



The Newsletter of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society

May 1998 Addendum

Windjammer Barefoot Eclipse Cruise

Several MAS members and their families shared an adventure of a lifetime, to sail the Caribbean on a fourmasted schooner and see a total solar eclipse to boot. We left O'Hare in the "wee hours Sunday 2-22, on to Miami, then Antigua, then a wild taxi ride, reminiscent of Baja, to the "Fantome", the flagship of the Windjammer fleet. After the "stowaway" party-night, Monday, 2-23, on stormy seas, we set sail to "Amazing Grace" bagpipes and all (tape recorded).

On 2-24, we docked at St. Barths' harbor. Being a part of France, Carnival was celebrated on fat Tuesday. After the option of snorkeling, diving, a fantastic glass-bottom boat adventure, or just exploring the island at will, we witnessed the island culture imagination in theme and costume parade. On the dock, waiting for the boat back to the Fantome, we observed the most startling green flash of the trip, a brilliant fluorescent, lime-green spark of the setting sun, almost laser-like in its purity.

St. Kitts, 2-25, some explored the island towns and the British Brimstone Hill Fortress; others conquered the rain forest in a grueling mountain hike, always optional -scuba or snorkel; culminating the afternoon, gamble on your favorite hermit crab, matching speed and dexterity against tenacity and strength, on a race to the victory circle.

The Fantome sailed from St. Kitts in the evening, passing Nevis and Montserrat by morning. On 2-26, our destination was fifteen miles out from between Montserrat and Guadeloupe on the eclipse centerline. The Captain (and passengers) decide not observe from Guadeloupe because clouds form above the mountains during the day; they did, Guadeloupe was clouded for totality. At sea, we were surrounded by dozens of ships. Of course, people flew kites from the stern, kites & eclipses? Totality approached and even Captain Casey started to adopt our technical terms, its eerie, the shadows are strange, all the light is wierd. There were Bailey's Beads and a diamond ring that seemed to last forever, 10 - 15 seconds? Even the cruise people, many several-timers were moved. When the umbra struck, there was not the usual cheer. It was too awe inspiring for the neophytes on board. A light Strato-cumulus cover did obscure some of the corona, but there were still detailed

Continued, next column

Eclipse Cruise continued

streamers from the North and South magnetic poles. The flares, the chromosphere, again, almost a laser -like purity of color, pink-red fluorescence. On the way out, the diamond ring seemed to last forever, too soon, the photosphere, partial phases, post totality depression. Solar eclipses are always short, this one: 3 minutes, 18.26 seconds, for us on the centerline, but those that saw a solar eclipse for the first time are talking Europe in 1999 with the rest of us umbraphiles.

To alleviate the PTD, Captain Casey sailed within 3 miles of Montserrat. Originally, he considered the safe distance to be 8 miles, far enough not to be engulfed by the pyroclastic blast or sunk by the 6 - 12 foot tidal wave expected if the "thing went", a volcanic eruption. Wine and cheese tasting and a costume dance ended the evening. Docked at Nevis, 2-27, ship or island options: tour and explore the island or swim with the local sharks. The last evening we enjoyed the Captain's Dinner with the usual humor and always bountiful food and drinks.

Sailing back to Antigua for our return to reality and civilization almost seemed absurd. For a week our only reality was the sky, the rolling deck of the ship on the ever changing sea, and the island stops, where every day is a Carnival, if one chooses.

This is only a fraction of the fun we had: Astronaut-Astronomer Pinky Nelson was the ship's expert speaker, detailing his intimate personal experiences on 3 Space Shuttle flights, stuff we never see on TV; The darkest night we ever envisioned, Carina and the Milky Way itself, were like a vast Orion Nebula and a star cluster swathing a major portion of the sky; and, of course, amateur astronomers informed the voyagers about the stars, constellations, their myths, and general astronomy every clear night.

Carnival, the green flash, astronaut Nelson, darkest skies, a total eclipse, and an erupting volcano in one vacation. I am sure that all of us would recommend a Windjammer barefoot cruise to the stalwart adventure seeking soul.

*Scott Laskowski
MAS Umbraphile*

From the President:

Where is the MAS Going?

Since I am stepping down as your President this May after three years at the helm of the MAS, I wanted to give some of my views of your Society from the inside and after I am gone, so to speak.

I was a member of the MAS in the early 70's as a starstruck child who slaved all summer with a paper route to save up \$100 for an Edmund 4.25" telescope. I got the MAS newsletter, called "The Double Dome" at the time since we had only 2 domes at the Observatory. How I wanted to go to meetings, but alas, I could not drive and would not get my license until I was 21 (partly by choice). How I wanted to talk with other astronomers and see their scopes and observe with them!! Ironically, meetings then were at the UWM Physics building like the recent meetings this spring. And I was not alone. At that time, the MAS was a little larger than now, but with many more activities and active members. Observing and building at the Observatory was active, as the "old timers" can attest.

