



R E G U L U S

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA -- KINGSTON CENTRE

SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, 1986

STELLAFANE, 1986

Stellafane, which occurred this year on the first weekend in August, will be remembered by many for several reasons. Four members of our Centre made the trip to southern Vermont, and are not likely to forget the huge crowd, the heavy rainstorms, and the fabulous telescopes that were displayed. I enjoyed this year's event for only the second time, and am still impressed with one of the world's oldest conventions of amateur astronomers.

Located amid the rolling hills of southern Vermont, in the lush Green Mountains on the eastern fringe of the Appalachians, Breezy Hill, just a few kilometres west of Springfield, is very special to the astronomers who have been making their pilgrimages there year after year, a place that has become a kind of shrine (as, indeed, the name Stellafane implies) sacred to the memory of Russel Porter who built the observatory that stands atop the hill.

Driving up the winding, partly paved road that snakes to the summit, one always thinks of previous trips to Stellafane, whether they have been one, ten, or forty, but this year, I was directed to one of the new campgrounds that had recently been acquired and cleared by the 'friends of Stellafane'. No matter how early I arrive, it seems that there are hundreds of 'the regulars' already there busily sharing their tales of observing adventures and renewing acquaintances. On the Friday evening everyone strolls past the Springfield Telescope Makers' Clubhouse, a most distinctive landmark with its pink walls and steep-pitched roof whose fascia boards proclaim the Biblical inscription about the glory of the heavens. Nearby, and seeming to have been there for much more than its fifty-five years is the Porter Turret Telescope, a whitewashed observatory of a style no longer built and a remarkable tribute to the genius of Russell Porter.

This year's gathering was under cloudy and rainy skies, perhaps the worst in two decades. However, it did not dampen the spirits of the crowd. There were over three thousand present - one of the organizers said almost four thousand - and genuine friendship and camaraderie were clearly evident. We met friends from London, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Sarnia, Tucson, and many other places.

At least it did not rain while I was putting up my tent on Friday night and talking with some friends who gathered near the Porter Telescope. Luckily, the huge Stellafane tent could accommodate many of us during the Friday night talks which featured a number of reviews of Comet Halley observation projects. Without the trusty tent, the talks would have been not just rained out but literally flooded out. Those who could not crowd into the tent looked as if they had been pulled from the ocean; their recourse was to go back to their own tents and hope they were still anchored.

By next morning, however, only a few of the tents had been flooded out. Mine, fortunately, was spared, and only a small puddle of rainwater had found its way into one corner. During the day when the telescopes were on display and various talks were given, a light drizzle or the threat of rain persisted, and by evening the rain was so heavy that many people - myself included - skipped the traditional cookout (which always features the delicious Green Mountain corn) and went to a restaurant in Springfield. It seemed that no amount of rain or threats thereof could keep astronomers from the twilight talks which were held in the tent - for obvious reasons. Walter Scott Houston gave the traditional review of some past conventions, a talk that is always called Stellfane Shadowgram, and he thanked those who had recently been responsible for having an asteroid named in his honour. The feature talk, by Dr. Brian Marsden of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, was on amateur contributions to cometary studies. Brian's tributes for discoveries in recent times included mention of the names of our Past-President, David Levy, and Rolf Meier of the Ottawa Centre, both of whom were in

attendance.

My Sunday morning included breakfast at Hartness House in Springfield with a Mr. Levy, a Mr. Meier, and four members of the London Centre - a thoroughly enjoyable gathering of some of the Canadian contingent. There remained only the job of packing up a wet tent and making the homeward trek. As luck would have it, the rain had stopped completely by ten o'clock and the drive back through New York State was beautiful, with only a few clouds to remind me of the great downpour when hundreds of people had wanted clear skies! I hoped that next year things would be better. How could they be worse, as far as the skies were concerned? Yet, I had savoured again the magic that is Stellafane and would relish it for a long time, and I had renewed acquaintances with some good friends and knew that they were still as interested in telescopes as I was.

REPORT OF THE JUNE 1986 NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

The National Council of our Society held two meetings on the occasion of the 1986 General Assembly in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Both were held on the campus of the University of Manitoba, the first on Friday, June 27, and the second on Sunday, June 29, following the 1986 Annual Meeting of the Society. At the first meeting, the National President, Dr. Roy Bishop, presided until the time of the announcement of the newly elected officers, and then the new President, Mrs. Mary Grey, took the chair and also presided at the second meeting. Fourteen of the twenty Centres of the Society represented at both of the meetings.

Meeting of Friday, June 27

The essential agenda items of the first meeting included reports from all the officers and standing committees of the Society, and a number of important decisions. Approval was given to a proposal to continue funding the Helen Hogg Public Lecture by sharing the cost of the speaker's honorarium equally with the Canadian Astronomical Society.

