

THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

Volume 18, Number 1

December 27, 1977

CLUB MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE SET TO INCREASE EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1

Price of membership dues in the Prairie Astronomy Club will increase, effective January 1, 1978. The increases were voted in by the club's membership at the November meeting, which was held at Hyde Memorial Observatory on November 29.

The new dues schedule is:

Regular membership (1 vote):
\$12.00 (up from the present \$10.00)

Family membership (2 votes):
\$14.00 (up from the present \$12.00)

A subscription to the club newsletter only is \$4.00. Such a subscription does not constitute club membership, and carries no voting privileges.

Members whose dues are scheduled for payment, as indicated by their receipt of Sky & Telescope subscription renewal cards, may renew at the old rates through December 31, 1977. (Please note: Since the club accepts renewals only in one-year terms, it is not possible to accept membership dues at the old rate in advance of actual renewal date. If you have not received a Sky & Tel subscription renewal card, your membership renewal must await such receipt, and the then-prevailing membership dues will be assessed.)

If you can't make it to the December meeting to pay your dues, get them in the mail as soon as you can

before December 31. And, be sure to mail them to the club's P.O. box--not to individual officers.

The rate increase results from our rising costs of operation, the depletion of the club's treasury because of our donations to the Hyde Memorial Observatory, and the increase in the cost of Sky & Tel subscriptions (from the present \$6.00 to \$8.00), which will become effective July 1. Increasing our membership dues now, it was agreed, would give the treasury a little breathing room--a chance to build up some cushion which is lacking presently. (See the separate story on our financial position, page 4.)

DECEMBER MEETING NOTICE

The December meeting of the Prairie Astronomy Club will be held Tuesday, December 27, 7:30 p.m., at Hyde Memorial Observatory.

HANDBOOK, CALENDARS ARE ORDERED

Members voted that a minimum order of 10 copies each of the Observer's Handbook (of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada) and the Astronomical Calendar be ordered. The orders were placed immediately after

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THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Last month's meeting was so well attended that some were left without chairs. Looks like the observatory is too small already! I want to welcome the many new members who joined us last month and encourage any thinking of joining to do so before dues go up at the start of the year.

Club activities were again centered upon Hyde Memorial Observatory. The weatherman didn't cooperate very well with the public nights this month as two of the three were cloudy. The third was fairly clear but cold. Even so, crowds were surprisingly large. There is now a sign out front which shows the open nights, though it is unreadable at night. A "closed" sign is soon to be added by the door, which should help to reduce the confusion. Now, if the newspapers can just get the dates correct! We have four open house nights coming up in January and four in February, so dig out the long johns and come out and help.

Many public school groups wish to use the observatory, but they can only do so during the day. This means they will be limited to solar observing, which is highly dangerous with large groups and large telescopes. For this reason, we feel that the main scopes should not be used during the day in the presence of large groups, and in the absence of a supervisor. Funds have been made available to us for the development of safe solar projects that can be set up and demonstrated for the school groups by operators with only a minimum of training. We accepted this responsibility and now need both volunteers and ideas. While these funds are not from our treasury, they are limited, so think cheap.

See you at the meeting!

-- Rick Johnson

THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, and is free to club members. Yearly subscription without club membership is \$4.00. Regular membership (includes one-year subscription to Sky & Telescope, club newsletter, and four quarterly issues of the Astronomical League newsletter), is \$12.00. Family membership is \$14.00. Newsletter Editor, Lee Thomas (489-3855). Articles and news for publication must be submitted no later than the Monday of the week prior to club meetings. Address all correspondence to: PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, P.O. Box 80553, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68501.

IN MEMORY OF JESS WILLIAMS...

The normally joyous month of December was saddened by the death of our most ardent member, Jess Williams. I was going to use the phrase, "long-time club member", but Jess was more than that. He was one of the club's founding fathers back in 1960 and served in every club office. He was an officer in every year until his recent illness prevented it. During the early lean years, Jess practically was the club, at least he was the club's spirit and vitality. Jess imparted this vitality to everyone he came into contact with.

