
The Observer

The Newsletter of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers
March 2004 Volume 29, Number 3

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Next General Meeting Monday, March 8th

The next meeting of the TCAA will be held on Monday, March 8th, at the ISU Planetarium commencing at 7:00 p.m. The presentation that evening will be a brand new planetarium presentation *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. This presentation will focus on the stars and stories of Ursa Major, or more commonly, the Big Dipper. The stars of the Big Dipper are among the brightest and most special in the night sky – pointing the way to the North Star. Throughout time these stars have been thought to resemble everything from a big bear and three hunters to a drinking gourd guiding slaves to freedom. Join us as we listen to tales surrounding the Big Dipper and the stars to which it points. Everyone should be aware of that fact that Tom Willmitch, ISU Planetarium director, wrote and produced this program (including artwork and sound track). Let's have a great turnout for this presentation to let Tom know how much the TCAA membership really does appreciate his hosting of our membership meetings.

TCAA Calendar

Regular Meeting

8 March 2004 - Monday
7:00 PM - ISU Planetarium
Featured Presentation: Thomas Wilmitch
"Follow the Drinking Gourd"

Members-Only Observing Session

20 March 2004 - Saturday
Dusk-Dawn - Sugar Grove NC

Public Observing Session

27 March 2004 - Saturday
7:30-9:30 PM - Sugar Grove NC
Featured Sky Objects: Carl Wenning
"Saturn, Open Clusters, M44 & M47"

Public Observing Session March 27

On Saturday evening March 27th the TCAA will host the first public observing session of 2004. The program will be held at the Sugar Grove Nature Center beginning at 7:30 p.m. and running until 9:30 p.m. The events of the evening will begin in the picnic shelter with a lecture focusing on Saturn and nearby open clusters M44 and M67. The lecture presentation will be given regardless of sky conditions. Following this 30-minute presentation, constellations, Saturn, and the location of the star clusters will be pointed out if the sky is clear. This will then be followed by telescope viewing of the evening's feature objects. Additional objects will be viewed as time permits. TCAAer's are encouraged to come on out to enjoy and support this event.

Minutes of the Annual Meeting

44th Anniversary of the TCAA
21 February 2004
Sugar Grove Nature Center

Some 30 members and guests attended the 44th anniversary meeting of the founding of the TCAA at the Sugar Grove Nature Center. Included among this number were members from the earliest years of the astronomy club: Taylor Cisco, Lyle Rich, and Barry Beaman. Following a social hour, those assembled enjoyed a potluck dinner and much camaraderie. At 7:30 p.m. TCAA President Dan Meyer called the meeting to order. The first order of business was the treasure's report given by Duane Yockey.

He reported a general operating balance of \$1,422, and an observatory fund balance of \$890. He noted the names of observatory key holders, announced several state and national astronomy meetings, and indicated that Sharon MacDonald is the TCAA's legal registered agent. He announced that William Carney had won the Astronomical League's Urban Club Award for having observing 100 deep sky objects from or near his residence on the west side of Bloomington. He received a lapel pin from the AL in recognition of his accomplishment.

Dan noted that Michael Rogers and Jean Memken had just completed ten years as editors of the *TCAA Observer*. He congratulated them on an outstanding job for a truly "award winning" newsletter. Rebecca Wenning, it was noted, will be serving as the new editor, but that the newsletter would be smaller. Dan introduced Barry and Carol Beaman when they jointly presented "E/PO (Education/Public Outreach) in Astronomy." The presentation dealt with the many and varied resources astronomy clubs like the TCAA could avail themselves of at no or very little cost. The presentation concluded at 9:40 p.m. at which time members either returned home or visited the SGO for a few quick peeks at winter showcase objects through openings in the intermittent clouds.

Respectfully submitted,
Carl J. Wenning, Secretary

Support Your Local Planetarium!

Minutes of March 1, 2004, Board Meeting

The Board of Directors elected at the February Annual Meeting met at the offices of Miller, Yockey, and Brown to hold their annual planning meeting. In attendance were Board members Lyle Rich, Duane Yockey, Dan Meyer, Kal Kumar, and Carl Wenning. Also in attendance was newsletter editor Rebecca Wenning. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. The following decisions were made. Officers were appointed as follows to their respective positions:

President – Dan Meyer
V. President – Lyle Rich
Secretary – Carl Wenning
Treasurer – Duane Yockey
5th Director – Kal Kumar
Historian – Carl Wenning
Property Manager – Dan Meyer
Education Coord – Rebecca Wenning

Jean Memken and one additional member will represent the TCAA on the coordinating council for the TCAA, ISU Planetarium, and PAM Challenger Learning Center. They will meet as necessary to coordinate events for the coming year.

