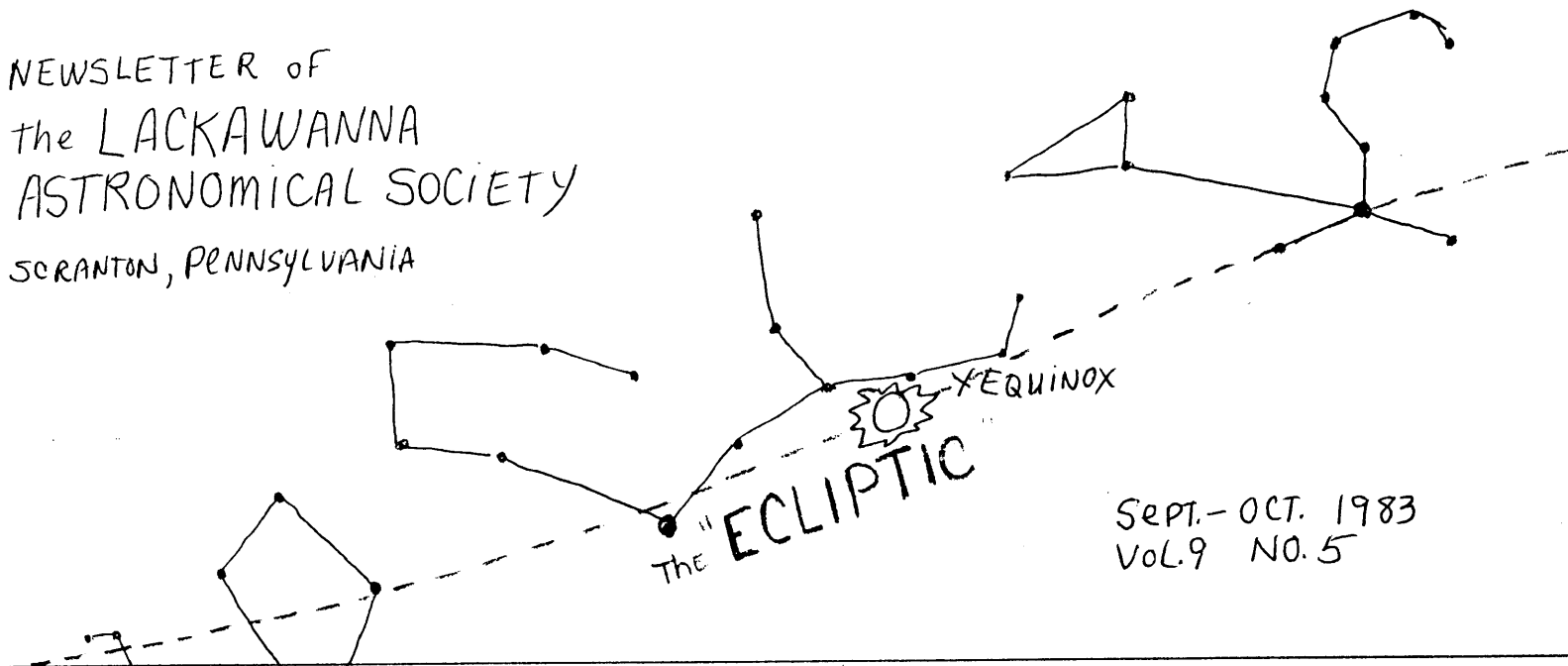


NEWSLETTER of
 the LACKAWANNA
 ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
 SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA



SEPT.-OCT. 1983
 VOL. 9 NO. 5

LAS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS FOR 1983

President - Jo-Ann Pluciennik
 Secretary - Bob Maleninsky
 Junior Vice President - Scott Bailey
 At-Large Members - Jill Adelstein/Bob Bolock/Bill Mecca
 Vice President - John Sabia
 Treasurer - Joe Kamichitis

LAS CALENDAR

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>TIME</u>
Sept. 6 Tuesday	Regular meeting	Everhart Museum	7:30 PM
Sept. 10 Saturday	Official club observing night	KJC/LASO, Fleetville, PA	9:00 PM and on
Sept. 20 Tuesday	Board Meeting	Home of J. Pluciennik	8:00 PM
Oct. 4 Tuesday	Regular Meeting	Everhart Museum	7:30 PM
Oct. 8 Saturday	Official club observing night	KJC/LASO, Fleetville, PA	9:00 PM and on
Oct. 18 Tuesday	Board Meeting	Home of J. Pluciennik	8:00 PM

KJC/LASO is on Route 107, about halfway from Exit 61 of I 81, as you head to Fleetville Corners. You take a left on Hack Road. The gate is right there.

