

## NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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### General Assembly at Hamilton, May 21-24, 1971

Anyone who did not attend this year's General Assembly missed one of the best planned and smoothly executed meetings of the Society to date. It was held at McMaster University—which boasts one of the most beautiful campuses ever with its park-like setting complete with flowering trees, evergreens and nature trails. Registration began at 12:00 noon in Brandon Hall where delegates were presented with a folder of information, name tag, meal and function tickets, etc. and escorted to rooms by a "porter" from the Hamilton Centre. The first event was the Flag Raising Ceremony at City Hall under the auspices of the Deputy Mayor, Mrs. Ann Jones. The flag was designed by members of the Hamilton Centre for the occasion—the seal of the Society and seven stars representing the Big Dipper, done in white on a dark blue background. After the ceremony our President, M. Henri Simard, was presented with white gold cuff links bearing the crest of the City of Hamilton and the official guest book was signed by M. Simard, Rev. Norman Green, Mr. Hugh Maclean and Mr. Leslie V. Powis. A model of the Hamilton Centre proposed observatory was on display at the City Hall until the ceremony was over. The flag will be presented to the National Office after the close of the Assembly.

The Council meeting in the afternoon was well attended with delegates from 13 of the 18 Centres. Afterwards, members and their wives were invited to a dinner given by the host Centres. In the evening, the delegates were welcomed by our President and the Presidents of the Hamilton and Niagara Falls Centres—Mr. and Mrs. Les Powis and Mr. and Mrs. Bob Doran. The Wine and Cheese party, held in the lounge of Brandon Hall, afforded an opportunity for greetings, introductions and renewing of old acquaintances. Student members of the Toronto Centre presented their narrated film "Meadows to Infinity." An excellent trio played background music during the evening. The Papers Session at 9 a.m. Saturday morning was held in the Arts II Building. The number of papers was disappointingly small but the quality was excellent. They were:

"A Photomechanical Method of Preparing Isophotal Contours" by Peter Tattersall and B. R. Chou, Toronto Centre.

"Some Grazing Occultation Experiences of the Niagara Falls Centre" by Bob Winder, read by Bob Doran.

"Observations of Comet Abe (1970g)" by Douglas Gies and Richard McWatters, Toronto Centre.

"A Proposal to Measure Shadow Bands Electronically" by G. A. Thede, Hamilton Centre.

"The Ottawa Centre Observatory" by L. A. Higgs, Ottawa Centre.

"Electrical Meteor Watch" by David Dodge and David Hurd, Vancouver Centre.

We were particularly pleased to have unattached member L.Cdr. Robert J. Wood of the Brevard Junior College Observatory, Florida, and his wife and children attend their first General Assembly. He showed a prize-winning seven-minute film "Shoe-string Star Gazers" and an excellent one-minute film on the occultation of Antares.

The group photograph was taken just before lunch at which time the Eclipse '72 Committee met to discuss future plans. Immediately afterwards, the COCOCA Committee held a well-attended session, with Dr. Percy in the chair. Members were invited to ask questions, comment or criticize but, judging from the discussion, it was evident that those present had no vital criticism to offer of Dr. Percy in his capacity as Editor of the "National Newsletter" and he will continue in this office although he asked to be relieved of the chairmanship of the Committee.

The Annual Meeting followed on immediately after, chaired by the President, M. Henri Simard (see Minutes in this issue of the JOURNAL). During this time, a Fashion Show, arranged by Mrs. Powis, was intriguing those of the visitors who did not wish to attend the business sessions. Following the Annual Meeting, the invited speaker, Mr. T. R. Dickinson, a long-time member of the Toronto Centre and now of the Strassenburgh Planetarium, Rochester, gave an hour-long well documented lecture on "The Planet Mars." The second meeting of Council was arranged in the Library of Brandon Hall at the conclusion of this lecture.

