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# NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

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Mars was a special favourite of observers during the summer and autumn. Marc Gélinas of Notre-Dame-Ile-Perrot, Quebec captured the Solis Lacus region just east of the central meridian and part of the south polar cap in this photograph. Marc used a 6-inch  $f/12$  apochromatic refractor and TP 2415 film using the projection method to take the picture on October 19, 1988 at 04:08 UT. South is at the bottom.

## NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

The *National Newsletter* is a publication of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and is distributed together with the Society's *Journal*. Inquiries about the Society should be directed to its National Office at 136 Dupont Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1V2.

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Deadline for April issue is February 1.

### Across the R.A.S.C.

WINDSOR: Observations of the planet Mars by members were highlighted by an observing session at Point Pelee National Park on September 10. This is the most southerly location in mainland Canada to observe Mars at this very favourable opposition. About 29 members and friends viewed the red planet at two sites. Excellent views of the planet as an actual world were obtained through the telescopes of Dana Willis and Dan Taylor. Joady Ulrich also reports that the September membership meeting showed the greatest attendance yet this year with over 40 people present. Assisted by Tom Sharron, Al Des Rosiers gave an excellent slide show and working model demonstration of doing astrophotography using a simple Scotch mount.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO: Several centre members attended the annual Starfest '88 observing weekend in Mount Forest in August. On September 10, a small group of members visited the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill. The centre was planning to re-aluminize the primary mirror of the 12.5-inch Ayr reflector during the late autumn.

QUEBEC: Le Centre de Québec était, pour la première fois cette année, l'invité du Parc de la Jacques-Cartier pour animer, les 12 et 13 août, une fin de semaine thématique sur la pluie de météores. Les étoiles filantes étaient au rendez-vous les vendredi et samedi soir et réjouirent les quelques centaines de personnes présentes. Plusieurs télescopes leur révélèrent aussi les merveilles célestes. Des causeries ont été présentées à la brunante; le vendredi, "en attendant les Perséides" par Mario Lapointe, le samedi, "Voyage dans le système solaire" par Eric Dorion et Patrick Dufour. En après-midi de samedi et dimanche, Jean-Marie Fréchette présentait une causerie "Ces pierres qui viennent du ciel". Le kiosque présentait des photos et des dessins, mais surtout un exhibit de météorites obtenu du

Conseil National de la Recherche par l'intermédiaire de Damien Lemay. L'animation du kiosque et des observations était assumée par une dizaine de membres du Centre qui ont pu profiter du confortable chalet mis à leur disposition par la Direction du Parc.

Cette invitation fut une occasion bien réussie de faire connaître le Parc, l'astronomie, la S.R.A.C. et l'A.G.A.A.. Il semble assuré que l'expérience puisse être renouvelée l'an prochain.

TORONTO: The Annual Picnic in September was cancelled due to bad weather but a very enjoyable evening was held at the Annual Open House at the David Dunlap Observatory. The numbers present far exceeded the capacity of the observatory. The 5th Annual Awards Banquet was held on November 21. Mary Anne Harrington received the Bert Winnearls Awards for service to the Centre in many capacities and Frank Dempsey received the Bertram J. Topham Award for his work in observing and reporting positions for Earth-orbiting satellites. Barry Sloan was the first recipient of the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Toronto Centre. Dr. Don Fernie, outgoing chairman of the Department of Astronomy at the University of Toronto and Director of the David Dunlap Observatory was guest speaker.

VANCOUVER: Discussions are continuing with local government authorities on the use of a park for a centre observatory. Greg Soderling reports in *Nova* that the problem of light pollution had not been thought about by the authorities but they agreed it was a matter of concern! Terry Dickinson was one of the speakers in a series of Mars lectures held in the early autumn. The annual meeting was scheduled for December 13 with Gerry Knight to succeed Greg Soderling as centre president.

SASKATOON: The Centre's 13th Annual Public Star Night in July was mostly clouded out although fully one-third of the membership was present with telescopes in case clear skies appeared. A new slate of officers was elected at the Annual Meeting in October. Jim Young is continuing in his second year as centre president.

KINGSTON: Better late than never but congratulations to Leo Enright on his marriage to Denise this past summer. Leo reports in *Regulus* that "I am learning that two amateur astronomers are better than one. After many years of solo observing, there is a kindred spirit at the eyepiece".

LONDON: Eric Clinton reports in *Astronomy London* that eleven members attended the August Starfest convention in Mount Forest, Ontario organized by the North York Astronomical Association. He thought it was by far the best of the four had attended.

OTTAWA: The Annual Dinner Meeting was held in November with Dr. John Percy of the Department of Astronomy of the University of Toronto as guest speaker. The 16th Annual Deep Sky Weekend was held in October to celebrate the 1971 opening of the Indian River Observatory. David Robinson is investigating the possibility of installing an observatory on the roof of his apartment building. Interestingly enough, his building is located on Dominion Avenue. Any thoughts about the name for the observatory? Candidates for the Observer of the Year Award had to submit their logbooks by November.

NIAGARA: The September issue of *Niagara Whirlpool* was a special anniversary issue celebrating 30 years of astronomy in Niagara. September 29, 1958 was the founding date for the Greater Niagara Astronomical Society which later was to become the present Niagara Centre. Congratulations to the members of this very active club!

EDMONTON: Alister Ling has stepped down as *Stardust* editor as he has been transferred to Toronto. Centre president Peter Ceravolo and his wife-to-be Darlene will be assuming the editorship. Bob Drew who designed the centre's new 17.5-inch Dobsonian telescope was to unveil it to the membership at the November meeting. The Edmonton Space Sciences Centre, the Planetary Society and the Edmonton Centre hosted Marswatch '88 in the early autumn on six nights. Despite poor weather several thousand people gathered for a glimpse of the Red Planet.

