

SIDEREAL TIMES

The Official Publication of the
Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton

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From the Director

So far this fall the weather has not shown much improvement from the very wet conditions we have suffered through all year. Hopefully this will change over the next few weeks for two reasons. First, we are fast approaching the winter solstice, the time of year when nights are longest and darkness falls early. My work schedule requires me to get up early, so I go to bed early. It is nice to be able to do a little star gazing in a dark sky in the early evening.

The second reason is the upcoming opposition of Mars on January 29th. Mars, despite being one of the closest planets to the Earth (the other is Venus) is one of the most difficult to observe. For most of its orbit it is far away, small and close to the Sun. However, about once every two years Earth passes Mars on the inside track and we get a close approach of the two planets called an opposition. During the opposition in January Mars won't be as close as it was during the historic opposition of 2003 but it will compensate for this by being much higher in the sky. I may even try to get out to the Simpson Observatory during the holidays to use the 6" Hastings refractor (a fantastic planetary scope) on Mars – if the weather cooperates.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday December 8th at 8 PM at Peyton Hall. The speaker will be the AAAP's own John Church. The title of his talk is "Occultations, Eclipses, and Transits: Their Science and Appeal"

If you have not had a chance to vote yet on the Constitution and Bylaws changes I encourage you to do so. At the November meeting we recorded 15 votes. Under the existing bylaws we need 40% of our membership to vote to constitute a quorum. Since we have about 100 members we need over 40 votes. An absentee ballot was included with the article I wrote about these changes for the October issue of ST. (available on our website: <http://www.princetonastronomy.org>) An exact version of the changes is available on the website as well (click on the dropdown site map and go to "Constitution & Bylaws (pdf)").

Happy Holidays!

Bill Murray, Director

**The deadline for the January issue is:
Friday December 18, 2009
Send your submissions to:
editors@princetonastronomy.org**

Membership Meeting Minutes November 10, 2009

1. Director Bill Murray called the meeting to order and awarded an observatory key to new keyholder, member Vasi Rahaman.
2. Assistant Director's Report: John Church reported that the bill for the observatory repairs came in from the contractor and it was below the estimate.
3. The Treasurer's, report appears in another section of the Sidereal Times.
4. The Outreach Coordinator, Jeff Bernardis said that a troop of Boy Scouts will be at the Simpson observatory, next Friday. He also stated that on December 9, we may have two events, at the Riverside and the Stewart Schools in Princeton.
5. Sidereal Times. It was noted that the next deadline for submitting articles to the newsletter is Friday, November 27.
6. New Business: Director Murray announced that there will be a meeting of the AAAP Board of Directors on Thursday, November 19, in Peyton Hall. All members are invited to attend. He stated that at the meeting, a discussion will be held concerning the StarQuest contract with the Conference Center.
7. A vote was conducted on changing the AAAP by-laws. Of the members present, fourteen voted for changing the by-laws and one reported that he had mailed in his ballot.
8. The meeting was adjourned by the Director.

Larry Kane, Secretary

Minutes of the AAAP Board of Directors Meeting, November 19, 2009

1. Vote on by-laws changes: Larry Kane reported that he had picked up the mail and there was only one vote. Added to the hand votes cast at the last meeting, only fifteen members have voted, so far. Michael Mitrano suggested that another effort be made to get members to submit their votes and/or to pass out ballots at the next meeting.
2. Treasurer's Report: Michael Mitrano reported that to date, 49 members had turned in their dues for 2009-2010. He provided financial data that will appear in the next edition of the Sidereal Times.
3. A speaker for the January meeting has not yet been confirmed. Ken Kramer is trying to get Steve Gorevan from Honeybee Robotics. Also, as a back-up, two possible speakers from Massachusetts will be speaking at the Princeton Plasma Physics Lab at that time, and one of them might be agreeable to speak to the AAAP. Travel expenses may have to be covered, but the Board agreed that reasonable expenses could be offered. So far, this program year, no money that was allocated for this purpose has been spent.
4. StarQuest 2010: A discussion was held concerning changing the month in which we hold the event. It was noted that while the Conference Center was gracious in not charging the AAAP for cancelling the last Star Quest, due to the weather, this may not occur in the future. The Board recommended that StarQuest 2010 be changed to May 14 and 15.
5. The deadline for the submitting articles for the next Sidereal Times is Friday, November 27.
6. A discussion was held concerning the State's attempt to build a thirty bed cabin in Washington Crossing Park, near our observatory. Kane stated that he would complete his letter to the Parks Commissioner and forward it to the AAAP Director.
7. The meeting was adjourned by the Assistant Director.

