



The Mason-Dixon Astronomer

Westminster Astronomical Society of Maryland

November 1986, Vol. 3 No. 11



Nature of Comets at November Meeting

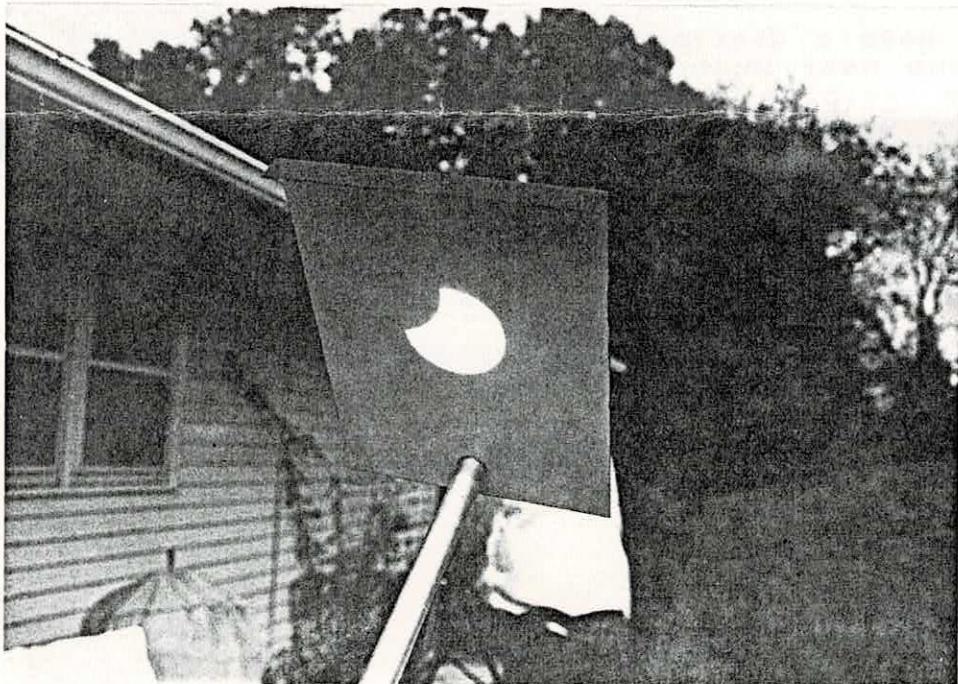
The Westminster Astronomical Society is pleased to have as guest lecturer at the November 19 meeting, Dr. Michael F. A'Hearn, Director of the Astronomy Program of the University of Maryland. The topic of November's lecture is "Chemical Abundances and the Origin of Comets."

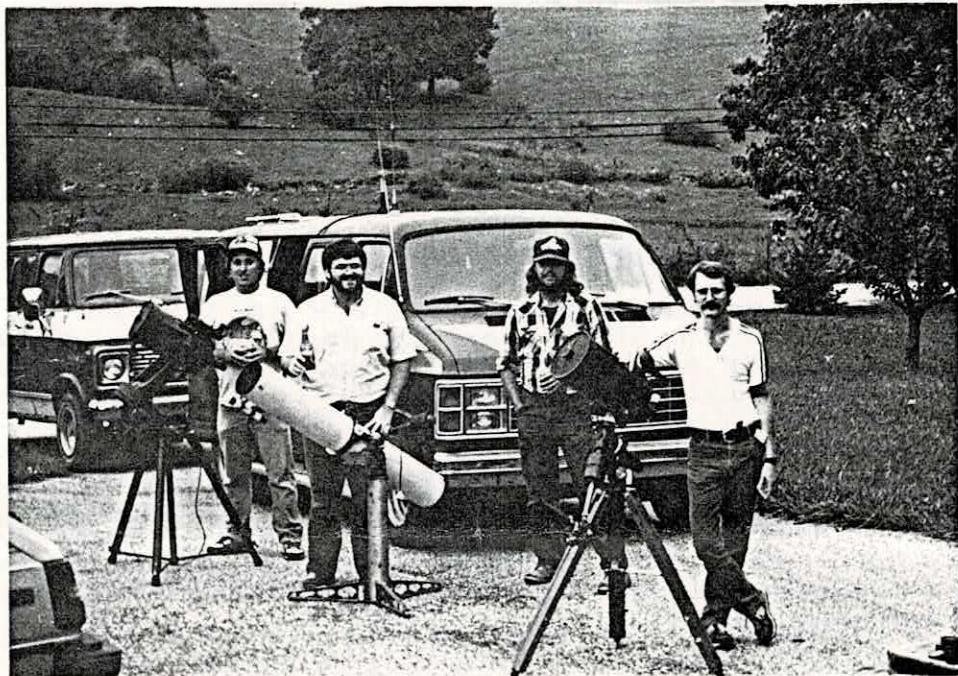
Dr. A'Hearn is a member of the exclusive Discipline Specialist Team of the International Halley Watch (IHW). He is Discipline Specialist for Photometry and Polarimetry. Dr. A'Hearn is the second IHW Discipline Specialist to address WAS. Dr. John C. Brandt, Large Scale Phenomena specialist, spoke at the February meeting.

