

The Skyscraper
Vol 32 no. 3

the monthly publication of



**The Amateur Astronomical Society
of Rhode Island**

47 Peepthead Road
North Scituate, RI 02857

www.theskyscrapers.org

President

Dan Lorraine

1st Vice President

Steve Hubbard

2nd Vice President

Bob Horton

Secretary

Joel Cohen

Treasurer

Bill Kirby

Trustees

Ted Ferneza

Jack Szelka

Richard Arnold

Members at Large

Ken Dore

Mercedes Rivero-Hudec

Membership Committee Chairperson

Pat Landers

Librarian

Dave Huestis

Editor

Jim Hendrickson 354-4906

See back page for directions to Seagrave Observatory.

Please submit items for the newsletter by March 15 to Jim Hendrickson, 1 Sunflower Circle, North Providence, RI 02911 or e-mail to jim@distantgalaxy.com

Email subscriptions:

To receive *The Skyscraper* by email, send email with your name and address to jim@distantgalaxy.com. Note that you will no longer receive the newsletter by postal mail.

© 2005 Skyscrapers, Inc.

The Skyscraper

March 2005

March Meeting

Friday, March 4, 2005; 7:30pm at North Scituate Community Center

This month we are pleased to present Ian Dell'Antonio, Assistant Professor of Physics at Brown University. He will be speaking to us on "Imaging Dark Matter in the Sky." His talk is related to his research in using observational techniques, particularly gravitational lensing, to determine the distribution of dark matter in the Universe.

He is currently an assistant professor at Brown doing research in observational cosmology, growth of galaxy systems, dark matter and more. He has been a member of the Brown faculty since 1999 and is a graduate of Haverford College and received his PHD from Harvard University.

From Seagrave Observatory: North Scituate Community Center is the first building on the right side going south on Rt. 116, after the intersection of Rt. 6 Bypass (also Rt. 101) and Rt. 116, in N. Scituate. Famous Pizza is on the corner of that intersection. Parking is across the street from the Community Center.

Skyscrapers Calendar

Public observing is held every Saturday at Seagrave Observatory weather permitting and when the grounds are accessible.

**March 4
Friday** 7:30pm **March Meeting** at Seagrave Observatory

**March 5
Saturday** 8:00pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

**March 12
Saturday** **Trip to Van Vleck Observatory** weather permitting. See notes on page 3

8:00pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

**March 19
Saturday** 8:00pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

**March 26
Saturday** 8:00pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

Note: membership renewals are due in April.

Easter and the Astronomical Connection

Dave Huestis

The motion of the heavens is a precise clock and calendar which can be used to determine when to celebrate special events. One doesn't have to observe the sky for too long a time to notice the cyclic phases of the Moon, or the changing position of the Sun relative to the horizon during the course of a year. Even the rising of specific stars could signify some importance to an early civilization.

It should therefore not be surprising that many religions celebrate special events that are connected to the clockwork of the heavens. For instance, Christians celebrate Easter every year, but the date for the celebration changes. Since we can barely even remember birthdays and anniversaries that always occur on the same date, it's time for me to enlighten you with the facts of how the date of Easter is determined.

Think back to Easter celebrations of years past. Was it cold or snowy and you had to bundle up? Or, were Spring outfits proudly worn amidst warming sunlight and returning songbirds? Why the extremes of weather? Well, if the date for the celebration of Easter occurred on the same Sunday every year, our fickle New England weather could easily account for the differences in attire.

However, some years Easter can occur as early as March 22 or as late as April 25. Why this range? The varying date for the observance of Easter is determined by astronomical circumstances. And this year it is celebrated almost as early as it can be, on March 27.

The story began many moons ago when the Christian Church first developed. Since Easter was determined in conjunction with Passover, it often fell on a weekday. However, in 352 A.D. the Council of Nicaea declared that Easter should always fall on a Sunday. They determined that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the Full Moon on or next after the vernal equinox (Spring... March 20 or 21). However, if the Full Moon occurs on a Sunday, Easter is celebrated on the following Sunday. This scenario happened in 2001.

This year the vernal equinox is on Sunday, March 20, at 7:33 am, EST. The Full Moon on or after that date occurs five days later on Friday, March 25. Therefore, Easter is celebrated 2 days after the Full Moon, which is Sunday, March 27.

People aren't as observant of sky happenings these days as they once were long ago. Light pollution in and surrounding urban areas has blocked all but the brightest stars and planets from view. The Milky Way galaxy, our own island universe, is only seen to best advantage from dark rural skies. Let's not lose our connection to the stars from which we were born. Lighting can promote safety if properly installed. Keep unwanted light from polluting the night sky. Let starlight shine down from the heavens, and help prevent stray lighting from blazing up into the night sky. Then maybe folks will begin to notice and appreciate the beauty of the starry heavens once again.

Have a happy Easter, and remember to keep your eyes to the skies!

Secretary's Report

Joel Cohen, Secretary

Monthly Meeting - February 2, 2005
Scituate Community Center

Meeting called to order at 7:35 pm

Secretary's Report - Submitted by Acting Secretary Ken Dore and accepted as published in the Skyscraper

Treasurer's Report - Accepted as read and posted by Bill Kirby

Trustee's Report - Ted Ferneza reported that the Observatory had been snowed in over the last few weeks. One squirrel had been caught and removed humanely from the Clark building and the hole had been patched.

