

# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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## Vice President's Report

### BEHLEN PUBLIC NIGHT, GATEWAY SKY SHOW HIGHLIGHT MONTH'S CLUB ACTIVITIES

(Earl Moser was caught up in committees, graduations, and astronomy programs when we called for this month's President's Report, so Vice President Larry Stepp has filled in for Earl. --Ed.)

Eight telescopes and about twenty people from the Prairie Astronomy Club assisted at the Behlen Observatory Public Night on Friday, May 7. The Omaha Astronomical Society provided nine telescopes and about the same number of people as the Lincoln club.

Visitors to the observatory's 30-inch telescope were given the opportunity to take extended looks through a variety of instruments, including Roger Besch's 12½-inch Cave, Rick Johnson's 10-inch f/8, Bill Besch's Criterion RV8, Merton Sprengel's Celestron 8, Earl Moser's Dynamax 8, Brad Bender's 6-inch custom, Jeff Mallatt's Criterion RV6, and Dr. Robert Manthey's 3½-inch Questar.

The Boller & Chivens 30 was trained on Saturn several times during the session, along with M82 and M31. Saturn was crisp and detailed early in the evening, but as the night progressed seeing deteriorated to the point where it was as well seen through some of the amateur instruments.

Films and slides were shown inside the observatory. Dr. Manthey and his daughters provided popcorn

for the crowd, and both clubs handed out material on their programs to prospective new members.

The night of May 6 saw three telescopes on the mall at Gateway Shopping Center for the monthly sky show. Bill Besch brought out his Criterion RV8, Rick Johnson was on hand with his 10-inch f/8, and Earl provided his Dynamax 8. Everyone agreed it was the best seeing in many a (quarter-) moon for a Gateway sky show. The atmosphere was steady enough to allow high powers on the moon, and elusive

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### MAY MEETING SET FOR OLIN ON 25TH

Program Chairman Jack Dunn reports that he should have his month-long quest for a Sony videotape machine that is compatible with the J. Allen Hynek lecture videotape completed in time for this month's meeting. It will be held at Olin Hall, Nebraska Wesleyan University (50th & St. Paul), Tuesday, May 25, at 7:30 p.m.

For those who missed last month's meeting, we listened to (but could not see) Dr. Hynek's speech concerning UFOs, and were forced to give up after about a half hour of dial-twiddling, plug-pulling, and case-thumping. All videotape recorders, it seems, are not created equal.

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## BEHLEN PUBLIC NIGHT, GATEWAY SHOW HIGHLIGHT MONTH (Continued From Page 1)

features such as a pair of small craters on the floor of Plato were easily seen.

Although daylight savings time cut into the length of the show, crowds were good with people waiting at the telescopes during the entire show.

It's always interesting to give a first-time skygazer his maiden glimpse through a telescope. It has been my experience that 15-20% of first-timers think they're looking at a picture, not the real thing. And another 15-20%, when shown the moon for the first time, want a good look at the footprints, launch stand, lunar rover, etc., that the astronauts left behind!

We are getting much better turnout from the club at these affairs, and we want to encourage more members to bring out their telescopes. Believe me, it is anything but a dull experience--giving people what may be a once-in-a-lifetime look through a good astronomical instrument, and sharing their excitement at discovery is worth the little time it takes to unpack and set up.

And...you never can tell who might wander by. Earl had an interesting chat with Walter Behlen (yes, that Behlen), who happened upon our little group, and talked telescopes for awhile.

The next Gateway show will be Thursday night, June 3. Make plans now to be there.

A reminder about two conventions coming up:

The Mid-States Regional--University of Missouri-Rolla campus June 18, 19 and 20. Cost is \$20.25 for 2 nights lodging and six meals, including the Saturday night banquet. The banquet speaker will be Dr. John Dickel of the University of Illinois, whose interests are supernova remnants and late stellar evolution. Check with Earl Moser for further details and registration forms. Advance registration is desirable, though not mandatory.

Astronomical League-ALPO National Convention--Kutztown, Pennsylvania, August 18-22. Highlights include a tour of the Franklin Institute, Franklin Arsenal Optics Lab, a speaker from the Smithsonian Institution on the convention theme, "Two Hundred Years of Amateur Astronomy", a speech by Dr. Charles Price, Benjamin Franklin Professor of Chemistry, about "Stellar Evolution and the Origin of Life", and a real coup: a NASA report of the Viking landing on Mars by project leaders via "telelecture."