HALIFAX: Patrick Kelly reports in *Nova Notes* that the summer Nova East '88 conference was a great success. Mary Lou Whitehorne, the centre's observing chairman, reports a successful year with many members and telescopes at the Beaverbank site for many good observing sessions during the year.

VICTORIA: The centre is searching for its 4-inch Unitron refractor which was last seen several years ago and seems to have disappeared. The centre has started an affiliation with the Fort St. John Amateur Astronomers, a group which is interested in becoming a RASC Centre. Greetings to the Fort St. John members. We are looking forward to hearing more from you.

MONTREAL: The Centre's refurbished Celestron-14 telescope is now back in the Observatory. Continued repairs are being made to the building. The Centre's 70th anniversary was celebrated in September with a special wine and cheese party and a lecture by David Levy. Dennis Ryan reports the centre's answering machine receives about two calls per week but plans are being made to revise the message more frequently. Jimmy Letourneau reported that attendance at the Formal Lectures had been low this year and they might be discontinued.

*Across the R.A.S.C.* is a regular feature of the *Newsletter*. Centre editors or secretaries should send reports of their centre activities and upcoming events directly to the Editor. Deadline for the April issue is February 1.

## Letter to the Editor

### Erratum in the errata

Many thanks for Jim Lucyk's comments and corrections for the *Uranometria 2000.0* (August issue, pp 55-56). It is understandable that there are numerous mistakes given the urgency with which Volume 1 seems to have been published.

However, I found an "erratum in the errata", so to speak. The correction for chart #147 should read just the reverse. It should read as follows:

"Change NGC's 3789, 3793, and 3797 to 3989, 3993, and 3997 respectively".

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## XIII ième Congrès de l'A.G.A.A.

Les 17-18-19 juin 1988, le Centre de Québec était l'hôte du Congrès de l'Association des Groupes d'Astronomes Amateurs (A.G.A.A.) à l'Hôtel Quality Inn, Sainte-Foy. Le conférencier invité était le Dr. Gilles Fontaine de l'Université de Montréal qui traita de l'Age de l'univers.

A cette occasion, Pierre Bouliane, actuel président de l'A.G.A.A., était heureux de remettre le Trophée Méritas à Mario Lapointe, ancien président de l'A.G.A.A., en appréciation de son implication bénévole dans l'organisation de l'astronomie au Québec depuis de nombreuses années.

Lors de l'assemblée générale, le prix de la meilleure causerie fut mérité par François Bourbeau pour son diaporama "Le souffle d'Eole", celui du meilleur atelier fut mérité par François Ouesnel. Le prix du meilleur kiosque est allé au club de Dorval. Enfin, Michel Rebetez put caractériser les 12 premiers congrès de l'A.G.A.A. et remporter la plaque "Je me souviens".

## More Star Atlas Corrections

Two of the most popular star atlases for observers are *SkyAtlas 2000.0* and the *Uranometria 2000.0*. Over the past year, Leo Enright (London), Patrick Kelly (Halifax), Jim Lucyk (London) and Chris Spratt (Victoria Centre) have compiled lists of errors they have found and published the lists in their Centre newsletters. In the August 1988 *Newsletter* pp 55–56, Jim Lucyk's list for the *Uranometria 2000.0* was published. In this issue, the following summary list compiled by Patrick Kelly for *SkyAtlas 2000.0* is printed.

*Charts #1, 3:* The object listed as NGC 133 (R.A. 0h29.7m, Dec +63 degrees) was to have been deleted as it was not a cluster. Examination of the area with 11 x 80 binoculars shows that this is a group of stars merging into NGC 146, a true cluster which lies about 13" SE. In an 8-inch at 125x, there are about 12 stars in this group with a close 10th magnitude double in the center. This cluster should therefore not be deleted even though the Revised New General Catalogue lists it as non-existent.

*Charts #13, 14:* About three degrees north of M61 is a galaxy labelled NGC 4305. In fact, this is NGC 4365. The real NGC 4305 is about five degrees further north and is about three minutes west of M84. It is not plotted at all.

*Charts #13, 14:* About a degree and a half NE of M61 is a galaxy labelled NGC 4266. This should actually be NGC 4260. The real NGC 4266 is located SSE of the nearby galaxy NGC 4261, not north of NGC 4261 as shown. Thus the real NGC 4266 is not shown.

*Chart #15:* There should be a 6th magnitude star at R.A. 16h23m Dec -2 degrees.

*Charts #16, 22:* The open cluster listed as NGC 6003 (within M24) is only listed as such in the desk copy. The Deluxe Edition correctly identifies this cluster as NGC 6603.

*Chart #16:* The open clusters NGC 6682 and NGC 6683 are correctly located in the Deluxe Edition. In the Field and Desk Editions, they should be moved one hour in R.A. and located at R.A. 18h40m.

*Chart #18:* NGC 1305 (in the Fornax cluster) is incorrectly labeled and should be NGC 1365.

## Festival d'Astronomie Populaire du Mont-Megantic

Pendant la plus chaude fin de semaine de l'été 1988, les 8–9–10 juillet, se tenait le sixième Festival d'astronomie à Notre-Dame-des-Bois. Celui-ci fut un succès, tant par l'organisation que par la participation du public. A chaque jour, 4 séries de 5 ateliers simultanés y étaient présentés. Parmi ceux-là, il y eut celui de Denis Martel sur la construction de l'observatoire de St-Luc, "Les portes du ciel". Jean-Marie Fréchette anima un atelier sur l'observation du soleil et un autre chaque jour sur la lecture de l'Almanach graphique. Malgré la canicule, les deux nuits furent favorables à l'observation et biens des gens profitèrent de cette unique chance dans l'année de mettre l'oeil à l'oculaire du télescope de 1.6 mètre de diamètre. Jean-François Lallier et Pierre Bouliane représentaient aussi le Centre de Québec dans cette rencontre d'astronomes québécois.

