

The "ECLIPTIC"

Newsletter of the Lackawanna Astronomical Society, Scranton, Pennsylvania

January-February 1985

Vol. 11 No. 1

LAS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS FOR 1985

President - J. Michael Schirra

Vice President - Jo-Ann Pluciennik

Secretary - LouAnn Benjamin

Treasurer - Joe Kamichitis

Junior Vice President - Tommy Holeva

Members-At-Large - John D. Sabia/Mary Rose Schirra/Ed Sidorski

SEASONS
GREETINGS!!

REGULAR MEETINGS

7:30 PM TUESDAYS

JAN. 8

FEB. 5

MARCH 5

OFFICIAL CLUB NIGHTS

9:00 PM SATURDAYS

JAN. 12

FEB. 9

MARCH 9

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

8:00 PM TUESDAYS

JAN. 22

FEB. 19

MARCH 19

MEETING PLACES

Regular monthly meetings

JAN - Viewmont Mall Community Room
Feb., March - Everhart Museum

CLUB NIGHTS (only if clear)

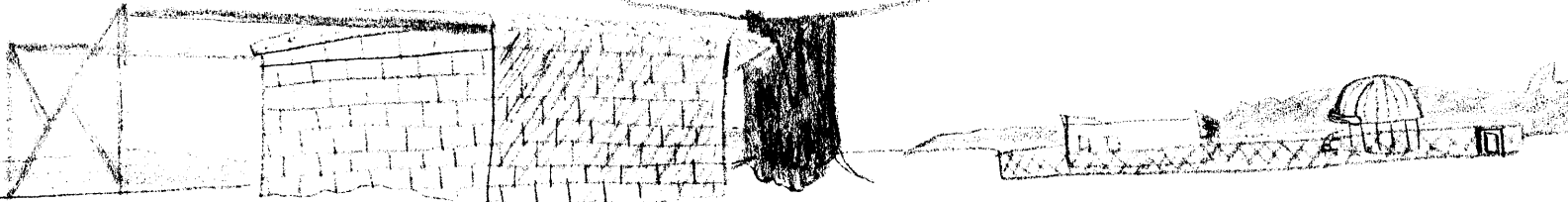
KJC/LASO on Rt 107 between I 81
& Fleetville (other clear
weekend nights call J. Pluciennik
(at 346-3268) or the observatory
(at 945-3665) to see if the facilities
are available.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

home of J. Michael Schirra, Moosic, PA

RIVERSIDE H.S. OBSERVATORY'S (PUBLIC NIGHTS

Clear Tuesday nights from 7:30 on. (only
when school is in session) Behind the New School
Building just off MAIN Ave. in TAYLOR, PA.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to accept the challenge of becoming President of the Lackawanna Astronomical Society for the year 1985. I hope that I will be able to serve the Club well.

In the past few years, I have come to learn some of the workings of the Club, and at first, I thought the challenge of becoming an officer might be exciting, but too demanding. However, when Jo-Ann informed me that all I needed to become President was to have the letter "J" as the first initial of my name, I knew everything would be okay.

I know that the former officers of the Club will be more than happy to supply me with any help I may need, and I wish to thank them for their support, both past and future.

In the coming year, I hope to provide the Club with as much excitement as in the past at each of the meetings. We hope to provide seasonal star configurations so amateurs can easily find constellations and their way around the skies. We also hope to have movies and special talks on our solar system, and maybe a few surprises.

At the January meeting, we will have an upcoming events talk from John Sabia, and an astronomy trivia game with audience participation. At the February meeting, we will have a solar system slide show for the beginner as well as the experienced presented by myself, and an upcoming events talk presented by Jo-Ann Pluciennik.

Thank you again for allowing me to be President in 1985.

J. Michael Schirra
President

THE "COMET" NEWS NOTE

I've been plotting the path of Halley's Comet on my Norton's Star Atlas for various dates, in order to show the members where to look for it. Well, I've carried that a bit farther and produced some preliminary finder star charts that can be used by even the novice star gazer.

