

The Skyscraper

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the monthly publication of



The Amateur Astronomical Society of Rhode Island

47 Peepthead 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

December 2003

December Meeting & Holiday Party

Friday, December 5, 7:30pm at Seagrave Observatory

It's time for the annual Skyscraper Holiday meeting again! Your officers have been working overtime to make this meeting a memorable one, with fine entertainment, lots of food and a great time for socializing.

Dennis DiCicco, senior editor at *Sky & Telescope* magazine, has agreed to come down and talk. For those of you who don't know him, he is a regular visitor to the Skyscrapers, has been with *Sky & Telescope* for many years and maintains his own private observatory at his home in one of Boston's outlying suburbs. He has discovered asteroids, has been a pioneer in the field of astrophotography and now in the area of astroimaging. He has written many articles in *Sky & Telescope* and is often seen reviewing new equipment that comes out.

He will be talking about his recent trip to the Antarctic to observe the total eclipse of the sun from an airplane. We will be the first people to hear of and see his results.

As if this weren't enough, we will be having our own Gerry Dyck providing us with live holiday music and of course, there will be refreshments. Lots of refreshments. For those of you who spent the entire week before last years meeting fasting to prepare yourself for the spread we put on, we wont disappoint again. There will be 12 pounds of shrimp, cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, apple cider, egg nog and more. So, bring your appetites, bring your friends, come one, come all to our special holiday meeting and have a great time.

Skyscrapers Calendar

Public observing is held every Saturday at Seagrave Observatory.

December 5 Friday	7:30pm	December Meeting & Holiday Party at Seagrave Observatory
December 6 Saturday	7:00pm	Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory
December 13 Saturday	7:00pm	Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory
December 20 Saturday	7:00pm	Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory
December 27 Saturday	7:00pm	Public Observing Night at Seagrave Observatory

President's Message

Dan Lorraine, President

Hard to believe that the Holidays are already upon us and that another year is about to slip away! 2003 has been very good to Skyscrapers members – two total lunar eclipses observable from Seagrave, the Mars opposition, a fantastic AstroAssembly and members cookout, great monthly programming, some unexpected solar activity and a magnificent aurora ... and best of all, the skies have been much more cooperative this year than last and we've had a significant increase in the number of people from the general public passing through! Membership continues to increase on a monthly basis as word continues to spread about the organization. And the momentum will carry over into 2004!

December is our Holiday meeting with some special refreshments, live Holiday music by member Gerry Dyck, and a very special guest Dennis DiCicco, Senior Editor of a magazine near and dear to all of our hearts, *Sky & Telescope*. Mark your calendars ... don't miss this one it's sure to be a fantastic evening.

We are now ready to start training interested members on the use of the organizations telescopes. The training sessions are open to any member in good standing, but before you are entitled to hold keys you need to have been a member for a minimum of one year and you must be active in the organization (Saturday work sessions, assisting on public nights, volunteering at AstroAssembly, etc.) ... in other words you have to earn them! Once you have been fully trained and are considered proficient on the instrument, you will be awarded a certificate at the monthly meeting. We are privileged to have such fine instruments and I would encourage you to become more familiar with them. If you

are interested in scheduling your training session please contact one of the following members:

For the 8.25" Alvan Clark refractor Dave Huestis
Dhuestis@aol.com
For the 12" Patton Newtonian, Joel Cohen
papajoe49@yahoo.com
For the 12" Meade Cassegrain, Rick Arnold
r.c.arnold@worldnet.att.net
For the 16" Meade Cassegrain, Bob Horton
Shootingsta98@yahoo.com (Please note that before you can be trained on the 16" Meade, you must be certified on the operation of the 12" Meade)

On behalf of myself and the members of the Executive Committee, I would like to extend to all Skyscrapers members and their families our best wishes for a happy and safe Holiday season, and a healthy new year! Oh yeah, and clear skies of course!!

A Message from Bill Herbst

Speaker at our November meeting

It was a pleasure to meet you and see your fine facility. What makes it worthwhile for a speaker is to have an audience of interested people, and you certainly delivered! I think it is remarkable that so many people would come out on a Friday night to listen to a talk and share their love of astronomy. Congratulations to your and your club for making this all happen. You guys are obviously doing something right!

Best wishes,
Bill

Mid-December Meteor Shower

David A Huestis, Historian

Did you take some time to observe the total lunar eclipse last month? About 125 folks braved unseasonably cold weather to watch the Moon slide in and out of the Earth's shadow from Seagrave Observatory. The clear skies provided everyone with a spectacular view.

As I predicted, the Moon never completely disappeared from view. It hung there in the sky, a bright bottom edge that slowly moved around the lunar profile as the eclipse progressed. The rest of the surface took on a coppery hue as seen through a telescope or binoculars, but looked more red to the naked-eye. Though totality lasted only 25 minutes, everyone thought it was magnificently beautiful. Some folks commented that it looked like a painting from a 1950's sci-fi magazine.

This total lunar eclipse was the second such event during 2003, and it was also the second one not spoiled by inclement weather. Combine that with the two to three months of decent Mars observing we experienced at Seagrave Observatory and I'd say 2003 turned in a "stellar" performance for amateur astronomers in southern New England.

As I write this column just prior to the November Leonids meteor display, I can only hope they too were seen to good advantage, though they were only expected to be back to the normal peak rate of maybe 30 per hour with no major storms predicted. Let's hope the last remaining meteor shower of the year occurs under clear sky conditions as well.

