

# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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## COMET WEST PHOTO EFFORTS ACCENT REGULAR MARCH CLUB MEETING

Comet West was revealed in its photogenic splendor at the March meeting, which was held on the 30th at Olin Hall. Slides by Merton Sprengle, Earl Moser, and Rick Johnson showed the brilliant comet in pre-dawn Nebraska skies. And, since many of the slides squeaked in from processing just in time for the meeting, the photographers had little chance to censor their efforts. So club members were able to view not only the crisp, detailed shots that will find their way into permanent collections, but also the views of drifting nuclei, tail-less underexposures and frames bleached by pre-dawn sky light. But in astrophotography, the boo-boos heighten appreciation of the perfect exposures...and there were enough of them on view to make for an entertaining program.

Also at the meeting, Larry Stepp presented a discussion of "The Limitations on Design of a Telescope by the Constraints of Newtonian Optics and the Eye."

There was some discussion concerning the club library, which consists of books and periodicals that have been donated by members. Club Librarian Joe Hamersky is compiling a complete list of books now in the library, and this will be published in a future newsletter. In the meantime, Joe will select several books each month, and bring them to the

club meeting so that members who might be interested in a particular title can check it out on the spot. If you are looking for material on a specific subject, or want to inquire whether a title is included in the club's library, you can reach Joe at 488-7354. His address is 3748 South 40th street.

And, this reminder: if your astronomical book shelf is overloaded, perhaps with duplicate titles resulting from a recalcitrant book club computer that refused to believe you didn't want five copies of the same book, or if you have stacks of Sky & Telescope that your spouse is threatening to dispose of... give them to the club. Somewhere in our 70-astronomer membership is somebody who would like to read them.

### HYNEK SPEECH VIDEOTAPE WILL HIGHLIGHT UPCOMING APRIL MEETING

Originally scheduled for showing at the November, 1975, meeting of the club, a speech by Dr. J. Allen Hynek, videotaped at the Great Plains Planetarium Association convention, has now been rescheduled for showing at our April meeting. As usual, the club will meet the last Tuesday of the month, April 27, at Olin Hall of Science, Nebraska Wesleyan University, 7:30 pm.

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## STAR PARTY IS PLANNED FOR APRIL 23 OR 24, IF SPRING WEATHER HOLDS

Assistant Observing Chairman Roger Besch reports plans for a star party to be held at Earl Moser's either Friday night or Saturday night, April 23 or April 24, whichever is the first clear night. The usual plan is to arrive just after sunset, although it might be wise to get there a little early since Mercury is in a favorable position for observation just after sunset right now.

The spring sky is chock full of deep sky objects, particularly galaxies. Saturn and Uranus are in good position for planetary observation. And, as we go to press, the long range forecast indicates a nice, fat high pressure ridge should be arriving for a weekend stay about Friday or Saturday.

Roger's telephone number, in case you want to confirm the star party before venturing toward Hickman, is 467-1532. To find Earl's house, follow 56th street south past highway 2, turn left at Saltillo Road, follow the pavement south again into Hickman. Turn right at the bank, and follow the pavement west across the tracks and Salt Creek bridge. Turn left at the first mile road (gravel), and head south. Earl's house is the

first one you'll come to (on the East/left side of the road), and if you arrive after dark and your windows are rolled down, you will be able to tell that you are in the right place because there will be many complimentary remarks concerning your headlights.

## A DUES REMINDER...

Some members have neglected to pay dues recently. The first thing you notice when dues slip into arrears is that your Sky & Telescope subscription stops. (Sky Publishing is finicky about things like this...no money: no magazine.)

If members fail to pay dues for 6 months after renewal date, we must terminate mailing of the club newsletter. Postage expenses are too great to carry many mailings that are not supported by dues.

So, please check the renewal date of your membership (upper right hand of the address label on this newsletter.) We would like to see you at the next meeting... and welcome you back as an active member.

THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, and is free to club members. Yearly subscription to the newsletter only is \$3. Regular membership (including one-year subscription to Sky & Telescope, club newsletter, and four quarterly issues of the Astronomical League publication, The Reflector) is \$9, family membership is \$11. Editor: Lee Thomas (489-3855), Assistant Editor, Merton Sprengel (489-3177).

## A SPECIAL SKY SHOW PROJECT IS SCHEDULED FOR MEAD ON MAY 7TH

The Prairie Astronomy Club has been asked to supply telescopes and people to man them at the Behlen Observatory near Mead on the night of May 7. As you may know, if you have ever visited the 30-inch telescope at Mead during a public open house, the brief glimpse you get through the scope is small reward for a rather lengthy trip. And the wait for your chance at the eyepiece is a bore.

The folks at the UNL Physics Department believe that the availabil-

ity of some amateur instruments for observing will make the trip more interesting and worthwhile for the public...and for us, we expect to make contact with more possible club members.

We will probably organize a caravan to Mead on Friday night, May 7-- assuming reasonably good weather. There will be more discussion about it at the meeting, but in the meantime, please keep your calendar free for May 7.

## A CRANKY EXPENSIVE OBSERVATORY

Astronomers at Michigan State University can't use their new observatory to observe the stars. People say they can watch it rain inside the dome or watch the telescope's 24-inch mirror fog up, but star gazing is out.

Hailed at its conception as a pioneer design for observatories, the university's new \$1 million facility just doesn't work. The problem centers on the \$150,000 air conditioning system. Theoretically it prevents the telescope from fogging up when the roof door is opened. But adjacent offices must be maintained at a comfortable temperature, so the air conditioning system goes bananas working against itself.

As if that were not enough, the computer that is supposed to aim the telescope has worked only once in two years.

(--excerpted from UPI)

## PERFECT WEATHER IS NOT NECESSARY FOR GATEWAY SKY SHOWS

Apparently many club members looked at a rather hazy sky on the night of April 8, and concluded that it wasn't a good night for a Gateway sky show. But it was good enough. President Earl Moser set up his lone telescope and attracted a sizable crowd at the shopping center, aided briefly by Larry Stepp and Norm Freichs.

In case some of the newer club members aren't aware of the Gateway shows, we try to schedule them at the clip of one per month except during the dead of winter. Normally they are held at about first quarter moon, which allows first-time sky gazers a good look at craters and plains in sharp relief, and affords some good planetary observations.

The shows are a service that the

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**DELAYED HYNEK SPEECH WILL RUN  
AT APRIL MEETING (From Page 1)**

Dr. Hynek is well known as the author of several books on UFOs, the result of his personal studies on the subject, as well as the vast wealth of data which he helped to organize as chief astronomical consultant to the official Air Force UFO study. Among his other credits, he is director of the Dearborn Observatory of Northwestern University, where he is also professor of Astronomy; he is director of the Center for UFO Studies in Chicago, and past director of the Satellite Tracking Program.

**WEATHER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE GREAT  
FOR GATEWAY SHOW (From Page 3)**

club performs for the community, and they attract potential members who might never have discovered the club's existence in any other way.

But, to make the shows work, we need enough telescopes so the public can look without being rushed. Upcoming sky shows are announced at the meetings. Make a note of the dates, and try to hold your calendar open to help in this worthwhile project.

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