EARLY FALL ACTION WITH THE LAS

MEETINGS

In September our featured speaker is Bill Speare, science curator at the Everhart Museum. Bill's slide talk will be on his astronomical travels in the southwestern U. S., this past summer. In particular he'll be featuring Mt. Palomar and the 200" telescope. Our recent concerns with the prospect of light pollution in Benton Township run parallel to those of the professionals at Mt. Palomar. Their problems, though, may affect the future of astronomical research. Don't miss this talk! (Bill's slides are always interesting -- he'll be showing us the Orient and the June eclipse of the sun later on this year.)

For October, Joe Kamichitis and John Sabia are working on a presentation

about "Choosing and Using Star Atlases" and "Tips on the Right Gear for Winter Observing." Also our soon-to-be-named Nominations Committee will be rooting around, searching for people willing to take on the responsibilities of club leadership. If you're full of ideas for programs and activities or have been itching to guide the destiny of the LAS, come out of hiding! Volunteer for the Nominations Committee or put yourself in contention for one of the offices, now!

CLUB OBSERVING NIGHTS

Both club nights listed are between new and first quarter moon; this would be a great time to come up to KJC/LASO and get the full effect of country-dark skies. There are fewer mosquitos and earlier darkness than in summer; more comfy temperatures than in mid-winter. Ottwell's "Astronomical Companion" has cloudiness maps that show September-October to be generally one of the most cloudfree times around here. Find out what you've been missing all these years!! If you're a new member, get acquainted with the constellations. Learn how to use the 10" Dobsonian, the 12" equatorial Newtonian and the 9" Clark refractor. Bring up your own 'scopes and finally learn how to use them (or finally see just how well your 'scope can perform.) Comparison shop in the field before you decide just what type and size of 'scope you want to spend your money on. Figure out your astrophotography problems. Learn how to make perfect Mr. Coffee coffee in the cozy red dimness of the classroom building's office. There's something for amateur astronomers of any level -- even the fabled LAS library shelves for armchair types.

On all official club nights, a keyholder to KJC/LASO will be present (either John Sabia or Jo-Ann Pluciennik). On other clear weekend nights, contact J. Pluciennik (346-3268) to see if the place will be unlocked or will you have to bring your own 'scopes and warm up in your car. KJC Observatory's phone number is 945-3665 but people are not always near enough to the phone to hear it.

PUBLIC NIGHTS

KJCO's regular Wednesday public nights will run from September 14 to November 16 inclusive. Each public night features a slide-talk on various astronomical topics, followed by observing with the 9" Clark and the 10" Dobsonian. Programs begin between 7:30 and 8:00 o'clock (depending on how dark it is and how late the public arrives,) and ends when the night chill drives the unsuspecting public away. Anyone interested in scheduling a group of any type (scouts, school groups, church fellowship, social club, family reunion, etc.) for a private session should contact Tom Cupillari, KJC Observatory Director at Keystone Jr. College (945-5141) during the day.

LOANER TELESCOPE

Many of our members may not be aware that the LAS owns a 6" reflector (an f/8 RV-6 Dynascope.) This 'scope, which is complete with eyepieces, equatorial mount, clock drive, setting circles, sky guide, and star atlas, is available for loan to any dues-paying LAS member. We'll show you how to set it up and use it, and you'll get the chance to decide how big a 'scope would be handy for you. Anyone interested in the use of this 'scope for a month should contact John D. Sabia (586-0789) to be scheduled for it.

Jo-Ann Pluciennik
President

"HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION" DEPT. PART I

MY FIRST STELLAFANE

As soon as I realized I would finally be at Stellafane in a week, I was getting pretty excited. Finally! My big chance to rub elbows with all the big shots from the magazines, especially the man -- who (to quote him) "nobody believes" -- Walter Scott Houston.