## First Space Graduates

The International Space University has graduated its first class of 104 students from 21 nations. Among the graduates are ten Canadians (see *Newsletter*, August 1988, page 62).

The first International Space University was held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology over a 10-week period this past summer. The 1989 International Space University will be held at either the Aachen Technical Institute (West Germany) or the University of Toulouse (France). Canada is bidding for the 1990 session.

## Gold Medal of the R.A.S.C., Toronto Centre

by **Ralph Chou**  
Toronto Centre

In 1905, the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada was created to honour the fourth-year student graduating each year from the undergraduate astronomy program at the University of Toronto with the highest first-class grades. Of the 37 recipients of the Gold Medal, many have gone on to become important members of Canada's professional astronomical community and supporters of the R.A.S.C. In 1987, the Society's National Council instituted an annual award for an outstanding Ph.D. thesis in astronomy, the Plaskett Medal, and the tradition of recognizing a University of Toronto astronomy undergraduate came to an end.

The Council of the Toronto Centre decided to keep the tradition of the Gold Medal alive by taking over responsibility for the award. It is therefore a great pleasure to announce the first recipient of the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Toronto Centre is W. Barry Sloan.

Barry Sloan has been a member of the Toronto Centre since 1986. A graduate of Etobicoke Collegiate Institute, he enrolled in the Physics and Astronomy program at the University of Toronto in 1984. He was a 1987 recipient of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada undergraduate summer research scholarship in the Department of Physics at the University of Toronto. His fourth-year research project, supervised by Dr. John Percy, was an analysis of 75 years of A.A.V.S.O. observations of 391 Mira-type long period variable stars, searching for changes in their periods. He has also participated in Dr. Percy's photometric study of Be stars. Barry has been active in the Toronto Centre's public education program during the past two years, in addition to helping with the summer tours at the David Dunlap Observatory. He is now working on CCD observations of merging galaxies for his M.Sc. in astronomy under the supervision of Dr. Ray Carlberg of CITA.

Congratulations on your achievement, Barry!

Reprinted from Toronto Centre's *'Scope*

## A View of Uranus and Neptune

by **Richard W. Schmude Jr.**  
Texas A&M University

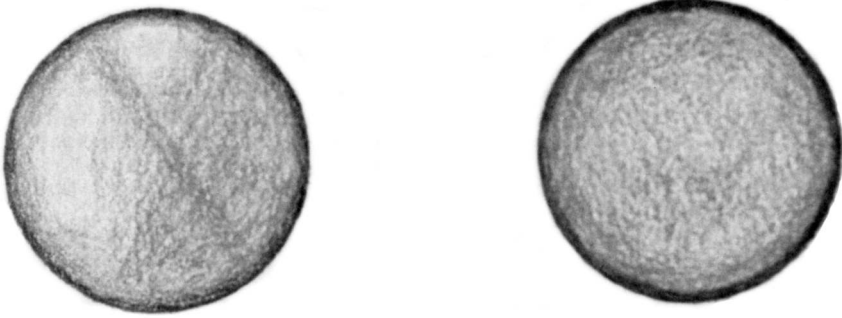
*Editor:* This brief report on Uranus and Neptune appears rather appropriately just after the 250th anniversary of the birthday of William Herschel who was born on November 15, 1738 and discovered Uranus in 1781.

On the night of July 15, 1988, members of our astronomy club, the Association of Amateur Astronomers, went to the Texas A&M University Observatory.

Among the celestial objects we observed were Uranus and Neptune. Surprisingly, we found the air was unusually steady and found the disc of Uranus was quite sharp even at the high magnification of 527x. Several club members observed Uranus and then I took a close look at the planet for 30 minutes. My impression is given in the accompanying photograph (left photo). Then, without telling the others what I had observed, I asked them what they saw on Uranus. Two of them felt the planet was brightest in the left region (corresponding to the planet's western limb) while a third reported a colour change in this region. In all cases these irregularities corresponded approximately to my impressions of the planet.

In addition to observing the disc of Uranus, I noticed two faint, but steady points of light near Uranus. These two objects were about 25 and 34 arc-seconds from the centre of Uranus and they, along with Uranus appeared to form a right triangle. I later found out that these bodies were very close to the positions of the moons Titania and Oberon.

After the club had run out of objects to observe I suggested that we look at Neptune, the only unexplored planet besides Pluto in the solar system. I was anxious to look at this planet because of the



Uranus (left) and Neptune (right) as they appeared on July 16, 1988 through the Texas A&M University Observatory 35.5cm telescope at 527x. The time of the Uranus observation was 3:32-4:04 UT and the time of the Neptune observation was 4:50-5:06 UT. West is to the left.

good skies and the recent reports of brightness changes in the infrared (Hammel and Buie, 1987). At 4:50 UT on July 16, we found Neptune.

The first response of the group was that it was much dimmer than Uranus. The disc had a blue-gray colour but did not have any definite albedo irregularities except for a slight limb darkening. I did notice a tiny bright speck but this feature appeared to jump around inside of Neptune's disc. My impression of Neptune is reproduced in the accompanying photograph (right photo). I also spotted a dim object about 8-9 arc-seconds south of Neptune and later found out it was Triton. Like Titania and Oberon, this moon was a steady point of light which was visible through direct vision.

