

OBSERVATIONS

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE CHESTER COUNTY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

APRIL 1994

(VOLUME 2, NO. 4)

▲ acting president, edwin lurcott ▲ acting vice president tim ryan ▲ acting treasurer steven lurcott

Meeting Notes

The next meeting of the Chester County Astronomical Society will be on April 12, 1994 from 7:30 to 9:00 PM at the planetarium (room 186) of the Schmucker Science Center at West Chester University. Schmucker Science Center is located at the corner of Church Street and Rosedale Avenue in West Chester, PA. The following meeting will be held on May 10, 1994.

Old Business

Those of you missed the March Society meeting missed a good one. WCU graduate student Guy McCann gave an excellent illustrated talk on Sir John Herschel, a pioneer in photography. Guy drew attention to the fact there is very little credit given to Sir John in the development of the photographic process. Herschel was honored many times by the Royal Society for this, but his contributions often elude modern photographers.

Almost all Society members have returned their response forms indicating their approval of the Society's constitution. Some members had comments which will all be considered. Pending approval of these suggestions, the constitution may earn its first amendments. The acting officers would like to thank Society members for their timely response.

The first Society observing session was held at Ed Lurcott's home on the evening of March 19. Three 'scopes ranging from 2-1/2" to 10" were available. The inexperienced were assisted with set-up and alignment and then enjoyed the show pieces in the night sky. Some of the objects observed were the moon, Orion nebula (M42), galaxies M65, M66, M81, and M82. A collection of binary stars was also observed. It was still cold standing on the frozen ground, but hot chocolate, coffee and donuts available in the warmth of Ed's observatory made the evening more pleasant. Some members stayed late enough to catch Jupiter rising through the trees. Another observing session is planned for April if enough interest is generated. Roger Taylor, our observing chairman, will help us get an observing site in the area of the Brandywine Valley Association (off rt 842 west of West Chester).

New Business

The April guest speaker will be Dr. Anthony Nicastro, a physics professor at WCU. The title of his talk is the Vindication of "Sloppy" Pierre, a French astronomer who may have discovered Uranus before Sir John Herschel. This should prove interesting particular given the lecture on Sir John presented last month.

The Society's present officers have been acting officers since last September. A three member nominating committee was appointed at the March meeting. The committee will be in contact with all members to obtain candidates for president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. The slate of candidates will be presented at the April meeting, additional nominations may be made at that time. Elections of the officers will be made at the May meeting, the newly elected officers will assume their duties at the beginning of the June meeting. Those members who cannot attend the April meeting and who wish to vote must submit written absentee ballots to the acting president before the May 10 meeting.

Worth Seeing

Two open clusters are readily seen with binoculars in the April evening sky. Since they are almost overhead, laying back in a lawn chair is a comfortable way to view them, and should appeal to the Society's full and part-time couch potatoes. M44, known as the beehive cluster, is just about halfway between the bright twin stars of Castor and Pollux,

and the bright star Regulus to the east. M44 consists of a crowd of stars about 1° in diameter. The cluster has over a dozen stars greater than magnitude 7.5, and over 100 stars greater than magnitude 10. It is reported to be about 500 light years distant and perhaps 30-40 light years in diameter. Because of its complexity and easy visibility, this is a real "worth seeing" item.

M67 is located about 8° SSE from M44, is somewhat smaller (0.25°) and much further away (about 2500 light years). The several hundred member stars in this cluster range from 10th to 16th magnitude, and will require at least a 6" 'scope to resolve the individual stars. This cluster is estimated to be very old, at some 10 billion years.

Brilliant Venus is now well up in the west after sunset. A 'scope will be required to detect its 11 arc second diameter. By next September, it will be 5 times as big as it drops between the Earth and the Sun.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Chester County Astronomical Society was formed to provide a local organization dedicated to promote an interest in Astronomy through meetings, discussions, and speaker programs. Observations are made with a variety of telescopes. All individuals with an interest are encouraged to join. There are a variety of membership plans available. Please note that these initial membership rates do not include a subscription in Sky and Telescope. As membership grows, we hope to incorporate a subscription to this publication with each membership. If anyone is interested in membership, contact Edwin Lurcott at (610) 436-0387. and active

- Regular \$20/year
- Student \$15/year
- Junior \$10/year (18 years or younger)
- Family \$30/year

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBSERVATIONS

Members are welcome and encouraged to contribute articles to OBSERVATIONS. The deadline for the May edition is April 26, 1994. Contributions should be sent to:

Timothy Ryan
1864 Brackenville Road
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Every effort will be made for the timely inclusion of submitted articles.

SPECIAL NOTE - Congratulations to acting VP and Secretary Tim Ryan and his wife Susan on the birth of their son Austin Timothy on March 22, 1994.