

R E G U L U S
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA - KINGSTON CENTRE
JUNE, 1979

The 1979 G. A. - A MEMORABLE GATHERING

The 1979 General Assembly of the R. A. S. C. held in London last month was one that should leave many pleasant memories in the minds of the people who attended.

This annual gathering of the 'Clans Astronomical' brought together amateur and professional astronomers from many parts of the land, from all the Centres of the Society save one, and from the United States and Bermuda as well. It was an exciting and memorable occasion - a time for meeting, sharing, and discussing a favorite pursuit, and taking part in a well-organized program.

All the events of ^{the} program reflected very careful planning; long, thorough preparation; and very studious attention to the last detail. The members of the London Centre, especially Peter Jedicke, Eric Clinton, Robert Cornforth, Gerald Schieven, and others, can be justly proud of a General Assembly that can be called successful in every way. It is hoped that they can somehow feel rewarded for the enormous effort that went into producing such an enjoyable and interesting weekend for several hundred people.

The hospitality provided by the members of the London Centre was most gracious. Accommodation in Delaware Hall on the University of Western Ontario's beautiful campus was excellent. The meals were nothing less than fantastic - quality and quantity of food made them fit for a convention of kings. 'Remember the Sunday lunch with roast beef this thick!' And that was only lunch!)

I must not forget that besides basking in London Centre's generous hospitality, we actually did have time to savour many other things besides the food. The fine quality of the film and slide presentations on Friday night made us aware of projects being done at other centres. The displays gave us a chance to see the results of a great deal of dedicated work that was done over the past year. The papers presented were well done and every one of them should have been of some interest to every amateur even the very beginner - a statement that cannot be made of every paper presentation at a gathering of amateur astronomers. The two special lectures were by men who had first-hand information from projects in which they had been involved. Dr. William Wehlauf from his involvement with the Canada-France-Hawaii telescope project, and Dr. Gerald O'Neill from his projects which could be used in the mining of the moon and in establishing colonies in space. (Members of our centre who wish to learn more about Dr. O'Neill's recent ideas may read about them in next month's (that is, July) issue of Omni Magazine.)

There were certain very important moments at this General Assembly. Several of them came at the Society Dinner when awards were presented to most deserving individuals. They were the awards presented to M. Rolland Noël de Tilly in recognition of many years of dedication and service to the Centre d'Astronomie de Montréal, to Rolf Meier for the discovery of Comet Meier (1978 f) and Warren Morrison, discoverer of Nova Cygni.

There were other moments that we can look back on with a smile or a laugh for many amateur astronomers have a fine sense of humour. I am, of course, thinking of the song contest, the hilarious attempts at singing by many 'good sports', and, of course, the unbelievably fine and funny lyrics presented by the London Centre.

To Peter Jedicke and his committee, I wish to say that you did a superlative job in organizing the General Assembly of 1979. We will remember it for a long time.

OUR OWN TELESCOPE

This month is a milestone for our centre. As of this month we now have a telescope that we can call our very own. After many years of waiting, and several attempts at scope-building projects that never (yet) reached fruition, we now are ready for 'first-light' ceremonies on a 10-inch Newtonian reflector that should be considerably better than any of the previous instruments would have been even if they had been completed. There have been a few minor problems and delays along the way, but it is very gratifying to have an instrument that can be shared by members of our centre. We all owe a debt of gratitude to David Levy for his dedication to this project and for his very considerable donation of time and funds which made the building of this telescope possible.

The choosing of a name for our first major instrument was an easy task. It is to be called the Dr. A. V. Douglas Telescope, named after a person who has been and is very helpful to our centre and who for many years has contributed enormously to our Society.

Dr. Douglas, we would be very happy if you could come and see our new telescope - sometime in the coming year if that were possible. You are cordially invited.

A LETTER! AT LAST!

"People" asked for a letters column. I agreed and urged that you write in and talk about anything astronomical. At last a letter has arrived, and so, I'll print it (whole and entire; it's short and sweet.)

Dear Leo,

I would like to compliment you on the fine work you have been doing as editor of our newsletter. Unlike many newsletters, yours is a genuine "letter" which is written in a friendly and informative way, and which one would look forward to receiving and to reading from start to finish. Your articles are inspiring and I look forward to reading more of them.

All the best,
David

Thank you, David. That was easy to take. Your compliments are really appreciated.

At the present time it is your generosity (See above) that all of us in the Centre should be grateful for and should be striving to imitate.

I hope the fact that you have written something will show others that writing a letter is possible. It can be done.

Write a letter that is short or long, trivial or profound, elementary or technical. Allow me to edit it, if it is more than nineteen pages in length.

A SUPERNOVA IN VELA

Supernovae have been creating news for astronomers recently especially with the recent discovery, reported last month, of the supernova in the spiral galaxy, M100, but, while this article concerns a supernova, it is not about a still more recent discovery.