There are two charts, the first, concentrated on the pre-perihelion evening sky for the month of January 1986. At that time, it should be visible with binoculars or the eye after evening twilight. The map shows the constellations of Pegasus and Aquarius. The path of the comet is shown at five-day intervals, as it moves from the region of the asterism of Aquarius, to the star Beta Aquarii. Additional information on viewing times and directions are noted on the bottom. The constellations are orientated as they would be seen at the end of twilight in the western sky.

The second chart plots Halley's Comet travelling through the constellations of Sagittarius and Scorpius during March of 1986, which will be the best chance to view it. Keep in mind that then the comet will be a morning sky object.

Both charts will be printed on 8½ x 11 paper at the scale of "Nortons." The constellations are labelled and the figures will be sketched in to aid identification. They will then be duplicated for distribution to members, news releases and the public. An announcement will be made in "The Ecliptic" when they are available.

Photographic charts are also in the works, to be made from our own photos of the same areas depicted in the handout charts. These will then be displayed at our meetings; KJC Observatory and, tentatively, at the Everhart Museum.

John D. Sabia

TALES OF THE COMET TAIL

We are now in the season of Comet Halley commemorative this and commemorative that. Anything from T-shirts to telescopes -- it's enough to drive you to drink. Therefore, why not a commemorative drink? Yes, now you can have a "Tail of the Comet" right at your own bar. Simply by mixing the following, you can toast your friends on those cloudy evenings or mornings when a view is not possible, and reminisce about comets of old.

TAIL OF THE COMET

8 oz of ginger ale or cola
1 oz of white rum
 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz of Sambuca
Stir well and serve.

You'll have a light refreshing beverage to serve all your friends, (who are probably wearing their Halley's Comet T-shirt, tie clasp, ring, earrings, necklaces, stick pins, etc., etc., etc.)

Cheers!

John D. Sabia

BOOK REVIEW

The Astronomical Scrapbook by Joseph Ashbrook

Every other month for 23 years beginning in 1954, Joseph Ashbrook wrote "The Astronomical Scrapbook" articles in Sky & Telescope magazine. Ashbrook, a Ph. D. astronomer and editor of Sky & Telescope until his death in 1980, wrote about the known and little-known, occasionally off-beat personages who comprise the history of astronomy. In his articles we learned some of the background of men whose names are more like terminology to us today -- Dawes, Airy, Foucault, Bayer -- or men whose names we see only in tables or maybe never hear at all -- Perrine, Hall, Groombridge, Krieger. We learned about thin lunar crescents, lost planets, mapping the moon, and the making of the Bonner Durchmusterung.

When I read those articles (mostly in back issues since my current subscription didn't start until the late 1970's) I found that even though a particular title didn't exactly catch my interest, Ashbrook's no-nonsense enthusiasm was so contagious that I wouldn't stop until I was finished.

Now, Sky Publishing Corporation with the Cambridge University Press has published The Astronomical Scrapbook subtitled Skywatchers, Pioneers, and Seekers in Astronomy. 91 of Ashbrook's articles are collected here in 470 reader-friendly, non-glare, opaque, flat-lying, high-quality, hard-bound pages. Nearly all of the 83 chapters have one or two photographs or drawings, the majority of which I can almost guarantee you've never seen before, and they by themselves are worth having the book. The current introductory price is a mere \$19.95 which is a bargain in today's world of 200 page, \$50.00 coffee table books and \$3.95 paperbacks. My advice is to order your copy today and find out when the space age really began, the real story of Tycho Brahe's nose, and how Walter Scott Houston got his 4" Clark refractor.

Joe Kamichitis

CRYPTOQUIP #2

1. PGA DJXC LCJWL JWN OPNWN SX OFN
2. DSREC AJC? JEB GY OFND!

Hard clue B = L

J. Michael Schirra

A PERSONAL VIEW OF AMATEUR ASTRONOMY TODAY

Excerpt from the "Observer", IVAAS newsletter, November 1984 issue.