The Treasurer, Dr. Chou, on behalf of the Budget Committee, presented a financial statement and commented on the healthy state of the Society, thanks in part to the increase in membership and the brisk sale of Observer's Handbooks, both of which were spurred by the appearance of Halley's Comets. Dr. Batten, the editor of the Journal, presented the results of a study of production costs of the Journal over the past eight years, and noted that a current "price war" among the Canadian printers capable of producing it would mean that our production costs over the next several years would surely decrease, though they might be offset by possible increased distribution costs. National Council also approved the editor's recommendation that the University of Toronto continue to print the Journal. Dr. Bishop, as editor of the Observer's Handbook reported that the original printing of 14000 copies of the Handbook had been sold out in February, and as a result, 1700 more were printed, most of which had also been sold.

A report from the Librarian, Mr. Brian Beattie, mentioned that there had been a joint meeting with the Historical Committee and some progress had been made in converting the Library into an historical archive. As Astronomy Day Coordinator, Mr. Enright reported on some of the activities in Centres on April 19, and announced that the next International Astronomy Day would be Saturday, May 9, 1987. Mr. Loehde, the chairman of the Computer Use Committee, reported that the committee was proceeding to buy an IBM-compatible system, namely a Trom Enhanced XT system for the National Office. On behalf of the Gold Medal Committee, Dr. Lloyd Higgs announced that the committee was working toward designing a new national award for graduate students in astronomy - one to be called the Plaskett Medal; further detail remained to be worked out, but the first presentation would probably be in 1988.

Approval was also given to a request from the Hamilton Centre to have the grant of \$1000., which it had previously received to assist in the construction of its new observatory, converted into a loan.

Meeting of Sunday, June 29

During the second meeting Council appointed its standing committees for 1986-1987. These were (with the chairman's name given in brackets): the Awards (Mr. Franklin Loehde), Budget (Dr. Ralph Chou), Editing (Dr. Alan Batten), Executive (Mrs. Mary Grey), National Newsletter (Mr. Ian McGregor), and Property (Mr. Kim Rowe).

Council approved a motion to have the Centre hosting the annual General Assembly make

a full financial report of the event before the end of the year in which the General Assembly is held.

A new committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Peter Jedicke of the London Centre was established to study the federal government's import duties on astronomical equipment and what possible position the National Council might take on the matter.

The next meeting of Council was scheduled for the National Office on Saturday, September 27, 1986.

Complete details of all the items discussed at both meetings may be found in the Minutes of the meetings which have been distributed to our Centre President, Mr. David Stokes, and our National Council Representative, Mr. Terry Hicks.

The Minutes of the 1986 Annual Meeting of the Society, which took place on June 29, will be published in the October issue of the Journal.

AN IMPORTANT OBSERVING ACHIEVEMENT

On June 27, National Council approved the awarding of the Messier Certificate to another member of the Kingston Centre, and on August 22, the presentation was made at one of our regular meetings. This was not a unique event by any means; a number of our active observers have observed the one hundred and ten objects of the Messier Catalogue and received the recognition that goes with the completion of such a project. However, there was something very special about the awarding of this Messier Certificate. It went to Mr. Mark Sorensen, who had observed ALL ONE HUNDRED AND TEN MESSIER OBJECTS with 11 x 80 binoculars. This was indeed a high ranking achievement, something which few, if any, observers anywhere have accomplished. Mark was able to complete this task in this way with the help of his Vehrenberg Photographic Star Atlas, a magnificent atlas which gives stars to about fourteenth magnitude and allowed him to determine precisely the positions of the galaxies, clusters, and nebulae which make up the Messier list of deep sky objects.

It is little wonder Mark is convinced that such binoculars are magnificent observing instruments, and such an atlas a tremendous boon to the serious observer. We look forward to what he can do in the future in the area of binocular observation.

Congratulations, Mark, on an important observational achievement!

FOR YOUR COMPENDIUM OF ESOTERIC FACTS

Currently our solar observers are witnessing a dearth of sunspots with both total numbers and numbers of groups being very low. On such occasions we can only recollect a time when these numbers were very high.

Did you know that there have been times when sunspots lasted a very long time; in fact, the longest lasting sunspot observed since the invention of the telescope persisted for over a year. It is true: the remarkable sunspot of 1840 lasted for a full EIGHTEEN MONTHS! That represents a period of time several hundred times as long as the longest hurricanes ever observed on earth. Truly remarkable when compared with the duration of sunspots of recent years!!

HALLEY FROM NEW ZEALAND

[**EDITOR'S NOTE:** I am very pleased to have received from Ruth Hicks, a letter in which she briefly described the view of the sky's most famous comet that she and Terry had during their trip to the Southern Hemisphere earlier this year. At this time we also welcome Ruth to Life Membership in our Society.]