Duane provided the February Treasure's Report that will appear in full detail in the *TCAA Observer*. He pointed out the major TCAA expenses to occur during the next three months: insurance (\$150), Abrams Planetarium Sky Calendar (\$220), and Astronomical League dues (\$200). The following expenditures were approved or re-approved:

- Purchase of 2 eyepieces and a filter set for the observatory (Carl, \$250)
- Purchase of solar filter from Astrophysics for several telescopes (Dan, \$30)
- Repair of observatory pier to stop vibration (Dan, \$20)
- Interface observatory computer with LX200 telescope (Lyle, \$20)
- Plaque for Lifetime Membership for Sandy McNamara (Carl, \$60)

Purchasing a number of other items was considered (digital camera, photometer, laptop computer, video project), but put off pending future income.

Dan summarized the results of the survey of the TCAA membership at the Annual Meeting. The following general points were made:

- The membership is generally happy with observatory facility.
- There are no problems with the loaner telescope program.
- Meetings on Monday evening are in poor location and time.
- Should continue with member education and public outreach.
- The membership is optimistic about the future of the TCAA.
- The Internet will never replace views through a telescope.
- Members spend 0.5 to 4 hours per month on amateur astronomy.

("Board Meeting" continued on page 4)

(“Board Meeting” continued from page 3)

Because so many members had a number of good ideas, an open forum on the Annual Meeting survey will be held at the March 8th meeting of the TCAA. It was further decided that general membership meetings (with the exception of this March) will now be held prior to Saturday public observing sessions and generally at SGNC. The plan for public presentations and membership meetings will be as follows; times will be announced in future editions of the *TCAA Observer*:

<i>'04 Date Event</i>	<i>Event Coordinator</i>	<i>POS Topics</i>	<i>POS Coord.</i>
March 8 Planetary Program	Carl Wenning	X	X
Mar 27 X	X	Saturn, M44, M67	Carl Wenning
April 24 Astronomy Day	Duane Yockey	Jupiter, M65, M66	???
May 22 Spectroscopy	Dan Meyer	M51, M104, comets	???
June 19 Stonehenge	Carl & Rebecca W.	M13	Dan Meyer
July 24 Telescope Workshop	Carl Wenning	M8, M17	???
Aug 21 GPS Workshop	Rebecca Wenning	M11	Carl Wenning
Sept 18 The Moon	???	M27, Albireo	???
Oct 16 Variable Stars	Dan Meyer	M57, Uranus/Neptune	???
Nov 13 Galaxy Classification	Rebecca Wenning	M31	Lyle Rich
Dec Saturnalia Party	TCAA Board	X	X
Jan Challenger Learn Ctr	Carl Wenning	X	X
Feb Annual Meeting	TCAA Board	X	X

An “X” in the above table indicates no event. Event coordinators are needed where “???” is present in the table. Please consider volunteering, and contact any member of the Board to do so. Other possible activities for TCAAer’s will be trips to Millikin Observatory in Decatur, to Adler Planetarium in Chicago, to Shades State Park in Indiana for camping and observing, Mackinaw Valley Vineyards, and the Illinois Dark Sky Star Party west of Springfield. The TCAA/CLC/ISU Planetarium coordinating committee might well arrange other special events such as astronomy merit badges for scouts. The Board meeting was adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

45th Anniversary TCAA History Now Under Preparation

In 1985 Carl Wenning wrote the first edition of the TCAA history chronicling events from very beginning of the club in 1960. He produced updates in 1990 and 1995. Now, he’s preparing the fourth edition, to cover the period of the past ten years. The issue will be distributed at the 45th anniversary Annual Meeting during February 2005.

Using new production techniques, this fourth edition will host a large number of pictures, as well as personal vignettes of individual members. Carl has plans now of including short stories and pictures featuring prominent TCAA members of the past such as John and Bertha Kieviet, Aubrey and Miriam Johnson, and Weldon Schuette.

Carl is encouraging TCAA members to write personal vignettes of 300 words or less, and submit them to him along with a current picture for inclusion in the history. If you very familiar with members who are no longer living and would like to write a historical vignette about one of these individuals, please feel free to do so but be certain to clear your subject with Carl before you begin.