The cost of approximately \$47 will cover registration, housing for four days, banquet, and meals for  
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## OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: A BIG BUNCH OF GALAXIES FOR MAY AND JUNE

This month you should check out a few of the easterly galaxies in the evening sky. In southern Canes Venatici there is a close pair of galaxies that should be viewed under the darkest possible conditions, and with at least a 6-inch telescope. NGC 4631 is an elongated spindle that is roughly 12 seconds of arc by one second of arc, and shows some possible dark bands across its midsection. Nearby, NGC 4656 is somewhat longer than the former, according to the Skalnate Pleso Atlas, but I sometimes wonder. NGC 4656 is the southern member of the duo. Both galaxies are located  $2\frac{1}{2}$  degrees west and 6 degrees south of Alpha Canum Venaticorum in a sparse field.

While you're in the area, you should take a look at a nice globular cluster, NGC 5272 (M3) in the southernmost portion of Canes Venatici about 6 degrees east and  $\frac{1}{2}$  degree north of Beta Comae Berenices. It is a rich and compact cluster, and is well worth the look.

If you have an 8-inch telescope, you might try NGC 4565, a beautiful edge-on spiral galaxy in Coma Berenices. An 8-inch will show a streak of light with a bulge at the middle, and a faint dark lane down the center. It is located  $2\frac{1}{2}$  degrees south and two degrees east of Gamma Coma Berenices.

In the southern skies we have two rather prominent galaxies, both Messier objects. M104, the Sombrero Galaxy, is an edge-on galaxy that shows a definite dark lane down the middle, thus giving it the appearance sug-

gested by its name. It is located  $4\frac{1}{2}$  degrees north and two degrees east of Nu Corvi. M83 is a difficult galaxy because it is never more than 20 degrees above the horizon, and is best seen shortly after astronomical twilight ends. It is 2 degrees north and 3 degrees west of Eta Centauri, and shows some faint detail in a larger telescope.

For those who hate galaxies, I give you a spectacular globular cluster, M5, located in Serpens Caput, near the star 5 Serpens, about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  degrees west and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  degrees south of Alpha Serpentis. It can be seen with binoculars as a faint fuzzy spot, and can be resolved quite nicely with a 6- or 8-inch telescope.

--David Knisely

## STUDY SHOWS 60 COMETS HAD SAME ORIGIN

The orbits of 60 comets indicate they originated from the explosion of a giant planet that once existed between Mars and Jupiter, according to Dr. Thomas C. Van Flandern of the United States Naval Observatory in Washington.

The astronomer said in an interview April 20 that computer plotting of the comet orbits seemed to confirm the long-held theory that the giant planet existed up to about six million years ago.

"At that time, the planet exploded--accounting for most, if not all comets, the asteroid belt and many meteorites", Dr. Van Flandern said.

What could have caused the planet to explode is unknown.

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## COMET STUDY SHOWS SIXTY HAD COMMON ORIGIN IN ASTEROID BELT (Continued)

The astronomer traced backward the orbits of 60 comets that have been seen only once from earth. These comets have orbits so large that it takes millions of years for one swing around the sun.

"There is a tendency for these

## MAY MEETING ON THE 25TH (Cont'd)

Jack reminds everyone that he really doesn't want to hog all the programs--he's just itching for someone to suggest presenting a program next month. (Maybe Jess Williams could wheel in his piano and give us a sample of the stuff that dazzled those Smithsonian reps! At any rate, don't be shy. A few words (sample: "I want to do a program!") to Jack will get you the spotlight.

orbits to intersect at a common starting point in the asteroid belt", Dr. Flandern said.

Three quarters of the orbits indicate the comets originated in that area five to seven million years ago in a zone about 100 million miles wide, he said.

## VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Continued)

three highlight days of the convention. Pre-registration forms can be found in the center of the February issue of The Reflector.

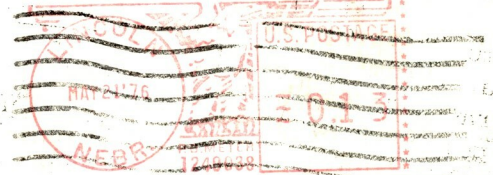
It would be nice to have the club well represented at both of these important amateur conventions.

--Larry Stepp

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