

The Skyscraper

Vol. 30 no. 2

the monthly publication of



The Amateur Astronomical Society of Rhode Island

47 Peepload Road
North Scituate, RI 02857

www.theskyscrapers.org

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See back page for directions to Seagrave Observatory.

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Email subscriptions:

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The Skyscraper

February 2003

Gary Walker, Variable Star Observing

Friday, February 7, 7:30pm at North Scituate Community Center

Gary Walker is an Aeronautical Engineer, and spent 31 years in the defense business designing navigation equipment for Northrop Corporation. He currently works for Maxtor Corporation, responsible for the advanced technologies of spindles and CFD (computer fluid dynamics).

Gary has spent the last 18 years observing, building telescopes and observatories, photographing the heavens, and lastly making photometric measurements of various variable stars.

He is a past president of the AAVSO (American Association of Variable Star Observers) and his talk will focus on his photometric results utilizing a CCD camera as well as discuss what's been going on at the AAVSO over the past ten years.

Directions to North Scituate Community Center:

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 on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month at Seagrave Observatory, weather permitting. Public Nights will resume a schedule of every Saturday night, clear or cloudy, beginning in April.

**February 7
Friday** 7:30pm **February meeting** at North Scituate Community Center

**February 8
Saturday** 7:30pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

**February 22
Saturday** 7:30pm **Public Observing Night** at Seagrave Observatory

Treasurer's Report

Dolores Rinaldi, Treasurer

Checking Account Activity

1/1/2003 – 1/28/2003

INFLOWS

Deposits dues	45.00
TOTAL deposits	45.00
TOTAL INFLOWS	45.00

OUTFLOWS

electric	83.58
insurance	1684.00
postage	136.83
printing	102.06
TOTAL OUTFLOWS	2006.47

OVERALL TOTAL -1961.47

Account Balances Report

As of 1/28/2003

ASSETS

Cash and Bank Accounts	
Checking	2,378.68
Savings	10,564.84
TOTAL Cash and Bank	12,943.52
Accounts	
TOTAL ASSETS	12,943.52

LIABILITIES 0.00

OVERALL TOTAL 12,943.52

Secretary's Report

Pat Landers, Secretary

Monthly Meeting

December 6, 2002

The Skyscrapers' yearly Christmas party took place at December's monthly meeting at Seagrave. Special thanks are extended to those individuals who helped sponsor the refreshments: Tom Rinaldi, Ted Ferneza, Dave and Tina Huestis, Bob Napier, Steve & Susan Hubbard, Dolores Rinaldi, Pat Landers, and Dan Lorraine. A brief meeting was also held. Dave Huestis

discussed the rather disappointing (at least compared to last year!) Leonid meteor shower in November. Bob Napier gave an update on the International Space Station. Finally, the proposed members listed in last month's Skyscraper were approved for membership.

Monthly Meeting January 10, 2003

January's monthly meeting commenced at the Cormack Planetarium in Roger Williams Park at 7:41 p.m. At the outset, President Hubbard spoke for all those present by extending heartfelt wishes to Fred Ewalt. Fred, a longtime member and passionate astroimager, is battling a serious illness. Members were encouraged to include a speedy recovery for Fred among their thoughts and prayers.

Treasurer's Report--Checking--\$4170.74
Savings--\$14724.06

Secretary's Report--None

Trustees' Report--The Observatory Committee has scheduled a meeting for January 11, 2003. Among the expected topics for discussion include reassessment of the present schedule of Public Nights on Saturdays, and whether to offer programs to the public when those nights are cloudy.

The possibility of offering CCD and imaging workshops for members is also likely to be a topic.

Membership Committee--

The following memberships were proposed: 1) Peter Elkins, Warwick, RI; 2) Charles Stanfa, Mansfield, MA. Their membership will be voted upon at next month's meeting.

New Business--Fred Ewalt wishes to sell some of his equipment, including: 1) SBIG ST-9 CCD camera with a color filter wheel for \$2350; 2) 8" Meade LX200 GPS with dew shield, and dolly for \$1500; and 3) SBIG ST7-EN CCD camera for \$1850. Bob Napier announced that he will purchase the ST-9 himself, but will transfer it to Skyscrapers for the same price if the Society decides to acquire it. President Hubbard proposed that the Society should indeed purchase the camera, and that this issue be taken up at a later time.

Tom Rinaldi is donating a DVD player to the Society. Bob Howe is donating a 23" color television set as well.

Good of the Organization: Bill Luzader invited the Society for a day at the planetarium in Plymouth.

Proposed dates include April 5th, May 3rd, and May 31st. Bob Howe announced that he had located a lodge with beds and 3 meals a day near White Mountain in the Sierra Nevadas on the California/Nevada border. As a result, it's likely that some members will once again be making a summertime journey there to observe the unparalleled skies of White Mountain. Finally, members were again encouraged to elect to receive the Skyscraper via computer rather than mail. The meeting adjourned to 8:04 p.m.

Observatory Committee Meeting January 11, 2003

Present were Ted Ferneza, Bill Kirby, Bob Howe, Jack Szelka, Bob Horton, Bob Napier, Bill Gucfa, Steve Hubbard, and Pat Landers. The first topic discussed was whether we should return to having Public Nights every Saturday night. Presently, there are Public Nights on two Saturdays per month. The exceptionally cloudy weather during the Fall unfortunately rendered the grounds effectively closed to the public. Some members, concerned about manpower constraints, want the present schedule to continue. Others thought the present setup too confusing for the public.

