

The Newsletter of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society January-February 2001

President's Message

Enough Already!

Most local astronomers know that November and December are usually pretty cloudy and poor for astronomy, but this is getting ridiculous! Record snows have made it difficult to do much observing but we are digging out. This does illustrate why we choose a roll-off roof design for the C and D shed. The snow can be removed easily with a wooden rake that is stored in D shed. Keeping the rails clear of ice has been a problem, so we will be putting up rubber rail covers so that they can simply be pulled off the rails to clear them. We are trying to keep trails between the observatories plowed but the snow is constantly falling so be prepared for deep snow.

The Christmas party was lots of fun again this year. I had a chance to talk to a number of members I haven't seen for a while. One question got me to thinking about where we are going with the construction projects we have finished or that are in process and I thought I would talk about what we would like to accomplish in the next couple of years.

My strongest desire is to get many more members involved in activities in the club. I must admit that I have taken a line from the movie "Field of Dreams" which is approximately "Build it and they will come". Both C and D shed were built for all members to use with a little training and an understanding of the responsibility of caring for the equipment. The Pop-Top shed, scheduled to be built in April, will house a 10 inch LX200 automated telescope that will be controlled from inside Z building. This telescope and camera combination will greatly simplify taking images of deep sky objects and will even be capable of imagining satellites such as the International Space Station.

WINTER MEETING SITE

Regular MAS Monthly Meetings will be held at 8:00PM on the 3rd Friday of each month at the UWM-Kenwood campus for the months of January thru April.

These dates are:
January 19th, February 16th
March 16th, April 20th

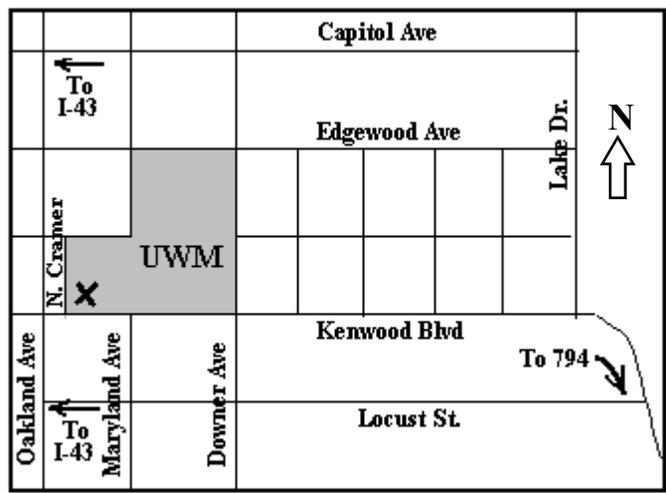
We meet at UWM Kenwood Campus on Friday, Jan.19, and Feb.16, 2001, 8:00PM, Room 133, of the Physics Building

Program Chairman, Tom Pelnar has lined up another stellar cast for January (and February). **The January speaker is one of our own members, Neil Simmons who, after attending a workshop sponsored by AAVSO (American Association of Variable Star Observers) and NASA will speak on possible cooperation between amateurs and professionals observing gamma ray bursters.** The upgrading of many fixed amateur facilities, including our MAS observatories, gives amateurs tools to make serious quantitative observations in support of helping professionals characterize these massive stars that suddenly collapse (?). The January issue of Sky and Telescope has an article on this subject which Neil will expand upon.

On February 16th, same time and same place, our featured speaker will be Kay Kriewald from UW-Madison's Space Place, who will discuss the outreach activities at this very busy center for popularizing astronomy.

Directions to the UWM Physics building are shown in the map below (X marks the spot). Rm 133 is one of the lecture rooms on the first floor. Parking lot (east of bldg.) is open to public after 5:00PM

Lastly, our **Board meetings are held at 7:00 PM, preceding each of the above regular meetings.** All Board



Presidents Message Continued from Page 1

My biggest project for this summer will be to update and improve Z scope's capabilities. This will involve such things as a new drive for the Declination axis, better protection for the two computers that control it and remote control from the lower floor. One of the more exciting tasks will be to rotate the base of the entire mount by 0.4 inches to perfect the equatorial alignment. (I do hope we figured the direction right!) .

After all this will they come? No, not just because of the equipment. In the end, astronomy is a whole lot more fun when there are other people around. Many times I have gone out to the observatory to do some imaging for myself and found that the scopes and cameras are all being used. This is great! I have enjoyed watching others do astronomy of all types just as much as if I had done the imaging myself. On nights like that, it is a lot like going to our fall camp out where you can go from scope to scope seeing the sights all evening without even using a telescope yourself!