Larry Kane, Secretary

Community Outreach

On Friday November 20th, we had our first public outreach event of the season, and it was quite a success. John Giles, Ron Mittelstaedt and I hosted Cub Scout pack 20 from Newtown PA and their parents at Simpson observatory—altogether about 15 to 20 visitors. We fought the clouds for a bit, but we were able to see quite a few objects. Everyone was very happy, and the scouts not only expressed interest in doing this again, but they were planning on spreading the word to other troops in the area.



Ron, John, and Jeff stand behind Cub Scout pack 20 and their leaders

We have two upcoming events on our calendar:

- Wednesday December 9th we will be having a star party for Riverside Elementary School in Princeton. Rain dates are Thursday and Friday 12/10 and 12/11. Currently signed up for this are the following: John Giles, Dave Letcher, Brian Van Liew, Mike Kozic, and John Miller
- Friday December 11th we will be having a star party for Stuart Country Day School, also in Princeton. Rain date is Tuesday 12/15. Last year we had bad luck with Stuart, cancelling at least 3 times due to weather; let's hope for better conditions this year. Currently signed up for this event are: John Giles, Dave Letcher, Bob Cava, Vic Davis, and Larry Kane.

As always, if you would like to help out with these or future events, please let me know by emailing me at jbernardis@comcast.net or calling me at 609-466-4238.

Jeff Bernardis, Outreach Coordinator

Treasurer's Report

Dues for the current fiscal year have now reached \$2,240 (56 members). With contributions and outreach included, revenue year-to-date is nearly \$2,400.

Expenses so far this year other than the observatory repair have been modest, so we have a surplus of about \$200 for the fiscal year to-date.

The Association's cumulative surplus is about \$18,400.

Michael Mitrano, Treasurer

December's Program

The December program will be presented by John Church, Assistant Director of the AAAP. John, a retired physical chemist, has been a member of the AAAP since 1970 and has previously served as Assistant Director, Director, and Program Chairman. He was one of the builders of the Washington Crossing observatory in the late 1970's and remains an active participant in the maintenance of the building and equipment.

John has published four articles in *Sky and Telescope* relating to the optics of refracting telescopes, a subject he became interested in while researching the history of our fine Hastings-Byrne 6-1/4-inch refractor. He has also written there about conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn and their historical significance, which is one of the subjects of his talk.

The talk is entitled "Occultations, Eclipses, and Transits: Their Science and Human Appeal." It will feature simulations of various events by "The Sky" software, including a grazing lunar occultation expedition in Bordentown that John organized in 1977 and of which there is an audio recording. Having observed and timed about 160 lunar occultations, he was very fortunate in being able to see and photograph two total solar eclipses including a motion picture of one of these, which has been digitized and will be included. He has timed several transits of Mercury as well as the 2004 transit of Venus, which was well seen at Washington Crossing and photographed as an image projected by our historic refractor. Photographs of the moon and planets taken with this refractor, several of which have been published in *Sky and Telescope*, will be shown at the end of the talk.

20 Years Ago In Sidereal Times...

SIDEREAL TIMES

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton, Inc.

DIRECTOR: Larry Smith

DECEMBER 1989

EDITOR: JWHS

The December meeting will be at the usual place at the usual time. That is, Peyeon Hall at 8:00 PM on December 12. There will be a pre-meeting dinner at the Tiger's Tale at the NW corner of Routes 518 and 206 at 5:45 PM. All are welcome and encouraged to attend this pre-meeting dinner. Our speaker will be Ray Harris.

Ray is a member of the Lehigh Valley Amateur Astronomy Society, and will present a talk on the discovery and delineation of Deep Sky Objects on early sky Atlases. He will detail his discovery of the methods used to depict these unusual and fascinating objects by ancient astronomical map-makers.