Librarian/Historian's Report - None

Nomination Committee - Dave Huestis has accepted nomination for President and has asked for others to step up and help lead Skyscrapers in the near future.

New Business - No new business

Old Business - Ray Kenison was voted in as a new member

Good of the Organization - Bob Horton announced the Hartness House trip for March 18 & 19. Al Hall announced June 6 as the date for StarConn and the visit to Van Vleck Observatory is scheduled for March 12th at 6:30pm (meeting at PeepToad Road and car pooling to

Middletown, CT). Ted Ferneza asked for additional volunteers for for the Feb 8th Star Party. John Kocur asked about establishing a seminar on Imaging, Registax, and Photoshop. Dan Lorraine announced the June 25th as the date for a day trip to Nantucket to visit the Maria Mitchell Observatory. Dan also presented a short slide show on his recent visit to the Dartmouth College Observatory in Hanover, NH.

Adjournment - 8:08 pm

Following adjournment, Dave Huestis presented a historic retrospective on Skyscraper's inflatable Planetarium show at the Rhode Island Mall in 1980. It was greatly entertaining. There will be additional material posted on the website regarding this monumental undertaking.

Van Vleck Observatory Trip

March 12, 2005

Please check the web site on the day of the event for updates based on the weather conditions.

Ever look at Jupiter or Saturn through a 20" Alvan Clark refractor? Well here's your chance! Skyscrapers will once again (weather permitting that is) have exclusive use of the 20" Clark at Wesleyan University's Van Vleck Observatory in Middletown CT thanks to our hosts, members of The Astronomical Society of Greater Hartford. We will meet at Seagrave Observatory and car pool for the 1 1/2 hour drive -- departure time will be 6:30 pm sharp! If it's easier for you to meet us there feel free to do so.

Astronomical Poetry

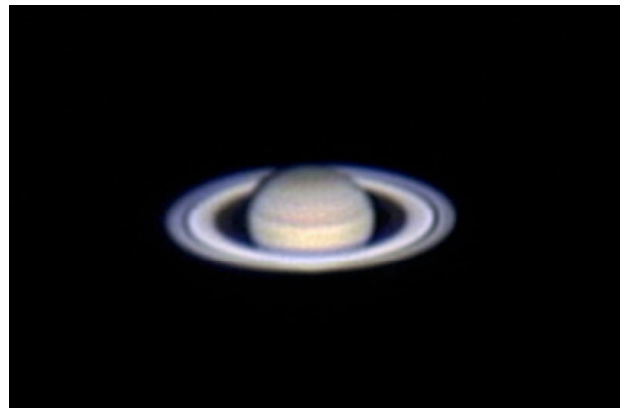
Submitted by Steve Hubbard

TO THE COMET PELTIER

-Dr. Charles Cave

Whence comest thou? And whither art thou bound?
Can aught like thee in cosmic depths be found?
Has Earth ere this been favoured with thy sight?
Hast thou no more to give of thy great light?
Thy radiant form I dimly can espie
Amidst the suns of Cassiopeia's sky
Across the vast abyss 'twixt thee and me,
There stream thy gentle rays. But who can see
Thy beauteous splendour at so great a range
Except by optics or immortal change?
Night after night, I gaze with longing eye
To trace thy trackless path across the sky,
Expecting that some time thy blazing trail
Would fill the heavens, and men from hill and dale
Proclaim thine advent to this little speck,
A mote in space which giant orbs bedeck.
But hope grows dim as dimmer grows thy light.
Past constellations one by one, thy flight
Declares that other realms beyond my ken,
(Immensity that baffles human pen,
Whose denizens of flaming fire whirl round
On orbits mighty, through the vast profound).
Are thine abode. Why should'st thou linger? Flee!
Since voices from the deep seem urging thee
To come. Thy light receding from my view
Is gone. Adieu! Fair visitor, Adieu!

Gallery



Saturn just past opposition. Photo by Krysz Ruczyński

Directions to Seagrave Observatory

From the Providence area:

Take Rt. 6 West to Interstate 295 in Johnston and proceed west on Rt. 6 to Scituate. In Scituate bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right onto Rt. 116 North. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Coventry/West Warwick area:

Take Rt. 116 North. Peeptoad Road is the first left after crossing Rt. 101.

From Southern Rhode Island:

Take Interstate 95 North. Exit onto Interstate 295 North in Warwick (left exit.) Exit to Rt. 6 West in Johnston. Bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right on Rt. 116. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Northern Rhode Island:

Take Rt. 116 South. Follow Rt. 116 thru Greenville. Turn left at Knight's Farm intersection (Rt. 116 turns left) and follow Rt. 116. Watch for Peeptoad Road on the right.

From Connecticut:

- Take Rt. 44 East to Greenville and turn right on Rt. 116 South. Turn left at Knight's Farm intersection (Rt. 116 turn left) and follow Rt. 116. Watch for Peeptoad Road on the right.
- Take Rt. 6 East toward Rhode Island; bear left on Rt. 101 East and continue to intersection with Rt. 116. Turn left; Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.

From Massachusetts:

Take Interstate 295 South (off Interstate 95 in Attleboro.) Exit onto Rt. 6 West in Johnston. Bear right off Rt. 6 onto Rt. 101. Turn right on Rt. 116. Peeptoad Road is the first left off Rt. 116.



**47 PEEPTOAD ROAD
NORTH SCITUATE, RI 02857**