

THE ATLANTA OBSERVER'S NOTEBOOK

-prepared for the members of the Atlanta Astronomy Club-

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AMATEUR TELESCOPE MAKERS AT STELLAFANE IN VERMONT

As usual the Aug. 4-5 1978 meeting of Amateur Telescope Makers at Stellafane on Breezy Hill west of Springfield has been adequately reported and clearly pictured in the pages of Sky & Telescope by our friends in Cambridge, Mass. So I do not choose to bore you by trying to compete with their article. However, since I have not knowingly seen any other members of The Atlanta Astronomy Club at any Stellafane meeting I have attended in the last 40 years, let me just pass on some of my impressions of this event in 1978 and of its evolution to date. (But I hope that some of you all have already been there and that others will be on hand for future annual sessions at Stellafane.)

Having attended these meetings off and on beginning in the 1930's, I have seen them grow from a few campers with local characters and their reflectors, to many hundreds from the northeastern United States and eastern Canada who have brought their personally made scopes of all types; some having sophisticated electronic controls and others simple manual adjustments. The machinework on the mountings, setting circles and drives has improved a lot through the years.

Although most of the pioneers whom I saw at first have by now passed on: Russell Porter and John Pierce, Sr. of Springfield, Vt., Wagn Margbol of Boston, Ingals of Scientific American, and my old friend Dick Perkin of Garden City, N.Y. Their places have been taken by other capable speakers and judges of telescopes. Now more and more young people are bringing their excellent instruments, slides, and reports on projects. In recent years, attendance has far exceeded the capacity of the Breezy Hill camping area necessitating the relegation of slow applicants to more distant motels and campgrounds. Fine organization and cooperation by the Springfield and Boston clubs have resulted in well arranged accommodations and programs. This year the good nature and the consideratness of everybody at Stellafane, as well as considerable skill for driving cars and campers in rugged and crowded places, paid off by obviating troubles and tantrums.

Two turret telescopes are in use and on exhibit in the vicinity. One is at Stellafane on Breezy Hill and the other is half-buried near the Hartness House at Springfield. In using these, the observer sits inside and enclosed room ~~room~~ sheltered from the night chill; looking through an eyepiece and viewing some celestial field ~~field~~ via an outside mirror, tube and objective, while the rotating turret holds the starry sky in his visual grasp by cancelling out earth's rotation.

Also at Hartness House (a former governor's place but now an Inn) is an exhibit of early amateur telescopes, including one

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having the "Springfield type" mounting in which the eyepiece stays in one place while the tube swings to any position. A prime mover in setting up this fairly new museum has been Berton Willard, the author of the recently published biography of Russell Porter. (As you doubtlessly know, Porter was instrumental in launching Stellafane Observatory, amateur telescope making, and the Hale scope at Mt. Palomar.)

Former governor Johnson of Vermont, a member of the Springfield club, is the one exception to my sad report on the pioneers. Although quite old he still comes, buys his supper at the food-tent and gives a speech of cordial welcome to all. This year he drove his car up the hill to Stellafane, although I heard him say many years ago when he was governor: "I took the state trooper to drive for me" to a meeting!

Illustrated talks, well made scopes, and discussions with folks having similar interests and problems made this year's Stellafane Convention as fortuitous as ever, in spite of unfavorable weather.

-Chandler Holton

ed note: Chandler is one of the original Atlanta Astronomy Club members. He was an active member from the beginning and remained so throughout the 1950's and 60's. In 1972 his long tenure as a math professor at Ga. Tech came to the end and he retired and went home to Maine, to a small town called South China.

APPARENT MAGNITUDE

How cold and small they seem
The stars so far away,
The twinkling fragile lights
Invisible at day.

How ominous and blinding
The Sun that binds our Earth,
That warms our mighty oceans
that gave our lifeforms birth.

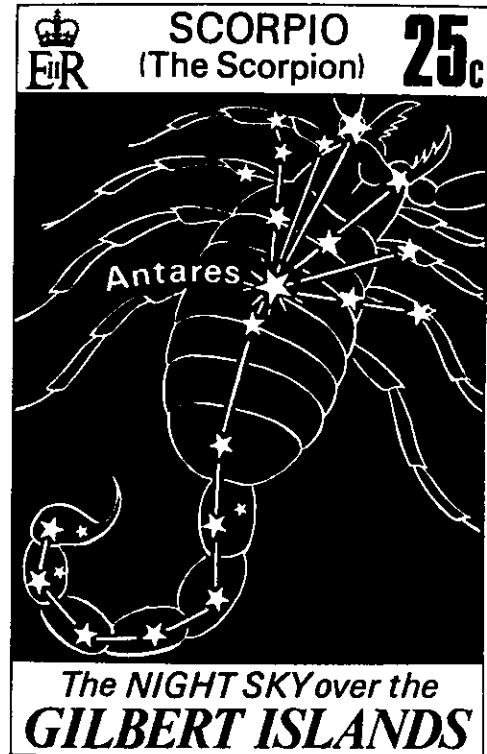
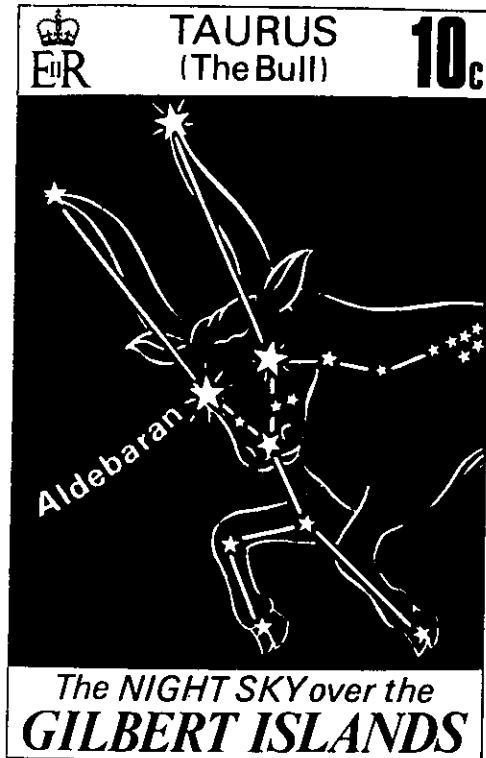
But all of us now know
That stars are suns as well,
Some smaller, many larger
Do beings near them dwell?

