

# SIDEREAL TIMES

The Official Publication of the  
Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton

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## From The Program Chairman

I know that most of you are regular readers of *Sky & Telescope* and *Astronomy* magazines, and like myself, you are also frequent visitors to NASA's *Astronomy Picture of the Day* web site. I am sure that over the years you have wondered just how did that person capture such awe inspiring images of the Great Andromeda Galaxy in the SBIG Instruments advertisement and the even more fantastical images of the Horsehead Nebula or of NGC 6960, the Witch's Broom Nebula. I know I have. If you count yourself among the many who admire these images and wonder how they are made, then you should definitely not miss this month's meeting. We are fortunate to have as a guest speaker on Tuesday evening, the person who is responsible for some of the best astronomical imaging available, the highly accomplished astro-imager and amateur astronomer, Dr. Robert Gendler.

Dr. Gendler is a physician (radiologist) by profession who resides in Avon, Connecticut with his wife and two children. His passion for astronomy started during his childhood in New York City. As a frequent visitor of the Hayden Planetarium, he fondly remembers "the great feeling of excitement and inspiration felt when gazing at the magnificent astro-photographs produced by large observatories of those days". He also writes that "astronomy and especially astrophotography remained little more than a dream until I moved from New York City to Connecticut in 1993". Dr. Gendler rekindled his interests by taking an introductory course in astronomy at a local college. He then purchased a pair of binoculars and spent the next year and a half learning the night sky. He began astro-imaging in 1996 with a 10" Schmidt Cassegrain and a CCD camera. This once again kindled the excitement and fascination he had as a boy with astro-imaging. From that point on he was hooked on making astro-images. He presently uses a 12.5" Ritchey-Chretien cassegrain and a ST10E (SBIG) CCD camera or a IMG 1024 (FLI) camera for much of his work



Dr. Gendler credits his early inspiration to the great professional astrophotographer David Malin and to the early black and white images taken with the 200 - inch telescope at Mt. Palomar. He was also highly influenced by the aesthetic images being produced by amateur astronomers. He states that images taken by amateurs like Bill McLaughlin, Al Kelly, Adrian Catteral, Stan Moore and others demonstrated to him that the CCD camera along with digital enhancement techniques could be used to produce images rivaling film in aesthetic quality but with superior resolution and contrast.

Dr. Gendler also states in his autobiography that aesthetic imaging has great educational and artistic value, though scientifically, their value is limited. I do not agree with him on his scientific assessment of his hobby. I believe that his images and the images of other amateurs who do this wonderful work plant the seeds of wonder, curiosity and lifelong desire to study the universe. Who knows, there maybe a future Stephen Hawking, Freeman Dyson, Neta Bahcall, David Wilkinson or Paul Steinhardt out there who are at this moment reading *Sky & Telescope* or they have just visited the *Astronomy Picture of the Day* web site for the first time. For the first time they see the Horsehead Nebula or the Great

Simpson Observatory (609) 737-2575

(Program, continued on page 2)

*(Program, continued from page 1)*

Andromeda Galaxy in all their splendor. This ignites a passion in them and it is the beginning of a lifetime of curiosity and discovery. Not bad for a guy who does all his imaging in the drive way next to his house. If you have not had the pleasure of seeing Dr. Gendler's work before or you would like to know more about our guest speaker, please surf over to the club's website and click on the guest speaker link. Click on his name and that will take you to his web site. [*The xerographic reproduction of Dr. Gendler's astrophotography shown on the front page is hardly representative of his excellent work.* - ed] Please check out his Image Gallery and spend some time enjoying his work. I hope that after reading this short article and especially after seeing some of his images you decide to attend this month's meeting. I look forward to seeing you all on Tuesday evening.

**Note:** Plans for the pre-meeting dinner on Tuesday evening have not been finalized as of yet because Dr. Gendler will be driving directly from Connecticut on Tuesday afternoon. I will let you all know by email a few days before the meeting as to what is happening with the dinner. In May, our guest speaker will be Dr. David Spergel of Princeton University. He will be speaking about the results of the Wilkinson-Map Satellite.

