

# FOCAL POINT



Newsletter for the

*Milwaukee Astronomical Society*

February 1992

## From The Editor

Midwinter. Too many nights have been starless for this stargazer. (But I'm currently reading Starlight Nights by Leslie Peltier). What with the Holidays and the seemingly endless cloudiness, I need a clear, dark night to improve my psyche. Gee, I hope that the 2nd annual Pike Lake Star Party scheduled for February 8th is the equal of last year's—warmish temperatures and a perfectly clear sky with the Winter Milky Way gleaming high overhead. Contact **Tim Burrus** at 783-6572 if you have any questions.

Another stellar event eagerly awaited is this Spring's NCRAL Convention hosted by the MAS on April 25, 1992. Information is included in past *Focal Point's* and in the current issue of *Northern Lights*.

Of course, in the 60th year of our Society, we would like to see many of you there. Contact **Dan Koehler** at 662-2987 if you have any questions.

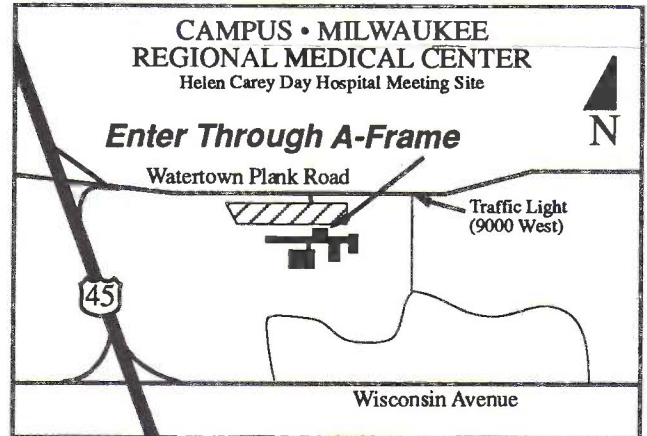
-Matthew McNeely

## Program/Meeting

Some of the most beautiful deep sky objects we seek out with our telescopes are globular clusters. Some globulars appear as dim patches of light, yet some dazzle the eye with countless faint stars that fill the field of view of our telescopes. Dr. Mike Kahill of the University of Wisconsin-Washington County, will describe our current understanding of these distant and beautiful members of the universe in his talk: Globular Star Clusters. I believe all of us will enjoy his presentation. See you there!

For security reasons, doors open from 7:30 to 8:15 only. Meeting starts at 8:00 sharp.

-Tom Renner, Program Chairman



## Calendar of Events

- February 5, Wednesday ..... First Wednesday Meeting  
7:30 at the Observatory
  - February 10, Monday ..... MAS Board Meeting  
7:30pm at Paul Borchardt's House
  - February 21, Friday ..... 8:00 pm Program-Meeting
  - February 28, Friday ..... Deadline for next Focal Point
  - March 4, Wednesday ..... First Wednesday Meeting  
7:30 at the Observatory
  - March 16, Monday ..... MAS Board Meeting  
7:30pm at Jim & Dorothy Kube's House
- Saturday Nights—Member night at Observatory—Call key holder

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## Library News

Messier's Nebulae and Star Clusters - 2nd ed., 1991, by Kenneth Glyn Jones is a bonus in any sense of the word. It comes to us as a gift of Astronomy Book Club because Martin Brunet Jr. let MAS sponsor his enrollment; and it is a book of particularly high quality.

The earliest known star catalog, that of Hipparchus of Rhodes, mentioned two nebulous objects which have been identified as the Beehive or Praesepe in Cancer and the Double Cluster in Perseus. Jones gives a short history of other lists such as the Herschel's and the New General Catalog, and he offers some discussion of discrepancies found in Messier's work. Another section gives guidance on the choice of telescope, viewing conditions, eyepieces, filters, and recording your observations. A good summary of the types of objects is also given.

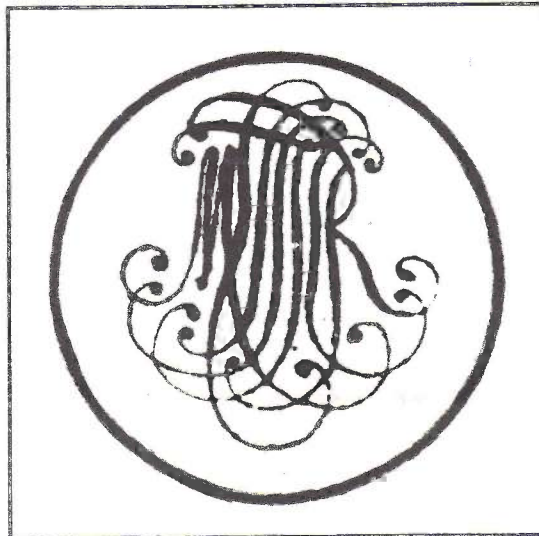
The major portion of the volume, of course, is devoted to a numerical listing of all 110 Messier objects including the additions by Mechain. Besides the star chart locaters and eyepiece views, Jones provides complete annotation for each object. Included are the descriptive notes of several classical observers such as Messier himself, John Herschel, or Flammarion. Some of the more widely observed objects such as the Ring or Orion Nebulae were sketched by such notables as Lord Rosse or William Lassell. Those of us who have "completed" our Messier list will enjoy comparing these drawings with our own impressions; or, perhaps we will be inspired to take another good look!