#### REFERENCE

Hammel, H.B. and Buie, M.W., *Icarus* 72 62 (1987)

### Due\$ Due

This is a last reminder that if you have not yet renewed your membership for the 1989 membership year which started last October 1, you may miss receiving some of the 1989 publications and your name will soon no longer be on the Society's mailing list. The national fees are as follows:

- Regular Membership	\$25.00
- Youth Membership (under 18 years of age)	\$15.00
- Life Membership	\$500.00

For all foreign members outside Canada, these fees are quoted in U.S. funds. Several Centres also have surcharges in addition to the national fees. Check with your Centre to get the correct fee. Centre members should send their renewals to their Centre Treasurer. Unattached members send their renewals to the National Office. Late renewals cause extra work for the members responsible for handling the processing of memberships. Please help them by renewing promptly.

If you haven't renewed yet, what's holding you back?

## Mount Kobau Kaleidoscope

by John Howell  
Victoria Centre

*Editor:* The 5th Annual Mount Kobau Star Party hosted by the Okanagan Astronomical Society at Mount Kobau in August was a great success this year. It is one of four or five such events held annually across Canada.

An early morning start on Wednesday, August 10 saw me drive my Toyota mini-motorhome onto a ferry for the mainland at 6:45 am.

Some hours later at a campsite in Manning Park, I was madly swinging an old hand-operated water pump at a well to fill a few plastic bottles to take with me to the 1900 metre summit of Mount Kobau where there was certainly no water. I was planning on a four or five day stay there, and needed as much liquid as I could carry. A couple came along and each filled a plastic cup compliments of my newly-discovered expertise. Then Jonathan Fallows, a RASC member from Ladysmith, British Columbia came along and recognized me. Donovan and I have known each other for a long time, meeting at General Assemblies across Canada since about 1960. We both wondered how our small engines would survive the 21 km haul to the summit over the rough gravel road.

Soon I was making the grade at a steady, if not particularly impressive, 25 km/h in second gear and feeling relieved to be almost there. Then a well-painted sign presented the terse message "Halfway". A long time later, another cryptic sign told me I had covered about 18 km. I was in low gear, my carburetor was obviously suffering the effects of the rarefied air, and I still had a distance to travel. In retrospect, I did fare better than some. In the return trip I passed three vans which had not made it up the mountain and were stranded on the roadside.

By 5:30 pm I had registered for the Star Party and was ready for an inspection tour of the upper slopes. Over 300 stargazers were present. I soon found Victoria members Malcolm Scrimger and John Pazder, who together with Rainier Pipke had been at the summit since the previous Sunday. The summit itself was a kaleidoscope of outdoor equipment, recreational vehicles, trucks, trailers, and, most importantly, scores of telescopes. Every imaginable design of telescope had been muscled to the site including a 20-inch f/5 Dobsonian belonging to Jerry Catey of Seattle and named "Green Goddess". The Tacoma Amateur Astronomers were well-represented and had brought along two 17½ inch Dobsonians named "Cantor" and "Pollux".

John Dobson, well-known as the San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomer, had his ingenious Dobsonian set up, and when I arrived a group was already studying a beautiful sunspot with it. One of his current projects involved an on-site demonstration of the building of a 10-inch reflector from a round porthole glass in under 48 hours. Many people took advantage of the chance to get a little "Hands on" understanding of the process by taking turns polishing the spheroid. "No experience needed for this work" promised John. "The figuring later on is a little different!"

During the evening there was feverish activity at the site where John and Jane Cansino of Tacoma had attracted lots of interest with their huge, bright red Dobsonian, affectionately dubbed "Scarlett O'Hara". Built as a four-foot square box, it had lengthier pieces of plywood clipped to it, and then a four-foot diameter octagon. It appeared first as a 6-inch or 8-inch instrument but had actually a 36-inch diameter mirror! An f/4 instrument, the telescope needed a 3-m step-ladder to allow observing through the eyepiece. Later, I used this telescope to observe a 16th magnitude quasar about as easily as when using my own 8-inch to view Saturn's moon Titan.

As darkness descended, bands of clouds barred the heavens and most telescopes were turned southward to look at Saturn. Then it started to shower, Perseids that is. It was the day before predicted maximum. "What a celestial show is in store for tomorrow night" I thought.

Thinking back, I remember the dark closing in. There was a bright light in the east. It was Mars was rising. Someone shouted "aurora" and others joined in the chorus. A few Albertans standing nearby and I disagreed. "That's the Milky Way". Bands of clouds had isolated the glowing Sagittarius area and the brightness was accentuated. Observers from northern latitudes familiar with the Northern Lights were correct but it was an honest mistake for our more southern brethren to make.

"Lights" yelled everyone, and the tops of the trees were suddenly glaring white as late arrivals



rounded the final curve of the serpentine road, headlights blazing. Almost too late, they reached the sign reading “Only red lights beyond here”. A great gush of laughter erupted when someone commented “Here come some more visitors to the best red light area in British Columbia.”

Jupiter by then was up below the Pleiades and the colour contrast of it with Mars was plainly evident. Clouds were still crossing the sky but as one area faded out, we just swung our attention to a clear area. Another bright light appeared in the northeast. It was really bright. It was Venus and suddenly in dawn’s brightening glow we felt quite weary. I had been up for nearly 24 hours and my enthusiasm for Perseid meteors was fading just a bit. How many had I seen, 200, 300?

On Thursday afternoon, David Green, an astronomer from England visiting the Dominion Radio Astronomy Observatory down in the valley presented a talk on the history of supernovae. He was followed by Ken Hewitt-White, the new director of Vancouver’s H.R. MacMillan Planetarium, who discussed observing the Perseid meteor shower and predicted it would be really spectacular.

