
The FOCAL POINT

Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.
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The September meeting will be held at 8:00 p.m., Friday, September 18, at the Bradley Observatory of Agnes Scott College.

The program is entitled *The Great Refractor* and will be presented by Leonard Abbey, F.R.A.S.

THE GREAT REFRACTOR

On the brisk afternoon of November 10, 1824, nine wooden carts rumbled into the quiet university town of Dorpat, Russia. The cargo was twenty-two large wooden crates. The journey had originated in Munich, some 1500 miles away, and had taken most of the summer. As unlikely as it seems, this event was of pivotal importance to the science of astronomy. The Great Refractor had arrived.

Before this day there had been important telescopes. Many were large by then current standards. Many employed new techniques to overcome the optical shortcomings of their respective times. But never before had there been a telescope which enjoyed the mystique and renown of the Dorpat Refractor. To its maker, Josef Fraunhofer, it brought the fame of having built the first truly modern telescope. In the hands of Otto Struve it initiated a revolution in observational astronomy.

Our presentation this month concerns the Dorpat Refractor, and the other

triumphs of telescope engineering which preceded and followed it.

Leonard Abbey became interested in astronomy in 1950 when his parents took him to the Bradley Observatory. He has built three telescopes and became an active observer of planets while still in his teens. He also made a map of Mars based on observations he made with his six- and eight-inch telescopes.

He was the founding Recorder of the Outer Planets Section of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers. In recognition of his accomplishments he was made a Fellow of the the Royal Astronomical Society in 1970.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members who joined the club recently:

Richard and Shelby Emory
(rejoining!)
Chris Crews
Brian Arrington
Kelly Mallard
Clay and Terry McHann
Marc and Rochelle Tanenbaum
JoDianne Dybowski
William Linch
Deborah Welch

Please make these new members feel welcome when you see them at a meeting or at an observing session.

OBSERVING SESSION

The September observing session is scheduled for Saturday night, Sept., 26, the night of the new moon. If the weather is bad on the 26th an alternate night will be Sunday, Sept. 27th.

I would like to encourage new members to make an effort to attend and, of course, old members who may have never visited our observatory are also more than welcome.

Our club is very fortunate to have a 20-inch reflector for member's use. If you have never used a large aperture telescope for visual observing you are in for, literally, a revelation. This scope alone more than justifies the trip to Villa Rica on a Saturday night.

I would like to suggest that new members arrive before sunset. This will allow time to become acquainted with our equipment. There are a number of "do's and don'ts" concerning our telescopes; please understand their functions before attempting to use them.

I will bring some of my own eyepieces and filters to the observatory. If you are curious about their performance they will be made available. If you have a telescope, binoculars, etc., I would encourage you to bring them to our observatory.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions, whether about the weather or amateur astronomy in general. I would also welcome any suggestions or ideas

you have concerning our club observatory.

David Riddle
(404) 438-7818

MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 1992 MEETING

The meeting was held at Fernbank Science Center.

The August meeting featured "Show and Tell," where members brought telescopes, pictures and other items of interest to share with the club membership.

Program Chairman and incoming president Bud Rosser presented his Meade MTS-SN8 telescope, procured back in 1990. Noting that his model was no longer available, he described his telescope as "a great idea whose time came...and...went..."

Bill Close, a noted member for many years, brought several items. Most fascinating was a special camera mount -a sophisticated handmade tripod with a clock drive and finderscope. The most surprising aspect of this instrument was that he has never used it! "I've never used it...mainly because I've never been able to line the dad-blamed thing up!" Bill also presented several paintings that he did in preparation for a book on astronomy that was never published.

Avery Davis, commenting that his "Tasco 7 x 35 binoculars just weren't cutting it," presented his "Comet King" from University Optics. This binocular

workhorse, is an 11 x 80 powerhouse! He finds it a lot easier to chase Messier objects now. Now to put together a decent observing station!

Jackie Cochran, club treasurer, presented her favorite astronomy books. Her books, presented in order from beginning to more advanced astronomy, were *365 Starry Nights*, which covers the sky every day of the year; *Turn Left at Orion*, a good comprehensive guide for using a small telescope; *The Messier Album*, which talks about, strangely enough, Messier objects! She also presented her sky atlas by Wil Tirion, and a good book on astrophotography, *The Hidden Sun*.

Bill Kassler presented one of his favorite books. *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, by Timothy Ferris, covers the history of astronomy through fascinating anecdotes. Bill also showed photographs of his travels in Florence, Italy and brought back an Italian bank note, which features Galileo.

David Riddle talked about how he was introduced to astronomy back in 1969, and "it's been downhill ever since...it's almost an obsession!" David showed off his old *Sky & Telescope* magazines, comparing telescopes from 20 years ago to scopes available today. David's advice to anyone interested in astronomy: 1) Get the desire; 2) Pick up basic knowledge first, learn with binoculars. David also showed some of his favorite books. One book he found at Border's Book Store was *Visual Astronomy of the Deep Sky*, by Roger Clark. Another was *Planetary Nebulae*, by Steven Hynes; this

book provided several insights on selecting eyepieces.

Finally, Rich Jakiel presented his sketches of galaxies and nebulae. He also presented one of his books (must be book night - good thing Hal Crawford didn't bring his collection!), *The Color Atlas of Galaxies*, by James Wray, which was filled with brilliant photos of galaxies and deep space objects.

Although the weather wasn't cooperative enough for observing, it was still a fun evening for amateur astronomy.

GET INVOLVED!

by William Snell, Editor.

The monthly meetings and observing sessions are important advantages of membership in the club. However, there are other activities that are not currently being explored. Some examples:

Telescope-making workshop. Notice that I didn't say mirror grinding! Putting together telescopes from commercially available parts would be easy if members could get together, exchange ideas and divide the labor.

Search for new dark sky observing sites. Some members are more than an hour's drive from our observatory. Alternate sites to the east or north would be helpful.

Other ideas include a computer BBS, observing sessions at sites in town, workshops on observing techniques (not lectures!) and field trips. These ideas can turn a fine club into a great one but not without your support and participation.

The Focal Point is published monthly by the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.. The AAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of amateur astronomy.

Meetings are held on the third Friday of each month (the second Friday in December) at the Bradley Observatory of Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia.

Dues are \$35 annually and include a subscription to *Sky & Telescope* magazine, the Astronomical League's *Reflector* and use of the club observatory in Villa Rica, Georgia .

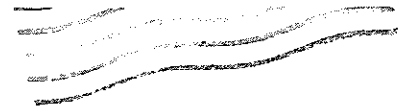
For up-to-date information and club programs and activities please call the AAC's telephone hot-line at 621-2661.

Article submissions are strongly encouraged; please deliver to the editor for consideration. The submission deadline for the October 1992 issue of the *FOCAL POINT* is October 5th. Permission is granted to duplicate and redistribute in a non-profit manner, in part or whole, provided credit is given to the authors, the club and this publication.

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