The book concludes with a detailed biography of Charles Messier and thumbnail sketches of observers contemporary to him or otherwise connected with his work. Messier was the first to observe fewer than half of the objects in his catalog, and Jones thoughtfully includes a list of the discoverers of record. Appendices furnish further finding aids, and almost as an afterthought, there is a splendid photographic portrait of each nebula and star cluster.

Venus Unveiled: The Magellan Images - 20 slides and booklet purchased from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Views show the unusual volcanic domes and lava flows of our sister planet as well as the trough feature which astronomers have playfully named "Gumby."

-Sally Waracznski

**Only 85 days until  
the 1992 NCRAL  
Convention!**



## Remember Mars '88?

Member John Asztalos (who now lives in Colorado) presented the MAS with a Christmas present—a set of his 1988 Mars photos. Thanks John!

## Phone Tree

We would like to form a phone tree. We haven't worked out the details, but it could be used for 'first alert' status for astronomical events such as a brilliant aurora display or an impromptu dark sky excursion. If interested, contact Wanda Berner at 691-2360 or 646-8229.

## Member Heads South— Way South!

MAS Member John Briggs (from Yerkes Observatory) is currently in Antarctica installing an infra-red telescope for the Center for Astrophysical Research (CARA).

## First Wednesdays

First Wednesdays, that is, the first Wednesday of every month, is set aside at the Observatory to offer MAS members an opportunity to get acquainted (or re-aquainted!) with the facilities, equipment and other members.

"How do I buy or build a telescope? How do I use setting circles? What is star hopping? What's all this I hear about astrophotography? What is there to see in the night sky?" There are members present to help you answer these and other questions.

First Wednesdays are also an excellent time to use our wonderful library! If you haven't looked it over recently, you are missing an excellent source of astronomical information.

New members will find First Wednesdays especially beneficial—it's a great opportunity to ask those burning questions that you have about the MAS equipment or astronomy in general.

## Night (de) Light



After the recent record breaking 2 weeks of cloudy weather, I am sure everyone was delighted with the beautiful, sunny day we were treated to on January 11. While many observers were hoping that the clear skies would last through the evening, I wasn't about to wait. I placed the solar filter on the 6-inch f/6 Dobsonian and took a look at our closest star. The view was wonderful, with at least 20 small spots visible at 36X. Limb darkening was evident around 2 areas of sun spots along the edge of the disk. What a treat after 2 weeks of gloom! Who says we have to wait for the night to enjoy delights?

-Karen Wesener

One of my greatest goals as an amateur astronomer is to share the awesome majesty of the skies with the general public. An astronomer's dream came true for me on one magical night, November 8, 1991. It was on that night that there was a conjunction of three very unlikely events. Events that have touched the imaginations and hearts of the lucky ones who were there: a clear night in November; the gathering of 15 interested lay people for a night of observing at the MAS Observatory and lastly the appearance of the auroral display of the decade! The class was dumbfounded by the display of bright red, green and white streamers arching from the horizon to the very pinnacle of the sky itself! The skies had opened up and let the lights of heaven itself open for the fluorescence of the air caused by invisible particles from the Sun. The aurora was so bright, in fact, that finding the constellations was difficult at times. I was reluctant to force the students to look through the restricted view of the telescope. In my quarter century of observing, I have NEVER seen such a bright or active display of the solar fury. It was a night that I had the incredible good fortune to share with the public and later, my wife. My only fear is that the students will be disappointed with any other astronomical event. Jaded rookies!

-Lee Keith

## The Member Who Never Came Back

*Here is a little gem reprinted from the Astronomy Network News, originally submitted by Stephen Smith of the Comet Rapid Announcement Service. I'm including it here as a reminder to us all that a little kindness goes a long way.—Tom Gill*

"It amuses me not to think that your organization spends so much time looking for new members when I was there all the time. Do you remember me?"