At 6:00 p.m., in the lovely Wentworth Grad Lounge, members and guests enjoyed a relaxing hour before the Civic banquet. Mr. Powis introduced those at the head table—Mrs. Ann Jones, Deputy Mayor of Hamilton, Professor and Mrs. McCallion of

McMaster University, M. Simard, Professor and Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Powis, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Doran and the two visitors from Amos, Quebec. This excellent dinner was attended by about 125 persons.

As Professor Kennedy had not given the usual "Presidential Address" at the end of his term of office as President because of the addition of the Ruth Northcott Memorial Lecture last year, we were delighted to listen to his first-class illustrated talk on "Our Heritage in Canadian Astronomy" which afforded us the opportunity, too, of seeing the old brass transit used at the William Brydone Jack Observatory in New Brunswick and the antique wooden instruments loaned by Dr. Scatliff of Winnipeg. The evening was terminated in a lively and colourful manner by the Kitchener Folk Dance Troupe—about 30 young men and women in ethnic dress who gave a remarkable demonstration of folk dancing.

The Variable Star group under the chairmanship of Rick Lavery held its meeting during the breakfast hour on Sunday. During the forenoon, about sixty people enjoyed the delightfully informal planetarium showing given by Ken Chilton. Right on time at 12:30 the buses were boarded for Niagara Falls and this part of the program was hosted by the local Centre with president Bob Doran at the helm. Arrangements had been made to visit the Adam Beck II Power Station and this tour afforded us the opportunity of learning how the frightening water power of the district was harnessed. The next thrill was seeing the beautiful Niagara district from a double-decker bus . . . stops were made at the floral clock which boasted 24,000 tulips at this particular time and was a perfect background for the hundreds of pictures being snapped, and at the whirlpool rapids. It was amazing to see that the river even at the rapids was snow and ice covered! After a short tour to Brock's monument and the surrounding parkland, the buses unloaded at the Skylon Tower. Many of us took advantage of seeing the Falls from this height—535 feet—before strolling down to enjoy a leisurely half-hour in the lounge of the Refectory before sitting down to the banquet tendered by the host Centres. Guests were welcomed by Alderman Walter Scott (who is also a member of the Society) and after the dinner, Mr. Haystead of the Niagara Parks Commission gave a most interesting talk on the history of the area and what was hoped to be accomplished in the near future. Our President then gave a short speech and made the occasion memorable to two darling young ladies from Florida—the mademoiselles Wood—by presenting them with yellow hard hats as were worn by the younger members of the Centres who assisted so ably in the weekend arrangements. Darkness had fallen by the time dinner was over and we were able to see the spectacular Falls under coloured lights—a sight not easily forgotten. Tired but happy and satisfied guests were returned to the University by about midnight.

During these three days the weatherman smiled but the bright sunshine ended on Monday—this certainly did not dampen the evident enthusiasm. There were two choices of tours—to the African Safari or to Stelco. The writer chose Stelco and was treated to an excellent guided tour of the facilities and buildings of this great steel company. We learned how the materials were put into the furnaces and the processes used until they appeared as slabs of about 6-inch thickness. As it was a holiday, the rolling mill was not open to give a demonstration of how the steel for such things as our vegetable cans, etc. was finished, but it was a most unforgettable two-and-a-half hours. We were then driven by bus to Dundurn Castle, a showplace dating from the early 1800s, and ended the tour by enjoying an excellent lunch in the pavilion. Our rendition of "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows" to two of the able organizers of the weekend, Peter Ashenhurst and Ken Chilton, was a sincere tribute. It is my opinion that everyone went home with the happy feeling that much had been accomplished in fellowship and learning during the 1971 General Assembly. Many thanks indeed to the Hamilton and Niagara Falls Centres for hosting this successful meeting.