Mark Lopez

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Minutes of the  
Regular meeting of the AAAP  
March 11, 2003

Director Kirk Alexander called the meeting to order at 8:05 PM.

The meeting began with a solicitation for volunteers by Ms. Amie Gallagher who is the coordinator of Project AstroNova. This program matches professional and amateur astronomers with 2<sup>nd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers or youth group leaders in New Jersey. The astronomer volunteer must be able to commit at least four one-hour classroom visits during the school year. For those interested, applications are due by April 18.

The evening's speaker was AAAP member Mr. Bill Murray. The title of Bill's talk was "A Plumb Line to the Sun: A History of Transits in Astronomy from Eratosthenes to the AAAP". This was a fascinating talk covering many of the major discoveries in astronomy over the past 2000+ years. The talk was well received.

Treasurer Ron Mittelstaedt reported that the club balance stands at \$XXXX.33.

Observatory Chair Rex Parker reported that the observatory roof could not be opened for the scheduled March 7 gathering of current keyholders. Keyholder training sessions are planned for the subsequent three Friday nights (March 14, 21, 28) assuming the roof can be opened. The C14 telescope has not been tested or run since last November.

Membership Chair Saul Moroz reported that AAAP has 118 members.

Sidereal Times Editor Vic Belanger said the deadline for the next issue is March 28.

Assistant Director and Webmaster John Miller mentioned that he's added a weather feature to our web site called the Clear Sky Clock which gives cloud and transparency information for our area. Updates to the announcement section of the web site will be made

twice/week. On April 12, the Fitz Randolph observatory will be having an Open House on the Princeton Campus. It will begin at 6pm and there will be opportunities to observe through the Perkin-Elmer 36 inch Cassegrain telescope.

Don Monticello said that a mailing with information about StarQuest will be going out April 1.

National Astronomy Day is April 10.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 PM.

Lisa I. Yeh, Secretary

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## From the Webmaster

The AAAP web site home page sports a new image of M 51, taken by our Bob Vanderbei. Come see this remarkable result, created in light-saturated Montgomery Township. Bob used his 3.5" Questar and gathered M 51 photons for five and a-half hours. Wow!

Speaking of sensational astrophotography, check out next month's guest speaker. You'll find details by clicking on "Guest Speakers" on the web site. April's speaker, the renowned Rob Gendler, is linked on our speakers' page. You'll get a chance to preview his astonishing images and learn how he creates them. It's all there on your web site! <http://www.princetonastronomy.org>

If you want to know what's happening regionally, click on the refurbished "Announcements" section of the site. Info about University observatory open houses, regional star parties and trades shows is all there. Remember, NEAF is fast approaching. And so is StarQuest!! SQ has a special section on the AAAP site. Tell your astro buddies!

Virtually all graphics on the AAAP web site have hidden captions. These captions describe the picture and sometimes contain a note to click on the pix for additional info. Just move your mouse over the graphic. Try it out -- mouse over Ron Mittelstaedt on the home page, and read the message. Hey Ron, there are theories that mouseovers work like voodoo dolls. If you have trouble sleeping some nights, it may mean AAAP'ers are mousin' you!

Cheers, John Miller AAAP

<mailto:jmiller@princetonastronomy.org>

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## From the Treasurer

The treasury balance is \$XXXX.33 and there are 119 members.

Note: Michele, our publisher, will continue putting the dues renewal date on the upper right corner of each Sidereal Times address label. This the date that your renewal membership is due with the AAAP. Those with club magazine subscriptions to Astronomy or Sky and Telescope or both would want their subscriptions renewed about three months prior to the date of your club renewal. Please act accordingly, for if you wait until your club dues are due to pay for your magazine subscription you may miss one or two issues.

