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# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

Volume 19, Number 12

November 27, 1979

## CLUB DUES TO INCREASE JANUARY 1

As we noted in last month's newsletter, Sky Publishing Company has raised its price to the Prairie Astronomy Club for Sky & Telescope subscriptions, necessitating an increase in club dues. It was moved and passed that the new rates would be as follows:

Regular member.....\$14.00

Family member.....\$16.00

Newsletter subscription...\$5.00

Any dues received by the club prior to January 1, 1980 will be accepted at the old rates. However, please note that, unless your membership is up for renewal, as indicated by receipt of a renewal card from Sky & Telescope, we cannot accept an extension. So, if you have now, or receive before the end of the year, your Sky & Tel renewal card, be sure to get it in to the club treasurer with your renewal at the old rates. After January 1, renewals must be at the higher rate.

delivery to those members who expressed an interest, at the November meeting. A total of 18 copies will be available. If you put your name on the list, please be present at this meeting to assure that you get your copy. Any copies unsold at the November meeting will be put on open sale at the December meeting.

Price per copy is \$4.00.

NOVEMBER MEETING OF THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB IS TUESDAY NIGHT, NOVEMBER 27, 7:30 P.M., AT HYDE MEMORIAL OBSERVATORY IN HOLMES PARK. Observatory Committee meeting precedes the club meeting at 6:30 p.m.

## NEW OFFICERS ARE ELECTED

As the Prairie Astronomy Club enters its 20th year (birthday celebration, anyone?), the following officers have been elected:

President -- Ron Veys

Vice-President -- John Lammers

Secretary -- Budd Duvall

Treasurer -- Lee Thomas

Program Chairman -- Rick Johnson

All these officers were re-elected from their previous terms with the

(Continued on page 8)

## RASC OBSERVERS HANDBOOKS ARRIVE

The OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK for 1980 from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada has been shipped from Toronto, and should arrive in time for



PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

The good news this month is that the club's 12½-inch telescope is now back in working condition, and that the Messier Group is going strong after a night of excellent observing on November 16. If you haven't been down to Hickman for our Friday night star parties the last few months, you've missed out on some of the warmest, darkest, most beautiful observing nights we've had in a long time. You should try to make it, if only to enjoy the company and the "astronomy talk". The next star parties will be scheduled for December 14 (the night of the Geminid meteor shower), and/or December 21.

I foresee a slight problem with the scheduled December club meeting-- the last Tuesday of the month happens to be Christmas day. I see two alternatives:

- (1) Hold the meeting the following Wednesday evening, December 26, or--
- (2) Move the meeting a week ahead to December 18, Tuesday.

We will decide at the November meeting. Look for an announcement in the next newsletter.

The club certainly owes a word of thanks to member Russ Genzmer. Russ has sold quite a number of our astronomy posters to his friends, associates, customers, etc., at Team Electronics. We have now just about broken even on poster sales, thanks largely to Russ, so that from now on all sales will be profit for the club and the observatory. We are now in the process of making a deal with the city so that we may sell posters at the observatory on Saturday nights. More on this as it develops.

See you at the meeting.

-- Ron Veys

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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.



## "NAME THE TELESCOPE" -- AND WIN IN NEW CLUB CONTEST

As you've probably heard, our club recently finished refurbishing its 12½-inch reflecting telescope, and now it needs a name! But first, a little history.

Our club bought the telescope in 1967 from a jeweler in Twin Falls, Idaho, for \$800 plus shipping. Earl Moser found the scope when he was on vacation in that part of the country. Earl reports that this jeweler had his own private planetarium and observatory dome on the roof of his house. He had built a new telescope and the club's present scope was just sitting in his back yard.

We're not sure exactly when the telescope was constructed, although we do know that the whole thing is homemade. Supposedly the mirror was constructed by a man named Melish, a rather reknowned mirror grinder in the 1930's. The tube is a custom-made job, made out of a material similar to fiberglass (probably built before fiberglass was developed.) The tube is thicker in the center and thinner at the ends. The rotating rings on the tube were unique at the time--most amateur scopes didn't have them. The club replaced the old monocular finder scope with the present finder under the supervision of Larry Stepp. Jess Williams also reworked the clock drive, installing a new motor. Unfortunately, when the drive was plugged in, it was found that the telescope tracked backwards! Jess installed an idle gear and the problem was corrected.

Since the club didn't have \$800 in the treasury when it purchased the scope, a loan (mortgage) was taken out to buy it. When the mortgage was paid off in April, 1969, the club set up the telescope at Gateway Shopping Center, and used it to focus the sun's heat on the mortgage to set it on fire. This event was well covered by newspapers and television, and was probably the club's first publicity event.