On this trip I was "riding shotgun" with club Vice-Prez, John Sabia, in his ultra-fuel-efficient, 4,000-mile-young Chevette Scooter. The trip went well to say the least. Upon entering the Stellafane camping area however,

I felt as if I was in Lackawanna State Park. This is Vermont?

After our base camp was set up, we affixed our embarrassing pink name tags and headed up the proverbial hill to the actual club house and turret telescope, to check out the telescopes on display and look for the rest of the LAS contingent. This is what I was waiting for!

My first impression was that the "hill" was quite small. The "usable area", that is, since much of the cleared part is made definitely "unstandable" by huge granite boulders, is small. The presence of about 2,000 "glass pusher" (while at Stellafane, people don't "build telescopes" or "grind mirrors", they "push glass") really drove this point home. Trying to navigate such uneven ground in the dark with just a red flashlight was an adventure! But, I was still impressed at seeing the structures on the hill. Both the pink clubhouse and the shed-like building that is the Porter Turret telescope were mounted on, what else, granite boulders!! This amused me to no end.

After the tour, Mr. Sabia and myself made our way to the clubhouse wall to purchase tickets for the telescope raffle, (obviously "fixed" since none of the LAS members won.) The gentlemen getting my tickets needed a pair of scissors to cut some punch cards. Being a survival-oriented astronomer, I lent him my Victorinox Swiss Army Knife, and saved the day.

About an hour after this triumph it came to me that quite a few of these people were here because of their god-like skills in the design and construction of astronomical instruments. Since my only claim to fame in this department is the use of a percussion cymbal stand as a photo tripod, I was feeling just a bit out of place. But the more I looked and listened and chatted, the more I found out that the majority of those in attendance were ordinary observation-oriented amateurs like myself. To be sure there were also quite a large number of braggarts that approached you as follows:

"Hi! Wilbur Diphong, South Perth Amboy ATM Rod and Gun Club. Been pushin' glass for 12(?) or was it 14, no 20 years and I love to build spectroscopes. Wanna help me clean my 15 zillion inch Maksutov?"

But seriously, on the whole, the people were great. Super-friendly and willing to spend loads of time with you talking about everything from politics to optics, and they do know their stuff! I can honestly say I'm proud to be an astronomer after visiting Stellafane. But on with my story.

The weather was lousy. Hot, sticky and brief periods of light rain with an occasional nearby thunderstorm. If it didn't clear soon, I was going to scream. After all, I wanted to look through the monster reflectors that were present, not at them. I'm the kind of person that's not too impressed unless I can use the tool I'm looking at. Don't tell me about your new Corvette unless you're going to let me drive it. Don't tell me about your new stereo or camera unless you're going to let me play with the knobs.

It finally cleared on Saturday night (except for a little haze) and I had a 6.3 limiting magnitude in the sky. Not too shabby. I was impressed with the 'scopes, but especially the refractors. For someone with only 3½ to 4 years of observing under my belt, I've used some comparatively big guns as telescopes go. But never a 22" or a 24". These were nice, especially the 24". But nothing beats the sharp images of a refractor. It's hard to explain how much more you will appreciate the Clark in Fleetville after visiting Stellafane.

Even if the skies hadn't cleared, I still would have enjoyed myself with the well-written, informative and funny talks, not to mention Walter Scott Houston's now historical Saturday evening talk. He's the only speaker I've heard who can creatively ramble and hold your interest. But honestly, I'm still leery about some of the views in his 4" apogee 'scope which has been made world famous by the "Deep Sky Wonders" column in Sky and Telescope.

To sum things up, every amateur astronomer should try to attend Stellafane. One warning though -- it is addictive. Soon you, too, can say, "I remember that 'scope from "X" number of years ago." Besides you will learn a lot and meet some very nice folks in the process. And let's not forget the simple pleasures of enjoying the chemical toilets available on the hill. Just the thought of using a "Johnnie on the Spot" that was also visited by someone famous is enough to lure anyone back for a future visit.

(By the way, the cheesy title was suggested by the club president.)