My how the world has changed! We no longer have almost daily space mission reports on TV, but we do have couch potatoes, 24 hr cable and the Internet. Now we have "soccer moms", mini-vans and day care for the multitudes of working moms. "Quality time" has become the mantra of many over scheduled parents that try to squeeze more and more activities into a day. Recently, Congress tried to have Lake Champlain declared one of the Great Lakes, maybe soon they will try to legislate a 36 hour day!

I don't mean to be overly pessimistic or negative, but to just put all this in perspective with what I see happening to the MAS and myself. I recently added a daughter to our family and she seem to absorb all my "spare" time and then some as all you parents out there know very well. I want to allow myself the time to play with Celeste since she really is fun! My life change is also a reflection of the wider society which has a greater demand on its time with all the things mentioned above and more! Especially the Internet. Beware of the Internet! It is the biggest time sucker since cable TV.

Such is the plight of most people. More choices of how to spend your time. Not just at work, but out of work. Which brings me to the MAS. I believe that most members would agree that the MAS is not what it was even 5 years ago as I outlined in last month's letter. The reasons are many and complicated. Whatever the reasons, the MAS is floundering as an organization. If I were a 14 year old again and came to a meeting, what could I look forward to? What about the adult who just bought a telescope and wants to take pictures with it "just like in the magazines"? What about a family with kids or a scout group? How about a serious deep sky or planetary observer? What Please think about this carefully! What do we offer these diverse groups? Some of these groups would find some things to do, some not. Unfortunately, all would require more time that many would be willing (or able) to give. We all live in "Internet Time" to varying degrees where leisure time is defined by how many things one can juggle at once. The MAS is just another activity in a busy life.

The MAS in competition with all those other things out there one could be doing. Even a popular activity such as the MAS campouts have become lonely places despite the fact that there are many recreational activities to do and the observing under dark skies. One bright spot, I believe, are the Open Houses which have actually flourished despite the fact that their success is largely determined by the weather. The Open Houses have actually become major money makers for the MAS and have been well marketed to scout groups who come in packs (and dens) to hear our programs and see our (and your) telescopes. My undying gratitude to all those who have contributed through the years! Your reward is all the memories you have had sharing the universe with those who appreciate it most!

The status quo is not going to cut it much longer. I used to be worried about the low meeting turnout, but I realize that there probably are other ways members would rather spend a Friday night. I believe the MAS needs to reevaluate its mission going into a era where space missions, finding planets around other stars and soon, life on Europa or Mars or one of those other planets is commonplace. Read the last sentence again! Did you ever believe that such a thing may actually be true??

Such is the task of my successors. The MAS can continue to merely exist or flourish.

While this address seems to have a negative tone, I don't mean it that way. It is just a realization that society has changed and the competition for peoples time is fierce. The MAS needs to be more deliberate and focused on its activities. We can't just drift along and expect people to come clamoring to our dilapidated Quonset hut. We need to more aggressively market ourselves with a smaller number of well thought out activities. And that takes time -- and people to do it. Are we up to it?

P.S. Ironically, I don't believe that interest in astronomy is waning, but urban sprawl and light pollution are winning. Potential observers are discouraged early because they cannot see anything. Very few people have the time to drive hours out of town. I hear this lament all the time from people I talk to on the phone or in my classes. "Backyard astronomy" is becoming an oxymoron. My apologies to all us observers. We may be the last generation that was able to see the universe with our own eyes!

Lee Keith, President, MAS

Library News

Recent MAS Library acquisition is;

1. **Eclipse!: The What, Where, When, Why, and How Guide to Watching Solar & Lunar Eclipses**; by Phillip S. Harrington -1997. This is an excellent guide on eclipse dynamics and where to go to see see natures most startling events through 2017

Scott Laskowski, MAS Lbrarian

Editors Note: This mailing is an addition to the recently received May issue of Focal Point.

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Is the MAS Fun for You?

When I joined the MAS for the second time in 1983, there was a lot happening. The national convention of the Astronomical League was held at Carroll College in Waukesha, there were 3 well attended campouts throughout the year, and a popular summer picnic at the MAS Observatory (with lots of door prizes!) There were several people that gladly handled the many activities of the Society and the members had lots of fun in the process. Many people actually did a lot of observing as the number of Messier and Herschel Club awards will attest. I had loads of fun and have wonderful memories of the period.