Long before there ever was a Prairie Astronomy Club, Jess was enthusiastically helping the budding amateur astronomers of Lincoln. All those needing advice on what telescope to buy, how to make a mirror, or any other subject, were soon put in contact with Jess. I once asked him how many people he had helped to start in astronomy, but he was unable to tell me as he never kept track. He did say he got a dozen or so calls a month that the newspapers referred to him. Jess was always on the lookout for a telescope that was available. He played matchmaker, matching boy with telescope. Again, he had no idea how many he had helped to locate telescopes. Many of his "students" became club members upon the founding of this organization. One such member has gone on to become a highly respected professional astronomer.

While we all knew Jess through astronomy, the rest of the community knew him through his music. In fact, millions have heard his music, though I doubt that they were aware of it. They were too busy getting married at the time. Yep, Jess composed one of the most popular wedding marches. Jess became nationally known for his interest in ragtime music and was asked, and did play in Washington in 1976 during the Bicentennial Celebration.

Jess had always wanted a conveniently located public observatory in Lincoln. In our club's early years, we sought to establish one, but, due to many factors, it was not to be. We settled for the 12-inch telescope and building we now have in Earl's back yard west of Hickman. This was okay for club members, but it did nothing toward the promotion of astronomy, or the club for that matter. I am just glad that Jess lived to see such an observatory... bigger and better than the one he had originally worked for... come to Lincoln after all.

CLUB FINANCIAL STATEMENT MONTH EARLIER THIS YEAR

To facilitate closing the books closer to the club's elections, and thus closer to the end of the Treasurer's term of office, we are publishing the financial statement for the club as of December 12, 1977, rather than year end. The statement covers approximately 11 months of activity, beginning January 1, 1977, and is especially interesting from the standpoint of expenditures for the telescope donated to Hyde Observatory.

As of December 12, the club still owed Larry Stepp \$31.74 as an Account Payable for materials purchased for the telescope. During the period January 1 - December 12, 1977, funds in the amount of \$219.27 were disbursed for purchase of materials (although this includes \$59.45 for eyepieces purchased from Meade Optical which are on permanent loan to the observatory, but remain the property of the Prairie Astronomy Club.) An additional \$64.50 was spent in 1976 toward construction of the telescope. The total expenditure of club funds for the telescope project, then, will amount to \$315.51.

As you will note, expenditures have substantially exceeded income during 1977. A small loan was made by the Treasurer to the club, at no interest, to prevent the treasury from dropping below \$100.00, which would trigger a checkwriting charge at our bank. A \$25.00 donation was received from the Seacrest Foundation on November 15, which helped in main-

taining a working balance. With the telescope project now complete and an upcoming increase in membership dues, it appears that the club's treasury has weathered one of the most active periods in its history in very good shape.

-- Lee Thomas,
Treasurer

(See Page 5 for complete Financial Statement.)

HYDE OBSERVATORY SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY IS ANNOUNCED

The Prairie Astronomy Club will be manning the Hyde Observatory public nights regularly, each Saturday night in January. The schedule for the month is:

JANUARY 7 -- LEE THOMAS
JANUARY 14 -- CARROLL MOORE
JANUARY 21 -- RICK JOHNSON
JANUARY 28 -- JACK DUNN

While these are the people responsible for the facility on the nights listed, as everyone knows, it takes many more than one individual to run the observatory. So far, we have a great record of club participation--and with clear January skies beckoning, let's strive for a good turnout each of the Saturday nights.

PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB INCOME STATEMENT, December 12, 1977Income

Dues & Newsletter subscriptions	\$475.00
Sale of publications, posters, etc.	241.55
Donations	25.00
Loan	<u>62.76</u>
Total Income.....	\$804.31

Expenses

Sky & Telescope subscriptions	\$300.00
Newsletter postage	85.28
Newsletter printing	96.37
Publications purchased for resale	126.31
P.O. Box Rental & Keys	22.00
Corporation Fees	13.00
Astronomical League dues	39.75
Annual club picnic	15.00
Hyde Observatory telescope	219.27
Miscellaneous	<u>3.16</u>
Total Expenses.....	\$920.64

Net Income (Loss).....(116.33)

Bank balance as of 1/1/77..... 221.01

Bank balance as of 12/12/77..... 104.68

Submitted by

Loe Thomas,
Treasurer

Observing Chairman's Report

PROWLING THROUGH JANUARY SKIES WITH SCOPE AND LONGJOHNS

The first object for this evening is a planetary nebula, NGC 7662 in northern Andromeda about $\frac{1}{2}$ degree southwest of the 5th magnitude star 13 Andromedae. The nebula appears as a small circular patch of light with a slightly darker center. It is of about the ninth magnitude and should probably be visible in a 3- or 4-inch telescope under about 50 power.