And now to a personal view: We have reached an age of lunar and planetary indifference among amateur (and even some professional) astronomers. Instead we have large numbers of "amateur astronomers" vying to buy or build large, fast telescopes up to 24" or more in diameter in an effort to see M31 or M57 a little brighter than in the next guy's scope. Most of these instruments are of dubious optical quality and some are mechanically atrocious, and are aptly termed "light buckets or photon buckets". Now, I can understand the enthusiasm and the philosophical thoughts which accompany the viewing of deep-sky objects. Who cannot look at a galaxy millions or even hundreds of millions of light years away and realize how small we and our niche of the Universe is? However, none of the D-S objects are going to change in the lifetime of an observer or in the lifetimes of generations of observers. These objects will look the same night after night. They are, to our view, static; and your chances of seeing a supernova in one of them suddenly appear are vanishingly small.

I suspect that much of D-S observing centers around the "instant gratification" scenario of which our society is plagued with today. It seems the easiest branch of amateur astronomy to enter without learning too much. Just buy the big behemoth and set it up and a galaxy 40,000,000 light years away swims into view! Whereas 30 years ago amateur astronomy attracted those of a scientifically curious nature, today it seems to attract just about anyone who can plunk down \$500-\$1,000 for the latest light bucket from XYZ Optics! As a result you get a bunch of astronomical illiterates running around from telescope to telescope at star parties, cooing and aahing about the view. Some, of course, don't even bother to get a scope but travel back and forth from scope to scope, up and down ladders, etc. They can't tell north from south in the sky, but they know it's M27 at which they are looking because someone told them that's what it is. It's ironic that "Astronomy Magazine", with almost 200,000 circulation, carries one-third the number of ads of S & T, and its ads bring in far fewer dollars to the advertisers per reader than do S & T's, which readership numbers about 75,000.

I also find it ironic that today's modern "amateur astronomer" (not all, but a large number) are all for returning to the moon or a manned expedition to Mars or are in favor of planetary probes to other solar system objects, yet so totally ignore these same objects telescopically or even curse at the moon when its light drowns out some D-S object on an especially clear night. Isn't it interesting that the planners of star parties almost always plan their events (or try to) when no moon is in the sky? The only body in the solar system where enormous amounts of detail can be seen and where your chances of seeing a lunar transient phenomena, (L T P's) are several orders of magnitudes greater than seeing a supernovae appear in a distant galaxy, is just about ignored. The extent to which the moon and planets are being ignored by today's amateurs is about comparable to the extent the vast majority of professionals ignored them during the 1930's, 1940's and most of the 1950's.

Many years ago I wrote that our first priority of Space exploration, manned or unmanned, is the Solar System and it will be for hundreds of years in the future. Interstellar travel is a dream and unlikely ever to become a reality despite Star Trek, Star Wars, E. T., et al. It makes for interesting reading if you are a Sci-Fi buff, and it certainly makes for entertaining afternoons at the local movie house; but it's time that in regard to Space Exploration, what can be done should be separated from what cannot be done. Unfortunately, the minds of the public and of many amateur astronomers cannot seem to grasp the essential difference between the two. When this type of mentality becomes interested in amateur astronomy and gets a telescope, I suspect the Star Trek mentality takes over and the result is indifference to the Solar System and "gee-whiz" to everything else. This attitude is also reflected by the press. Some years ago when one of the Martian probes was nearing its destination, a famous science-fiction, science-fact writer was approached by a woman of the press. It seems she told the gentlemen that she didn't want any science fact stuff or anything of a like nature about the object in question; but rather, said she wanted something "really far out" -- in other words, she wanted speculation of the wildest nature that would make good press!! She was not interested in the history making event about to unfold, but rather unscientific speculation that would help to sell more newspapers.

It's time to get priorities in order. We need more science and less science fiction. We need emphasis on what is likely and what is not likely. We need to realize some things can be done and other things cannot be done (or would be too expensive to do). Isn't it amazing that the generation growing up today can zap space invaders on a video screen or recite all the details of Star Fleet's technical manuals, but have difficulty in deciding whether Mars or Venus is the closest planet to the Earth. If we would have had the public clamor needed to get return visits to the moon or a Mars expedition on the drawing board that we had a few years ago by the Sci-Fi buffs to have the first space shuttle named "Enterprise", after the Star Trek "Enterprise", we might be a bit further on in the real goals of Solar System Exploration.