Recently Dr. A'Hearn was honored by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) when asteroid (3192)A'Hearn was named after him. The official announcement states that Dr. A'Hearn is a "prominent student of cometary physics...and has made many other important contributions to our current understanding of comets."

Dr. A'Hearn received his B.S. in physics from Boston College and a Ph.D. in Astronomy from the University of Wisconsin. He is Chairman of the Working Group on Cometary Filters, IAU Commission 15.

The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m., November 19, in Room 111 Lewis Hall of Science, on the campus of Western Maryland College, in Westminster. Members are invited to attend dinner with Dr. A'Hearn as our guest at 6:00 at Fan's Chinese Restaurant, 59 W. Main St.





Vans were a common sight at the October 3 solar eclipse party at Curt Roelle's. From left to right, Steve Rice, Curt, Andrew Demario Jr., and Charley Mantel. PREVIOUS PAGE: The image of the partially eclipsed sun is projected by a telescope brought by Blaine Roelke. Photos by Dennis Mishler.

President's Message

Poor weather this month prohibited all three star parties this month from occurring. In fact since new moon, it has been cloudy every night that I've set my alarm clock to get up, and it's been set almost each night for 4:30 a.m. to get a farewell look at Comet Halley. I will try again in the morning.

We have a distinguished speaker this month and I hope you will come hear Dr. A'Hearn. For those of you that have not attended the club dinner before a meeting, you have been missing some very good opportunities to meet professional astronomers in a relaxed informal atmosphere. All you need to do is bring along a little money to cover the cost of your own meal and cocktails.

Those of you who want to get Astronomy magazine from the club should have already sent your order to Joe Pekala. If not call him now and ask him what you can do to get your order in.

Now that full moon is approaching, the skies are sure to clear. Don't forget the star party at Key Observatory on December 5.

Curt Roelle

Ottwell Calendar Orders

Blaine Roelke announced at the October meeting that he will take care of ordering the 1987 Guy Ottwell Calendars. The Ottwell calendar has a good reputation and is available to us at a discount because we are sending multiple orders. For more information or to place an order, call Blaine Roelke at 756-2886.

Mike Potter In The News

This month's issue of Sky and Telescope magazine includes a summary of the 1986 Astrocon convention entitled "Harboring Dreams in Baltimore", by Stephen J. O'Meara. Exclusive details were given about the announcement by Dr. Riccardo Giacconi, Director of the Space Telescope Science Institute, that amateur astronomers will share time on the Space Telescope. Amateur proposals are reviewed by the Amateur Astronomers Working Group (AAWG), made up of representatives from seven amateur astronomical organizations. WAS member Mike Potter, it was explained in the article, will serve as Dr. Giacconi's Liaison. Mike Potter was also convention Chairman.

A videotape of the press conference in which the guest amateur observing program was announced was viewed at the September meeting.