Moving into Auriga, you should look at three open clusters: M 36, M37, and M38. They are all three in the central area of Auriga and all three should be visible in binoculars.

Those who take an interest in the planets should be observing Jupiter, as it is close to opposition and the view I got through the 14-inch Celestron at Hyde Observatory was rather spectacular to say the least. Also, Astronomy Magazine mentioned the notable recent invisibility of the red spot. Thanks to the sharp eyes of a certain person, possibly a new member, the red spot was seen on the public night of December 13 through the 14-inch Celestron. However, it was very faint, consisting of a faint elliptical ring with a small pink spot near one edge. It was only vaguely visible with the 8-inch Cassegrain, and then only if you knew where to look. I would appreciate further reports from any member who has seen it, and perhaps at the meeting we can look for it again weather permit

ting.

Those of you who are new to the club (and a few of those who aren't) are probably wondering why I don't mention the easy and spectacular objects instead of the fainter and more difficult ones. It is because most observers have seen them and know where they are (and they probably look at them anyway.) For those of you who don't know about them, I would suggest that you get Observe: A Guide To The Messier Objects, an Astronomical League publication which is available through the club, and which is almost indispensable for the beginner...and even for you seasoned veterans who want to find an object quickly. If you would like to see this publication or buy it, bring it up at the meeting and we will see about ordering some. It is rather inexpensive, and well worth it if you consider the time you'll save.

--David Knisely

HANDBOOK, CALENDARS ARE ORDERED
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the November 29th meeting, and, while neither publication has been received as of press time, one or both may arrive in time for the December meeting.

If you want an Observer's Handbook or Astronomical Calendar, be sure to attend the meeting, because they will be sold on a first-come, first-serve basis.

THOSE INTERSTELLAR VOYAGERS...AND THEIR TRAVEL PLANS

You are probably aware that the two Voyager spacecraft, now enroute to Jupiter via different paths, will eventually pass out of the solar system. Much has been made of the fact that they contain recorded messages for those civilizations out there among the stars that might chance to corral one of the Voyagers and, assuming that these beings (1) do not find the record particularly tasty and consume it before attempting to play it, (2) figure out that the little devil must be spun at a particular speed and "scraped" with a stylus to produce sound, and (3) even "hear" sound as such, much less determine how to make sense out of the squeaks and squawks that will pour forth, we will at last have communicated with intelligent life.

But, how good are our chances? Voyager 2 passes Neptune in September, 1989, and sails out of the solar system. About A.D. 46,230, Voyager 2 will pass a star called AC + 79 3888, in the constellation Ursa Minor. This star is 2.3 light years away (about 14 million million miles.) "Pass" is a bit strong to describe Voyager's path near AC + 3888, though. Actually, we expect it to get within 1.1 light years (about 6 million million miles.) Let's hope those folks out there are paying close attention!

But, there's always another chance. In A.D. 149,380, Voyager 2, by now probably looking like a hubcap after a close encounter with a semi on I-80, will pass star AC+24 2833-

133 in the constellation Sagittarius. It is 8.47 light years away, about 50 million million miles. Voyager will get within 2 light years from it, about 12 million million miles. Let's hope the phonograph record is a good pressing--with odds like this, it will need to stand up to hard wear from repeated playings!

THE BATTLE OF THE REFLECTOR, PART 7 -- OR IS IT PART 8?

Some lucky club members have received the November, 1977 issue of the newly-revamped REFLECTOR, the newsletter of the Astronomical League. Despite some grumbling regarding the fact that the publication has returned to what it was several years ago, rather than a compact journal of useful astronomical articles, we nevertheless want to make certain that all club members are receiving it.

All members on record by the date of the January newsletter, January 31, 1978, will be reported to the Astronomical League for their REFLECTOR mailing list. The full membership roster as of that date will be published in the January newsletter. If you have address changes, or your membership has lapsed, please make the necessary corrections before January 31,

We're going to make Heroic Effort Number 7 -- or is it Number 8? -- to get the AL mailing list up to date.