That last meteor shower of 2003 is the Geminids of December, now undeniably the most reliable meteor shower of the year. This year the peak is on the night of December 13-14, Saturday night to Sunday morning. Unfortunately a waning gibbous Moon (between Full Moon and last quarter) will be prominent in the sky during the peak of activity from midnight until dawn's early light. This unfortunate circumstance will certainly reduce the number of meteors that can be observed. Under moon-free skies this shower produces about 75 shooting stars per hour in a light pollution-free location. With the interfering moonlight this year, maybe 30 to 40 of the brighter members of the shower can be observed blazing across the heavens.

The Geminid shower now sports two different peaks about six hours apart. An observer may therefore possibly see several increases and decreases in the number of meteors during the course of the night. Whether or not we see both those peaks entirely depends upon the time the Earth intercepts the meteor stream and its tributaries.

To maximize your chances of seeing the shower to best advantage, you should dress warmly and position yourself in an environment well away from annoying outdoor lighting of any kind. Some folks may think you're crazy, but you can still use a lawn chair or chaise lounge from which to observe comfortably. With the bright moon a hindrance to meteor observing, simply screen it from view using a building. You will certainly block some area of sky as well, but it would be best not to be distracted by direct moonlight.

By maximizing your opportunities, that is choosing a dark-sky observing site, blocking the moon from view and staying awake,

Secretary's Report

Dan Lorraine, Acting Secretary

Executive Committee Meeting

November 22, 2003

Meeting started at 5:15 pm and adjourned at 6:30 pm

In attendance: Dan Lorraine, Steve Hubbard, Bob Horton, Rick Arnold, Ted Ferneza, Dolores Rinaldi, Ken Dore, Joel Cohen, Dave Huestis

The purchase of a power supply for the 12" Meade to run the dew zapper was discussed and Rick Arnold will make a motion at the next meeting that we allocated up to \$150 for its purchase. Jack Szelka had previously indicated that he could probably obtain one from eBay for substantially less than that.

Dave Huestis and Ted Ferneza will head up the nominations committee for the slate of officers for 2004.

Our insurance policy is renewable in December; it is currently being shopped around to see if we can find a more competitive rate.

Paid membership is now up to 93.

you should expect to observe 30 to 40 Geminid meteors per hour. The Geminids are characterized by their multi-colored display (65% being white, 26% yellow, and the remaining 9% blue, red and green).

Because the stream of particles intercepts the Earth's orbit at a right angle, the meteors hit our atmosphere at a moderate speed of 21.75 miles per second. They are fairly bright and also have a reputation for producing exploding meteors called fireballs. The Geminids are the most dependable display because they are an old shower and therefore the individual meteors are evenly distributed throughout the meteor stream. Good luck and stay warm and alert.

In conclusion, it doesn't seem possible, but the Winter Solstice occurs at 2:04 am on December 22. Where did 2003 go? Once again the Farmer's Almanac predicts a bad winter for southern New England. Last winter I received about 100 inches of snow in Burrillville. More of the same is expected this year. Thank goodness for snow blowers!

Let's just hope that Mother Nature doesn't surprise us with an early snowfall this year so we can observe the December Geminids on the night of December 13-14 without having to dig out a spot to place our chaise lounge! Keep your eyes to the skies.

Steve Hubbard updated the group on the speaker program for our monthly meetings, which is covered through May of 2004.

We discussed dates for upcoming Skyscrapers trips: January - Hartness House Inn; February - Van Vleck Observatory to view Saturn; and March to visit the Museum of Natural History in NYC.

Details of members training sessions on the use of the club's telescopes was discussed. It was decided that members could arrange for training sessions on a one on one basis with the individual club member responsible for each telescope – Dave Huestis (Alvan Clark refractor), Joel Cohen (12" Patton scope), Rick Arnold (12" Meade), and Bob Horton (16" Meade). This information will be posted on our web site along with their email address so members can make the necessary arrangements.

Member workshops are currently being arranged on Knowing the Constellations, astrophotography, and CCD imaging. -- more detail to follow.

The rising cost of mailing the newsletter, projected to be around \$1,200 annually was discussed. It was decided that all members that we have email for would receive it electronically. The projected savings would be about \$800! This will take effect in 2004.

Jim Hendrickson will be training others to be able to help in the updating and maintenance of the club's web site.

Aurora Borealis

On October 30, we were treated to an unexpected and spectacular display of the aurora borealis, or Northern Lights. A few members were able to capture photos of the brief event.



John Kokur, East Douglas MA



Bill Gucfa, Rehobeth MA



Dave Huestis, Pascoag RI

Lunar Eclipse

November 8, 2003

Clear weather allowed for some excellent observing and photography of the second lunar eclipse of 2003.



Multiple exposure by Bob Horton



Near totality by Dan Lorraine

More photos of the aurora, lunar eclipse, and other happenings at Skyscrapers can be found on the web site at <http://www.theskyscrapers.org/>

Account Balances Report1

(Includes unrealized gains)

As of 11/19/2003

Account	11/19/2003 Balance
ASSETS	
Cash and Bank Accounts	
checking acct	4,018.82
savings	10,045.97
TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts	14,064.79

Checking Account Report

10/1/2003 Through 11/19/2003

Category Description	10/1/2003- 11/19/2003
INFLOWS	
ASTRO INCOME	3,647.00
deposits	
donation	241.00
dues	135.00
publications	32.95
TOTAL deposits	408.95
TOTAL INFLOWS	4,055.95
OUTFLOWS	
astro	
gaspeaker - <i>MOTEL ROOMS</i>	364.00
banquet	787.50
portejohn	100.00
startupcash	250.00
tent - <i>BALANCE DUE</i>	125.00
TOTAL astro	1,626.50
ASTRO SNACKS	40.00
ASTRO-MISC. SUPPLIES	69.90
electric	39.20
POSTAGE AND PRINTING	110.90
propane	8.56
subscription	32.95
TOTAL OUTFLOWS	1,928.01
OVERALL TOTAL	2,127.94

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**