That night we were witness to a splendid event. Counts of 30 meteors in 15 minutes, or over 200 in less than 2 hours were made. I tape recorded 30 meteors in the 20 minutes just after midnight. Unfortunately, I dozed off briefly and missed one of the better sightings of the night. I awoke to the shout of “fireball” and heard the description of what I had just missed.

Friday afternoon, Alan Dyer of the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre, discussed astrophotography equipment. His advice was not to buy any modern SLR reflex camera. With all their electronics and batteries they are no good on a telescope. Look for the older mechanical models with interchangeable prisms. He recommended trying to find the older style Olympus (OM1 and OM3) camera bodies, or a Nikon F1, F2, or a 1960’s vintage Canon camera. John Dobson then debated cosmology with an enthusiastic group of university students. This session was thoroughly enjoyable, as audience participation was lively and spontaneous.

During the day work progressed on John Dobson’s reflector which was finished except for the aluminizing of the mirror. A length of Econotube was boxed in with plywood which had been hand-sawn on the tailgate of a truck.

That evening, as the star party wound down, the hot chocolate ran out and the generator died. Everyone in the warm-up tent told “black hole” jokes and eventually dispersed to camp for the night.

The final full day rolled around with an afternoon presentation by Alan Dyer followed by a swap shop. That evening was quite windy, and we were all ready for a real shower – the long, hot kind!

Reprinted from Victoria Centre’s *Skynews*

## Observer’s Cage 15

by David H. Levy

Each time the *National Newsletter* appears we are reminded that the RASC is something special, not just a group of astronomy clubs but a national family. We read of events in “Across the RASC”, we enjoy learning when one of the regional star parties is a success, and we like to know of birthdays.

The Montreal Centre just had a big birthday, its 70th. On two nights this September, members met at the Centre’s Observatory to celebrate its founding in 1918.

This centre has had a lively history. Its early meetings were held at McGill University amid some pomp. The national anthem was sung at the close of each evening, and according to E. Russell Paterson, “we could never pose as a ‘Learned Society’ inasmuch as no qualifications for membership were required except an interest in astronomy, but we tried to make up for this by the correctness of our proceedings. One feature was the understanding that both the speaker and the chairman should appear in dinner dress with black tie.” Can you imagine being chosen to give a lecture partly on your knowledge of a subject but just as much on your ability to dress formally?

Stories like this appear throughout *Fifty Times Around The Sun*, a delightful history of the Centre prepared in 1968 mostly by Isabel K. Williamson and James Low. The early stories pay tribute to the spirit and enthusiasm of A. Vibert Douglas, who would become one of Canada’s leading astronomers and who passed away this past summer in Kingston after a long career. As a professional she never forgot the amateur community. She founded and for a number of years guided the Kingston Centre.

In the early years, observing sessions took place on the 7th floor balcony of the downtown Sun Life Building. On one tragic night in 1935, the telescope tripod slipped and the objective lens was destroyed as it struck the asphalt of the balcony. This did not spell the end of that observing site and through wind, shadflies and clear nights, it was used until the outbreak of World War Two. Then for many years, DeLisle Garneau's observatory became the centre's home, until November 20, 1954, when the present observatory was opened.

By this time Isabel Williamson had become the Centre's guiding light, and until 1970 she presided over the Centre's evolution into a group of international reputation. Far ahead of her time, she believed that amateurs could contribute to astronomy if they completed well-prepared projects with accuracy and care. Founded over 40 years ago and still active, her Messier Club, the first in North America, was designed to foster good observing skills through the searching for, sketching, and photographing of these objects. For her achievements in meteor observing, especially the 1946 Draconid storm, Miss Williamson received the Society's Chant Medal in 1948.

We celebrated the 70th birthday of the Montreal Centre in the Observatory which last year was named in Miss Williamson's honour. It was a special week that celebrated a centre that has proved over all these years that we amateurs can make a contribution, that we can have fun, and that we can savour those fond memories.



Friendly faces from the Victoria General Assembly. Lloyd Higgs, newly-elected National President of the Society, stands behind outgoing National President Mary Grey and Victoria Centre conference organizer Jack Newton. Photograph by Andrew Franknoi, Astronomical Society of the Pacific.

## Nova East '88

by Mary Lou Whitehorne  
Halifax Centre

This year's Nova East held August 12 to 15 in Fundy National Park, New Brunswick was a very successful event. People came from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Maine, New Jersey and Bermuda! Quite a few stayed at the chalets and/or motel but, as happened last year, most camped at the Micmac Group Camping Site. Altogether we had about 70 participants by late on the Friday night. Because of all the publicity (radio, television interviews, and in-park publicity) there was a large group of about 200 people gathered to get a glimpse through a telescope. The skies were hazy and the seeing rather poor but no one seemed to mind. Saturn impressed many observers as did the brightest of the Perseid meteors when they flashed overhead.

Once the public drifted away, the telescopes were transported to the campsite for our own observing fun. However, about 20 people had sought out the campsite and they had a look through the telescopes set up there. Observing continued into the small hours.

Public presentations in the assembly hall were very well attended with standing room only on Saturday and a full house on Sunday evening. Unfortunately, the skies were cloudy and there was no observing. Even so, the public were reluctant to accept the "Cancelled" signs. On Saturday night, Glen Roberts and I went down to the public observing area at around 10pm on Saturday night to make sure it really was foggy and much to our surprise there were people waiting for the astronomers to arrive. "Show us something!" they demanded. So we showed a few constellations, answered questions, and since it was "sort of staying clear", told our guests that we would set some telescopes. This meant we had to break up the campfire party (sigh! and head for the public site. And guess what? As soon as we had set up, the fog really rolled in! A few hardy individuals decided to try observing further inland and up a hill to avoid the fog. They also ran out of luck because the fog travelled up the hill faster than they did.