What would help? I am open to all kinds of ideas such as observing programs and training sessions. I have received calls from parents of younger people that would love to participate in the club, but would be much more comfortable being with other young people. Alas, I don't seem to fit this classification any more but would like to encourage this activity. Starting this spring, Carlos Garces and I alternately will be at the observatory twice a month (probably the first and third Saturday evening of the month), specifically to help people use the equipment but to also provide stable times for open groups that would like to get together and do astronomy. Other volunteers to assist with these nights would be more than welcome!

Finally, I would like to mention the large impact that the presence of experienced people has on the tentative efforts of a beginner. For many of us older folk, amateur astronomy has been a highly social activity that we have enjoyed for a large part of our lives. It is much harder to compete with the video games and television etc. than when we were growing up, but I know that there are many young (and older) people that would appreciate some help. There are many experienced people in this club that have, for various reasons become less active in astronomy. I invite you back to enjoy the fruits of our efforts and to contribute to the future of amateur astronomy. There are now a number of people that have access to much darker sites that instead come to the MAS because of the equipment and people that are in this club. Feel free to call me about constructive ideas to improve participation in the club, but remember that your own frequent participation is the biggest impact you can make. Welcome to all!

Scott Jamieson,, MAS President

Library News

-There are 6 RASC Observers Handbook 2001 left for sale at future meetings @ \$15.00 each; usually \$21.95, a substantial discount offered to MAS members. RASC O.H. has been called "the best" single resource for observing throughout the year.

-A new addition, the MAS library has added a section called donate, borrow, trade, or take the science fiction novels in the cardboard box (for now) in the library in "Z". S. F. books are not catalogued and do not have to be signed out; Please follow sign out procedures for all other materials.

1. **The High-Energy Astrophysics Workshop for Amateur Astronomers- sponsored by the Association of Variable Star Observers & NASA, 4-13/14-2000.** This box contains: 6 VHS video tapes of the proceedings, folders and a ring bound synopsis. These items may be borrowed as a unit by arrangement with the librarian. Donated by Chris Hesseltine.

Note: This is the topic of the January MAS meeting by Neil Simmons (see Page 1).

2. **AAVSO: Observed Minima Timings of Eclipsing Binaries #6, October- 2000.** The MAS made EB timing in 1975/1976, a challenge to the rest of us. Observations contribute valuable data, used by pros, or anyone for research. Some MAS members still make numerous observations visually or electronically; a renewed interest in real science. This book (donated by Gerry Samolyk) is located in the vertical file for use as a on-site reference source.

Scott Laskowski, MAS Librarian

New Member Welcome

The following new members are welcomed into the club.

Kathleen Adams , Elm Grove WI

Matthew Berlik, Milwaukee, WI

Kathryn Weaver, West Allis, WI.

Older members, please do make sure these new people feel welcome.

Carlos Garces, New Member Chairman

For Sale

Tom Pelnar has the following items for sale.

1. 4" B & L SCT - \$325
2. Meade 8" F/6 newtonian on equatorial, DC, \$425
3. C8 (OTA) \$525
4. 10" Orion Dobsonian, \$450
5. 8" Solar filter, \$100
6. 8" dew zapper, DC, \$35
7. Tectron collimating kit, \$50

If your interested in any of the above, contact, Tom Pelnar at

262-782-6226 or Email: rumples5@hotmail.com

Call For Astro Photos

A graphics section is planned for the March/April edition of the Focal Point as a feature on members efforts on imaging various deep space and Planetary objects. Anyone interested in submitting a photo or image for reprint, please contact the editor. The images should be in a TIFF or JPG format.

Do Track Our MAS Website!

Because of the bi-monthly printing of the Focal Point, we can't usually flag forthcoming astro events (such as Occultations) on a timely basis. However, they are all flagged out on for our region of southwest Wisconsin on the web page with detailed description of the events and with suggestions on how to go about recording the event as usable data.

For get to mark MAS events on your calendar? They're all on the website. Want an estimate on how the cloud cover will be in our area? A cloud cover map (out of Madison) is updated every 15 minutes (night and day) so you can usually assess the sky viewability in your area with a fair degree of accuracy.

Its really a well managed site and a lode for useful observing info. The web page is : www.milwaukeeastro.org

My Thanks to Scott Jamieson, Scott Laskowski, Tom Pelnar, Lee Keith, et al. for inputs to this late issue. Some surgery slowed the output of this issue but we'll make up for it by mailing it first class.

Editor

Wither Thou Goest...Revisited!

Back when I started this task as Editor of the Focal Point newsletter a few years ago, I was relatively new to MAS and observing in general. I wrote an article with the above title in an attempt to categorize the various type of observing activities I saw at the MAS Observatory.

