

# SIDEREAL TIMES

The Official Publication of the  
Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton

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## From the Director

**January 9 AAAP Meeting (Peyton Hall, 8:00 PM)** Our astronomical excursion moves out of the solar system into the broad expanse of deep space astrophysics and cosmology, with a presentation by **James E. Gunn** of Princeton University. Jim is a fixture in the **Dept of Astrophysical Sciences, Princeton Univ.**, and is one of the leading lights in the astronomy/cosmology/instrumentation communities in the US and abroad, as reflected in numerous major citations and awards. Dr. Gunn was awarded the 2005 Crafoord Prize by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which he shared with James Peebles of Princeton and Martin Rees of Cambridge Univ., "for contributions towards understanding the large-scale structure of the Universe." Also in 2005, he was named recipient of the 2005 Henry Norris Russell Lectureship, the highest honor of the American Astronomical Society, for a lifetime of eminence in astronomical research. He is also the recipient of the 2005 Cosmology Prize of the Peter Gruber Foundation for his leadership and contributions to theory, observation and instrumentation in astronomy.

Jim Gunn was one of the originators and a key principal scientist in the concept, development, and execution of the **Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS)**, the most extensive mapping of the universe ever undertaken, which completed its first project phase in 2005. Some of you may also recall Jim Gunn's contributions in designing the original WFPC camera for the Hubble Space Telescope. I remember reading other interesting anecdotes about him in a number of the popular science/astronomy books of recent years, including his Cal Tech days and role in developing electronic imagers in the early CCD days with the Hale Telescope (in Richard Preston's "First Light"), and his interactions with the famed Allan Sandage at Palomar (in Dennis Overbye's "Lonely Hearts of the Cosmos"). His talk at AAAP on Jan 9 is entitled, "**Cosmology— a 50 Year Perspective and Some Prospects for the Future**". Please refer to **Program Chair Ken Kremer's** report in this issue for more on this presentation (also see the AAAP website for additional links).

**2006 – A Year of Progress in AAAP** Reflecting back over the

*(Director, continued on page 2)*

Simpson Observatory (609) 737-2575

## What did you get for Christmas?



Well if you are like me, you probably got very little in the way of astronomical equipment, books and such. Instead I got an early present of a clear night in which I spent getting what else . . . a horse of course!

Since Orion is now rising in the east I took advantage of the weather and it being a moonless night. This was taken from my yard on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. I spent about 2 hours shooting through an H-alpha filter since this nebula is mostly that. And as many do I placed string across my ED80 refractor to create the spikes on the brighter stars.

Equipment used, camera SXV-9H with guider, scope ED80 refractor guided for 120 minutes at 4 minute sub-frames and Astronomik 14nm Ha filter.

Brian Van Liew

## From the Treasurer

Income as of this report for December was \$540 and expenses were \$1497.36. The current balance is \$13,174.14.

Brian

*(Director; continued from page 1)*

past year, the contributions of many club members stand out. Significant improvements to the observatory were made and the use of the telescopes and observatory facility remained a cornerstone of the club. Bill Nagle joined Gene Ramsey and Ron Mittelstaedt as observatory co-chairs. Jeff Bernardis took the role of outreach chair, and many public and school-oriented events were successfully run with contributions by several core members (many thanks to Brian Van Liew, John Miller, Larry Kane, Ron Mittelstaedt, Manick Rajendran, Vic Belanger, and others). Jersey StarQuest-2006 was an interesting story as we faced the challenge of running the event despite inclement weather in June (once again). This contributed to a key decision by the Board to change StarQuest into a fall event, with the date for StarQuest-2007 to be Oct 12-14. We took a step to renew the AAAP Board as Ron Mittelstaedt stepped down after many reliable years as Treasurer, and Brian Van Liew was appointed to the post. The excellent club website was expanded in important ways thanks to the efforts of Assistant Director and Webmaster, John Miller. Ludy D'Angelo provided superb help in many ways including his post as secretary. The "Sidereal Times" remained the official journal of the AAAP thanks to the outstanding efforts of Vic Belanger (editor) and Bryan Hubbard. And perhaps the most "quintessential" piece of AAAP, our monthly astronomy lecture program at Peyton Hall, maintained its very highest level of excellence, thanks to the fine work of Ken Kremer, Program Chair. **THANKS to all members** who helped make AAAP in 2006 one of the best amateur astronomy clubs in the country.

**Light Pollution Update** In December I had the privilege of flying at night in a Cessna single-engine airplane with Hopewell Township Engineer Paul Pogorzelsky, an accomplished pilot and colleague in developing the Hopewell Township Lighting Ordinance. We flew from Trenton/Mercer airport over Hopewell Township and the surrounding area to compare the glare, upwards light spillage, and direct and reflected glow patterns. The differences in light pollution around the local region were striking, with most of Hopewell Township notably darker than surrounding areas. The area around the observatory was fairly dark. Our observations during this flight support the idea that local lighting ordinances (especially the requirement for full-cutoff luminaires) can help mitigate the light pollution problem. I'd welcome dialogue with club members who would like to get more involved with this critical issue for amateur astronomy.

#### **New Year's Resolutions for AAAP Members**

- Resolve to take better advantage of being a member of AAAP to expand knowledge of astronomy in theory and in practice.
- Spend more time observing and using telescopes and astroimaging instrumentation.
- Resolve to participate in club activities and observing events, and get to know club members as fellow astronomers.
- Take action in the AAAP's public astronomy outreach and education events, and give something back to others, inspire others to get involved.
- Get involved in the effort to minimize light pollution, through your own practices, influencing your neighbors

and your local township officials, the IDA, etc.

