

# FOCAL POINT



Newsletter for the

*Milwaukee Astronomical Society*

February 1990

## From The Editor

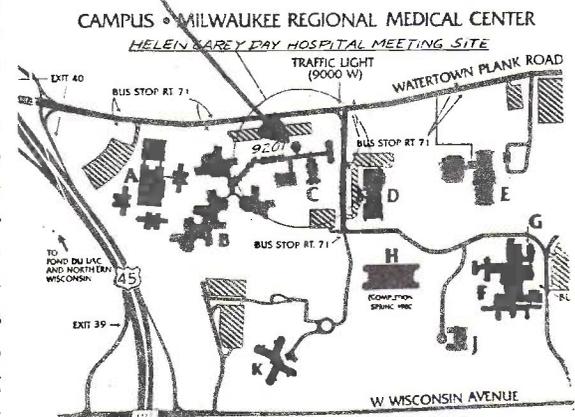
It's too early to "Think Spring" but not too soon to begin organizing your thoughts on spring observing. With Leo the Lion leaping into view about four hours after sunset, we can dig out our sky charts with Messier and NGC objects and plan our strategy for viewing. For those of us who have not visited the observatory lately - or those new to the Society - this is an excellent opportunity to attend 'First Wednesdays' and 'Saturday Keyholder nights'. It's also a good time to share your thoughts about the possibility for a 'Messier Marathon'. It's early enough to discuss, plan (or just plain forget) the March opportunity to see most, if not all, of the Messier objects. The Marathon, if held at the Observatory, could be a preview for the Spring campout. We'd like to hear from the members if you have interest in a group event. Talk it up!

—Matthew McNeeley

## February Program-Meeting

Our speaker for this month's meeting is the ever popular Dr. John Mathis from the Astronomy Department of the University of Wisconsin - Madison. One of Dr. Mathis's areas of interest is how stars form out of the interstellar medium in galaxies like our Milky Way. His presentation titled "Order and Chaos in the Interstellar Medium", is subtitled "How interstellar gas moves, cools and forms stars within the galaxy." Dr. Mathis has the ability to tackle a challenging topic and present it in a nontechnical and interesting way. His easy going style is always a hit. Don't miss this meeting!

### ENTER THROUGH A-FRAME



All members and guests (that's how we grow!) are invited to attend. Time is 8:00 pm at the Helen Carey Day Hospital Building, 9201 W. Watertown Plank Road. For security reasons, the entrance is open from 7:30 to 8:15 pm ONLY.

—Tom Renner

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## Calendar of Events

February 16, Friday .....	8:00 pm Program-Meeting
February 23, Friday .....	Deadline for <u>Focal Point</u>
February 25, Sunday .....	New Moon
March 7, Wednesday .....	First Wednesday Meeting 7:30 at the Observatory
March 11, Sunday .....	Full Sap Moon
March 12, Monday .....	7:30 pm Board Meeting Brian Ganieri's House
Saturday Nights—Member night at Observatory—Call key holder	

## Library News

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### Consider This a Valentine!

We amateurs celebrate our love affair with the sky in many ways. At open houses and star parties, in lectures and articles, we shout ti from the rooftops. The music is borrowed from other hearts, an electronically radiated background. Other times, the relationship is too personal to share with a crowd; quietly and alone, we faithfully watch and listen. The music builds within; and if it should escape our lips, the sound catches us by surprise.

Poetry of the Heavens, authored, compiled and edited by Jerome J. Knuijt—an amateur astronomer and former science teacher—offers some of that inner music set to words.

Somep'n kin' o' hol's de lan'  
on a summer night . . .  
Somep'n nigh to tears? dat's so;  
but hit's nigh to smiles.  
— Paul Dunbar, "A Summer Night"

"There waves of fire 'gainst waves of fire are dashing,  
and know no bounds. . ."  
— Mikhail v. Lomonosov, "The Sun"

". . . the soul-subduing galaxies. . . celestial trunnions. . ."  
— Jerome J. Knuijt, "Night Sight"

The poems are separated according to subject, and each section concludes with explanations of obscure references and historical background of the preceding works. Full page photographs illustrate selected lines. If I had to choose a favorite section, it would be the one about astronomers. Besides Sarah Williams' familiar "The Old Astronomer to His Pupil" ("I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."), there are two rebuttals to the lament of "The Amateur Astronomer's Wife". Neither was written by the husband.

