



a publication of the Minnesota Astronomical Society

LOCAL NOTES

DEATH OF CRAIG SHURR

Craig Shurr, president of the MAS during 1984, died of heart failure May 17, 1989, at Riverside Medical Center, Minneapolis, at the age of 51. He suffered from asthma and apparent suffered a bronchial attack.

He joined the MAS in 1980, according to membership lists.

MAS members knew him as Craig Shurr, the active amateur astronomer and telescope maker. His profession had been making lenses for telescopes. He also collected books and was interested in photographing atmospheric phenomena such as ice crystal displays and auroras.

He was also the Rev. Craig Shurr, rector of the Liberal Catholic Church of St. Francis, where he had been a member since the age of 4.

Craig was also a member of Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library and his pictures had been displayed at the planetarium.

He was always friendly, soft-spoken, pleasant and an engaging conversationalist who members stayed after meetings to listen to.

He is survived by his wife Mary and children Ella Mae, Alison and Brian of Minneapolis.

Craig was a great asset to the MAS and his many friends in our organization will miss him.

The June 6 regular meeting of the MAS is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Science Museum of Minnesota. As of this writing, the program has not been finalized.

The speaker for the July meeting will be Ivan Policoff of the University of Minnesota.

The speaker for the August meeting will be Jon Chase. Chase and Dick Ryan are building an observatory with a 25-inch telescope near Clear Lake, Wis.

MAS members should call our recorded telephone message at 612-534-7481 a few days before each meeting to check the time and place of the meeting and the program to be offered.

The May meeting could not be held at the Science Museum of Minnesota and a number of people made a fruitless trip there. There may be other occasions when this happens or when a field trip is schedule to another location.

If you are interested in subscribing to Telescope Making or Deep Sky magazine, subscriptions are available through our treasurer for \$10, a discount from the regular rate of \$12. Please send a check to (Continued on page 2)

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Richard Nelson, or you may call him at 698-3894 if you have any questions.

After some delay in working out the question of handicapped access, the observatory planning is back on track. The building will be handicapped accessible, but a way was found to do it at a reasonable cost.

These modifications plus the necessity for emergency exits mean the roof will roll off to the west instead of to the east. Although this is not our first choice, it should not affect the quality of the observations in any significant way.

The schedule for the remaining star parties is as follows:

- June 2 or 3 Baylor
- June 30 or July 1 Metcalf
- Aug. 4 or 5 Baylor

GEMINI

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Send articles and exchanges directly to the editor. Articles for publication are due the 15th day of the month preceding the month of publication. This is usually the same as the 15th day of the month following the month of publication of the preceding issue.

- Aug. 11 or 12 Metcalf
- Sept. 1 or 2 Metcalf
- Sept. 29 or 30 Clear Lake
- Oct. 27 or 28 Baylor

Star parties are scheduled for Friday nights, with Saturday night as an alternate if there are clouds on Friday. We will try to get the go/no go message on our phone line (612-534-7481) by 6:30 p.m., after the early evening weather report.

If for some reason the recorded message does not get changed, you can call Lauren Nelson at 612-644-1254.

The Aug. 11 or 12 star party is for the Perseids. This year there is a waxing moon which will set an hour or two before dawn, giving a short period of dark skies.

The Sept. 29 or 30 star party will be at the observatory that Jon Chase and Dick Ryan are building (see previous mention).

DEEP SKY EYE

By Max Radloff

The area in and around the bowl of the Big Dipper contains a number of interesting deep sky objects, and it is still high in the western sky and well-placed for observing in early summer.

In addition to the many galaxies in this area, there is also one of the best planetaries in the sky. This is M 97, popularly known as the Owl Nebula.

It is located about two and one-half degrees to the southeast of Merak (Beta Ursa Majoris), just to the east of a triangle of seventh and eighth magnitude stars.

Merak is the southern star of the two pointer stars at the front of the bowl of the dipper. If you are confused about directions in the sky, remember that south is always away from Polaris, and east is always the direction from which the stars appear to come when they move across the sky.

M 97 was discovered in 1781 by the French astronomer Pierre Mechain. Mechain reported his observation to Charles Messier, who included it in

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his famous list of nebulous objects.

It is not an easy object to spot if there is any light pollution or moonlight, but in a dark sky it can be seen in binoculars or a finder as a small, faint spot of light.

In a telescope, M 97 makes for wonderful viewing. At 11th magnitude, it is relatively bright and it is also quite large, about two and one-half arc minutes in diameter.

John Herschel's description corresponds quite well to what most amateurs will see, "a large, uniform, nebulous disc, quite round, very bright, not sharply defined but yet very suddenly fading away to darkness."

It was Lord Rosse who gave M 97 its nickname in 1848 when he observed two darker circular areas within the nebula which reminded him of the face of an owl.

Lord Rosse also reported a star within each of the dark areas, but only one of them can be seen on modern photographs.

It is a challenge to see the "eyes" of the owl. When I and several others observed M 97 last year at a star party at Baylor, all could agree that the light was not even across the disk of the nebula, but all the observers were hesitant to give a position angle for the eyes and when they did, the observations did not agree.

A 10-inch telescope is probably just a little too small to see the eyes. If you try to observe them, medium power is recommended because most faint details are easier to see when magnified. A nebula filter will also help, and one is essential if you want to observe the nebula from the city.