Bob Horton and Bob Howe suggested that we run programs even on cloudy Public Nights. For instance, the Center for Astrophysics reportedly runs movies on unclear nights.

It was decided to once again have Public Nights on every Saturday night. Even if it's cloudy, those members present will run a program. On cloudy nights, it's likely we'll close earlier. If there is snow or rain, the grounds will be closed. However, the new schedule won't be commenced until April or until the grounds are free of snow and mud.

A motion will be placed on next month's agenda to purchase some DVDs for presentations on Public Nights; Bob Howe mentioned he might be able to donate some DVDs. A cabinet is necessary for the slides/DVDs/videotapes comprising our presentations to the public. A computer projector from Brown University is available. It would be an upgrade over what we presently have. It will have to be installed in the ceiling

Offering programs for members was also discussed. Dave Hurdis and Tom Rinaldi are interested in teaching a CCD workshop. Bob Napier would like to host a presentation on the NASA missions. Participation would be done through an enrollment in advance.

The possibility of increasing Skyscraper visibility among the public at large through sidewalk astronomy was also discussed. George Washington Park in northwest Rhode Island was mentioned as a suitable site, if properly advertised.

Space Places in Rhode Island

Part II

David A Huestis, Librarian

Note to Skyscraper Members

This column was in the works prior to our January meeting held at the Cormack Planetarium. I was happy to see so many of you in attendance. For you this column will be somewhat redundant...been there, done that!

For those of you who could not attend, I hope this column will encourage you to set aside a weekend afternoon to visit Rhode Island's only public planetarium.

All my astronomy associates agree...2002 is a year we're happy has ended, and we'd simply like to forget. Early in the year, despite drought conditions, we still experienced many cloudy nights. When the drought began to break, it seems we had rain, then early snow, on every weekend. I can probably count

on one hand the number of clear open nights we had at Seagrave Observatory.

The Geminid meteor shower was clouded out, and so were the Quadrantids. We've had to keep the observatory closed due to the amount of snow in our parking lot. And as I write this, another potential

major storm is on the horizon. Unless the weather pattern changes significantly (a strong El Nino suggests it won't), at this point it seems we won't be able to open till spring!!

If that scenario proves to be true, then it's time for you to visit one of the space places in Rhode Island where the stars shine regardless of the weather outdoors. Today I will highlight the only public planetarium in our state, the Cormack Planetarium.

This wonderful little planetarium can be found in the Roger Williams Park Museum of Natural History in Providence. In 1995 a major renovation project was completed, including not only new, more comfortable seating for 79 visitors, but also a new 27.8 foot diameter dome upon which to project the starry heavens.

But the pisce de resistance was the installation of a new Zeiss Skymaster ZKP3 planetarium projector. This computer controlled masterpiece projects 7,000 stars, as well as the Sun, Moon, and five naked eye planets. The Zeiss projector can accurately reproduce the motion of the heavens from any location on the Earth as well as take us back and forth in time. It can also show the constellations seen from the southern hemisphere. Utilizing this great tool to create and illustrate the majesty of the heavens is Planetarium Director Fred Surowiec.

This sophisticated machine replaced an aging Spitz A1A projector that had been in use since the planetarium opened in 1953. During the mid-seventies I used to give programs using the Spitz projector. It worked as well as could be expected even then. Occasionally a bulb would burn out, usually right in the middle of a show. I'm amazed it performed as well as it did until being retired in 1995.

Since then it's been sitting in storage. I hope the museum dusts it off and prominently displays it during the planetarium's 50th anniversary celebration this year. The Spitz A1A was a workhorse that deserves to be honored for its years supporting astronomy and space education programs.

The Cormack Planetarium is open to the public every weekend and during school vacation weeks. The first

show, at 1:30 pm, is a program called 3-2-1 Blast Off, and its target audience is for kindergarten children through 4th grade. The second show, at 3:00 pm, is for a general/adult audience. That program not only talks in general about the heavens, but also highlights what can be seen specifically at that time of year. See the show in the dome during the day, then go out at night and put your new-found knowledge to use.

If you want to make special arrangements for a group of people, please call the Museum education department at 401-785-9457 for more information.

Located in Roger Williams Park on the south side of Providence, the Cormack Planetarium is easy to get to. Follow the signs off Route 95. Once you get into the park follow the signs to the museum. If you want precise directions please visit their web site at <http://www.osfn.org/museum/>. By the time you read this column, a new planetarium program will be in progress. A new show is offered every two months. There is a \$1.00 admission to the Cormack Planetarium, in addition to a \$2.00 admission to the Museum. Where can one have so much fun for so little money these days? And just a quick note: the museum and planetarium are handicap accessible. I put that accessibility to the test recently after hyper-extending my knee!

I hope you will find some time to visit the Cormack Planetarium. It's a wonderful little facility within easy reach of southern New Englanders. With the weather preventing us from enjoying our stargazing passion firsthand lately, I highly recommend that you plan to visit the Cormack Planetarium soon. Who knows? It may be the only stars you will see until the weather breaks!

In my next installment of Space Places in Rhode Island, I'll highlight one of several Rhode Island observatories that are open for public observing. There's nothing like looking through a telescope to kindle an interest in astronomy. Until then, visit the Cormack Planetarium where the skies are always cloud free, unless the cloud special effects projector is turned on! Oops!

Don't forget to keep your eyes to the skies!

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