MARIE FIDLER,  
*Executive Secretary.*

## Great Moments in Astronomy

The debt that astronomy owes to the hand that rocks the cradle and keeps a firm grip on the man of the house will never be properly assessed. Perhaps this imaginary scene may help. It is based on the fact that Asaph Hall, famous for the discovery of the two moons of Mars, might never have achieved that distinction had it not been for the encouragement and persistence of his wife. To both these people, of revered memory, apologies are due.

*The year is 1877. Professor Asaph Hall enters his bedroom on tiptoe, anxious not to disturb his sleeping wife. He lifts the covers and edges under them. Alas! The movement, though cautious, is sufficient to cause Mrs. Hall to turn over sleepily.*

MRS: Is that you, Asaph?

MR: (*restraining, on grounds of flippancy—a misdemeanour of which he was almost never capable—the impulse to reply ‘who else would it be?’*) Yes dear. Go back to sleep, now.

MRS: (*sitting up suddenly, remembering*) Did you forget to discover the moons of Mars again tonight?

MR: (*dropping his socks in the ashtray and stubbing out his left big toe*) Darn! I clean forgot all about it. Knew there was something I had to do at the observatory tonight.

MRS: (*acidly*) I can't see what you do with those night hours at the observatory. Stars, indeed! Sometimes I think I'm married to a dome!—and I wouldn't be too far out, at that.

MR: Now, dear. No need to get upset. I was so busy tonight, working time determinations. Heck of a lot of mathematical formulae to go through. Thought I'd never be finished. My eyes sting, too. I didn't even go near the telescope.

MRS: Well, I'm sure it's not for want of me reminding you. If you keep forgetting, next thing you know, that fellow Pickering will have the moons discovered.

MR: (*mildly*) I don't think he is even born yet, my dear. Not sure, though.

MRS: Well, Schiaparelli, then. He's after the canals, you know. Once he finds them, he may want to find the moons too.

MR: (*petulantly*) I'm tired of looking for those moons anyway. Do you realize how long I've spent hunting for them? And for all I know they aren't even there.

MRS: (*sternly but affectionately*) Now Asaph! You mustn't talk that way. I know you've devoted your life to Mars (*to herself: some women are lucky enough to have a red-headed female to contend with. Me, I have to have a red-headed planet!*) and I give you credit for really trying to find those moons. You mustn't give up at this stage, you really mustn't.

MR: (*patting her shoulder*) There, there, don't take on so. I'll get out of bed this very minute and see to it.

MRS: That's my Asy! But tomorrow night will do just as well, dear. (They both relax and drift off to sleep.)

MRS: (*awakening suddenly*) Asaph! Asaph! Wake up!

MR: (*in some understandable confusion*) Yes, m'dear. I'll name them in a moment.

MRS: Asaph, whatever are you talking about?

MR: (*now thoroughly awake*) Must've been dreaming. I was trying to think up names for the moons of Mars. Do you think 'Midget' would be a good one?

MRS: (*exasperated*) Asaph, you are a donkey! You know we've settled on their names long ago. They're to be 'Deimos' and 'Phobos'—when you discover them, *if* you discover them. Which you won't do lying in bed and forgetting.

MR: Don't worry, I won't forget, although I really should make a note of it.

MRS: Asaph, a dreadful thought just occurred to me. Are you quite sure no one else has found them?

MR: Sure I'm sure. (*aside*) I'd better be!

MRS: It's just that I remember hearing one of the girls say Dean Swift discovered them years and years ago. He wrote it up in a book called *Gulliver's Travels*.

MR: Sheer imagination. Pure luck. Dean Swift never did know one end of a telescope from another. He was a writer, not a man of science. (*Getting out of bed and looking for his pants*) Just the same, perhaps you're right, and I should get on the job before someone else beats me to it.

