

THE FOCAL POINT

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The Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club

May 1990

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CLUB CALENDAR

Next Meeting: May 18, 7:00 p.m. at Villa Rica Observatory.
Program: A covered dish dinner and observing party. See the Program Preview on page 3 and the map to Villa Rica on page 4.

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The *Focal Point* is published monthly during the academic year by the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc. The AAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of amateur astronomy. Meetings are held the third Friday of each month (except the second Friday in December) at the Bradley Observatory on the Agnes Scott campus. Dues are \$35 annually for a family membership and \$25 for a student membership and include a subscription to *Sky & Telescope* magazine and use of the club observatory in Villa Rica.

Submissions: Article submissions are welcome, and may be delivered to the editor for consideration. Articles on computer floppy disk are encouraged.

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THE CASUAL ASTRONOMER: MAY 1990

by Hal Crawford

It's That Time Again!

It comes around every year, just as it has for the past 42 years. The membership of the club gathers at the usual place at the usual time (more or less) and selects the club members that will guide the Atlanta Astronomy Club for another revolution around the sun. This month the officers will be chosen by parliamentary procedure and ballot for the 1990-91 fiscal year.

If you're unhappy with the way the club is going for any reason, this is the time to make yourself heard. If you're thinking of making a significant contribution to the best astronomy club in Georgia -- nay, the Southeast! -- now is the time to act.

In a computer journal that I read a couple of weeks ago, a columnist attended a computer user's group in Tennessee. It was election time, and club members literally had to bind and tie people to get them to become officers of the club. The columnist thought this was pretty funny; it just was hilarious that Tennessee happened to be the "Volunteer State." Having served as an officer in several clubs, and having faced similar problems in my time, I didn't think it was so funny.

Actually, I am proud that in the AAC we usually can find people to fill an office. We have many enthusiastic people who devote many hours of time and energy as a club officer, and even more volunteers who help out when they are needed most. Last year I called on members to help out the club, and the response, in my opinion, was gratifying. As thrilled as I was with the way the Voyager Watch at Fernbank worked last year, it couldn't have been done without the tireless efforts of several volunteers who were on hand to help out. I know it was no fun to hand out AAC applications at the lunar eclipse last summer, but members did it anyway. They also hauled out telescopes and answered questions from thousands of curious people.

It is particularly amazing that people can volunteer in the '90s. Leisure time for Americans has declined considerably in the past decade, and time literally has to be MADE to do some of the things our members have been doing.

Now that I've waxed enthusiastic on the accomplishments of our memberships, I'll discuss the challenges of the upcoming year. As of this writing, we have approximately 150 members in the Atlanta Astronomy Club. I think that number should climb. Astronomy deserves the attention of the public, especially in Georgia, where the skies (incredibly) are better than in many other areas around the U.S. The irony is that in this highly technical age, many people don't understand the most elementary aspects of what our universe is all about. It has always been a goal of the AAC to educate the public, and the best way to do that is to first build your membership with knowledgeable people. There are many Atlantans who are interested in Astronomy, yet have no idea that there is even one astronomy club (indeed, there are two). Increasing public awareness of the

Atlanta Astronomy Club and in astronomy should be a topmost goal of the officers (and membership) in 1990-91.

Increasing public awareness is easy -- the easiest (and most fun) thing to do is schedule observing events for the public. We don't have to invite the public out to Villa Rica -- a new member just the other day reminded me that a telescope can be set up in a suburban area, and with the proper ingredients the people will come. There are countless other activities we as AAC members can do, we only need to desire to do them.

The second goal could be to clean up the observatory in Villa Rica. Not that it's filthy, but it can be spruced up. Now that the worst of the pollen season is past, we need to clean the telescopes. We now have a new focuser for the 20" telescope, but it must be installed. The friction clutch also needs some work, which requires partial disassembly of the telescope. The mirrors of all of our scopes no doubt need to be collimated. While not expensive in themselves, they take time to do. This summer offers excellent opportunities to improve our observational facilities.

A third goal is that something needs to be done about light pollution. I know the pragmatists are rolling their eyes at the thought, but the situation is only going to grow worse without some form of appeal to our elected officials. I believe that with proper effort and focus, our government leaders can be convinced that minimal legislation, even if it doesn't pass, can provide more public focus on the problems of light pollution, and how working on the problem now can save energy and money down the road.

The Atlanta Astronomy Club elects six officers every year. (The Board of Directors are elected in odd-numbered years.) All officers will assume their roles in September. A brief summary of those offices are as follows:

President (currently Leonard Abbey): Presides at all meetings, the president is responsible for the administration of club affairs. He establishes committees as necessary and appoints the chairmen for those committees (except for the Program and Observing Committees). He may call officer meetings when necessary to coordinate policy decisions of the club.

1st Vice President (Program, currently Eugenia Abbey): Presides at meetings if the President cannot do so. Succeeds to the presidency if the office is vacated. The 1st Vice President is charge of planning programs and securing speakers for general meetings.

