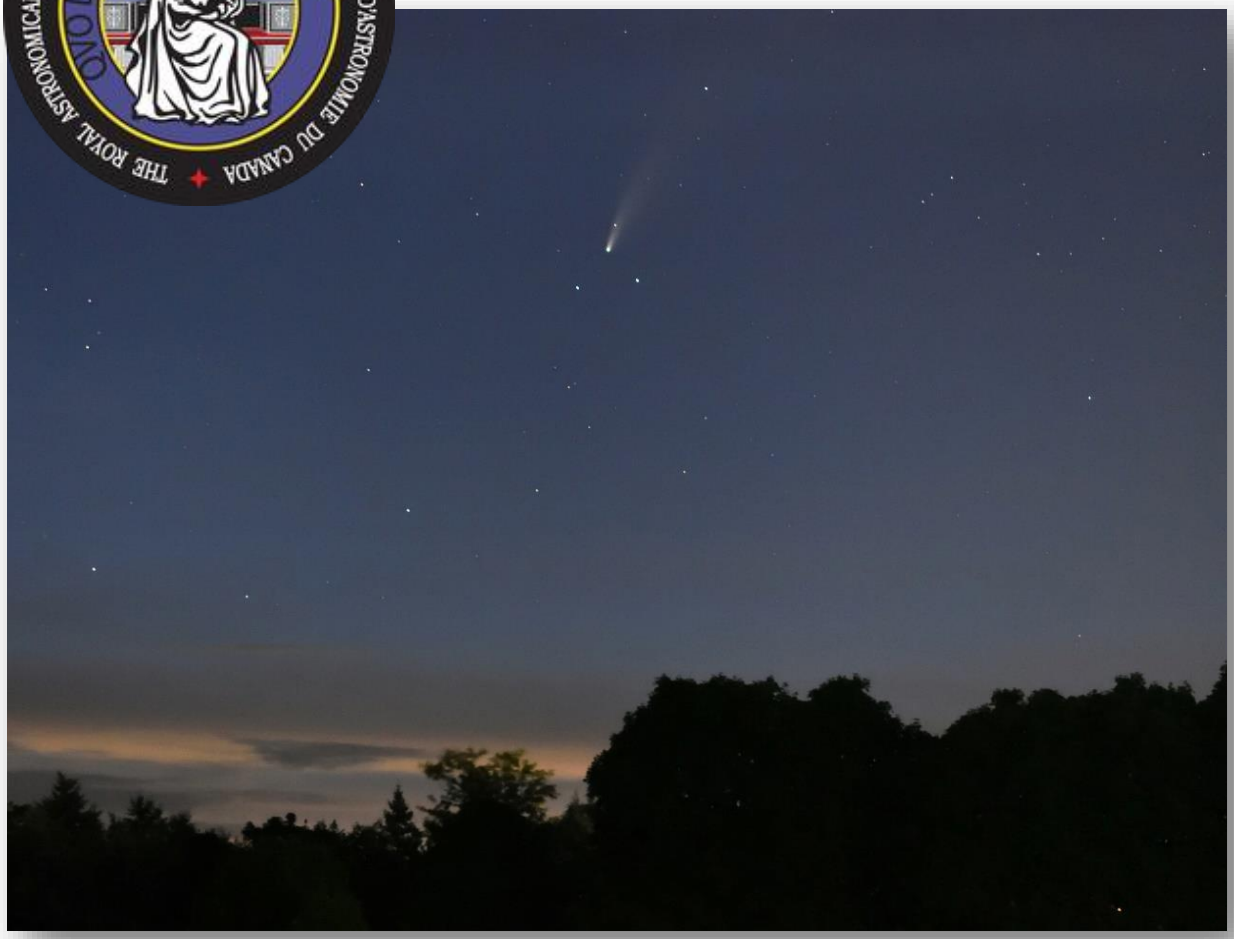
RASC History Committee Report



Comet Neowise, likely the most photographed comet in history. New Dundee, ON

Photo by Clark Muir 2020 July 18

Autumn 2020

October 15 2020

An ominous start to 2020…

Dark Sky Project Observatory Tekapo, NZ visited on New Year's Day 2020. The thick haze in the sky was caused by Australian wildfires over 2,000 km away.

Photos by Clark Muir

Recently restored 18" Brashear telescope made in 1894 is housed at the Dark Sky Project, Tekapo, NZ. On the history of this instrument, see http://old.narit.or.th/en/files/2019JAHHvol22/2019JAHH...22..247T.pdf

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Commentary

The last History Committee report was delivered orally at the Virtual GA on 2020 June 7. As a result, this report will cover activities of the committee from January 1.

The Pandemic

RASC has had to make considerable changes to the way it conducts its business and meetings as a result of the pandemic. Canadian astronomy enthusiasts found ways to observe, image and enjoy the night sky through the spring and summer. It was in many circumstances a prescription for our mental health.