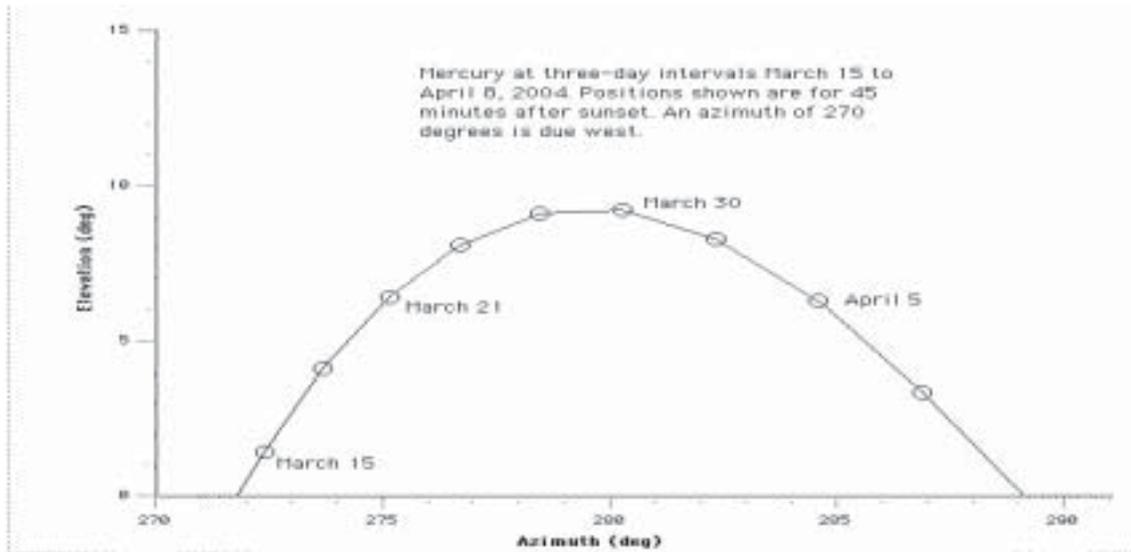
If you would like to submit a personal or historical vignette, please send your submission to:

Carl Wenning
21 Grandview Dr.
Normal, IL 61761
cjwennin@ilstu.edu

Best Views of Five Planets Coming Soon

If you have never seen the elusive planet Mercury before (and a surprisingly large number of TCAA members have not!), then you'll want to take advantage of the March-April apparition of Mercury to view it along with four other planets in the evening sky. Mercury is difficult to observe because it orbits so near the sun, and is frequently lost in the Sun's bright glare. The speedy little planet can only be observed shortly before sunrise or shortly after sunset.

Use the crescent moon to find Mercury on the evenings of March 21 through March 23. On the 21st Mercury will be located to the upper right of the young crescent moon. On the 22nd, look for Mercury to the lower right of the moon. On the 23rd, Mercury will be about as far below and to the right of the moon as the moon is relative to Venus. Make certain that you observe over a western horizon free from any obstructions; viewing over an open field in the countryside will be the best of all possible circumstances.

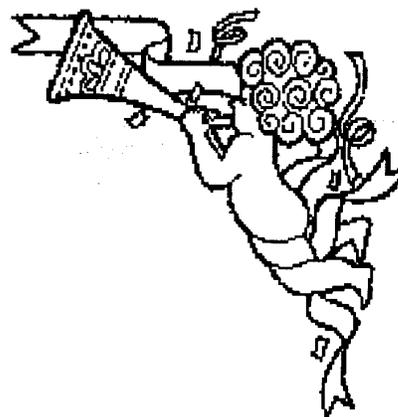


Mercury will be visible in the bright evening twilight as early as March 13 when it sets nearly due west 45 minutes after sunset. As Mercury swings out from behind the Sun, it brightens and then fades as it moves to pass between the Earth and Sun. It shines at a magnitude of -1.4 on March 13 and by March 19 fades to -1.0 . By the end of March it fades to magnitude 0.0 but climbs higher in the sky at the same time each evening relative to sunset. Look for the planet 45 minutes after sunset (roughly mid twilight) to the lower right of brilliant Venus that dominates the western evening sky. Mercury fades to magnitude $+0.5$ by the end of March when it reaches its greatest eastern elongation of just under 19 degrees. It rapidly disappears from view thereafter.

Use a pair of binoculars to help you find the planet. During the entire apparition sweep the span between Venus and the Sun. Using these techniques, the planet should be relatively easy to find.

Mercury joins four other naked-eye planets in the evening sky during March. Going from west to east across the sky, observers will find Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter. The next opportunity to see all five planets at once will occur during December-January, 2004-2005. The next easily observed planetary lineup of five planets occurs in the predawn sky of January-February 2016. Enjoy this convenient evening apparition.

The Welcome Mat



The Observer

Newsletter of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, Inc.

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Dues Due?

The Dues Blues

If you see a check in the box above, it means your dues are due. To retain membership -- and with the new observatory, why quit now? -- please send \$40 to our esteemed treasurer:

Duane Yockey
508 Normal Avenue
Normal, IL 61761

Thank you for your support!