2nd Vice President (Observing, currently Rich Jakiel): Presides at meetings if the President or 1st Vice President cannot do so. Responsible for scheduling monthly observing sessions throughout the year and training members for the use of Club-owned telescopes and equipment at the Villa Rica

Observatory.

Recording Secretary (currently Bud Rosser): Shall take minutes at all meetings and prepare them in writing for approval at the next session. Minute reports are then abbreviated by the Recording Secretary for inclusion in the newsletter.

Corresponding Secretary (currently Steve Gilbreath): Shall prepare and mail the newsletter each month. It shall contain an announcement of the next meeting together with other material at his discretion, or as required. He shall distribute the annual membership list.

Treasurer (currently Hal Crawford): The Treasurer shall be in charge of records of dues, all expenditures, disbursements of money; and of overall financial responsibilities of the club. He is responsible for filing the club's income taxes and maintaining the club's corporation. The Treasurer shall prepare the annual membership list to be distributed by the Corresponding Secretary.

As you can see, each of these positions are vital to the existence to the club. A nominating committee has been designated to appoint candidates for those positions. Any last-minute candidates can be added with a motion and second at the next meeting.

Now is the time to make yourself available. Roll up your sleeves and get ready for the 1990-91 year with the Atlanta Astronomy Club!

APRIL MEETING REPORT

At the April Meeting, Fernbank Astronomy Rick William gave a presentation of the most significant events of 1989. Neatly skimming the more obvious events, such the Voyager Neptune encounter in August, he presented in-depth reviews of items that are less significant in the popular press but of far greater interest to astronomers and physicists.

Rick's updates include the latest information on Supernova 1987A; the discovery of geyser-like eruptions from the surface of Triton, as revealed by Voyager photographs; a new theory indicating that our own galaxy is more elliptical than spiral; and information on the Galileo probe, which is expected to perform an Earth flyby in December of this year.

Rick's list also touched on an event here on Earth that could have far more significant implications on other planets and moons, particularly in our own solar system. Geologists near the Savannah River plant have found evidence of life over 900 feet beneath the Earth's surface. Yet at this depth microbes

flourish, shedding new possibilities that life could exist on Mars and other regions of our solar system.

PROGRAM PREVIEW

Our May meeting will be a picnic at the club's Walter F. Barber, Jr. Memorial Observatory just outside Villa Rica. There will be a short business meeting, including election of officers for the new year, followed by observing, weather permitting. In the event of rain, the meeting will be inside the Barber's new rumpus room. The Barbers have graciously offered to provide tables and tablecloths. Plates and cutlery will be provided. You are asked to bring:

- * A covered dish. Call Kara and Will Rogers at 593-2727 and let them know what you plan to bring.
- * \$2.00 per person in your party to cover the cost of fried chicken. Children under 5 years are free.
- * Family and friends. Let the Rogers know how many are coming when you call.
- * Telescopes, binoculars and other observing equipment.
- * Folding chairs and lounges.

Kara and Will need volunteers to help with setting up the picnic and with cleanup. Please let them know you will help!

A map to the observatory is included in this issue.

REMEMBER: May 18, rain or shine, Villa Rica. The fun begins at 7 p.m.!!

ORION SUPPORT PROGRAM PAYS OFF!

A credit voucher good for \$139.37 from the Orion Telescope Center was presented to Treasurer Hal Crawford at the April meeting. This amount represents the share of purchases made by Atlanta Astronomy Club Members over the past six months from Orion. Orion had set aside a pool of \$5,000, to be distributed proportionally among all participating clubs. The credit is good for Orion-brand equipment, and will be used to supplement the facilities at the Villa Rica observatory.

The second half of the program has gone into effect as of March 1. This is for a second pool of \$5,000 which will be distributed after August 30. Members who would like to help earn points for the Atlanta Astronomy Club should consider

ordering from the Orion Telescope Center. Be sure to mention that you are a club member when you order. Contact Hal Crawford for an Orion catalog or for additional information on the program. Members should please note that participation in this program does not constitute an endorsement of the Orion Telescope Center by the Atlanta Astronomy Club.

CLUB TELESCOPE CHECKOUTS AVAILABLE

by Steve Gilbreath

It's another clear night and you're outside looking up at the stars with you're 4 inch reflector trying to find the Horsehead Nebula while the street lights of downtown Atlanta cast a bright glow in the distance. Good luck... You're tired, frustrated and want to get you're hands on a really large telescope in a really dark location. "What can I do?" is the question. The answer is "Villa Rica".

Our club owns a premier observing site only about 35 miles west of Atlanta in Villa Rica and since you're a paying club member (at least I hope you are) you're entitled to use it. No too many other astronomy clubs have an observing site like ours and ours is one of our club's best kept secrets. We have a 10 inch and 20 inch reflector as well as plenty of room and power for your own telescopes. It's easy to find, easy to use, and doesn't cost you a thin dime more.