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The book was donated by Milton Knuijt at the January meeting. Copies may be ordered using one of the forms found in the vertical file under CATALOGS-LITERATURE.

— Sally Waraczynski

Additional Book Review found on page 4

## New Members

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The following new member was recently announced by the MAS Board.

**John Malan- Brookfield**

The Society extends John a big welcome! When you see him at a meetings or other MAS functions, be sure to introduce yourself.

## New Comets

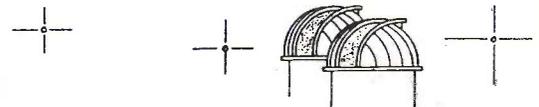
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The brightest comet in 15 years will approach earth this spring. By mid-April Comet Austin should be visible before dawn in most parts of the world, university of Florida astronomer Billy Cooke stated.

Estimates are that Austin will be twice as bright as Comet West (1975). This info from Milwaukee Sentinel 2/6/90.

## From the Past . . .

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### DOUBLE DOME

— 20 Years Ago

#### BOARD ELECTS VP:

Mr. Virgil Tangney, Assistant Observatory Director, has been elected MAS Vice President by members of the Board meeting January 23rd. Mr. Tangney is sure to continue the fine programs the MAS has enjoyed in the past.

— 10 Years Ago

#### 26" (66cm) TELESCOPE NEWS:

New Berlin city hall has approved the building permit. Now we can start construction.

## Wisconsin Observers Weekend

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Something to put on your brand new 1990 calendars! The members of NEWSTAR (NorthEast Wisconsin STARGazers) extend an invitation to MAS members to join them at the third annual WOW gathering on June 22 - 24, 1990 at Hartman Creek State Park outside Waupaca, WI.

Details will be included in future a Focal Point. If you can't wait for more information or want to preregister right now, contact:

Don Wyman  
1815 Kienast Ave.  
Oshkosh, WI 54901  
414-233-3083

Note: A few members went last year and really enjoyed themselves!



"During the past Holiday Season I did some winter observing but I was disappointed with the many cloudy nights, and when clear, the ever waxing moon as it climbed higher each night, finally reaching its zenith nearly overhead. Why is this bright, winter orb so near the zenith in winter when August's moon had been far beneath the celestial equator? What accounts for this variance in declination during the year?"

-Moonpeeper, Milwaukee

Dear Moonpeeper,

First you must realize that a "full" moon occurs at opposition - when the Sun, Earth and Moon are aligned. Rising opposite the setting sun, the full moon cuts across the night sky shining brightly until it sets with the Earth's rotation and the dazzle of dawn. But the moon's declination - the degree which it is above or below the celestial equator - is related to the sun's position on the ecliptic.

For example; when the December sun is at its lowest in the southern sky, the fully lit moon lies high overhead in the night sky opposite the position of the noonday sun. And as the sun approaches the celestial equator, so too does the moon in all its phases, but on opposite sides of the ecliptic. Thus, over the year the moon moves from a low in the southern, summer sky to nearly at the zenith overhead in winter's chilly night. the specific zodiacal constellation which the moonbeams (phases and full) emanate from can be found in any monthly sky chart such as those published in Astronomy and Sky & Telescope. And there's a neat thing you can do with an orange, a globe and a flashlight, but maybe I'll save that for another time.

If you have any questions to "Ask the Astronomer" please submit them to the Focal Point for consideration.

## Calling all Stars...

My IBM PC and I do a great deal of "hacking" around on computer Bulletin Board Services (BBS). There are a lot of excellent astronomical BBS's operating in the U.S. In addition to ASTROFORUM on Compuserve, among my favorites are:

### STARGATE (The Astronomical League BBS)

Phone: (214) 578-7618

Param. 8 bit/Parity: none/1 Stop Bit

You can download a list of Astronomy and Space Bulletin Boards from STARGATE. The list is 3+ pages in length and includes names such as: Scooter's Scientific Exchange, The Comm-post, NASA Spacelink, Open Cluster BBS, Physics Forum, Howard's Notebook, Galaxy Astronet and Stargazers Haven: The Humor Hotel. This is small sampling and these things come and go like mushrooms after a spring rain so the list is always changing.