At the time, I categorized active members, I invented the categories as **Students of the Universe**; those who improve their knowledge of the night sky ,including planet and deep sky objects for their own edification and maybe take a shot at a Messier certificate; The **Johnny Appleseeds** who take the Student category a step further and enjoy spreading knowledge of the night sky to others; the **Tinkerers** who delight in designing and building their own scopes and gadgets improving on them; the **Data Gatherers and Analyzers** who directly contribute to astronomy by virtue of VSO , grazes , Occultation's etc.

This not so profound article was written three years ago, so the question comes up of "where do I fit in" after this period of time. An honest answer is that what I've done with this hobby is up for debate. I designed and built my own 10" F/6 dobsonian with a light weight truss tube scope assembly. I have to admit it was fun using my woodworking skills and analytical skills in coming up with this scope and I have made some good use of this knock down scope both at our lake place in the U.P. and in our annual winter sojourns to Tucson for general observation. Once, out in the Tucson desert I found and logged 20+ Messier objects in a night...then I misplaced the logs. My Messier object hunt total is in the 35 to 40 faithfully logged in misplaced logbooks. This is not acceptable behavior for a observer bent on getting a Messier certificate.

When the club acquired an SBIG ST6 CCD imager, its appeal to a retired systems engineer like myself should have been immediate...and it was. But for whatever reason I only dabbled in learning its use on a couple of occasions. Mastering the use of the Imager should be within most members capability but it does take repeated use to learn all the subtle software capabilities. The ST6 and the ST9 imagers are still on my "throw yourself into it" list before my aging body gives up on my youthful mind.

Perhaps the category I admire the most and done the least is that of the data gatherers and analyzers. My engineering background says this is where I belong. But it is also where I've done the least in the time constraints available. The idea of having data you acquire contribute to our knowledge of the universe has a lot of appeal...but it also requires a lot of dedicated effort and determination to be a real contributor.

I think the incubation period on "wither I goest" with this hobby has long passed. Come more respectable weather, I will mount my faithful steed and charge the windmill atop the MAS observatory hill and give it my best shot. Anyone care to join me?

Editor

MAS Officers/ Staff

President	Scott Jamieson	262-896-0119
Vice President	Lee Keith	414-425-2331
Treasurer	Dan Yanko	414-453-3382
Secretary	Margaret Warner	414-327-7427
Observatory Director	Gerry Samolyk	414-529-9051
Assistant Observatory Director	Paul Borchardt	262-781-0169
Focal Point	Rudy Poklar, Editor	262-786-8931

Future MAS Events

Feb16, Mar 16, April20- Regular MAS monthly meetings at UWM- Kenwood Campus, 8:00PM

May 18-Regular meeting at the MAS Observatory; Election of Officers

MAS Membership is open to all with an interest in Astronomy and expanding their knowledge of the Universe. Yearly Membership Dues are: Individual \$28/yr.; Family \$32; Non-resident (individual \$18, Family \$22); Student (under 18) \$12.
For more information, contact Membership Chairman, Carlos Garces,

Focal Point Publishing Guidelines

Focal Point Newsletter is published bi-monthly (Sep Nov Jan Mar May) with a Mid-summer issue in July. Articles, Announcements, Graphics, Photos, Swap/Sale Ads etc. should be submitted at least 10 days prior to the first of the month (of the desired issue). Article inputs are preferred via E-Mail, or diskette in a text or Word compatible format, if possible. Submit FP inputs to:

MAS Focal Point c/o Rudy Poklar
12905 W. Crawford Drive

Saturday Keyholders**January**

6	Terry Ross	262-784-2093
13	Gerry Samolyk	414-529-9051
20	Tom Schmidtkunz	414-352-1674
27	Neil Simmons	262-889-2039

February

3	Chris Weber	262-789-7128
10	Dan Yanko	414-453-3382
17	Wanda Berner	262-646-8229
24	Paul Borchardt	262-781-0169

March

3	Tim Burrus	262-548-6372
10	Brian Ganiere	414-961-8745
17	Carlos Garces	262-786-2623
24	Brian Garness	262-538-3888
31	Chris Hesseltine	414-482-4515

Loaner Telescopes (available to members for local use)

Lee Keith (Franklin) 414-425-2331 8" Dob reflector
Scott Jamieson (Waukesha) 262-896-0119 8" Dob reflector

MAS Observatory 262-542-9071

MAS Web Page: www.milwaukeeastro.org

New and timely, Check it out

The Milwaukee Astronomical Society

2933 N.68th Street
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****Jan. 19, Neil Simmons speaks on amateur/Professional observing of Gamma Ray Bursters, UWM, 8:00PM***

****Feb. 16, Kay Kreiwald speaks on outreach activities of UW-Madison's Space Place, UWM, 8:00 PM***

