



The Prairie Astronomer

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At Last Month's Meeting...

A report by President Ron Veys described membership trends during the past six months. Ten new members joined, 7 failed to renew memberships, one former member returned. Of the 7 who did not renew, 5 had belonged for only one year. Membership increased from 56 to 59.

A card received from Curt Roelle, now residing in Washington, D.C., was read. He is now a member of the National Capital Astronomy Association, which meets at the U.S. Naval Observatory. They have use of a 5-inch Clark refractor and are buying a Celestron 14.

The observatory needs tools (small items for use in repairing equipment, adjusting, etc.) Your excess tools are solicited. Right now, Hyde is operating with a tool complement of 4 screwdrivers--all the same size!

A committee was appointed to head the PAC's exhibit project for the Midstates Convention. Chairman is Russ Genzmer, who will be aided by Steve Myatt, Merton Sprengel and Marc Cherry.

Ron announced that brochures for "Siberian Eclipse Tours" are still available. Tour cost is \$4,000 minimum. Nearly all club members expressed an interest in going. About the same number declined to make the down payment.

Program Chairperson Jeanne Miller arranged for two films: Space Science,

Galaxies and The Universe, and Exploring Space Beyond The Solar System. In the absence of the professional film critic (who had departed before the meeting began), the entire club participated in a group critique. From the comments recorded in the Official Minutes, it appears the professional critic should turn in his credentials -- he's gone hopelessly soft compared to this crowd!

February Meeting

Despite last month's experience, Jeanne Miller plans another double feature film extravaganza for the February meeting. TIME: 7:30 p.m. DATE: Tuesday, February 24. PLACE: Hyde Observatory.

Titles: "EXPLORING SPACE--HOW ASTRONOMERS STUDY THE UNIVERSE" (for new members.)

"PLANETS OF THE SUN" (1974)--What an explorer would see if he visited all the planets of the sun, based on what we knew then. A discussion will (undoubtedly, and probably unavoidably) follow during which we will enumerate the vast collection of findings that have illuminated our knowledge of the solar system in the past 7 years.

Also, the Astronomical Calendars have arrived for those who ordered them. Bring \$6.40. There are no extras; if you didn't order one last month, it's too late.

OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The highlight of the winter season's observing is, of course, the Orion Nebula. However, many people miss a number of good objects in the winter sky that are well worth looking for. One such object is a galactic nebula, NGC 2264 in Monoceros. Located near the star 15 Monocerotis, this nebulous cluster of stars has a dark inclusion from the north known as the "cone", or "Madonna and Child" nebula, which is somewhat difficult to see except in moderate telescopes at very low power. The cluster is visible in binoculars, but the nebula is large, faint and not readily visible except at low power with a 10-inch or larger scope.

Nearby is another nebulous cluster, NGC 2244, also known as the Rosette Nebula. Located about two degrees east of Epsilon Monocerotis, this object shows a good deal of dark detail in a faint, irregular nebula that surrounds a nice cluster. Again, the rich star field shows up well in small to medium instruments, but larger ones are necessary to show the nebula.

Moving south, you get two objects for the price of one with M46 in Puppis. It can be found by going about $5\frac{1}{2}$ degrees south of Alpha Monocerotis and is near several other clusters such as M47 ($1\frac{1}{2}$ degrees west of M46). The cluster has a large number of stars and a small planetary nebula in the north section of the cluster than can be seen in a six-inch reflector.

In Gemini, look at M35, a cluster located two degrees northwest of Eta Geminorum. It is beautiful in a small telescope and larger scopes show its faint companion cluster, NGC 2158. For those with six-inch or larger telescopes, the planetary nebula NGC 2392 is a good target. It can be found by moving about two degrees southeast of Delta Geminorum, and shows up as a

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Your Elected Representatives Speak!

Following are excerpts of replies to the Prairie Astronomy Club's letters to Nebraska's U.S. senators and 1st District Congressman, in which we expressed concern over NASA funding cuts:

EXON--"I share your interest and concern with this matter. As you may know, I serve on the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee which has jurisdiction over the space program. I want to assure you that when the Committee begins consideration of the NASA authorization legislation, I will give it careful consideration remaining mindful of your organization's support for this important scientific program."

ZORINSKY-- "The 1981 fiscal year appropriations has not as yet passed the Congress, and will be taken into consideration in the near future. When I served on the Commerce Committee, which oversees this agency, I strongly supported the efforts of NASA. Although I no longer serve on the Committee, I continue to support these programs. Please be assured that when the Senate takes up consideration of NASA's budget, I will again try to help this agency to get the funds it needs to carry on its outstanding work. This of course will have to be balanced by my commitment to seek a balanced budget. A commitment that has forced me to cut a vote in several programs I consider worthy."

BEREUTER-- "I share your enthus-

iasm for the space program. Products of research resulting from the program have yielded countless scientific and social benefits. However, future budget cuts are going to hit every sector of the U.S. economy. Consequently, NASA and the space program may have to face reduced funding in the years ahead. Please be assured, however, that I will consider future financial support to the space program with your views in mind."

In the meantime, the Reagan administration has announced that its proposed spending cuts include a \$250 million reduction in NASA's budget.

OBSERVATORY MAY APPEAR AGAIN IN SKY & TELESCOPE MAGAZINE

Norm Sperling of *SKY & TELESCOPE* magazine has returned last year's Astronomy Day materials, and mentions in his cover letter that he plans to publish a picture of Hyde Observatory, probably in the April issue of the magazine. Sperling took the picture himself during a visit to Lincoln in 1979. The picture is expected to accompany an article on plans for the Midstates Regional Convention, which will be held in Lincoln with PAC as co-host, in June.

CAVE OPTICAL IS DEFUNCT

Word from the Astronomical League is that Cave Optical Company and its successor, Astrola are now defunct.

Apparently all inventory and e-

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OBSERVING CHAIRMAN,
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small disc with a concentric ring surrounding it. The nebula is known as the "Eskimo Nebula", and it is a good example of the last stage of stellar evolution.

-- David Knisely

CAVE OPTICAL, Continued from Page 3
quipment were sold at auction. The company was a well-respected old-line manufacturer, but recently had given amateurs who placed orders non-existent delivery dates and the kind of grief to which the line "caveat emptor" poignantly applies.

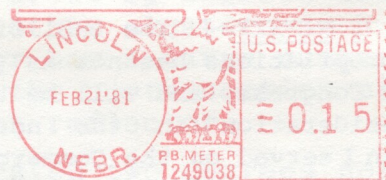
NOTICE: TELESCOPE MAKING MAGAZINES HAVE ARRIVED. If you are one of our group subscribers, bring your \$1.25 to the February meeting.

First Quasar Cluster Found

A group of well-known quasar observers announced in a recent issue of *ASTROPHYSICAL JOURNAL LETTERS* that they had identified a cluster of quasars near the galaxy M82.

Photographs of the field around M82 reveal three objects that, upon close examination, the group found to be quasars with nearly identical redshifts. Assuming the Hubble constant applies, the quasars would all be about the same distance from Earth. Since the group is a relatively small 3 megaparsecs across, it is assumed that they are physically related. At such a great distance, it is possible that they may be 3 of the brightest in a cluster of quasars, the majority of which are invisible to us.

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