NOAA,  
Space Environment Laboratory  
Boulder, Colorado  
Phone: (303) 497-5000  
Param. 8 bit/Parity: none/1 Stop Bit

Reports from NOAA include Solar Reports, HF Radio Propagation Report, Latest Activity Summary, Lates Region Report, A Quick Solar and Geometric Data Report and various news comments.

BBS's can be a great source of excellent free public domain astronomical software as well as a way to electronically link into current information and amateur musings.

-Richard Adduci

For more information contact:

Richard Adduci  
2600 Pebble Valley Rd. #E-2  
Waukesha, WI 53188

## Saturday Nite Keyholders

February 10	Nick Nichols 628-4059
February 17	John Pfannerstill 475-6494
February 24	Terry Ross 784-2093
March 3	Gerry Samolyk 475-9418
March 10	Tom Schmidtkunz 784-0253
March 17	Peter Smitka 785-0926
March 24	Virgil Tangney 327-7976

## Classes in Astronomy

Member Lee Keith teaches astronomy classes at UW - Waukesha. Classes have a \$35 fee each and are open to members and the public.

Contact Donald Bracco, Program Coordinator, at UW - Waukesha, phone 521-5460 during normal business hours. If you have questions about either program, call Lee Keith at 961-8752.

### Astronomy With Telescopes: Seeing the Universe with Your Own Two Eyes.

Mondays; March 5, 19, 26 & April 2.  
MAS Observatory, 6:30 - 9:00pm. Registration Deadline is February 28, 1990.

### Adventures in Astronomy.

Mondays; April 16, 23, 30, May 7 & 21.  
MAS Observatory, 6:30 - 8:30pm. Registration Deadline is April 11, 1990.

## March M45 Passage

On Friday night, March 2 - 3, the 39% sunlit Moon will occult the M45 star cluster. This passage will be similar to the one we observed last April with the Moon passing through the northern part of the cluster.

The graze recorder will be used as in previous events of this type so all that will be required to observe is a telescope. Anyone who would like to participate in observing this event is asked to be set up at the observatory by 8:30 to receive a station assignment. We have eight 10" portascopes so observers who own large scopes should bring them along. The events run from 3 to 6 h U.T. (9 - Midnight CST).

More information will be available at the February First Wednesday meeting (snow cover permitting). A chart of the cluster along with predictions for the occultations will be available on the night of the event.

- Gerry Samolyk

## Book Review: Through the Telescope by Mike Porcellino

Looking for a good "down to earth" book about Astronomy? One that doesn't talk down to you and has useful, interesting activities explained in a friendly manner? A book written by an experienced observer who still loves to look at-gulp-the Moon, and not with a massive 25" Dobsonian, but with a modest 80mm refractor?!?! Well this book fills the bill!

It has to be far and away one of the best books of its type I have ever read. The author writes from experience of real events, not theoretical possibilities. He writes to the reader, not at them. It is an exceptional friendly and warm book and not overly technical! Anecdotes, advice, explanation and poetic analogy abound making the book a real pleasure to read. I really liked the quotes at the beginning of each chapter, they were especially appropriate and inspirational! For example: "Astronomy offers a pleasure that follows the law of increasing rather than diminishing returns. The more you develop a thirst for it, the greater your return." - Olcott. The author makes the important point that we should be very proud to be amateur (from Latin "for the love of", NOT substandard) astronomers! This book should be on every beginner's "must read" list!

Besides the obligatory sections on observing planets, comets, double stars, etc., the author takes the reader "by the hand" on their "first night out", which is the title of a whole chapter. There is also an exceptionally clear description of the eye and its function under low light conditions. This allows the beginner to view their eyes as part of their telescope and something that needs preparation and experience, too! In the back there are not just tables of objects, but addresses of suppliers and astronomy groups which are hard to find for the beginner. Lastly, all the photos and the many drawings were done by amateurs! No overdone professional photos here. Just the facts, ma'am!

This book isn't just for beginners. Some advanced topics covered are planetary drawings, star testing a telescope, image reversal with a star diagonal, how to find objects (a subject sorely neglected), reporting a new comet, measuring double stars with a diffraction grating micrometer and aperture mask, as well as describing the latest in Dobsonian telescope technology. I wish that I had this book when I was a beginner but I'm glad I have it now!

— Lee Keith

Note: This book is available in the MAS library.



## MAS INFORMATION

### MAS OFFICERS

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