Sunday evening it drizzled steadily so there was little doubt in the public's mind that observing was cancelled again. However, no one went down by the public area for fear there might actually be people waiting there for the telescopes. Instead we checked a number of alternate sites for next year's public observing sessions.

Our own seminars were held Saturday and Sunday afternoon in the assembly hall. Pat Kelly, Doug Pitcairn and myself gave the talks. Then on Sunday evening many of us gathered at the Micmac campground for an informal get-together and campfire to look at photographs taken by Bill Thurlow in Australia and New Zealand.

In spite of poor weather, Nova East '88 was an unqualified success. We had one really good night with lots of public in attendance. As for ourselves, events were fairly well-organized and ran smoothly. It was great to get together with so many amateurs from the Maritimes. There were lots of telescopes too! Seeing old friends again and making new ones has got to be one of the best reasons for going to a star party such as this one. Will you be there next year I highly recommend it!

Reprinted from Halifax Centre's *Nova Notes*

## Stellafane 1988

by George Fortier  
Montreal Centre

The 53rd Annual Stellafane Convention of amateur telescope makers took place August 12 and 13 on Breezy Hill just west of Springfield, Vermont on a hot, humid, hazy weekend.

Bert Widdop and I drove down from Montreal on the Friday and during a refreshment stop met up with Renny Bachner who was on his first trip to Stellafane. He had made no reservations for a campsite (this is definitely not recommended since most places are full) so we directed him to a campground just north of Springfield and, with beginner's luck, he acquired a site.

We carried on to our hotel in Chester – “The Inn At Long Last”. It had been built in 1923 and refurbished not too long ago by the current owner. Once settled in we went shopping in Springfield and then went on to Stellafane where changes continue to be made. The old camping and parking areas are now about 90% planted with small fir trees and only a small strip along the southern end remains for “parking only”. The new campsite, however, is being steadily enlarged so that in spite of everything there was accommodation for all.

The Stellafane site itself was as usual, with many telescopes already in place and the large tent up and ready for things to come. A large number of people were on site and the overall impression for the weekend was that this was probably the largest Stellafane gathering ever!

Later that evening the informal program under the tent got underway. The format allows anyone to speak on a topic of his or her choice for ten minutes with facilities for slides available. The meeting started on a somewhat sad note with an announcement that the popular Master of Ceremonies, Doug McGregor, had been killed a week previously in a car accident. He was a member of the Springfield Telescope Makers (our hosts) and a well-liked and enthusiastic popularizer of astronomy. He was and will be truly missed.

The outstanding “show” of the evening was an excellent co-ordinated slide and sound presentation by Michael Watson of Toronto titled “South of Capricorn”. This described his trip to Australia to view Comet Halley and conveyed his enthusiasm for astronomy in an impressive fashion.

The talks were continually interrupted by roars of approval from those outside the tent for the frequent appearance of bright Perseid meteors. These were appearing in as gorgeous a night sky as you will ever see in the east. The Milky Way and its dark lanes were strikingly displayed in a sky bursting with myriads of stars—a sight long absent from Montreal skies. Beautiful!

During the course of the evening we encountered many old friends. From Montreal were: Bert Widdop, Renny Bachner, Fred Clarke, Don Alexander, Constantine Papacosmas, Andre Germain, David Levy, Ron Pow and Bob Venor. From Ottawa were Rolf Meier and Frank Roy and some pleasant memories were spent chatting with members of the American Association of Variable Star Observers Keith Danskin (President), John Bortle, Mike Mattei, Charles Scovil, and John Greise.

As usual, there were many telescopes on display of all types. Most were equatorially mounted (Is the Dobsonian craze on the wane?) and many of them were of very good quality. The prizewinner in both the craftsmanship and design categories was an altazimuth 6-inch f/10 refractor by Bill Volna of Minneapolis. The observer is comfortably enclosed in a heated (thermostatically controlled, of course), windowed housing made of aluminum and turning on a sturdy base. The telescope is carried on the outside of one wall and a diagonal within the tube intercepts the focused light path and directs it through the wall via what is now the declination (altitude) axis to the eyepiece inside. The whole instrument was elegantly made including the manual and electronic controls as well as the digital readouts. The telescope is apparently capable of tracking a star by virtue of computer control of the drives of both axes. The elegance of the whole system has to be seen to be appreciated—this must be the ultimate in viewing comfort! When my turn to view finally came the telescope was on Saturn—an excellent view and very smooth controls.

The best optics that night (my evaluation only since the skies on Saturday night did not allow optical judging) were those of an 8-inch refractor. Due to another long line-up I had only a few moments at the eyepiece but the view of the globular cluster M13 was superb and easily outperformed a nearby 17.5-inch Newtonian on the same object. A close second was a Newtonian-Maksutov which was also beautifully made. I believe this also took second prize in craftsmanship.

There was bustling activity around the Swap Tables from early Saturday morning until later in the afternoon. A wide variety of lenses, gears, mirrors, telescopes, photographs, magazines, books, computers and sundry other items were available. Some felt that several of these items were overpriced and these items undoubtedly went home with their salesmen.

The Saturday afternoon talks proved very interesting. Charles Enz gave a detailed talk on the development and performance of his “Computer-controlled Polishing Machine”, the main portion of which he had displayed at Stellafane the previous year. He has apparently fine-tuned this to the point where he can turn out highly corrected mirrors very quickly. There was naturally a lot of interest from the audience as to if and when he was going into production but he was obviously reluctant to go into the commercial aspects of the operation. I spoke with him later when he stated that “this convention is not

intended for commercial purposes”, and he is right. Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that his mailbox will have several inquiries in the near future regarding optics from his machine.