Scott Bailey
Chief of Observatory
Security and Defense

"HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION" DEPT. PART II

Astronomy is probably the only science that is widely attractive to the public. This seems to be because it doesn't sound dull and practical like say, polymer chemistry; instead the most popular and most discussed fields in astronomy are not concerned with humdrum real-life, but are full of daring speculative thinking. The public's attraction for astronomy was plainly shown this summer by the large attendance at both KJCO's summer lecture series and the star parties at Promised Land State Park.

For all that people complain that the observatory is so hard to find, the notices in the papers led about 300 people to attend one or more of the six summer sessions. At Promised Land State Park, our three slide show/star parties attracted between 400 to 450 people. The head ranger has commented many times that he's been really impressed by the good reviews our programs have received, and the number of requests for more such programs. While we have had pretty good cooperation from club members and were able to handle the crowds, we really could have used more participation from our club. You don't have to be Carl Sagan to answer most of the questions people ask, and you could always refer the questions to another LAS member. We'd like to thank these participating members for their help at Promised Land this past summer (alphabetically listed) -- Jill Adelstein, Scott Bailey, Ron Benjamin, Joe Kamichitis, John Kosek, Bob Maleninsky, Luann Naughton, Jo-Ann Pluciennik and John Sabia. For next year, we hope the list will be even longer.

In addition, the LAS outings averaged 14 people or so each month. Those who didn't make it up for these club nights truly lost out, ^{SINCE ALL} were near new moon and all had clear dark skies, enhanced by the presence of Saturn and Jupiter. This has been a most unusual summer, in that none of our activities (except for the Persieds) were affected by bad weather conditions.

Jo-Ann Pluciennik

NEW MEMBERS/MEMBER NEWS

The summer lecture series brought us a bumper crop of new members to be added to your membership list. (*) after name means junior member.

Louie Durkin*, 329 Chestnut St., Dunmore, PA 18512 343-7249

Mike Gilhooley*, 2114 Brown Ave., Scranton, PA 18509 347-5213

Edward Kashuba*, 1507 Wyoming Ave., Scranton, PA 18509 342-8097

Joseph Kuranda*, R. D. #3, Box 463, Lake Ariel, PA 18436 689-9886

Francis Maros, 307 Edgar St., Olyphant, PA 18447 383-0594

Robert Sallavanti*, 104 Miles St., Dalton, PA 18414 563-1732

We want to thank Claude Fanucci for his hard work this summer reconditioning the 9", including making a missing part out of brass. Now the 9" moves easily without the groaning sounds that had become all too familiar. We're lucky Claude has such an affinity for Alvan Clark and his sons.

Thanks also go out to Frank Maros for making some knobs to facilitate locking down the roof to LASO.

"CLOSE ENCOUNTERS" -- Comet 1983d

When the ringing of the phone awakened me from my rest at about 11:20 PM, I assumed it was the computer operators at work calling me about another problem. It was, therefore, surprising to hear Jo-Ann's voice, calling from the observatory this dark, clear night. (It was too bad I had to drive to Rochester, NY, early in the morning so I'd have to waste this night.) I could hear the excitement in her voice as she relayed the information of Bill Mecca's discovery -- an ULNO (Unexpected Large Nebulous Object) -- maybe even his own comet!

Bill Mecca had found a comet! News like that is enough to wake me from any sleep. Jo-Ann continued on to say the object was located near Draco's head, a very large nebulous patch easily seen in binoculars. I informed her that I hadn't received any information on any recent discovery, but she said there had been an article in the "Tribune" that morning talking about a new comet in the sky that would make a close approach to the earth. They suspected Bill's ULNO was that comet, but naturally we're sort of hoping it'd be his own instead.

After hanging up I had to get dressed, find my 10 x 80's and red flashlight, and search frantically for the correct AAVSO Atlas charts for that area of Draco (not necessarily done in that order.) When I finally got outside, I located Bill's comet with no difficulty. It was big, over one degree in diameter, with a magnitude of 6.2 as compared to the field stars. The globular cluster, M13, appeared dwarfed in size when compared to it! This could be an interesting comet -- much more so than say, Comet Austin last summer.

Well after I returned from Rochester NY, I finally received the ephemeris for Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock. Discovered visually on May 3, 1983 U.T., my first observation in my observing book was dated May 7, 1983 U.T. Bill had picked up on this comet very quickly. He was even faster than my usual mail service.