Over the course of the last several months it has been an occasional point of conversation that the society might wish to archive how the pandemic has affected the practice of astronomy, particularly amateur pursuits. This perhaps is being done, for better or worse, through social media. Travel plans have been scrapped, events cancelled etc. A strong argument can be made for archiving the personal experiences of members in the pursuit of astronomy during the pandemic.

Comet Neowise

Canadian observers were treated with a surprisingly bright comet to enjoy through July. Comet Neowise put on a show in both the morning and evening skies. The irony is not lost. It is noted that comets at one time were often considered an omen or symbolized calamity. Who could argue against that this year!

As noted in the image on the cover page, Comet Neowise is likely the most photographed comet in history. The visibility of Comet Neowise in the northern hemisphere where some 88% of humanity resides and the ubiquitousness of the "smart" phone assured that images could be easily obtained by just about anybody making the effort. It was a welcome distraction.

RASC Oral History Project (ROHP)

At the virtual Annual General Meeting on 2020 June 7 the ROHP was introduced. In brief, the project is designed to facilitate oral interviews of longstanding members to record the traditions and practices of our society at Centres in years past. Full details are available in the History committee Report, NC196 pp. 10. Protocols and tutorials for conducting interviews will need to be created before the project commences. It is expected that progress will be made during the upcoming year.

Astronomical Landscape of Canada Project (ALC)

A proposal by the committee for the Astronomical Landscape of Canada was introduced on 2020 October 15. The purpose of the project is to create a web based source for a comprehensive list of astronomically significant sites across Canada. The proposal will be made accessible to all RASC members in the near future.

Presentations

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Truth at the Eyepiece—exploring disjunctions between past and present astronomical imagery”, 2020 April 17, London Centre of the RASC, via the Zoom Video Communications platform

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Truth at the Eyepiece”, with Chris Beckett, 2020 May 21, RASC and SkyNews Speakers Series, via the Zoom Video Communications platform, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWIV3FAwBZI&list=PLzou3EKq3ths24-xNSqFpsWcV7FiJuYO1&index=5&t=0s

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Colonialism & Toppling Statues”, for the session “What's the Point of the History of Astronomy”, 2020 June 14, RASC Virtual GA 2020 (Vancouver), via Zoom Video Communications platform, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwVnuSBB3C4&list=PLp4p--2i2yDBtDaC6EpYVx1VNwuAltCCh&index=5

Peter Broughton, “What's the Point of the History of Astronomy”, 2020 June 14, RASC Virtual GA 2020 (Vancouver), via Zoom Video Communications.
Platform, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwVnuSBB3C4&list=PLp4p--2i2yDBtDaC6EpYVx1VNwuAltCCh&index=5

Chris Gainor, “What's the Point of the History of Astronomy”, 2020 June 14, RASC Virtual GA 2020 (Vancouver), via Zoom Video Communications.
Platform, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwVnuSBB3C4&list=PLp4p--2i2yDBtDaC6EpYVx1VNwuAltCCh&index=5

Papers/Publications

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Visually Reimagining the First Known Astronomical Use of a Telescope in “Canada”: Fr. Bressani’s 1646 Eclipse Observation at Sainte-Marie among the Hurons”, JRASC 114, 2 (2020 April), 83-89

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Claude Mellan’s Moon in Pierre Gassendi’s Printed Letters: Clues to Changes in Perceptions of Accuracy?”, JRASC 114, 5 (2020 October), 218-223

R.A. Rosenfeld, “Zwicky: The Outcast Genius Who Unmasked the Universe, by John Johnson” (review), JRASC 114, 5 (2020 October), 237-239

Peter Broughton, revised several articles in the “*Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers”*. The revised versions will eventually be included when the third edition of this very useful reference appears; https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-1-4419-9917-7

Peter Broughton, has contributed to the, “Astrogen” project. It has now appeared on the web for all to enjoy: https://astrogen.aas.org/front/index.php

Peter Broughton, “Some Canadian Links to the Herschel Family,” *JRASC* 114 (August 2020), 161-72

