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THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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SEPTEMBER CLUB MEETING INCLUDES NOMINATIONS, AUCTION, SATURN

The September meeting of the Prairie Astronomy Club will be held at Hyde Observatory, Tuesday, September 25, at 7:30 p.m.

This is a very important meeting, because nominations for all club offices will be taken at this meeting. If you are interested in running for office, or know of someone who is, please be prepared to nominate him or her. Final election of officers will take place at the October meeting, and the new slate of officers assumes its duties on November 1.

Another highlight of this month's meeting is the auction of items from the club library. Those who attended the August meeting know that sale of selected items from the library was authorized by the membership in a vote. Since the library includes many items that may be of narrow interest to some members, but will rarely be used by the full membership, or items that are duplicated in the private libraries of many members and thus are not likely to be checked from the library, such materials will be available for sale. There are duplicate copies of books, older books, and many old copies of *Sky & Telescope*, including some complete year sets. This auction is open to club members and newsletter subscrib-

ers only. Bring your money and be prepared to bid!

Hyde Observatory Committee meeting as usual precedes the PAC meeting at 6:30 p.m. Committee members are urged to arrive promptly at 6:30 so that the agenda can be completed without delaying the start of the Astronomy Club meeting.

(Another possible feature of the September meeting--if we have time after all the club business-- is a tape recording of some highlights from the Pioneer 11 mission to Saturn. Some club members were fortunate to see the Pioneer 11 transmissions as they were received, via a PBS hookup received through NETV, and fed into the UNL closed circuit TV system on September 1, the date of closest approach on the flyby. The hookup was arranged by Jack Dunn, who videotaped some of the highlights. Jack will have the tape available for viewing at the meeting, if we have time.)

MESSIER SEEKERS BEGIN THEIR QUEST

As announced at the last meeting, we are forming a Messier group within our club. Members of this group will get together on dark nights at least once a month at Earl Moser's farm

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

If you were at Lincolnfest last weekend, I hope you stopped and visited the Prairie Astronomy Club booth. We were displaying the solar scope, handing out free materials, and selling posters, postcards, star charts, etc., to raise money for the club and the observatory. If there are any of these materials left, we will have them for sale at the meeting. Many thanks to all the members who helped out by volunteering to man the booth.

This has been a busy month for me in connection with the club's activities. Along with Lincolnfest, I was interviewed on KFOR and X103 radio stations, and started teaching another telescope-making class at the observatory for the Parks Department. All of this has brought a lot of publicity to the club and it's now paying off in new memberships.

While we're on the subject, I'd like to personally welcome all our new members and invite them to join in any and all club activities. Just let your presence be known. We're glad to have you in the club and would like to share all the fun with you.

The results of the questionnaire of a few months ago show that many members are interested in doing more observing. Because of this demonstrated interest, the club will be stressing observing programs in the future. We've already formed the Messier Group (see story on Page 1 of this newsletter) and we've started setting up dates at the meetings for at least one star party a month.

Dave Knisely will also start presenting an Observing Chairman's report at each meeting, pointing out some of the more interesting objects viewed. If you have any other ideas or anything we could use as an observing program, please let me know.

See you at the meeting.

---RON VEYS

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 (includes all regular privileges, plus one additional vote in club elections) is \$14.00. Newsletter editor, Lee Thomas, 489-3855. Address all correspondence to PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC., P.O. Box 80553, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

This month, meteor observers have two good showers to watch. The Giacobinid shower on October 9 has a very short duration with part of the shower peak occurring during daylight hours. This shower is highly irregular, with some showers having more than 100 meteors per hour and some having almost none. The comet that produces this shower did make a perihelion passage within the past six months, so this might be a good shower, even though it occurs during the post full moon.

A more reliable shower occurs on or about October 20 near new moon. The Orionid shower has a duration of about eight days, and a maximum rate of about 25 meteors per hour. For most of the shower, meteors will seem to come from a point in the club of Orion, north of the main body of the constellation.

But suppose you're all fired up and ready for a late night meteor spectacular and then it turns cloudy! Out of luck, right? Wrong!

If you own a fairly sensitive FM receiver, you can actually listen to the shower. Yes, that's right, listen! Just turn your receiver to a portion of the FM band fairly near the center of the dial, but not where there is a local station broadcasting. Normally, you just hear a hissing sound, but when a meteor enters the earth's atmosphere, you may, for a few seconds, hear a very distant station. The station's signal, normally blocked by the earth, is re-

flected off the ionized trail of the meteor and back down to your receiver. Be sure and use a good antenna (preferably outside the house), and listen from about 2:00 a.m. on, even through dawn, because the signals will still get bounced off the trails, even if they aren't visible to the eye.

I have heard signals bounced off meteor trails on many nights when there are no major showers. Sporadic meteors sometimes leave trails that last for several minutes and that long lifetime may allow you to determine what station's signal is being reflected off the trail. With an omnidirectional antenna, you will "hear" meteors from all over the sky, including the ones you miss seeing because you were looking the other way! All in all, this method avoids most of the major hazards associated with meteor watching, such as cold feet, mosquito bites, and, of course, the perennial stiff neck!

-- DAVID KNISELY

FOR SALE-- Partially ground 8-inch mirror. From an Edmund kit, this mirror is ground to a spherical shape. Needs final grinding, polishing, and coating. Includes all abrasives, tool and pitch mat. Price negotiable. Call Carlton Gordon at 489-5358.

--Advertisement--

MESSIER GROUP IS FORMED

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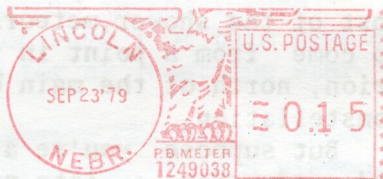
or at the observatory, where they will be helped to locate and observe all the Messier objects within the course of a year. We will also be able to discuss what we are seeing and share observations. This is also an excellent opportunity to compare performance of various telescopes on a variety of deepsky objects of varying difficulty.

Members can bring their own telescopes or share with other members, or use the club's telescope, or the

ones at the observatory.

The group will be led by Rick Johnson and Dave Knisely, two very experienced observers. If you complete the course, you will be eligible for the Messier award within one year. All interested individuals must sign up at the meeting, or call Rick, Dave, or Ron Veys to get on the list as soon as possible since we are starting to observe immediately. If you are on the list, you will be called and notified when the group is to meet.

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