**AAAP Goals for 2007** Beyond the resolutions above, here are a few goals for AAAP this year.

- Identify ways to enhance and expand the astronomy observing experience of club members, including the techniques of visual observing and knowledge of the sky, telescope instrumentation, CCD imaging, and related technologies.
- Continue to develop and expand the club's public astronomy outreach and education agenda. This includes extending the Observatory Keyholder training program and graduating at least two new Keyholders in 2007.
- Continue to provide excellent Peyton Hall lecture programs, and develop a committee to work with the program chair to carry out this major responsibility.
- Clarify goals and responsibilities of core members and leaders in the club, and establish a viable succession plan for the Board and other key roles in the club

*Dark skies! – Rex*

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## Minutes of the General Meeting of AAAP

December 12, 2006

The meeting started at 8 PM. There were 40 members in attendance and the lecture hall was filled to capacity for the guest speaker lecture. Rex Parker (Director) made some general comments about manned flight back to the moon and involvement in club outreach programs.

Rex announced that we would take care of some club business before the speaker arrived. The first issue was for the vote on funds to buy new circuit boards for the Paramount ME, which were damaged at the observatory. This made the 14" scope unusable. Ron Mittelstaedt reported that the new boards and software that Software Bisque are issuing to replace the old boards are more robust and would cost the club \$1,000.00 (which is a discounted price). Of the 95 paid members, 40 were in attendance, which made a quorum of the membership for voting on expenditures of \$1,000.00 or more at any club meeting. There was some discussion and questions that followed. Saul Moroz made the motion to approve the expenditure of \$1,000.00 to buy new circuit boards for the Paramount ME. Vic Belanger seconded the motion. The vote was 39 for and 1 against, so the circuit boards will be ordered.

The second item to be voted on was the proposal to have the trees and shrubs around the observatory cleared. The clearing would happen on the east side of the building and a little on the north side by a professional service. The cost would be \$675. Vic Belanger moved to approve the expenditure, several members seconded. The vote was unanimous that the work would be done 40 for, 0 against. Rex said that the Washington Crossing State Park would need to review and approve the cutting before the work is done.

Ludy D'Angelo announced that the donated Orion Dobsonian was used for its first public outreach at the Riverside school in

*(Minutes, continued on page 4)*

*(Minutes, continued from page 2)*

Princeton. The star party for students there was well attended.

Jeff Bernardis (Public Outreach) indicated that the Project Astro project was still looking for volunteers for south Jersey.

Ken Kremer (Program Chair) announced that the speaker next month is Professor Jim Gunn and his lecture will be "Cosmology, a 50 year perspective". Ken also announced a Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup> lecture by Fred Espenack, which is not a normal meeting night. April regular meeting speaker will be Professor David Spergel. Ken then announced tonight's speaker, Jim Bell, to the audience who gave a lecture on "Postcards from Mars" All together it was estimated the there were ~150 in attendance. There was a book signing after the lecture.

After the break, the member meeting continued with a discussion about the proposed Fred Espenack lecture on March 30th. Rex Parker indicated he had mixed feelings about attending a lecture on a Friday night. Ludy D'Angelo pointed out that prior to the meeting tonight there had been email communication that indicated that there should be no meeting/lectures on Friday nights since the probability of member attendance was low. Vic Belanger indicated that the lecture would be his second choice if something else came up for that Friday, and that we should not get into the habit of having lectures on Friday nights. Ken Kremer quickly came back into the room and, on his way out, stated that there would be possible expenses of \$75 to \$225 to have the speaker come on March 30<sup>th</sup>. Everyone agreed that if there was low attendance to the lecture that it would be embarrassing for the club. Ludy D'Angelo pointed out that the AAAP was not in the business of giving free public lectures, and that the Program Chair's only responsibility as stated in the by-laws was to provide speakers for the member's meetings. John Miller indicated that the lecture was going to happen whether the AAAP is involved or not. Gene Ramsey spoke out that lectures like the one tonight were the best ways of attracting new members. Brain VanLiew said that we don't want the speakers to dictate when we hold our meetings because of their availability. Rex Parker indicated that since the commitment had already been made, we should just support this

effort, but inform Ken that this is not a precedent and will not be supported in the future. There was consensus of the club members present that this would not be supported in the future. And that their should be a concentration on getting diverse speakers for the member meetings only. Other comments indicated that the club had too many planetary speakers and that there should be a return, or more of, cutting edge speakers on the forefront of research in cosmology and deep space. The vote of the board of directors of AAAP that were present was 3 for and 1 against to have the Fred Espenack lecture on Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup> 2007.

Moving on, Rex Parker said he had talked to Dave Donally (WC Park superintendent) who was supportive of our plans for tree cutting and a sign and that approvals would probably happen after the holidays.

Ira Polans and Gene Ramsey will be working on a sign design for the corner of Bear Tavern road at Washington Crossing Park.

Ron Mittelstaedt said he had Brian VanLiew and Bill Nagel to help install the circuit boards when they come. He asked John Miller to install the new version of The Sky software on the pc at the observatory.

Gene Ramsey announced that the solar filter for the C-14 had arrived and was in excellent shape. He bought a container to hold it while its being stored. Gene also announced that the thermostat that regulates the heat for the computer box had failed, and that he will install a new one when he finds a replacement. The restroom has been winterized and all locks have been oiled.

Brian VanLiew (Treasurer) reported that the club treasury is at \$12,804.50

Larry Kane (Librarian) has acquired a copy of Freman Dyson's new book for the AAAP. It is available to club members to borrow. Please contact Larry if interested.

The meeting ended at 11:25 PM

Submitted by Ludovico D'Angelo, Secretary

Audio of the member meeting (not the lecture) is available from the Secretary.

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See us on the Web: [www.princetonastronomy.org](http://www.princetonastronomy.org)

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