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# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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## Observatory Gets New Amp

After the theft of its audio amplifier last month, Hyde Observatory was running on public nights with loaners and handouts until club member Russ Genzmer came to the rescue. Russ, who is Service Manager for Team Electronics, was able to donate a nearly-new Onkyo amplifier which was written off his inventory of equipment used for loans and parts.

The amplifier has been installed, this time with theft-resistant devices that, if they don't prevent larceny, at least will make it very unprofitable in terms of the thief's investment in time and effort.

Since the Observatory, thanks to Russ, does not need to look for sources of funding for the amplifier replacement, the Committee is free to seek money for replacement of the stolen slide synchronizer, hopefully with a better, more flexible unit.

### AUGUST CLUB MEETING NOTICE

The August Prairie Astronomy Club meeting will be held at Hyde Observatory, Tuesday, August 26 at 7:30 p.m. The Hyde Observatory Committee, as usual, will meet at 6:30 p.m.

## Club Members Will Teach Classes

Members of the Prairie Astronomy Club will be carrying out one of the club's prime purposes: public education. Several classes taught by club members will be available to the public through Communiversities or the Parks & Recreation Department. If you're interested in signing up, you are urged to do so early, since class sizes are limited.

**BACKYARD ASTRONOMY (Communiversities) -- Jack Dunn**  
5 classes, Sept. 11-October 9, 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Fee: \$25/single, \$35/family

**UFO'S: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (Communiversities) -- Jack Dunn**  
3 classes, November 6-20, 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Fee: \$18.50/single, \$25/family

**BASIC ASTRONOMY FOR JUNIORS (Parks & Recreation) -- Ron Veys**  
5 classes, October 1-29, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.  
Fee: \$8.00

**BASIC ASTRONOMY FOR ADULTS (Parks & Recreation) -- Carroll Moore**  
5 classes, Sept. 22-October 20, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Fee: \$8.00

OBSERVATIONS...BY THE EDITOR

For those who saw the slides of my all-astronomy vacation in the Desert Southwest last month, I am sure, the usual fascination was with those great big telescopes we'd all like to have in our back yards-- if our backyards were on mountaintops, and we had \$30 or 40 million to squander.

Between the lines, however, I probably didn't convey the curious sense one gets when brushing elbows with professional astronomers, as you have the opportunity to do as a member of Astronomical Society of the Pacific. If you read their books and papers, or see them lecture, you conclude the professional astronomers are unemotional, totally rational, logical, and, except for the ears, like Mr. Spock. One cannot imagine that (gasp!) petty politics could tarnish their monk-like dedication to True Science.

Well, brother, t'aint so!

Jealousy hovers above the astronomical peaks of Arizona like a vulture circling on an updraft.

High atop 6,800-foot Kitt Peak, where another telescope could not be added to the clutter without stacking it atop an already existing structure, the glow of pride over the 158-inch Mayall reflector occasionally darkens in salvos fired in the direction of Mount Hopkins 30 miles to the southeast, where the MIT sits in its unromantic bunker. The Multiple-Mirror Monster, say the Kitt Peakers, is beset with problems and may never work. Besides, they smirk, Mount Hopkins was never as good a site as Kitt Peak, or it would have been selected for the 4-meter back in 1959.

Meantime, the small band of astronomers-turned-mountaingoats camped in an old schoolhouse at Amado, Arizona, the base camp of Mount Hopkins, daily make their way up the tortuous 18% grades to the 8,600-foot summit to tinker with their 6-mirror marvel. They note, quite properly, that it is the first major optical breakthrough since Newton decided that mirrors were good for

(Continued on Page 3)

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OBSERVATIONS (Continued from Page 2)

something other than primping. They glare contemptuously toward Kitt (easily visible from Hopkins on a clear day); commenting acidly that 6,300 feet puts all those fancy big apertures right on the brink of the Tucson inversion layer, with trapped air pollution and writhing thermal currents...and, that no matter how peachy the agreement with the Tucson city fathers about light pollution, the city's growth is slowly eating away at the Kitt Peak skies. Why, even Phoenix, 100 miles north, glows visibly in Kitt's night sky, while Mt. Hopkins is relatively sheltered from both cities by intervening ridges.

The MMT boys defend their new toy, while devoting 75% of its time to "engineering adjustments" which, according to the Kitt Peak faction, translated, means the sophisticated laser system designed to align the secondaries to converge star images to within 1 arc second resolution doesn't work...and, they hint darkly, it never will. On Mount Hopkins, they note that the 158-inch Mayall really has a defective mirror, damaged on one edge by clumsy handling (and since masked off), and therefore it has never worked up to its specifications. Kitt was, they smile, just an expensive experiment in the design of the good mirror--which went to Cerro Tololo.

And, so it goes. And I thought my business had some big egos!

-- LEE THOMAS

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## The Night Was Right

About 35 members of the Prairie Astronomy Club and their guests gathered at Wagontrain State Lake on Saturday, August 12, for our annual picnic and star party. After dining on gourmet potluck dishes and downing three cases of club - supplied soft drinks, members set up their telescopes for an evening of observing.

This year the skies were dark and crystal clear, accompanied by cool temperatures and a gentle breeze to keep the bugs away. In other words, the weather was perfect until about 2:00 a.m., when a cloud bank began moving in from the north. By the time most members got back to Lincoln, a rousing (if not very product-

ive) thunderstorm was in full swing.

Along with personal telescopes, PAT, the club's 12½-inch reflector was uprooted from her normal resting spot in Earl Moser's yard, and transplanted to the park. Telescope-weary members could stretch out and count Perseid meteors, which put on a fair skyshow after midnight. We were also joined briefly by George McCourt and Ron Parmentier of the Neville Public Museum Astronomical Society in Green Bay, Wisconsin. George and Ron were winding up a three-week tour of the Great Astronomical Sights of the South, and we happened to be in the path of their return home.

All in all, it was one of the most enjoyable star parties in years.

## "Lincolnfest" Is Coming!

Lincolnfest is coming September 26-28. Our club, as it was last year, is scheduled to have a booth where we will sell posters, etc., and demonstrate the solar telescope. Another feature is to be a new version of the computer quiz first unveiled at Astronomy Day 1980.

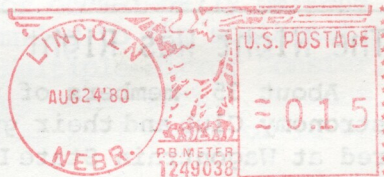
We will need a lot of volunteers to staff the booth. (Naturally, all of those voting in favor of our continued participation in Lincolnfest will be at the forefront of the volunteers!) We'll discuss schedules and signups at the meeting. If you can't make it Tuesday night, but you can work in the booth, please call Ron Veys, 464-1449, to volunteer.

## TELESCOPE MAKING MAGAZINES ARRIVE FOR THOSE WHO ORDERED...

If you placed a running order for TELESCOPE MAKING magazine, your copy of the first two issues will be available at the August club meeting. Cost is \$1.20 per copy. We have 1 copy of each issue which is not allocated to running orders, and it will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. If you wish to receive this magazine regularly (four times per year), please call Ron Veys to get on the list. If you're on the list, but you cannot make it to this month's meeting, call Ron to arrange getting your copies.

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## FIRST CLASS MAIL

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