THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA - KINGSTON CENTRE

AND THE

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY ASTRONOMY CLUB

MID-FEBRUARY 1978

Greetings, again, and clear skies for observing!

Poetic Lines With Astronomical Beauty

For those of you who, perhaps, did not attend, our last two meetings went as scheduled. On January 24th, David gave a very interesting talk on comets and in particular the comet of 1861. On February 7th, my talk was entitled The Astrolabe: Its History, Construction, and Use.

With David's permission, I wish to print some of the lines that he used in his talk. These lines are by Gerard Manley Atopkins and were written September 13-14, 1864 and as with many of the writings of that outstanding poet, they portray the beauty of nature with great skill, with colour and joy and excitement, though he is remembered as a poet, this writer had a good scientific knowledge of comets, and though these lines are from a much longer work, whose setting was an earlier time period, they quite probably were inspired by the Great Comet seen only a few years before they were written,

Here they are - lines I find to have thrilling beauty and to be worthy of a lot of study:

-- I am like a slip of comet,
Scarce worth discovery, in some corner seen
Bridging the slender difference of two stars,
Come out of space, or suddenly engender'd
By heady elements, for no man knows;
But when she sights the sun she grows and sizes
And spins her skirts out, while her central star
Shakes its cocooning mists; and so she comes
To fields of light; millions of travelling rays
Pierce her; she hangs upon the flame-cased sun,
And sucks the light as full as Gideon's fleece;
But then her tether calls her; she falls off,
And as she dwindles sheds her smock of gold
Amidst the sistering planets, till she comes
To single Saturn, last and solitary;
And then goes out into the cavernous dark.
So I go out: my little sweet is done;
I have drawn heat from this contagious sun:
To not ungentle death now forth I run.

The Nomenclature of Asteroids

In the last newsletter I mentioned that Chiron had been conditionally named 1977 UB (pending definite identification as an asteroid). Since many amateurs know something about asteroids but do not know about how they are named when new ones are discovered, I thought it might be helpful to deal with that topic.

Of course the familiar ones have dignified names from mythology, such as Ceres, Pallas, Juno, Vesta, (the four largest) Hebe, Iris, Psyche, Eros, and Icarus, and so on.

For the past 50 years asteroids have been given permanent numbers and there are now about 2,000 of these. Using number and name we could speak of 1 Ceres, 2 Pallas, 3 Juno, 6 Hebe, 7 Iris, 16 Psyche, 433 Eros, 1566 Icarus and so on.

This sounds very simple and it is, but what about objects that are discovered but are not yet identified as asteroids (for whatever reason) and have not yet been assigned a permanent number and dignified with a name? In such cases there is a temporary nomenclature which is employed (as was done with Object-Kowal). This is how it works: the first part is the year of discovery; then there are two letters, the first one indicating the month of the discovery and the second one the order of discovery. In fact the first letter indicates which half of the month. For example:

Asteroids Discovered From:	Are Numbered:
Jan. 1 to Jan. 15, 1977	1977AA, 1977AB, etc.
Jan. 16 to Jan. 31, 1977	1977 BA,1977BB, etc.
Feb. 1 to Feb. 15, 1977	1977CA, 1977CB, etc.
Feb. 16 to Feb. 28, 1977	1977DA, 1977DB, etc.
Mar. 1 to Mar. 15, 1977	1977EA, 1977EB, etc.
Mar. 16 to Mar. 31, 1977	1977FA, 1977FB, etc.
Apr. 1 to Apr. 15, 1977	1977GA, 1977GB, etc.
Apr. 16 to Apr. 30, 1977	1977HA, 1977HB, etc.
:	:
:	:
Dec. 1 to Dec. 15, 1977	1977XA, 1977XB, etc.
Dec. 16 to Dec. 31, 1977	1977YA, 1977YB, etc.

The letter "J" is not used.

There are about a thousand "asteroids"? that have been named according to this system, and many of them have been seen for a short period of time only.

When "O.K." was given the temporary name 1977UB, it told astronomers something. It announced that it was the second such discovery (the letter B) in the period October 16 to October 31 (letter U) in the year 1977. The photographs were taken on October 18th and October 19th.

It is interesting to note that a subsequent study of a large number of old photographs has revealed that this object was actually photographed a number of times over the past 30 years (actually dating back to about 1949) though it was never really discovered as such until Kowal's work in November.

I hope this is a better explanation of the naming of asteroids than I took time to give in the previous newsletter.

Would You Like To Specialize ?

Many amateur astronomers like to specialize. Why not try it. Be a Messier observer and see how many Messier objects you can find on a clear night. Keep a list and watch it grow.

OR

Be a Herschel observer. See how many of the 8 classes of nebulae and clusters you can find in your binoculars or telescope.

OR

Be a comet watcher or comet hunter. Try to find some of the regular, brighter comets. Who knows? Someday you might even discover a comet.

Our centre wants to get more specialists to join with the very few we have. (Or are they only semi-specialists?)

If you want to find out about Messier objects or report your list, please see Doug at one of our meetings.

If you are interested in comets,please see Enrico at one of our meetings.

If its variable stars you are interested in, see David.

If its N.G. C. objects,you may check with me.

Try being a specialist. It's often fun.

CONTEST!

Please don't forget to enter the contest mentioned in the last newsletter. You could win!

REMEMBER!

Please come and bring a friend to our next two very important meetings:

Feb. 21, 1978	- Dr. Douglas: a talk on the I.A.U. and its congresses
Mar, 7, 1978	- David's presentation: Observing Variable Stars

Leo.