Since its purchase, the telescope has been stored out at Earl Moser's house in Hickman. At first, Earl kept it in the house, but eventually the club bought a steel shed from Wards for \$107 and adapted it so that it would tip back to expose the telescope to the sky. This shed blew down twice. The first time it was rebuilt, but the second time it was a total loss. Earl then built the sturdy shed in which the telescope is now housed.

In all the time we have had this instrument, it has never had a real name, just "the club telescope." But now that it's back in use, it needs a name. So the club is sponsoring a "Name The Telescope" contest, open to all club members and newsletter subscribers. Just think of a good name for the scope and submit it (in writing, or over the telephone), along with your name, to Ron Veys, before the December meeting. The winning name will be chosen by a vote of the membership at that meeting.

*(Continued on Page 8)*



TREASURER'S REPORT:

As is customary at the completion of a term of office for the Club Treasurer, a report on the past year's financial activities and the current

status of the treasury is submitted herewith to the membership and executive committee.

-- Lee Thomas,  
Treasurer

STATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENSES  
Period beginning November 1, 1978 and  
ending November 2, 1979

Beginning bank balance, November 1, 1978: \$319.29

Ending bank balance, November 2, 1979: \$195.07

Income:

Membership dues.....\$740.00\*

Merchandise sales (books, posters, etc.) 275.61

Donations..... 15.00

Miscellaneous income..... 7.48

Total Income.....1,038.09

Expenses:

Sky & Telescope subscriptions.....\$432.00

Postage..... 124.56

Posters and Publications purchased..... 340.28

Telescope Repairs..... 32.16

Newsletter printing (paper, ink, etc.).. 39.34

Loan Repayment..... 62.76

Legal and Corporation Fees..... 10.00

(Continued on page 5)



INCOME STATEMENT, Continued from page 4.....

Post Office box rental.....	28.00
Astronomy Day expenses.....	28.75
Star Party expenses.....	20.00
Astronomical League dues.....	41.50
Miscellaneous expenses.....	2.96
Total Expenses.....	(1,162.31)
Net Income.....	(124.22)

\*Membership dues includes newsletter subscription revenue.

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## MESSIER OBSERVING GROUP REPORTS ACTIVITY AND PROGRESS

The Messier Group (club members interested in earning a Messier award by viewing all of Messier's deep sky objects) has already had two meetings at Hickman and many members are well on their way to achieving this award. Fifteen members have already signed up for the group, and if any others are interested, they should give their names and phone numbers to Ron Veys as soon as possible.

Ron, or one of the group leaders (Rick Johnson, Steve Myatt or David Knisely) will try to contact everyone on the list by phone to remind them of the scheduled observing session, but this is not always possible, since we don't know what the weather will be like until a day ahead of

time. At any rate, sessions are always planned for the Friday nights nearest third quarter moon and new moon each month. Sessions are held at Earl Moser's farm in Hickman.

Each group member should bring his own telescope (no matter what type or size) if he has one. The club telescope will be available for use of those who do not have their own scope. However, it will be slower going if a number of members all try to share the same scope, since each member must locate, observe, and make notes on each object to qualify for the individual award.

Also, each member must have his own OBSERVE manual in which to write down his observations. Members should

(Continued on Page 7)



OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Late autumn skies offer some interesting sights starting in Sculptor. Go south of Beti Ceti until you see a "Z"-shaped group of stars in your finderscope. About one degree south of the southwest corner of the "Z", you will find NGC 253, a bright, elongated galaxy which shows a bright, rectangular center and faint outer extensions. It is one of the few galaxies visible in binoculars, although its fine detailed structure is visible only with very large telescopes.

Nearby is a globular cluster, NGC 288, located about 1 degree south and 1 degree east of the galaxy NGC 253. It is moderate in size, but is faint and shows few if any stars.

If you want another galaxy to look at, NGC 247, about 3 degrees south and less than 1 degree east of Beta Ceti is a good target. It is very faint, so a large telescope is needed to see it.

On good, transparent nights, the Pleiades show some faint reflection nebulae. The Merope nebula is the easiest part of this nebular region to see. Look just south of Merope and you should see a faint patch of nebulosity, although any dust or smudges on your eyepiece will obliterate the glow (usually visible through a 6- or 8-inch instrument.) The Crab nebula in Taurus is somewhat disappointing to first time viewers who expect to see the wreath-like

filaments left from the supernova explosion. I have viewed this object in a 30-inch telescope and have only glimpsed the faint loops, although I did see the pulsar near the center. Still, the nebula can be seen with fairly good telescopes if you use very low power and look about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  degrees northwest of Zeta Tauri. It appears as an "L"-shaped patch of light in smaller instruments with some slight detail visible in larger telescopes.

