

3481 Salem Bottom Road
Westminster, MD 21157

Greetings,

This letter is a brief acknowledgement to your interest in astronomy. Astronomy is a science basic to life. The atoms that compose living organisms including ourselves have been in existence for eons, for they were created through nuclear reactions in the cores of stars billions of years ago. In the distant future when Earth no longer exists, our ashes (atoms) will still survive, having been spread through the heavens. We are complex assemblies of stardust.

Around the world in major observatories, universities, and laboratories, scientists work to unlock the secrets of the universe. So many mysteries remain that it is impossible for one person to become expert in each. Thus, soon the few men and women who dedicate their lives to science are forced to specialize in a particular area, "white dwarves", "black holes", "quasars", just to name a few.

The amateur astronomer has a major advantage. One is allowed to pursue astronomy at ones own pace, to whatever depth is desired. We can understand the physics of planetary motion, learn telescope building, spend leisurely evenings observing distant galaxies or nearby planets with a telescope, or simply learn the names of the constellations and bright stars on warm summer nights.

All of these activities can be performed individually. However there are many questions that one may ask from time to time: How do I choose the right telescope for my needs? How do I observe an eclipse of the sun safely? How can I tell the planets from the stars in the evening (or morning) sky?

The answer is to form a collective group of people with similar yet different interests. The more people there are, the more knowledge there is available for everyone's benefit.

Now, about the organization. Let me provide some preliminary thoughts as to how it might work. At least once a month there would be a meeting where a speaker would present a particular topic such as "How to observe the planets without a telescope". Also since astronomy should involve active observing, "star parties" would be held at a dark sight where members who own telescopes could bring their instruments and show others the rings of Saturn for instance. The society would also be a source of information to the general public, educating the community by announcing upcoming events (a lunar eclipse for example).

This is just an overview. Naturally all decisions will be made by the group as a whole. To help get an understanding of your personal interests, a questionnaire is enclosed. Please complete it and return it in the S.A.S.E. All questions are optional and you are of course not obligated to answer them, answer only those questions you wish. In return it is fair that I offer you the same information about me.

I work in the Space Systems Division of the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington. Astronomy has been a major interest since 1972. I currently own three telescopes, a 2.4" refractor, 6" reflector, and a 12.5" reflector. My interest in an astronomical society is to share astronomy with others, learning from others and helping those just starting.

Astronomy is the science of sciences, the beginning and the end. If you are interested in observing, give me a call and arrange a time on some clear night, weekends preferred. Be seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Curtis W. Roelle
848-6384

NEWSLETTER of the WESTMINSTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
June 1984, Vol 1 No 1

May Meeting Notes

The first meeting of the Westminster Astronomical Society was held May 28 at the Carroll County Library in Westminster. The meeting was held two days before the partial solar eclipse visible from Westminster on May 30. Besides discussing the physics of why eclipses occur, safe viewing techniques and equipment were demonstrated and displayed.

The Annular Eclipse of May 30

Despite obscuring clouds, Tim and Kathy Titus viewed portions of the eclipse from Westminster. They photographed the partially eclipsed sun and caught several visual glimpses through sun filters that were distributed at the May meeting. They reported that a noticeable darkness accompanied the eclipse as the moon hid about 94% of the sun as viewed from Westminster.

Several colleagues carried sun filters with them on a business trip. Although it was partly cloudy they reported viewing the 75% partial eclipse visible from Florida.

My wife and I travelled to Williamsburg, VA to be in the three mile wide path of annularity. As viewed from along the path, the moon crosses the center of the sun, leaving only a thin ring or "annulus" of sunlight. On the morning of the eclipse it was raining so we drove five hours SW along the path until finding blue skies in Greensboro, NC. As annularity neared the town became dark and surrealistic; darkness during the day with a clear deep blue sky. As the crescent of sunlight became very thin, it began breaking up as immense lunar mountains pierced the annulus. Suddenly the entire dark circular outline of the moon could be viewed against the sun. The distant lunar mountains seemed to tower overhead. The ring lasted about ten seconds before it ended.

The next total eclipse will be on November 22. If you cannot travel to Indonesia to see it, the next total eclipse visible from the eastern U.S. will be August 21, 2017.

Next Meeting Scheduled For July

Our next club meeting will be held at my home, 3481 Salem Bottom Rd., Westminster, 7:30 p.m. on July 7. The house is about 7 miles South of Westminster. If you're not sure how to get here, the phone number is 848-6384.

There will be two parts to the meeting. The first part will be a business meeting and we will make important decisions. Following the business meeting it should be dark enough to do some observing. Each activity is discussed below.

Club Business Meeting

July will feature a club business meeting. Although the purpose of our society is to have fun and enjoy astronomy, organizing must be performed so bring your ideas. The business meeting will be held in conjunction with the regular July meeting.

What we need most [besides members] is a location for holding monthly meetings. Anyone's help in finding a place is appreciated.

Heavens Follow Business

Even though the moon will be past first quarter, at least four planets are visible: Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus (the moon may prohibit observing Neptune).

The summer is a good time to get acquainted with the galaxy we call home, the Milky Way. Following the blessed relief of the setting sun on these warm nights, we are face to face with the center of the galaxy. An abundance of objects may be observed in small telescopes or binoculars. These include varieties of star clusters and softly glowing clouds of dust and gas -- the nebulae. The vast "star clouds" of our galaxy are best viewed with the naked eye because they are so large. They obscure the center of the galaxy which thus cannot be viewed visually. Some astronomers believe that a supermassive black hole lurks in the heart of the Milky Way.

Those of you with telescopes or binoculars are encouraged to bring them. Should it be cloudy, the meeting will be postponed and rescheduled. If you have any doubt, call before coming.

Comet Halley Information

In response to a request made at the meeting, here are some sources for information about Halley's Comet:

"The Comet Is Coming!", Nigel Calder, Viking Press, 1980"

- This book is in the Carroll County Library and is a good historical account of the comet with many illustrations.

"The Comet Halley Handbook", Jet Propulsion Laboratory

- This detailed observing handbook may be obtained free by writing: Comet Halley Handbook, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 4800 Oak Grove Drive, Pasadena, CA 91109

Future issues of the journals **Astronomy** and **Sky & Telescope** will carry increasing coverage in the future. The latter is on the rack at the public library.

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