A little less than a degree northwest of M 97 (towards Merak) is the galaxy NGC 3556. It was also discovered by Pierre Mechain in 1781, but its discovery was reported to Messier too late to be included in the last published version of his catalog.

The objects that Messier learned of between the publication of his list and his death have been added to many modern editions of his list and NGC 3556 is often referred to as M 108.

M 108 is a spiral galaxy seen nearly edge-on, and an 8-inch telescope should

show it as very elongated with a noticeable patchiness to the light.

At the star party mentioned above, I was able to view M 108 in a 17 1/2-inch telescope and it was an impressive sight with many details visible. Near the center, what appears to be the nucleus is really only a foreground star in our own galaxy.

An article that describes many of the galaxies in the bowl of the big Dipper can be found on page 444 of the April 1989, Sky & Telescope. The chart printed with the article will also be useful in locating M 97 and M 108.

Good luck and clear skies!

THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

How To Plan a Star Party

By Harold Doweiko

Austin, Minnesota

Amateur astronomers in Minnesota are scattered through the state, yet, even in Greater Minnesota, it is possible to plan and arrange a star party. Admittedly it is somewhat more difficult to arrange a star party out here than in the Twin Cities, but the rewards are much greater too. It might be necessary to drive 50 or even 100 miles, but the skies are clear and there are few lights to blind the observer.

For the past several months, plans have been underway for a star party for amateur astronomers in the southeastern Minnesota, northern Iowa and western Wisconsin area. Only 10 individuals will be invited because of limited space at the observing site. Letters of invitation have been sent to the astronomy clubs in La Crosse and New Ulm and several members of those clubs have expressed an interest in attending.

This month, I would like to share with you the steps necessary to plan, and carry out, a star party. (Continued on page 4)

It is far more complex than one would suspect.

Step #1: Pick a theme. Star parties may be arranged around one of several different themes. For example, a lunar star party (moon party?) might be held with the goal of the evening being to identify certain specific features on the moon, or for an occultation to be observed. Star parties may be centered around the theme of observing a meteor shower, such as the Perseid shower in August.

If you wish to hold a planetary or deep-sky party, you need to make sure the moon will not interfere. This star party will be a combined deep-sky and lunar party and will be held on the night of Saturday, Sept. 23. The moon will be two days past third quarter and will rise a little after 11 p.m. that evening. The moon will offer a fine target for observers.

Step #2: Pick an alternate date. For this star party, the alternate date will be Saturday evening, Sept. 30. The moon will be in its first day and will set shortly after the sun, leaving the sky clear for deep-sky and planetary work.

Step #3: Arrange a location. For this star party, we will use Dr. Eric Rachut's observatory and grounds. This site offers a fine view of the southern, eastern and western horizons. The northern horizon is somewhat bright because of the lights of the city of Austin, but it offers the advantage of electricity. In addition to Dr. Rachut's observatory, the site will accommodate 10 observers and their telescopes.

Step #4: Contact interested parties. Letters providing information about the star party have been sent to astronomy clubs in LaCrosse and New Ulm. Persons interested in attending have been asked to contact me c/o 1009 17th St. S.W., Austin, MN 55912. There are a few spots still open and members of the Minnesota Astronomical Society who are interested might wish to reserve a spot.

Step #5: Identify possible events of interest. In addition to Uranus, which will set at about 22:30 local time, there is Saturn, which will set at about 23:00 hours. Jupiter will rise at about 23:00

hours local time. Orion will rise at about 24:00 hours. Comet Brorsen-Metcalf should be receding from the sun, but should still be faintly visible in amateur 'scopes. Other comets are possible, although in the past few months, no new comets have made their appearance.

Step #6: Hope that everything works out. This step is still in progress.

LOOKING BACK

January, 1979, members: Kurt Allen, Lance Allred, Andrew Amerslav, Nils Anderson, Clifford Arnold, Joel Baskin, Richard Bauer, Marvin Bernstrom, Cindy Blaha, Donald Bliss, Vern and Vivian Bloomquist, Steve Boike, Rebecca Ann Brockway, Hubert Brueckner, Mark Buchanan, James Callahan, Tsing-Yun Chiang, John Cooper, James Cuff, Dr. James Cutler, Lee Driggs, Ron Finger, James Fox, Andrew Fraser, Dennis Garvey, Howard Gould, Frank Gray, Herbert Grika, Lary Gryziak, Raymond Gustafson, Tom Guy, Carl Harstad, Wes and JoEllen Herman, James Hildreth, Joe Hora, Robert Horvath, Gale Jalien, Howard Jenkins, Jeff Johnson, Alan Kraines, Loren Kuch, William Larson, William Lee, Pat Lincoln, Daniel Lowe, Bruce Lundegard, John Magnuson, James Markall, Kevin Marx, Fr. George Metcalf, Lloyd Minaai, John Milnar, Laurance Moreland, Maria Mortensen, Aribert Munzner, Melvin Nash, Lauren Nelson, Dennis Noukki, Alan Ominsky, Karen Ostrand, Thomas Pallo, Jan Peterson, Michael Picard, Ivan Policoff, James Robertson, Robert Schmidt, Dave Shumann, Harvey Senecal, Steve Sherman, Annette Siebenaler, David Siskind, Katherin Sproll, Jon Swanson, Donald Tate, James Thomas, Peter Thurmes, Michael Tomczyk, Maclean Tupper, Mark Tuszyński, Gary Vagstad, Paul Walker, Howard Weatherhead and Raymond Wilbur.