For a final look at nebulae, point your telescope at M76, a planetary nebula located about a degree north of Psi Persei. It looks like a faint miniature version of the Dumbell nebula, although larger telescopes bring out its more irregular form and details. It is rather small and faint, so use at least a 3-inch telescope and low to moderate magnification.

--DAVID KNISELY

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**LAST CALL FOR MESSIER OBSERVE BOOKS!**

*If you had your name on the list for an OBSERVE: A GUIDE TO THE MESSIER OBJECTS booklet and did not attend last month's meeting, please note: the November meeting is your last chance to claim your copy. Any unclaimed copies at the end of the November meeting will be sold openly to any club member who wants one.*



## MESSIER GROUP NEWS...

Continued from Page 5

also have reference to a set of good star charts to find the objects. (A number of members could go together to buy a set, although they're not very expensive, and someday you will want your own set anyway.) The best charts are obviously the Skalnate-Pleso Atlas of the Heavens by Antonin Becvar (Deluxe, color, bound edition, \$17.95, Field Edition-- white stars on black background--\$6.50, Desk Edition-- black stars on white background-- \$6.50).

As members of the Astronomical League, you can purchase these at a 10% discount through the League Book Service. Examples of these atlases will be available for inspection at the November meeting. If any one wishes to place an order for one, please inform Ron Veys by December 3. We will place a group order, and hopefully the charts will arrive for use in the December observing sessions.

The organization of the Messier Group is fairly loose, and your progress depends upon your personal initiative. If you are unfamiliar with the use of star charts and telescopes, or are having problems finding objects, just ask one of the leaders or more experienced members of the group. They're all glad to help--all you have to do is ask.

Good hunting -- see you in the dark!

SCIENTISTS PRESENT THE OTHER SIDE:  
WE ARE ALONE!

Technologically advanced civilizations are so rare that mankind's may be the only one in its galaxy, most of the 30 scientists who attended a meeting on the subject recently at College Park, Md., have agreed.

Therefore, they said, it is futile to expect any close encounters of any kind with alien beings.

The meeting was held at the University of Maryland and was attended by astronomers, physicists, chemists, biologists and space-travel experts. About 20 scientific analyses were presented at the conference, which was called, "Where Are They?: A Symposium on the Implications of Our Failure To Observe Extraterrestrials."

While all the participants are established experts in their respective academic disciplines, most of them challenge the prevailing scientific belief that intelligent life is widespread and common.

Although they acknowledged their minority view, the scientists who participated in the symposium said they felt their opinion was rapidly gaining ground and that evidence against the existence of extraterrestrial civilizations was mounting.

The opposing view is identified especially with the writings of Dr. Carl Sagan, an astronomer at Princeton University, and Dr. Frank Drake of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory. In essence, they contend that because there are so many stars

(Continued on Page 8)



**NEW OFFICERS (From Page 1)**

exception of John Lammers, who was serving out the unfinished term of Walt Baumann as Vice President. Term of office is November 1, 1979, to October 31, 1980.

**NAME TELESCOPE (From Page 3)**

And what is a contest without a prize, right? The winner of this contest will receive a copy of T.W. Webb's book, *CELESTIAL OBJECTS FOR COMMON TELESCOPES, VOL. I: THE SOLAR SYSTEM*. This book was first written in 1859, and revised in 1917. It's been considered a classic reference in the field of observational astronomy. It can be yours!! All you have to do is come up with a good name for the telescope.

**WE ARE ALONE (From Page 7)**

in the universe and because the sun and its life-giving planetary system seem typical, civilized life must be common.

The main thrust of the challenge to this view was presented by the conference organizer, Dr. Michael H. Hart of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and Dr. Sebastian von Hoerner, of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, W. Va.

"If we generalize from our probable future space travel, the galaxy should be teeming with life", von Hoerner said. "But we see no sign of it. All habitable planets, including Earth, should have been colonized long ago..."

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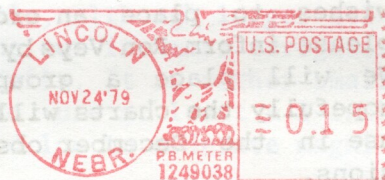
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(Continued on Page 8)