Boy, have things changed! I can't remember the last time I awarded an observing award, or went to a chili dump. The summer picnics have been dropped due to lack of attendance. Campouts have endured a similar fate and are down to once a year (in Fall). The last convention of the Astronomical League which was held in Racine, was poorly attended by MAS members. We are not having an annual banquet this spring because no one would volunteer to find a location. We have had a hard time finding timely replacements for officers and other positions. I had to work as interim treasurer twice because a volunteer could not be found for several months. The MAS did not have a secretary or Focal Point editor for several months two summers ago due to lack of help. We are still looking for a Program Chairperson after almost 2 years!! The meetings are better attended, but still only 20% of members attend the monthly membership meetings on a good night. Last year, I gave the talks during most of the 8 Open Houses at the Observatory. Even your Board of Directors are guilty; several of the meetings this past year did not have a quorum!

I have to admit that for me, the MAS has become more work than fun. It is not because I am too busy, but because most of my time is spent begging people to get involved and do some very simple tasks. Because people don't volunteer, the MAS has fewer and fewer activities to allow us to meet and have fun. Is this what you want??

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From the Prez Continued

The MAS is only as good as the people that do things. If you don't show up or participate, the entire Society suffers. Is this condition temporary or characteristic of society in general? Members, please ask yourself if this should continue. As I bow out as your President, I worry about the future of the MAS. Will it become a small exclusive clique of hard core observers or will it be an all inclusive large group of astronomy enthusiasts who want to mix fun and observing?

Lee Keith, President MAS.

Desert Sky Stargazing

I had dragged my 10" home built scope down to Tucson and was determined to try it out in the middle of the Arizona desert. The TAAA have star gazing gatherings for their members at a remote site called the Empire ranch which is about 40 miles SE of Tucson and 3500 to 4000 feet in elevation. What a sky! All the constellations were out like beacons with Leo the Lion riding high in the sky (& sitting atop a bunch of clusters). The double cluster between Cassiopeia and Perseus were easily found. The nebulas of Orion were conspicuous. In my bumbling way, I easily found about 20 Messier objects against this vivid constellation frame (I apologize Lee, for not logging them towards a Messier certificate).

It's amazing what a weak eyed observer can find when the seeing is superb! *-Editor*

For Sale

6" (155mm) F7 AstroPhysics Refractor and Mount

Details are:

* 155mm , f7 Starfire EDF Triplet Apochromat with 2.7" Focuser and carrying case

* 900 German Equatorial Mount with Quartz microcontroller & mounted encoders

* 6.5 " mounting rings * 18" Flat mounting plate

* 48" portable Pier *18lb Stainless counterweight

-No star Diagonal or eyepieces

-Delivered in April 1997 and used several times

- will sell the above for \$8700.00

- If interested, Contact Harold Biller @ 352-1554

MAS Officers/ Staff

President Lee Keith 425-2331
Vice President Scott Jamieson 896-0119
Treasurer Dan Yanko 453-3382
Secretary Margaret Warner 327-7427
Observatory Director
Gerry Samolyk 529-9051
Assistant Observatory Director
Paul Borchardt 781-0169

Focal Point

Editor Rudy Poklar 786-8931
Distribution Margaret Warner

Future MAS Events

May15 Election of Officers , Meet at MAS Observatory
May 1, 8, 29; Aug 7; Sept 11, 25; Oct. 9 are our open house (Public Star Parties) dates.

Focal Point Publishing Guidelines

Focal Point Newsletter is published monthly from Sept through 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 Word compatible format, if possible. Submit FP inputs to:
MAS Focal Point c/o Rudy Poklar
12905 W. Crawford Dive
New Berlin, WI. 53151

Saturday Keyholders

May

2* Chris Hesseltine 482-4515
9 Vern Hoag 548-9130
16 Tim Hoff 662-2987
23 Scott Jamieson 896-0119
30 Lee Keith 425-2331

June

6* Dan Koehler 662-2987
13 Jim Kube 453-8858
20 Scott Laskowski 421-3517
27 Rudy Poklar 786-8931

July

4* Terry Ross 784-2093
11 Gerry Samolyk 529-9051
18 Tom Schmidtkunz 352-1674
25 Ken Waraczynski 321-0918

**First Saturday Observatory nite meetings will be held in parallel with standard Observatory operations*

Loaner Telescopes (available to members for local use)

Scott Jamieson (Waukesha) 896-0119 4" f / 1 5 refractor
Lee Keith (Franklin) 425-2331 8" Dob reflector
Rich Stearle (Greenfield) 543-7479 8" Dob reflector

MAS Observatory 542-9071

Visit our MAS Website:

<http://members.aol.com/masmemb/home/memhome.htm>

The Milwaukee Astronomical Society

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***ADDITION TO MAY FOCAL POINT INSIDE**