I am not going to send out renewal notices to members who get magazines, they get enough notices from their respective publishers. If I don't receive you renewal on the date indicated on your address label you will be dropped from the roster. If you are a keyholder, the respected observatory chairmans will be notified

*(Treasurer, continued on page 4)*

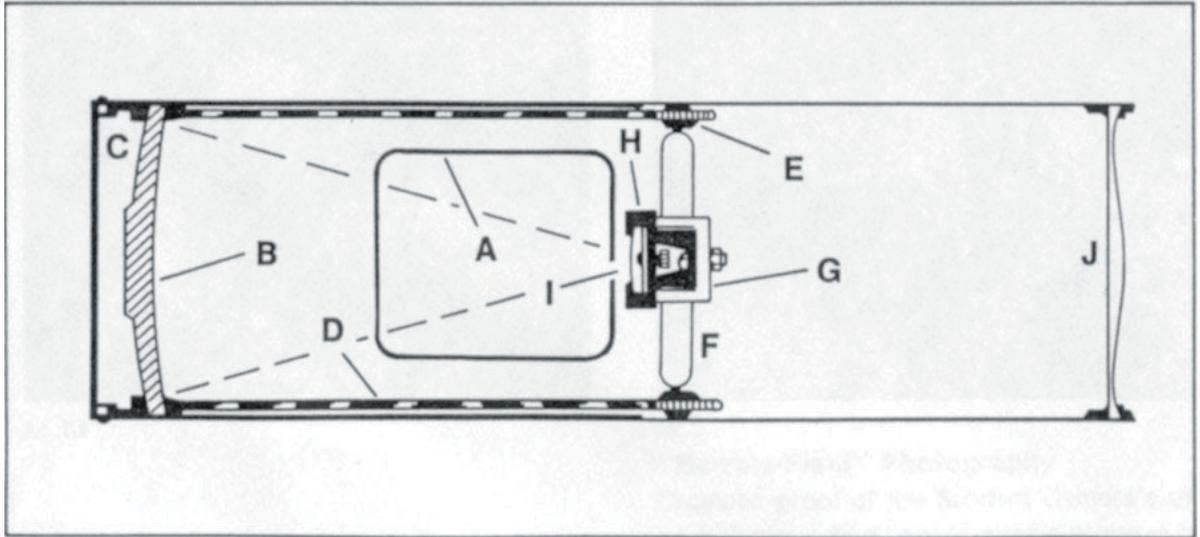
## From the Director

**A Gift from John Simpson!** This month I would like to report on a gift the club has received from Susan Weatherly, daughter of the late John Simpson. John joined the AAAP in 1985 and after playing a very active role in the AAAP he died of a heart attack while bicycling in September of 1993. In November of the same year the AAAP voted to name the observatory the John W. H. Simpson Observatory in his memory.

About a year ago I received a call from his daughter asking if the AAAP would like to take possession of an 8"

F1.2 Schmidt Camera that John had owned. It took us about a year to find an opportunity to get together but just a couple of weeks ago Susan and her husband came into Princeton to see some

dew cover, the original instruction manual and a brass plate engraved with '8" Schmidt.' Presently the instrument is stored in my shed but I will soon deliver it either to Washington Crossing or to our Jenny Jump observatory as the board recommends. I hope



2) Schmidt Camera schematic - the lettering on the caption is identified as follows: (A) loading port, (B) mirror, (C) mirror cell, (D) Ivar (spacebar) bar, (E) spacer nuts, (F) spider vane, (G) magnetic film holder saddle, (H) film holder, (I) film, (J) corrector plate.

possession of an 8"

F1.2 Schmidt Camera that John had owned. It took us about a year to find an opportunity to get together but just a couple of weeks ago Susan and her husband came into Princeton to see some

anyone that has an interest in astro-photography will come and have a look at this camera and hopefully even take it out for a test drive. With the short focal length it should be possible to capture stunning wide field images on 35 mm film!