Richard Buchroeder then spoke about his new design for an “almost perfect eyepiece”. This has the advantage of correcting all the aberrations of the main optics as well as providing 23 mm of eye relief (great for those who must use eyeglasses at the eyepiece). But don’t hold your breath waiting for these to appear on the market — it is only in the design stage and he will leave it to others to iron out the production problems.

Walter Scott Houston gave his early evening talk in his usual humorous vein, and the audience loved him. He insisted that the sole purpose of his “Stellafane Shadowgram” as his talk is known is to fill in time until the main speaker is ready to perform.

This year’s guest speaker was Dr. Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of Pluto, who gave a somewhat concise as well as humorous account of the tremendous amount of labour that went into the search for Pluto. The very large number of photographs taken and the thousands of hours spent at the blink comparator examining stars as faint as 17.5 magnitude bear out his assertion that he is a perfectionist, to say nothing of his determination to see the job through to its successful conclusion.

The finale for the weekend was another of Michael Watson’s superb shows, this one titled “Mindanao Eclipse ’88” in which he very successfully showed the exciting build-up and emotional climax to a solar eclipse.

All in all, a very rewarding and enjoyable Stellafane.

Reprinted from Montreal Centre’s *Skyward*

## Starry, Starry Skies

by Stefan Carter  
Winnipeg Centre

Early this year I took a two week vacation to Hawaii. I set out armed with a pair of binoculars, a small sky map from the *Observer’s Handbook*, and most important, a book filled with sky charts.

Soon after arriving my wife spotted an item in a tourist guide called “Starry Skies”. A phone call was answered by a concierge at the swankiest resort hotel on the island of Maui and we had a free reservation for that evening. After getting lost trying to get to the meeting place through the luxurious maze of sculptures, shops, stairways and waterfalls of the hotel lobby, we arrived breathlessly at the designated place and found our amateur astronomer and one other “customer”. We were taken to the roof and treated a slide show on the constellations and views of objects in large, mounted binoculars and a telescope. We also identified the bright star Achernar, a star not visible from Canada. This was an auspicious beginning.

Thereafter, I went stargazing in the relative darkness near our hotel. Early in the evening, I could still see the star Deneb but not the rest of its associated constellation of Cygnus. The other constellations visible from home were easily visible. Canopus, the second brightest star in the sky, was also present but clearly outshone by nearby Sirius.

Around midnight the southern constellations that make up the old depiction of the ship Argo Navis, Puppis, Vela, and Carina could be clearly seen. I was lucky to stumble upon the open cluster NGC 2516 not far from Canopus.

One early morning between 5 and 6 am, I got another treat. There in the northwest was Ursa Major (with all of its fainter stars which I can never see from my home in the city), Bootes with its bright star Arcturus and Virgo with its bright star Spica. To the east the red star Antares was rising with other members of Scorpius. Finally, what I had been hoping and waiting for, the Southern Cross, appeared in the southeast followed by Centaurus with alpha and beta Centauri! Looking to the northeast a bright star appeared low. Probably it was Vega. My day (night) was made!

Reprinted from Winnipeg Centre’s *Winnicentrics*

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# NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

## Index for the Year 1988

Supplement to the *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*

Volume 82

Compiled by Harlan Creighton and Ian G. McGregor

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### A

- Across the R.A.S.C., 9, 27, 38, 53, 70, 82.  
 Astronomical Conference – Victoria 1988.  
*Mary Anne Harrington*, 68.  
 L'Astronomie en Couleur. *Marc A. Gélinas*,  
 21.  
 Astronomy Day Calgary, 1988. *Glenn Hawley*,  
 44.  
 Attwood, Randy. Totality in the Philippines,  
 77.

### B

- Brooks, Dianne. Newton's Lincolnshire Home,  
 3.  
 Brooks, Randall. The Scientific Instrument  
 Society, 23.  
 Brown, Peter. International Meteor Organiza-  
 tion, 57.

### C

- Carter, Stefan. Starry, Starry Skies, 93.  
 Ceravolo, Peter. The Schmidt-Cassegrain Un-  
 veiled, 6.  
 Chou, Ralph. Gold Medal of the R.A.S.C.,  
 Toronto Centre, 86.  
 Comet Bradfield: A Look Back. *Patrick Kelly*,  
 46.  
 Comison, Paul. Uranometria, 2000.0, 16.  
 Creighton, Harlan. Index for the Year 1988,  
 82.

### D

- Dempsey, Frank. Dressing for Winter Observ-  
 ing, 12.  
 Dressing for Winter Observing, *Frank De-  
 mpsey*, 12.

### E

- "Eclipse Comets", The. *Christopher E. Spratt*,  
 19.

- Editorial. *Damien Lemay*, 18.  
 – *Ian G. McGregor*, 2, 50.  
 Enright, Leo. Minutes of the National Council,  
 42, 69.  
 European Telescope for 2001. *Peter McSweeney*,  
 58.

### F

- Fortier, George. Stellafane 1988, 91.  
 Friedrich, Gordon. Letter to the Editor, 41.

### G

- Gélinas, Marc A. L'Astronomie en Couleur,  
 21.  
 – Nouvelles de la S.A.M., 43.  
 – La Lunette Apochromatique, 75.  
 Gold Medal of the R.A.S.C., Toronto Centre.  
*Ralph Chou*, 86.

### H

- Harrington, Mary Anne. Astronomical Confer-  
 ence – Victoria 1988, 68.  
 Hawley, Glenn. Astronomy Day Calgary,  
 1988, 44.  
 Howell, John. Mount Kobau Kaleidoscope, 88.