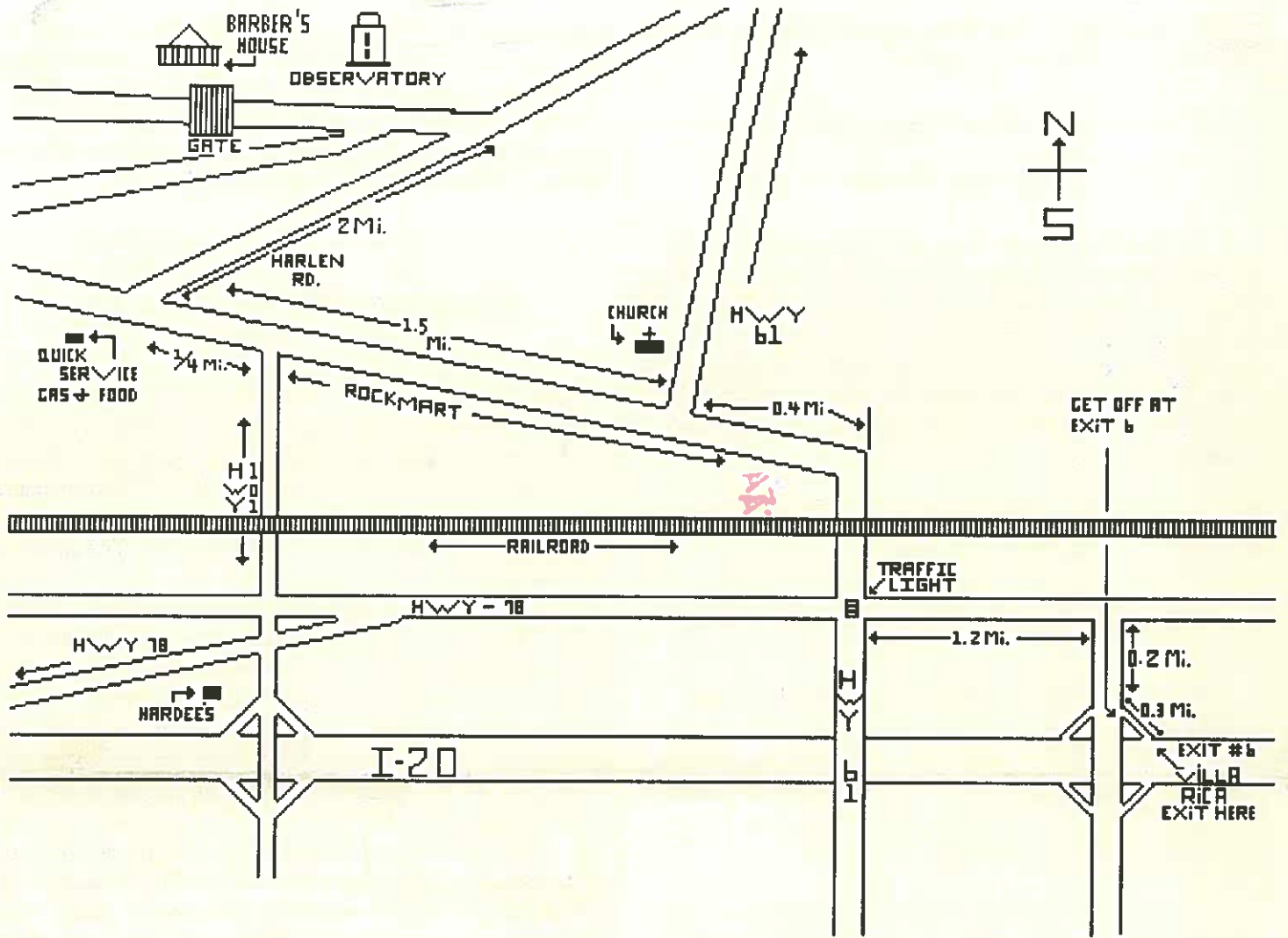
All you need to use the Villa Rica site is the combination to the locks (available from any officer) and if you want to use one of our telescopes we require a telescope checkout which takes only a few minutes and is quite painless. These checkouts are available from the observing chairman and other designated club members.

Since this month's meeting is at Villa Rica, it's more convenient than ever to get checked-out. So, at this month's meeting ask for a telescope checkout. Join the fun of observing and come to Villa Rica. We'll be looking for you.

ASTRONOMY MAGAZINE AVAILABLE TO AAC MEMBERS

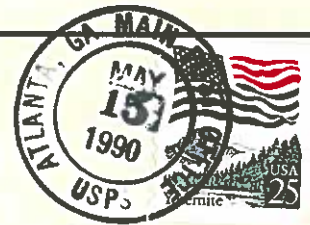
Members who ordered their May-Dec 1990 issues of Astronomy Magazine should be receiving them Real Soon Now. Those who do not see their issues by the end of this month should let Hal Crawford know (don't worry, he signed up too!).

Interested members can now order the July-Dec 1990 issues of Astronomy Magazine. The six-month subscription rate is \$7.50 (renewal rate for the full year is \$14.00, and participating members will be billed around October) - get your order in NOW so you can start receiving BOTH of the best magazines for the amateur astronomer community!



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First Class Delivery



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