



The Meridian

The newsletter of the
Quad Cities Astronomical Society

May 2008

April Meeting Minutes

Joe Bannon, Secretary

The April meeting was called to order at approximately 7:40 and began with a review of items discussed at the board meeting. The first topic was to provide more structure to our meetings so we can ensure club business is tended to and also allow for exchanging of ideas. Meeting will start with business first, followed by any presentations or discussions.

To start the business portion of the meeting, Karl brought up the issue of membership in the Astronomical League. The board has recommended dropping the club's membership. A factor in this recommendation was that at the current membership level of the QCAS, the club is breaking even on expenses, and that's before Astronomical League dues are factored in. Another argument for dropping membership includes a perceived lack of value by some members; however, other members thought the reduced costs for books and the free shipping the Astronomical League provides were valuable. Another member commented that even if the club were to drop its membership, anyone can join the league as an at-large member. Another member commented that many of the programs and certifications offered by the league are geared toward beginners, and if the club is predominantly beginners, this might be a good fit. If the club is composed of more advanced astronomers, the fit might not be as good. The final decision on the club's membership will be made at the May meeting when the membership will be asked to vote.

Purchase of a new drive for the 20" telescope was discussed next. This purchase had previously been approved and Steve provided an update on the sale. Steve found a drive but the price was too high. After contacting the seller, he reached an agreement where the club will purchase the drive for \$800 and provide the seller a letter saying the difference between the selling price (\$1,800) and the purchase price is a donation to the club. Four members have already donated \$100 each toward the purchase and other members chipped in at levels ranging from \$100 to \$10. Any other members interested in donating should contact Steve.

Dale requested that the club provide some instructional programs for new astronomers and also mentioned some books by Arthur C. Clarke, who passed away March 19 (see related note in *Observations* later in this issue).

Joyce mentioned that she has gotten advertisements for the public star parties in the Muscatine Journal, WVIK and others. This led to a discussion of member attendance at the public star parties and efforts to ensure we have

available a sufficient number of members who are certified to open the observatory and operate the telescope. Gary Charnoski reviewed that the by-laws preclude any member from being given the combination to the observatory until they have been a member for one year and have been certified. This helps ensure that people with access to the telescope and accessory equipment have demonstrated a commitment to the club. Gary offered to host a session during the May 31 public star party. Those with less than a year with the club are also welcome but will not be given the combination to the observatory. Because there is a public star party that same evening, the session will start at 7:00 promptly and latecomers will not be certified.

Dana provided an update on the club's Web site. He stripped the out-of-date material and has the site up and running at www.qcas.org. The background color of the new site corresponds to the sky color at the time you access the site.

The program portion of the meeting began with the Constellation of the Month and was led by Gary Charnoski. Gary reviewed the various stars, double stars, variable stars, multi-star systems, galaxies and clusters that can all be seen within or near Bootes.

Gary Poliquin made a presentation on RFTs, or rich field telescopes. Gary displayed one he built from parts obtained at various garage sales or from surplus suppliers. Afterward, he set the scope up outside for a look at the Beehive Cluster through an approximate 2° field of view.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20.

Presidential Ramblings

Karl L. Adlon

I would estimate there were a dozen people, mostly QCAS members, at the April 26 Public Star Party. With the twenty-inch, we spent a bit of time on Saturn, viewing at a little over 300X, then on to M44 – the Beehive Cluster (at least part of it) at about 45X and finally M51 – the Whirlpool Galaxy at 78X and 100X. The higher power was actually better, making the background light darker and some details became visible. Tantalizingly, looking at Saturn for a while resulted in a couple seconds of steadiness, making me want more steady time.

On April 23rd I sent the following via email:

As I'm sure you realize, members of QCAS have various levels of experience and varying levels of interest in different aspects of amateur astronomy. But I think we all have an interest to become better at what we do.

It occurred to me that groups of members with the same interest could help each other and QCAS advance in these areas. I thought of the following areas where members have expressed interest:

Beginners' Program Group - Want to help beginners or begin to become more experienced yourself? This could be a group for you. Maybe this group could develop some material/presentations for QCAS use.

Digital Imaging Group - This might involve various cameras and their uses, image processing techniques, etc.

Meade AutoStar Users Group - I know at least 4 people have this system. And at least 3 could use help, or at least share the learning experience, on this.

I envision the groups getting together separately from the Monthly Meeting, perhaps at the observatory, Butterworth Center or someone's house and perhaps more than once a month to concentrate on their interest areas. If there are any questions or if you have a different Group in mind, let me know.

Reminders:

If you decide to go observing and don't mind company, an email to QCAS members will probably find one or more interested members.

A vote is schedule for the May 19 Meeting on Astronomical League membership, which the Board has recommended be dropped.

Reminder: I have work-related meetings I've been scheduled to attend in the Chicago suburbs and will probably miss the May Monthly Meeting.

Wishing You Clear Skies!