### I

- Index for the Year 1988. *Harlan Creighton*,  
 81.  
 International Meteor Organization. *Peter  
 Brown*, 57.  
 Intimidated. Dennis Ryan, 77.

### K

- Kelly, Patrick. Comet Bradfield: A Look Back,  
 46.  
 Khan, Ray. Telescope Care, 63.  
 Krosney, Bill. Letter to the Editor, 41.

## L

- Larkin, Len. Other Worlds, 45.  
 Letters to the Editor. Krosney, Friedrich, Marafie, 41; Kemble, 84.  
 Lemay, Damien. Resume des activites de l'A.G.A.A. en 1987, 15.  
 – Editorial, 18.  
 Levy, David H. Observer's Cage, 5, 26, 42, 52, 73, 89.  
 Lucyk, Jim. More About *Uranometria 2000.0*, 55.  
 Lunette Apochromatique, La. *Marc A. Gélinas*, 75.

## M

- Marafie, Abdul Ilah. Letter to the Editor, 41.  
 McGregor, Ian G. Editorial, 2, 50.  
 – Index for the Year 1988, 82.  
 McSweeney, Peter. European Telescope for 2001, 58.  
 Memories of Mauna Kea. *Jack Newton*, 24.  
 Minor Planet Toro Approaching Earth. *Christopher E. Spratt*, 48.  
 Minutes of the National Council. Leo Enright, 42, 69.  
 More About *Uranometria 2000.0*. *Jim Lucyk*, 55.  
 Mount Kobau Kaleidoscope. *John Howell*, 88.

## N

- News Notes – A.G.A.A. Congress 1988, 20.  
 – Alberta Star Party '88, 47.  
 – Electronic Mail Anyone?, 13.  
 – Events Calendar, 5, 31, 40.  
 – Festival d'Astronomie Populaire du Mont Mégantic, 85.  
 – Fibre-Linked Spectroscopy at the David Dunlap Observatory, 64.  
 – Finland Prepares for Solar Eclipse 1990, 10.  
 – First Soviet Spacecraft Models, 47.  
 – First Space Graduates, 85.  
 – Fred Lossing Receives Recognition, 47.  
 – International Youth Camp, 8.  
 – More Star Atlas Corrections, 85.  
 – Names for New Satellites, 60.  
 – New Canadian Asteroid, 60.  
 – Recent Publications of the A.A.V.S.O., 37.  
 – Request for Photos, 39.  
 – Space University, 62.  
 – Starfest '88, 40.  
 – Telescope Operator Wanted, 61.  
 – XIIIème congrès de l'A.G.A.A., 84.  
 – Trip to the U.S.S.R., A, 22.

- Voyage en Union Sovietique, 22.  
 – World's Largest Telescope, 4.  
 Newton, Alice. Victoria Retrospective, 66.  
 Newton, Jack B. Memories of Mauna Kea, 24.  
 – Testing the "CAT", 62.  
 Newton's Lincolnshire Home. Dianne Brooks, 3.  
 Noted Astronomer to Visit Syracuse. *Frank Rioux*, 21.  
 Nouvelles de la S.A.M. *Marc A. Gélinas*, 43.  
 Nova East '88. *Mary Lou Whitehorne*, 91.

## O

- Observatory Opens at Cobalt-Haileybury High School. *Peter Ryback*, 60.  
 Observer's Cage. *David H. Levy*, 5, 26, 42, 52, 73, 89.  
 Observing on the Kuiper Airborne Observatory. *Neil Rowlands*, 34.  
 Other Worlds. *Len Larkin*, 45.

## P

- Percy, John R. The Travelling Telescope, 30.

## R

- Rankin, Mel. Red Stars, 32.  
 Red Stars. *Mel Rankin*, 32.  
 Resume des activites de l'A.G.A.A. en 1987. Damien Lemay, 15.  
 Rioux, Frank. Noted Astronomer to Visit Syracuse, 21.  
 Rowlands, Neil. Observing on the Kuiper Airborne Observatory, 34.  
 Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.  
 – Awards, 71, 72.  
 – Minutes of National Council, 42, 69.  
 – 1988 General Assembly and Joint Meeting (Victoria), 8, 29, 72, 68, 66.  
 – Nominations, 73.  
 – Poster Contest, 74.  
 – Committees, 79.  
 – Due\$ Due, 67, 87.  
 Ryan, Dennis. Intimidated, 77.  
 Ryback, Peter. Observatory Opens at Cobalt-Haileybury High School, 60.

## S

- Schmidt-Cassegrain Unveiled, The. *Peter Ceravola*, 6.  
 Schmude, Richard W. Jr., A View of Uranus and Neptune, 86.  
 Scientific Instrument Society, The. *Randall Brooks*, 23.

Spratt, Christopher. The “Eclipse Comets”, 19.  
 —Minor Planet Toro Approaching Earth, 48.  
 Starry, Starry Skies. *Stefan Carter*, 93.  
 Stellafane 1988. *George Fortier*, 91.

## T

Telescope Care. *Ray Khan*, 63.  
 Testing the “CAT”. *Jack B. Newton*, 62.  
 This Cloud’s for You. *Mark Zalcik*, 51.  
 Torrance, Tom. Writing for a Newsletter, 61.  
 Totality in the Philippines. *Randy Attwood*, 77.  
 Travelling Telescope, The. *John R. Percy*, 30.

## U

Uranometria, 2000.0. *Paul Comison*, 16.

## V

Victoria Retrospective. *Alice Newton*, 66.  
 View of Uranus and Neptune, A. *Richard W. Schmude Jr.*, 86.

## W

Whitehome, Mary Lou. Nova East ’88, 91.  
 Writing for a Newsletter. *Tom Torrance*, 61.

## Z

Zalcik, Mark. This Cloud’s for You, 51.