Honours

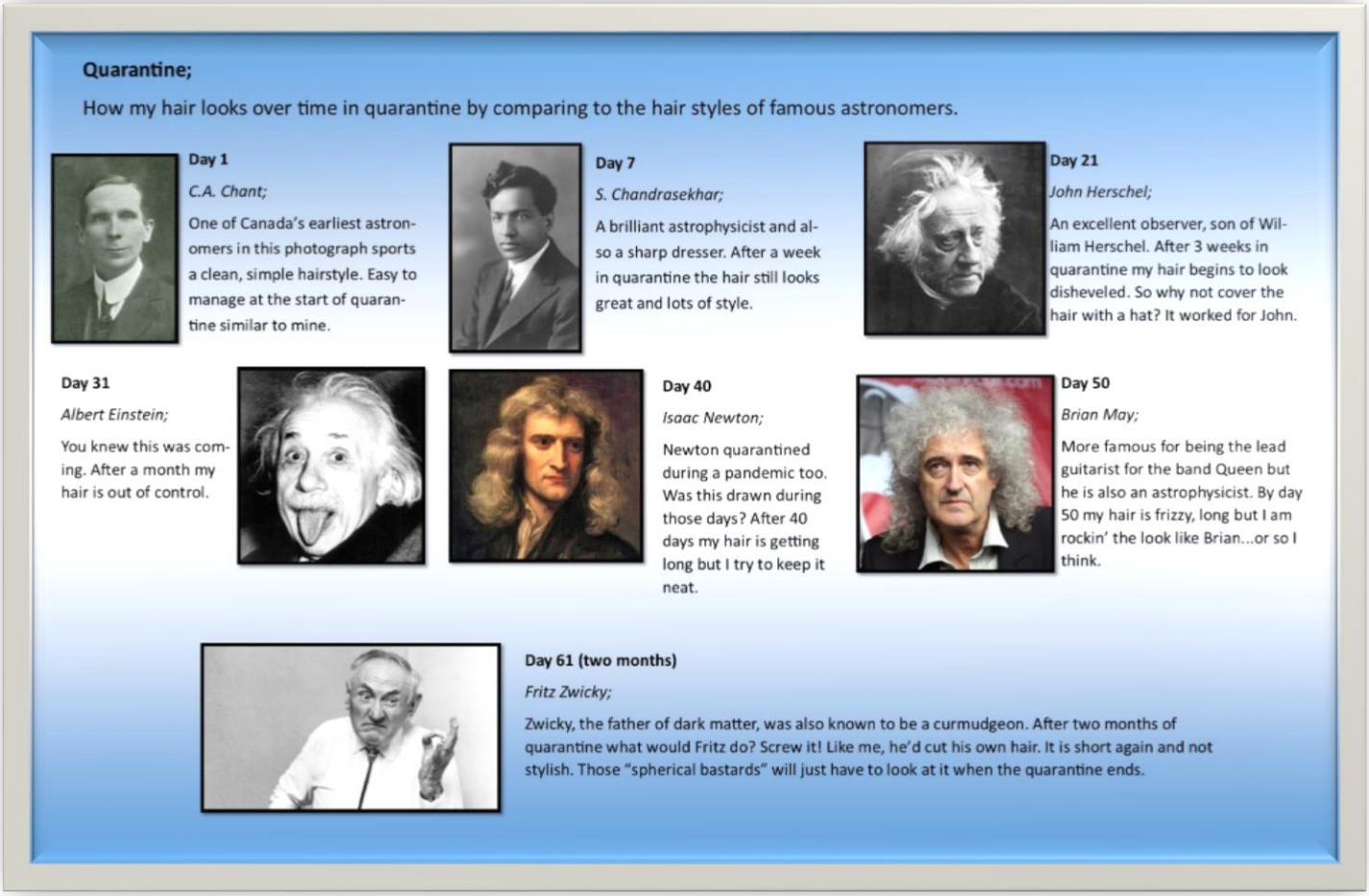
R.A. Rosenfeld was named a fellow of the RASC (FRASC) at the 2020 General Assembly; https://rasc.ca/sites/default/files/FRASC-2020-Rosenfeld.pdf

Ongoing Projects

The Dorner Telescope Museum has continued its artifact acquisition and program development activities under its Director who is also a member of this Committee. One notable endeavour undertaken to bring the earliest history of “Canadian” astronomical technology to life is the commissioning of a fully working "reconstruction" of the telescope used for the first recorded astronomical observation in Canada, by Fr. Bressani, s.j., in 1646 at Sainte-Marie among the Hurons (see Rosenfeld 2020a above). Dr. Roger Ceragioli of the University of Arizona's Richard F. Caris Mirror Laboratory (the lab making the optics for the Giant Magellan Telescope), has already produced the optics, and two colleagues in Germany are producing the OTA using appropriate mid-17th techniques.

Time-domain model for the classification of quarantine hair

The present unusual conditions have presented equally unusual avenues for research. One member of the Committee has developed a time-domain model for the classification of quarantine hair. Particularly notable are the historical *comparanda* underlying the classification. While the project is still in development, the PI hopes that it will still prove of interest, if not immediate utility (*note: the poster below has not yet been presented at any conferences*).



Respectfully submitted,
Clark Muir, Chair

Committee Members

- Clark Muir (Kitchener-Waterloo) Chair
- Randall Rosenfeld, FRASC (National Member), Vice-Chair
- Chris Beckett (National Member)
- Dr. Roy Bishop, FRASC (Halifax)
- Eric Briggs (Toronto)
- Peter Broughton, FRASC (Toronto)
- Dr. Karen Finstad (Ottawa)
- Dr. Chris Gainor (Victoria, Board liaison)
- *Renata Koziol (Accounting Manager)
- Andrew Oakes (National Member)
- Dr. Mark Tovey (London)
- *Robyn Foret *ex officio (President*
- *Dr. Philip Groff *ex officio* (Executive Director)

  * = non-voting