MRS: (*indulgently*) You've got your pants on, dear. You wore them to bed, remember? Be sure to wrap up warm. It's pretty cold, perched up there in a telescope. (*Asaph Hall shivers at the thought, but manfully completes his toilet*) . . . and Asy, don't forget to take off your nightcap, and please don't drop candlegrease all over the steps. (*She snuggles under the bedclothes*) Wait till the girls hear this tomorrow. I can see the headlines in the newspaper now . . . MARS HAS TWO MOONS. NEW DISCOVERY BY ASAPH HALL. SAYS BUT FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF HIS WIFE . . . (*Mrs. Hall drops off to sleep, a smug smile playing over her features. Does she realize she has made history?*)

*She does.)*

## Observation of Asteroids

The observation of asteroids can be a very enjoyable and challenging occupation for an amateur astronomer. To find and identify these tiny bodies and to follow them as they gracefully move across the background of stars is no mean achievement.

The first thing to do is to obtain the ephemeris for the asteroid. Ephemerides for asteroids may be obtained from COCOCA Observing Bulletins, or may be obtained from the author. The path of the asteroid, as determined from the ephemeris, should then be plotted on a star chart. Unfortunately most of these asteroids, aside from the major ones listed in the OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK, reach a maximum brightness of magnitude 8 or magnitude 9. Most star atlases reach only magnitude 6 or 7, so that the accurate plotting of the paths of asteroids becomes difficult, and their location amongst stars fainter than the minimum limit of the atlas becomes virtually impossible. One method of overcoming this is to plot the path on your atlas, and locate the field in your telescope. Draw all of the stars around the area where the asteroid is to be found. The next night, repeat the process and the asteroid should reveal itself through its motion, as it will not be where it was the night before.

The observer who possesses a star atlas whose limiting magnitude is fainter than the magnitude of the asteroid is fortunate, for he can undertake some observing of scientific value. Some asteroids, because of irregular shapes, exhibit marked variation in brightness, often amounting to 3 or 4 magnitudes. By using the methods of the variable star observer, the asteroid viewer may follow these changes estimating the magnitudes by comparison with the background stars. A comprehensive set of magnitude estimates will lead to the determination of the rotation period, and, possibly, some idea of the shape of the object may be derived.

The study of asteroids is much neglected by amateur astronomers. However, an effort by even a few observers should bear interesting and fruitful results.

HAMILTON

K. E. CHILTON

## News Notes

Professor John F. Heard, Honorary President of the Society, received an honorary doctorate on May 18 from the University of Western Ontario, his alma mater.

The International Union of Amateur Astronomers has organized an international astronomical camp, to be held in Bologna, Italy, from July 28 to August 10. Activities at the camp will include lectures by professional and amateur astronomers, visits to solar, stellar and radio observatories, and sessions of lunar, planetary and variable star observing. More than fifty participants from several countries are expected to take part.

The Canadian Astronomical Society, a society of Canadian professional astronomers, was established in Victoria in May. The purpose of the new society is to co-ordinate the efforts and opinions of professional astronomers in Canada.

The International Union of Amateur Astronomers is co-operating with the International Astronomical Union in establishing, at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, a register of the whereabouts of source material for historians of astronomy. The register will contain the present whereabouts of (a) individual large astronomical instruments, especially those associated with particular astronomers, observatories or events, (b) collections of smaller astronomical instruments, (c) collections of manuscripts relating to particular astronomers, observatories or events, (d) relevant illustrative material, such as engravings and photographs and (e) similar indexes elsewhere.

The Hamilton and Niagara Falls Centres have proposed that an astronomical week-end of the Stellafane type be held in the Niagara Frontier area in August 1972. Other Centres, and astronomical groups in north-west New York State would be invited to attend. The Society's Committee on Co-ordination of Centre Activities has voiced its approval and support.

Progress reports on two large amateur observatories were presented at the 1971 General Assembly in Hamilton. The Ottawa Centre Observatory is in an advanced stage of construction and the 16-inch telescope to be housed therein is almost complete. The ambitious Hamilton Centre Observatory, to contain a 30-inch (!) telescope, is well into the planning stage.