THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA - KINGSTON CENTRE

AND THE

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY ASTRONOMY CLUB

MID-APRIL 1978

Greetings and clear skies!

The Last Two Meetings

Because of unfavorable weather conditions we were not able to hold a Public (or Semi-Public) Moon Observing Night in conjunction with our meeting of Tuesday, March twenty-first. Better luck next time! We were able to elect our officers for the year beginning in September. They are as follows:

President:	Dennis Belanger
Vice-President:	Mike Payette
Secretary-Treasurer:	Enirco Kindl
National Council Representative:	Doug Baker
Q.U.A.C. Officer:	David Levy
Newsletter Editor:	Leo Enright

During the meeting of April fourth, Leo gave a talk entitled Faint Light in The Night Sky. It concentrated on the following: (1) Zodiacal Light, (2) Gegenschein (or Counterglow) (3) Interplanetary Light, (4) Nightglow, (5) Integrated Starlight. Once again weather conditions meant it was not the most favorable observing night ever recorded.

Asterisms

Almost everyone seems to be familiar with a number of constellations but few people except avid observers seem to know that there are asterisms or apparent groupings of stars which are much larger than the usual constellations. Again it must be stressed that, along with the constellations, these are apparent groupings or arrangements made in the mind of the observer. The one I would like to mention is the so-called 'Winter Hexagon'. This is prominent in the Southern Sky in Winter evenings. It is made up of the following bright stars in a rougly symmetrical hexagon:

1. Capella
2. Aldebaran
3. Rigel
4. Sirius
5. Procyon
6. Pollux

As you can see this hexagon ranges over six constellations and covers a large area of the sky. The "centre" would be somewhere near the upraised arm of Orion north of the star, Betelgeuse.

The second one is the so-called 'Summer Triangle'. It is made up of these stars:

1) Altair (α Aquilae)
2) Vega (α Lyrae)
3) Deneb (α Cygni)

This, too, is large and prominent but does not cover as great an area as the Winter Hexagon.

Most of the Winter Hexagon or possibly all of it can still be seen in the west in the early night sky just after sunset, but before long only a small part of it may be seen after sunset.

The Summer Triangle now rises into prominence in the East about two hours after midnight and may be seen during the rest of the night. It is crossing the meridian by the time morning twilight obscures the stars. Gradually as summer approaches it can be seen rising earlier and earlier until by July and August it may be observed very easily in the southern sky after sunset.

Look for these two asterisms at least and be able to identify them, and perhaps you will become aware of others or invent others.

Let me know if you discover any other asterisms of bright stars.

Some Reading For This Month

Here is some interesting reading you could do in the next month:

1) the article in Sky and Telescope (April 1978) which speculates on the possibility of "rings of Neptune" and tells about claims for their discovery long before the discovery of the rings of Uranus.
2) the article in Scientific American (April 1978) entitled "The Birth of Massive Stars". It is an extensive article on stellar evolution. Also of possible interest to observers is an article in the same periodical entitled "Atmospheric Halos". It deals with rings seen around the sun and moon, and other optical effects seen in the sky.

Meetings

If you would like to make a presentation at one of the meetings in May (the 2nd , 16th, or 30th) or in June (the 13th, or 27th) please let me know as soon as possible. Whether it is a talk or slide presentation or demonstration, I am quite sure we would be interested in hearing from you.

Leo.