Incidentally, I'm not taking a swipe at those who read Sci-Fi. I read it myself and have many of the classics on my shelf. But I do criticize those who can't separate fiction from fact while ignoring the obvious.

And what has this to do with Deep Sky Observing? Very simply -- the (in my opinion) large number of persons attracted to D-S observing these days seem to be of the Star Trek mentality. It's time things were brought back into balance. We need a little more enthusiasm for what's close at hand. At the same time we need to get the video generation away from the terminal (or the joy stick) and the Star Trek mentality and point it in the direction of the moon and planets. Because, my friend, that's where the real action and the real discoveries will be coming from for a long time to come.

Rodger Gordon

OBSERVATORY ASIDES

Easy clue - C - enlo Y

Christmas time means catching up with distant friends. Frank Adams is in the U. S. Air Force, assigned to Strategic Air Command headquarters as a computer systems analyst in the directorate of war planning. To think I knew him as a 6th or 7th grade astro-nut!

Joe Vazzarella was in, dazzling us with his slides of the Andes (and Cerro Tolteello) from the air. Telling us about using the 36" Schmitt camera in a place where you're not only assigned a dorm room, but a private Volkswagen Beetle to take your gear to the domes. (Yet another reason why I can't become a professional astronomer -- manual transmissions!!)

Christmas means gift calendars and gift books on astronomy. I can recommend both "The Grand Tour" and "Space Shots." Besides those, I bought myself a paperback book that can be cut apart and be put together to form a sky dome, hoping that this would ease my craving for a \$65 "Bowl of Night", however I must admit there are times now where I'd pay the price difference to anyone who'd assemble my dome.

We've had such a nice mild winter, but at the same time the mild weather has meant cloudiness. Now that it's finally become clear it's frigid. For those who want to escape the real winter that has arrived we're invited to "The First Annual Winter Star Party" hosted by the Southern Cross Astronomical Society from Friday night, February 15 to dawn on Monday, February 18 at the Pahogany Hammock Site in Everglades National Park, Miami, Florida, "the southernmost dark sky site in the entire continental United States." Contact Richard Fagin, P. O. Box 152, Miami, FL. 33197 or call: (305) 233-5165; or Tip D'Auria, 1051 N. W. 145th St., Miami, FL. 33168 or call: (305) 695-6001.

For those of us planning on staying home, time can be well spent looking for a dark site to observe Halley's Comet. I remember when Comet West was around in 1976 trying to think of a dark location to photograph it from. After Comet West faded away, I discovered "Royal Crown Road" off the Davis Street exit of I 81. It was so uninhabited and isolated that the only people who seemed to find that area were people illegally dumping old sofas, and young couples looking for a good dark spot to park. I thought, "Well, this'll be great for Halley!" The Scranton Post Office and the YWCA built up there. That was bad enough. But in the past 6 months we have the obnoxious lighting of the Montage Ski area; and now, new motels and restaurants. If anyone knows of a dark site that might stay free of lighting to the south for the next year or so, let the officers know. The weak spot at KJC/LASO is the Scranton sky glow to the south, so we're interested in a better location.

Jo-Ann Pluciennik

DUES DUES DUES

Your LAS dues are due as of January. Enclosed is a dues notice for 1985. If you've already paid up for this year, you should not find the dues notice enclosed. If you do, please check with Joe Kamichitis to see if our records are in error.

Please remit your dues as soon as possible by mail or at the next meeting. We'd like to get a complete up-dated membership list published by the March-April issue of the "Ecliptic".

The dues structure is \$5.00 Junior members, \$8.00 Senior members, \$12.00 families, \$20.00 contributing members. Dues may be sent to the treasurer, Joe Kamichitis, in care of the "Ecliptic."

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:

Jo-Ann Fluciennik, Editor
313 East Elm St.
Scranton, PA 18505

Staff: Diane Musewicz
Joe Kamichitis
Julie Musewicz