Procyonians may well stare
At their heavenly bodies' courses,
And ponder the minuteness
Of those tiny diamonds' sources.

"How cold and small they seem," they say,
"While our sun shines so bright,
The twinkling fragile lights above
We only see at night."

ACN Staff-
Lee Wilson
Emily Boland
Billie Ann Rice

-Joe Sheppard



This month we complete our series of illustrations of the stamps issued by the Gilbert Islands to commemorate their crystal clear skies. The constellations depicted are Taurus and Scorpius. As seen from these islands which are astride the equator, Scorpius rides high in the sky. From Atlanta it barely skims the horizon.

Our December meeting will be held on the second Friday of the month: December 8. This will be our annual Christmas Party. Members are invited to bring slides of astronomical subjects, or interesting related matters. (No X-rated material please!) An expanded spread of edible goodies will be in evidence, so have a light supper. The meeting will be held at Agnes Scott College's Bradley Observatory, and will begin at 8:00 pm. This casual type of meeting might be a good way to introduce some of your friends to the Club. There will be many informal discussions, at all levels of interest and achievement.

Fernbank Science Center's Astronomy Film and Lecture Series will Feature Falling Stars and Fuzzy Cousins: Meteors and Comets on December 13; and In the Still of the Night: Poetry by Starlight on December 27. Showings are at 9:15 and 10:15 pm, and are free!

We are still looking for a suitable photograph for our 1979 calendar. If you have an astro-photo or a slide of some astronomical activity or equipment why not submit it? It will be returned undamaged. Proceeds from the sales of these calendars go directly into our Observatory Fund, and represent a 100% profit for the Club.

PRESIDENT TIPS

December 26 in the A.M. Venus will whisperingly whisp behind "Ye Olde Mone." This rare event will be observable in our area in the early morning hours. Even more spectacular will be the transit as Venus plays "hide and seek" with you behind the 15% sunlit moon. Gainesville, Florida is just south of the graze zone.

Occultation timings and photographic stations will be set up by I.O.T.A., headed by Mike Reynolds. You will remember that he spoke to us this September. If you want more information write him at 610 Florida Blvd., Neptune Beach, Florida, 32233.

My wife and I plan to drive to the observation site Christmas afternoon. Call me at 957-9653 if you want to join us.

-David Speering

Astronomical League Announcement Card #5 is reproduced below. These cards are sent to Members-at-Large, and represent a unnique service to amateur astronomers in this hemisphere.

CIRCULAR NO. 5
OCCULTATION OF SAO 114159 BY (18) MELPOMENE

ON THE MORNING OF 11 DEC. 1978 THE 9.2 MAG MINOR PLANET (18) MELPOMENE WILL OCCULT THE 7.7 MAG STAR SAO 114159 = AGK3 +6 0778 ALONG A LINE FROM LATITUDE 36 DEG N ON THE EAST COAST OF THE U.S. TO 42 DEG N ON THE WEST COAST. THIS IS ONLY ACCURATE TO WITHIN 5 DEGREES, PUTTING MOST OF THE US IN THE PREDICTION AREA. THE EVENT WILL OCCUR AROUND 0911 UT IN THE EAST TO 0919 IN THE WEST. THE STAR IS LOCATED AT RA 6 HR 36 MN 44.6 SEC DEC +6 DEG 41 MN 59.7 SEC APPARENT. MELPOMENE WILL BE MOVING ESE TO WNW. AN OCCULTATION IS OBSERVED IF THE COMBINED LIGHT OF MELPOMENE AND THE STAR SUDDENLY DROPS BY AT LEAST A MAGNITUDE. A CENTRAL OCCULTATION COULD LAST AS LONG AS 19 SECONDS. THE STAR IS SPECTRAL CLASS K0. OBSERVERS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD OBSERVE THIS EVENT TO ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER ANY SATELLITES THAT MAY BE ORBITTING MELPOMENE. IF POSSIBLE, AN OBSERVING FENCE SHOULD BE SETUP WITH OBSERVERS 2-4 MILES APART TO ALLOW CONFIRMATION OF ANY SECONDARY EVENTS OBSERVED. UPDATED PATH PREDICTIONS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE THE PRECEDING DAY AT (312)-929-7470 (NO COLLECT).
25 NOVEMBER 1978 BERTON STEVENS, JR.