Supernovae, as mentioned last month, were detected in our own galaxy in the years 1054, 1572, and 1604. Now, an American Egyptologist, linguist, and expert in ancient astronomy named George Michanowsky is directing our attention to a supernova that was seen about 4000 B.C.

Strange as it may seem, this supernova that was seen about six thousand years ago may have had a profound effect on men of the time and on their own and subsequent civilizations. Michanowsky has done considerable research on the supernova called Vela X which was seen in the southern sky by the ancient Sumerians, one of the earth's oldest great civilizations. This supernova is said to have been the brightest ever seen from earth. In his book called, The Once And Future Star, Michanowsky explains how this very bright spectacle of the bursting star spurred the ancient Sumerians to develop the beginnings of the art of writing and also the science of mathematics.

It seems that more and more we are seeing that astronomical phenomena profoundly influenced the development of civilization, and in the near future we may well know much more about how such events each played their roles at earlier and earlier times - how such events launched and spurred our ancestors toward cultural development.

The supernova in the constellation Vela may have been one very important such phenomenon.

FOR YOUR COMPENDIUM OF ESOTERIC FACTS

Add this fact to your list of esoteric information.

The Ancient Egyptians believed that Sothis (the Nile-Star, the one we call *Sirius*) was responsible for the vital rising of the Nile River which annually flooded the valley and made their land so fruitful. In fact at the time of the Old Kingdom (2500 B.C.) the rising of the water and the heliacal (sun-related) rising of Sirius occurred on the same date June 25th. The heliacal rising date is the first date on which the star is far enough from the sun to be seen in the morning sky before the sun rises, though the particular star may actually have been rising before the sun for two or three weeks or even more (depending on its magnitude) before it is actually seen. It is easy to see how the connection between the two events could have been established and one could have been used as a predictor of the other.

REMINDERS AND OTHER ITEMS

1. We apologize for a mistake that occurred in the membership directory last month. Dr. A. V. Douglas should have been listed as Honorary President of our centre and Life Member of the R.A.S.C. The directory was not done by me and was added later to the newsletter. We apologize to Dr. Douglas for the words omitted.
2. You may notice your newsletter has a name, Regulus. The contest that was announced on page 4 of the April newsletter did not draw an enormous response. Unfortunately, in fact, there were no entries received before the announced deadline of May 30. Consequently, there was a discussion of the topic by the executive at the "pre-meeting meeting" on May 31. The name "Regulus" seemed to fit the criteria

announced in April. Regarding the star, Regulus, Richard H. Allen has this to say in the book, 'Star Names: Their Lore And Meaning' "Regulus was so called by Copernicus.... as a diminutive of the earlier Rex equivalent to the βασιλλικος of Ptolemy. This was from the belief that it ruled the affairs of the heavens, - a belief current, till three centuries ago, from at least 3000 years before our era." (p. 255. Refer also to p. 256-258) The English translation "King" or "Little King" may remind us of our city, Kingston. It seemed to be a suitable combination.

3. Our centre now has a postal box all its own. Any correspondence to be sent to the secretary of the centre or to any member of the executive can be sure to reach its destination if addressed in the following way:

Kingston Centre - R.A.S.C.,
Box 141, Station A,
Collins Bay, Ontario
K7A 6M1

4. Mr. Tony Lopez of East African Travel Consultants has asked me to mention their expeditions to the Feb. 26, 1980 Solar Eclipse. There are 3 expeditions going to Kenya, Tanzania, and India and arrangements have already been made for a number of people from Toronto. The address for specific information is

Mr. Tony Lopez,
East African Travel Consultants,
33 Bloor St. E., Suite 206
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3H1
Phone: (416) 967-0067

5. There has been some discussion of Centre exchanges in the near future. It may be possible to arrange exchanges with the Ottawa or Montreal Centres. Let's discuss it further at our next meeting.
6. It was thanks (or perhaps No Thanks!) to our friendly Post Office that you received your last newsletter later than you should have - the one that warned of a change of meeting time after the meeting had taken place. It was all because it took approximately 8 days for the master pages to travel a short distance that should have taken a day or two at the most.

All those in favour of the return of the passenger pigeon, please indicate by saying "Aye" ("Thank you, Shall I declare that a majority?")

7. Try to keep up or expand your observing programs during the summer. Don't forget the interesting Mercury-Jupiter configuration in the evenings in late June and early July, and in the very early morning you may watch Mars move close to the Pleiades and later the Hyades.
8. Remember the dates of upcoming meetings: June 14th, June 28th, July 12th, July 26th, Aug. 9th, Aug. 23rd. Please try to attend during the summer.

You may see "G. A. Photographs" at the next meeting. Bring along your own photos.

Good Observing!

Leo