while
observing

Neutons ring - jewelry made of cookie crumbs

Sleep - seldom used in astronomy

Right acension - proper way to climb an observing platform

Shooting stars - kamikaze pilots of the solar system

WELL SO LONG FOR NOW. WILL RITE NEXT ISSUE! Prof. S. A. Yagain

Editor's note: If Prof. Yagain and all my other contributors wish
to be in the next issue, please have your articles in by August 15.
Your continuing cooperation is deeply appreciated. Send any itens
to: Jo-Ann Pluciennik
313 E. Elm Street
Scranton, Pa. 18505

STAFF: Diane Pluciennik

The Lackawanna Astronomical Society is interested in exchanging newsletters with other amateur groups. If your group shares our interest, please notify me at the address below, or send me a copy of your latest issue of your newsletter. I hope to be hearing from you soon.

Jo-Ann Pluciennik
Editor, the ECLIPTIC
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Scranton, PA 18505

Handwritten notes:
I have a copy of the newsletter
I will send you a copy of the newsletter
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