Karl

Observations

Joe Bannon

Wow, that was some turnout at the April meeting. Some new faces were there as well as some old ones, and it led to a lively discussion as you can see from the meeting minutes. We're trying some things to help ensure the meetings address club business but also provide instruction, information and programs we all can benefit from. For example, Gary Charnoski started off a feature called, *Constellation of the Month*. Each month a member will make a presentation on a constellation that's viewable or coming into view. We'll try to highlight not only the constellation, but also other objects that appear within or near it that may be of interest to newbies or experienced astronomers. Gary's presentation elicited discussion on deep sky objects and other people's observations of Bootes so it seems to be a hit. I'm on the hook for May and am looking at Hercules or Virgo so if you've observed either of these, bring your notes, comments and yourself to the meeting.

At the April meeting Dale mentioned the death of Arthur C. Clarke, the man most known for 2001: A Space Odyssey. Clarke was more than an author and served in the Royal Air Force and was nominated for a Nobel Prize (1994). But writing is his legacy and he authored almost 100 books, many of which promoted the idea that man's future lies beyond the Earth.

In perhaps an ironic twist, the day he died astronomers using the Swift orbital telescope detected four strong gamma bursts, including one from the most distant object ever visible to the naked eye and the brightest object ever seen, GRB 080319B. Astronomer Judith Racusin of Penn State University reportedly said these were the universe saying good bye to Clarke.

Upcoming Celestial and Club Events

May 8-9	Thurs. – Fri.	Asteroid 5 Astrea visible less than 5' south of mag. 6 star 37 Virginis
May 10	Saturday	Moon passes by the southern edge of M44, the Beehive Cluster
May 11	Sunday	First quarter Moon
May 12	Monday	Saturn and Regulus appear a few degrees north of the Moon
May 19	Monday	Mars passes a few arc minutes north of mag. 5.3 star Eta Cancri

May 22-23	Thurs. – Fri.	Mars passes through M44, the Beehive Cluster
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Also, Mercury appears high above the evening twilight for about two weeks in the west-northwest. It will be at its highest on May 12 and appear as a half moon. It will wane as it drops in the sky through about May 26.

PUBLIC STAR PARTIES		
April 26	Karl Adlon	Joe Bannon
May 31		
June 28		
July 26	NEED someone here for sure	
August 30		
September 27		

PUBLIC STAR PARTY EXPECTATIONS

- ★ Each club member will sign up for at least one star party.
- ★ The first person should be a key holder; the second can be any member, key holder or not.
- ★ If it's your turn and something comes up, it's your responsibility to find a replacement.
- ★ You should get there about ½ hour after sunset and open up while there's some light.
- ★ Sign the log book.
- ★ You should be there if it's clear or if it's cloudy. No need if it's storming.
- ★ If it's cloudy, there are slides and a projector in the observatory. You can show slides, or talk about the observatory and telescope, describe opening the observatory, pointing the scope, what you can see through the scope, invite them back when it's clear. Tell them what you like to observe.
- ★ Recommend if it's cloudy you take a book, computer & DVD, etc. in case nobody else shows up.

Jens-Wendt Observatory – Quad Cities Astronomical Society – Located at Sherman Park in Dixon, Iowa

Monsignor Menke Observatory – St. Ambrose University – Located at Wapsi River Environmental Education Center in Dixon, Iowa

QCAS Contacts

Elected Officers			Volunteers and Committees		
President	Karl Adlon	kmja@mchsi.com	ALCor	Ken Boquist	hippalus@aol.com
Vice-president	Jim Rutenbeck	jim@qconline.com	Facilities	Jim Rutenbeck	jim@qconline.com
Secretary	Joe Bannon	mzbannon@aol.com	Web Master	Open	
Treasurer	Steve VanHyfte	vanhyfte@mchsi.com	Outreach	Joe Bannon	qcas@mchsi.com
Director	Gary Charnoski	stargazer_44444@yahoo.com	Programming	Jim Rutenbeck	jim@qconline.com

All other contacts can be sent to qcas@mchsi.com or mailed to the club at P.O. Box 3706, Davenport, IA, 52808.

Members are also reminded that anyone can submit articles for *The Meridian*. Submit articles to Joe Bannon at jbannon@midamerican.com and mzbannon@aol.com.

HELP WANTED

...No longer

Many thanks to Dana Taylor for updating the Web site. He's replaced out-of-date information regarding star parties that have troubled us and will work on other updates as time permits. So he's not bombarded with requests for updates, let me [Joe Bannon](#) know if you see something that needs to be updated or if you have a recommendation for the site.

Presentations

Don't forget that if you make a presentation to a group, share the information with the club. These events help demonstrate fulfillment of one of the club's bylaws; to help bring astronomy to the public. Whenever you make a presentation, collect a contact name and number, the date, the content of the presentation, and the number of participants. Send that information to any board member or bring the information to a meeting.

These types of activities help raise the club's profile, identify potential new members and support future grant requests.