797 Candover Crescent,
Kingston, Ont.,
July 30, 1986.

Dear Leo,

Receiving "Regulus" today was a treat. Congratulations on your G.A. Report and for winning the Service Award.

There have been so many Halley Reports over the months, all carefully recorded and reported! I first saw the "blurry blue spot" before Christmas from an easy-access spot -- our front step.

When it came from behind the sun Terry and I were in North Island, New Zealand. Every night the clouds rolled in - and out - and in. We were in our last week there when we finally glimpsed it. As usual, after dinner, in came the clouds. We settled down in the motel at Glishorne to enjoy the tv program on Giotto. It proved to be very interesting with many aspects of Patrick Moore's predictions vindicated.

After rising at about 3:30 a.m. on March 15 (out of sheer habit by now), I glanced out and the view was electrifying; it was clear. The hotel lights were off and the heavens "sang". The constellation patterns were so strange I was almost in a panic! I swung around and was prepared to search for a while, when I found it! It was a slant or stroke of light. Yes, there it was! Our 7 X 50 binoculars produced a golden slash in the sky. It was really worth all the fuss! We had a few more days in the Southern Hemisphere and so we decided we would try to photograph it later since Terry did not have his "fast" film in the camera at the time. And so he did - whenever the rain clouds cleared out and between showers - at Hicks Bay on the South Pacific, and again at Lake Taupo, but never again was the view like it was at Glishorne.

After returning home, I saw it again at Lemoine's Point where it was sporting a filmy tail. I was with two neighbours who were enjoying their first-ever view of this fascinating visitor. We shared the views in our 7 X 50 and 11 X 80 binoculars.

Regards,
Ruth Hicks

REPORTS AND OTHER ITEMS

1. The last two months have had more than a fair share of rainy and cloudy weather. However, a few very interesting observations were made by several members. The total numbers of meteors in the Perseid Shower, at least near the time of its peak, seemed to me to be rather disappointing, but I must admit that many of the meteors I saw were unusually bright, and there seemed to be a good number of reports of bright ones having been seen in many parts of Ontario. Four or five members of our Centre saw the unusual glowing and expanding gas cloud that appeared about 2:00 UT on the night of August 12-13. Your editor was fortunate enough in being able to photograph it, recording its passage from Sagittarius in the south to Pegasus in the east in a time of about ten minutes. For some time, mystery surrounded the precise cause of "this event"; however, we later learned that it was a release of liquid hydrogen and oxygen fuel from a Japanese rocket which had just placed several satellites in orbit.
2. At two of our recent meetings we enjoyed talks by special guests from the nation's capital. As the second part of the Kingston-Ottawa Centres' Speaker Exchange, Doug George, the chairman of the Ottawa Observers' Group, spoke to us on August 22, and we were very pleased with his interesting presentation on "Deep Sky Observing Techniques". On September 12, Peter Ceravolo, a member of the Edmonton Centre, who is currently working at the National Research Council in Ottawa, gave a very thorough discourse on the topic "Optical Design For Telescopes", a subject on which he is a recognized expert.
3. Several objects will be well worth observing over the next two months: (1) The first to be mentioned should be the partial solar eclipse of October 3. At Kingston, the magnitude of the eclipse will be approximately 70% (with approximately that amount of the solar disk obscured by the moon in the mid-afternoon). Mid-eclipse will be at 3:07 p.m. E.D.T. Start observing at about 1:45; first contact should occur about four to five minutes later. (2) Try to observe Venus for as many evenings as possible as it sinks lower in the western evening sky. Try to observe it as close as possible to the date of its greatest brilliancy on October 1 when its magnitude will be an amazing -4.6. (3) We should not forget the Orionid Meteor shower which peaks on the night of October 21-22. It is one of the showers associated with Halley's Comet, and there is the remote possibility of an unusual display.
4. With only a short while before our Annual Meeting, our President has asked that members be reminded that they should give some thought to who would be good candidates for next year's Kingston Centre Executive. Proposals for amendments to our constitution

and bylaws must be submitted in writing to the President and Secretary before October 29, which is 30 days before the Annual Meeting.

Here is our calendar of upcoming meeting date:

September 26	Slides, reports from various members
October 10	
October 24	
November 14	(tentatively) Larry Manuel: Building A Refractor
November 28	The Annual Meeting
December 12	

There will be only one meeting in the month of December.

5. Your editor would like to hear more from the readers of these pages. Please write about your observing or other projects. The address is:
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Box 1793,
Kingston, Ont.
K7L 5J6

Clear skies!
Good observing!

Leo Wright