On a side note let me remind everyone that our planning for the summer Jersey StarQuest star party is now in full swing for the weekend of June 27 – 29. All of the relevant documentation and sign-up forms are now on our web site <http://www.princetonastronomy.org/>. We are looking for a few more volunteers to help make the event a total success. During the event we will need a few hands to help with registration, parking cars and setup for the speakers. Even more important right now we need volunteers to contact a few vendors or take other initiatives to get contributions for door prizes. Additionally if anyone would like to suggest (and even organize) any special sub-events please feel free to contact any of the club officers including myself or our StarQuest chairman, Don Monticello. This year we will be trying a new event ("Learning To Use Your New Telescope!") at which AAAP members will be on hand to help anyone with a new telescope learn out to set it up properly and teach it to hunt for those valued deep-sky trophies. This StarQuest promises to provide a good time for all!

Clear Skies (Please!), Kirk

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## From the Editor

Since Bill Murray and I are planning to attend the Texas Star Party the deadline for the May issue of the Sidereal Times will have to be moved up to April 18, 2003. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause but we will be returning from Texas on May 5, and I will be leaving for South Carolina to attend my daughter's graduation from college on May 10. Bill and I both hope to see you all at our regular meeting on May 13, where we can share some tales of our week at 30.6° N. latitude.

Vic



*Photo of M-33 by John Simpson and Bill Murray taken with the 8-inch Schmidt*

friends and brought the camera with them. I met her husband on a sunny Saturday morning and soon learned that John had been as meticulous with this instrument as I have heard that he was with all his astronomical equipment. The camera arrived in pristine condition, packed in a wooden crate complete with film holders,

*(Treasurer, continued from page 2)*

and you will be asked to return the key.

The dues structure is as follows:

\$30 basic membership.

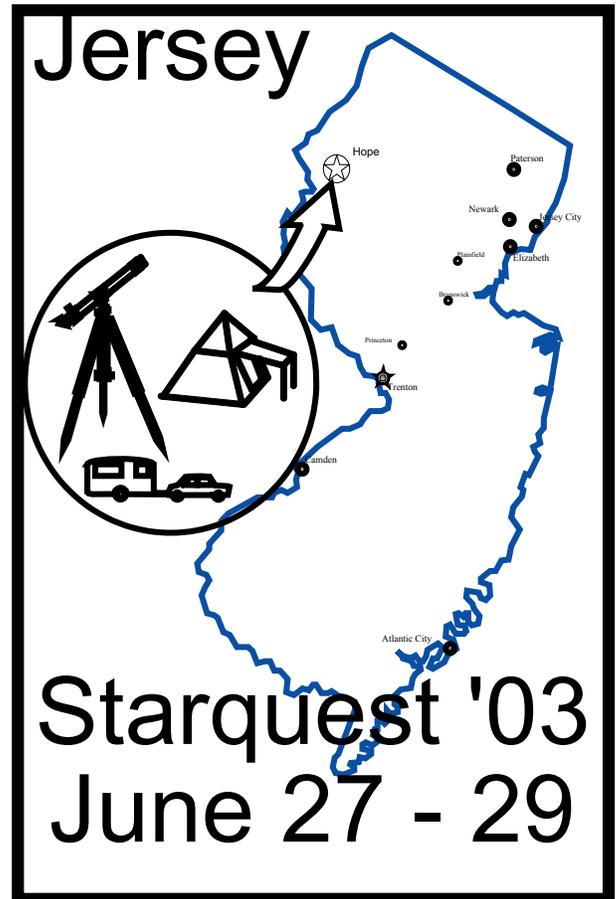
\$60 for membership and subscription to Astronomy or Sky and Telescope magazine.

\$90 if both magazines are desired with membership.

If you have a Sky and Tel subscription please send the subscription notice and the postage paid envelope when renewing your membership.

You may send the dues directly to me at: Ron Mittelstaedt-Treasurer, 149 Palmer Lane, Ewing, NJ 08618-3207

Ron Mittelstaedt



## Deadline

for the May Issue  
of the Sidereal Times

April 18, 2003

Note the earlier than usual deadline since Bill Murray and I will be going to the Texas Star Party.

April 2003

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Visit us online: [www.princetonastronomy.org](http://www.princetonastronomy.org)