All during the close approach of Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock, clear to partly cloudy skies prevailed. The usual observers witnessed a fascinating naked eye comet -- a circular patch of light, with a nucleus noticeably offset from center, moving very rapidly across the night sky. A very nice display. Not the impressive spectacle of Comet West or Bennet, but nice nonetheless.

Of course now the astronomical world will call 1983d "IRAS-Araki-Alcock", but around here it will be recalled as Mecca's "ULNO" -- "Comet Mecca."

John D. Sabia

Editor's note: Don Murray recalls his own independent discovery of a comet in 1957. Looking over the valley towards West Mountain just after sunset, he was startled to see a perfect little comet -- tail and all. What a thrill that must have been even if it did turn out to be Comet Arend-Roland, not his own!!

OBSERVATORY ASIDES

This summer has provided me with a lost of food for thought (although normally I take the summer off). For example, we've just had a serious scare about the future effectiveness of the observatories in Fleetville. There's construction going on just across the road to the north of us, and so we were called upon to send information to various agencies (zoning board, board of supervisors, etc.) expressing our concerns especially about light pollution caused by the proposed airport. In order to maximize attendance at our August meeting where we were going to inform our members about what was happening and what we'd done, postcards were sent to all 55 members. Only about 35% of the membership attended. This is, to say the least, discouraging, but yet not surprising when you consider how few of our members make any use of the Fleetville facilities. Luckily for those of us who do, a meeting with Mr. Jay Sasale of NTI indicates that things may not turn out to be as bad as we thought.

The problem seems to be that most of our members just have a mild sort of interest in astronomy; so they read and become knowledgeable, take the time to observe the Perseids and may even become acquainted with the brighter

constellations. Others own telescopes and observe whenever it is convenient to do so. To frequent the observatory though, astronomy has to become a necessity, not something you do just when conditions are perfect. Most beginners go through a brief period after buying a telescope, of wanting to be out every clear night, even to the point of begrudging others those clear nights that they cannot take advantage of. If you wait for only perfect conditions, then the moon eliminates at least one to two full weeks of each month. Cold weather (when you'd have to go through the bother of getting all those layers on) eliminates a good three to four months. Then there's always rain, of course, and hazy conditions, TV, work, social life, and before you know it the telescope just sits collecting dust. Facing facts, observational astronomy is basically an inconveniencing activity and perfect conditions are hard to come by in this area.

I'm not suggesting that no one should do armchair astronomy or that everyone should give up all normal society to spend all their time skulking around at night seeking the perfect view, but we could use more people who find it necessary to do some astronomy daily. Just noticing the shift of the sunrise and sunset points, how the planets have moved among the stars, how much sooner Sagittarius sets these days, will gradually lead you to the state where you'll more often be able to push yourself to give up some sleep, dress up warmly, and drive a few miles to see a good sky, even with no particular special event going on.

It's not as if light pollution is the worst thing that can happen to anyone. I'm even more worried about toxic wastes and radioactive wastes poisoning our soil and water. The prospect that within my lifetime we may well get to the point where there's only man and whatever domesticated plants and animals he deems necessary left on the earth, that was so far-fetched in my junior high science fiction readings, now seems unnervingly likely these days (not to mention nuclear war, please.) Basically I feel that LASers should seize what chances they can get now because this may become the golden age of the club in a few years and you wouldn't want to have missed it.

Jo-Ann Pluciennik

The "Ecliptic" is the bimonthly newsletter of the Lackawanna Astronomical Society. A subscription to the "Ecliptic" is one of the benefits of membership in the LAS. No permission is needed for nonprofit use of any material published in the "Ecliptic" provided it is properly credited.

Articles, cartoons, news items, may be sent to:

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Scranton, PA 18505

Staff: Diane Musewicz
Joe Kamichitis
Julie Musewicz

MEMBER NEWS

We've just found out that Ed Swarts, a long time member, and husband of Jane Swarts, one of the founding members of the LAS, was seriously injured in a car accident. Anyone wishing to send him get well wishes, may do so at the address below:

Ed Swarts
ICU, Horten Memorial Hospital
60 Prospect Avenue
Middletown, NY 10940