"I'm the fellow who was asked to join. I paid my dues, and then I was asked to be a loyal and faithful member. I'm the fellow who came to every meeting, but nobody paid any attention to me. I tried several times to be friendly, but everyone seemed to have his own friends to talk to and be with. I sat down among some unfamiliar faces several times, but they didn't pay much attention to me."

"I hoped somebody would ask me to join one of the committees or to somehow participate and contribute—but no one did. Finally, because of an illness, I missed a meeting. The next month no one asked me where I had been. I guess that it didn't matter much whether I was there or not. On the next meeting date, I decided to stay home and watch a good television program. When I attended the next meeting, no one asked me where I was the month before."

"You might say that I'm a good guy, a good family man, that I hold a responsible job and love my community. You know who else I am? I'm the MEMBER WHO NEVER CAME BACK"

## Saturday Nite Keyholders

Feb. 1	Chris Hasseltine	482-4515
Feb. 8	Lee Keith	425-2331
Feb. 15	Dan Koehler	662-2987
Feb. 22	Jim Kube	453-8858
Feb. 29	John Pfannerstill	475-6494
Mar. 7	Terry Ross	784-2093
Mar. 14	Frank Roldan	608-787-1730
Mar. 21	Gerry Samolyk	529-9051

If you compare the above to the six-month list printed in the January Focal Point, note that Terry Ross and Frank Roldan have switched nights.

## For Sale

Equatorial Mount with counterweight, slow motion controls on cables, \$90 or trade for 6" f/8 optics. There is a 1/4-20 thread to mount it on top of a photo tripod or can be mounted on wooden legs (it comes with legs, but they could be improved upon). Call Tom Gill @ 476-6986.



# Observation Summary September 1990 - December 1991

## Lunar Occultations

With the end of the M-45 passages, our observations of Lunar Occultations is down considerably. On the positive side, after being clouded out for the last few years, we finally had two successful graze expeditions.

	Total	Graze 9/9/90	Graze 12/15/91
Chad Andrist	-	1	-
Paul Borchardt	9	-	1
Chris Hesseltine	-	1	1
Dorothy Kube	3	1	-
Jim Kube	3	1	-
Scott Lascowski	-	1	1
Gerry Samolyk	20	1	1
Virgil Tagney	3	-	-
Jim Toeller	-	1	-
Sally Waracznski	48	-	-
Totals	86	7	4

September 9, 1990—This was a difficult graze due to a bright Moon and small cusp angle. Despite this, 16 contacts were obtained. Seven observers contributed to this effort.

December 15, 1991—Cold weather and strong winds made this graze a challenge for the four observers, however a number of good contacts were observed. At this time, the data is not fully reduced but it seems that a North shift had occurred for this one.

## Asteroid Occultations

This has been a poor year for favorable occultations of stars by asteroids. It is unfortunate that we had clouds on Jan 18-19 since the shadow of 216 Kleopatra passed over Southern Wisconsin (Jan Sky & Tel, pg. 73). The following observers made reports during the past year: Paul Borchardt - 1; Jim Kube - 1; G. Samolyk - 3; Virgil Tagney - 1; Sally Waracznski - 1.

## Planets

Terry Ross continued his monitoring of Jupiter by making 276 central meridian timings of features in the planet's clouds. Two satellite eclipse timings were reported by G. Samolyk while an eclipse of Europa by Ganymede was observed by Ken and Sally Waracznski.

Saturn also got in the act this past year with the appearance of the white spot. Observations were reported by Virgil Tagney and G. Samolyk.

## Variable Stars

The following observers made observations of variable stars during the past year:

	EB Minima	RR LYR Maxima	OBS	LPV Observations
Chris Hesseltine	3	-	43	-
Scott Lascowski	2	-	39	-
G. Samolyk	225	11	3688	518



## MAS INFORMATION

### MAS OFFICERS

President: Dr. Richard Wiesen  
781-4786

Vice President: Matthew McNeely  
354-5347

Secretary: Dorothy Kube  
453-8858

Treasurer: Dan Koehler  
662-2987

Obs. Director: Gerry Samolyk  
529-9051

Ast. Obs. Director: Paul Borchardt  
781-0169

Librarian: Mrs. Sally Waracznski  
321-0918

Assist. Librarian: Mrs. June Regis  
962-0896

Program Dir.: Tom Renner  
392-2799

### FOCAL POINT Staff

Matthew McNeely (Editor)  
8200 N. Cedarburg Road  
Brown Deer, WI 53209  
354-5347

Tom Gill (Editor/Publisher)  
1391 N. 72nd Street  
Wauwatosa, WI 53213  
476-6986

### MAS Observatory

18850 W. Observatory Rd.  
New Berlin, WI  
542-9071