-Don Monticello

SCHEDULE OF OBSERVATORY DUTY: WINTER 1989-1990

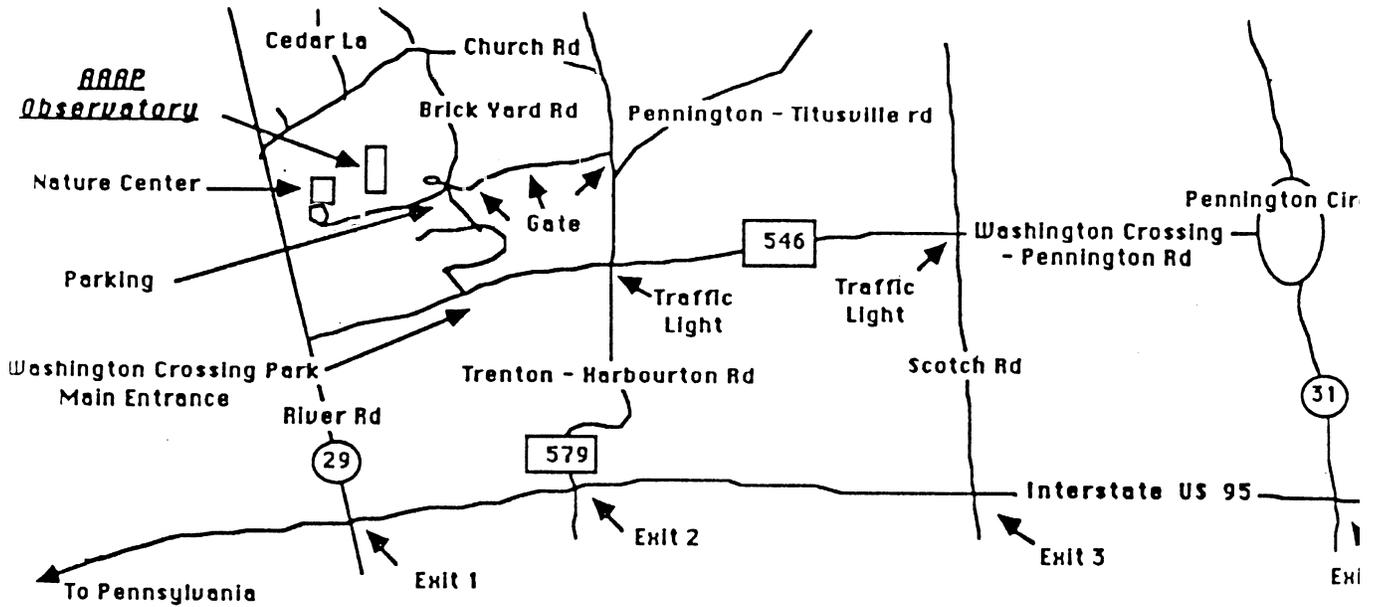
12/8/89: Al Zampiri & John Zysk
 12/15/89: Art Esposito & Greg Mauro
 12/22/89: John Church & Don Monticello
 12/29/89: Dennis Hicks & Pat Colestock
 1/5/90: Bill Murray & Chip Yuill
 1/12/90: Louisa Lockette & Ron Shulte
 1/19/90: Helen Marotte & Kurt Goepfert
 1/26/90: Al & Dan Valius & Vic Belanger
 2/2/90: Dick Sivel & Larry Smith
 2/9/90: Doug Wurzler & Roxanne Perry
 2/16/90: Ron Mittelstaedt & Ed Perry
 2/23/90: Joe/Kevin Mooney & Bob Slusher
 3/2/90: Jon Ewald & Dave Brown

If any changes are desired, call Bill Murray (890-7446) at least 2 weeks in advance of your assigned date.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

At the November business meeting, we planned at least three field trips for this year: to GE Astro in the winter, to NASA/Goddard located in Maryland for a tour and a star watch in conjunction with a local astronomy club in the Spring, and a trip to Fels Planetarium in Philadelphia for a program entitled The Voyager Grand Tour in late Winter. Many thanks to Jay Albert who is arranging these trips. Final dates will be announced shortly. Please contact Jay if you have any suggestions for additional trips.

We are continuing preliminary planning for the Beemerville Star Party and convention. We must nail down the name of the event at the December meeting [The list of submitted names follows---Ed.] in order to publicize it in Sky & Telescope and Astronomy magazines. Please mail



The best way to get to the observatory is to take Interstate 95 South towards Pennsylvania. Then take Scotch road at Exit 3 and proceed north (this amounts to right). Then, at the third traffic light take a left onto the Washington Crossing-Pennington road (County Route 546). Take this road to the first traffic light and take a right onto Trenton-Harbourton road (County Route 579). Take this road to the first driveway on the left, this is the Phillips Farm/Soccer Field entrance to the park. There is a series of three gates with club combination locks. If the gates are not open, you will need the lock combination to open the gate or be accompanied by a Keyholder member. The Simpson (AAAP) Observatory's phone number is (609) 737-2575.

See us on the Web: www.princetonastronomy.org

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