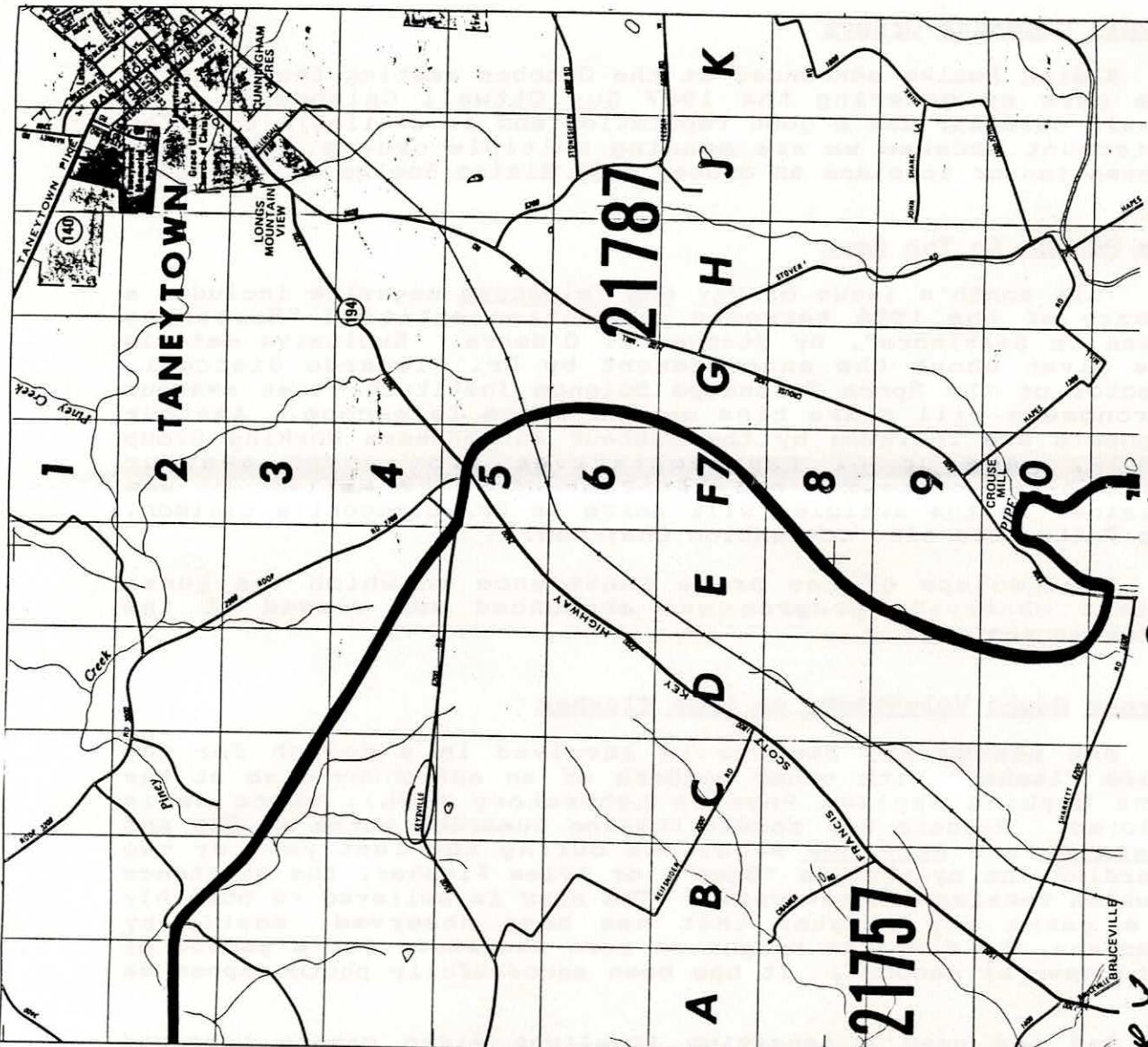
Sterner Seeks Volunteers to Spot Flasher

WAS member Ray Sterner is involved in a search for the "Aries Flasher" with other members of an astronomy club at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL), where he is employed. Readers may recall reading numerous notes in Sky and Telescope and Astronomer magazines during the last year or two regarding the mysterious "Ogre", or Aries Flasher, the existence of which remains controversial. The star is believed to possibly be a gamma ray burster that has been observed, mostly by Canadians, to flare as bright as zero magnitude for a period of up to several seconds. It has been successfully photographed as well.

Ray has used a sensitive low-light video camera borrowed from APL to "stare" at the region of sky occupied by the flasher. Ray needs volunteers with video cassette players to "observe" the tapes in the privacy of their own home, in the hopes that a burst may have been recorded. This is a good cloudy night observing project, and one that could have significant scientific value. If you are interested, contact Ray at 795-6443 for more information. He plans to present some of his low-light results at one of the 1987 season meetings.

Star Party December 5

The December Star Party shall be at Key Observatory, in Keymar on the night of Friday, December 5. At 5:37 a.m. when astronomical twilight begins, Halley's Comet should be at an altitude of 33 degrees. At this altitude the 17.5 homebuilt telescope housed there should be able to observe it. Halley is about 1.5 magnitudes brighter than predicted, hanging around magnitude 11.5.



KEY OBSERVATORY

Blaine Roelke home
6700 Keysville Rd
Keymar, MD 21757
ph: 756-2886

Event: December Star Party
Date: Friday December 5 1986

Date: Friday, December 5, 1986

Time: 6:00 p.m.

The observatory is on Blaine Roelke's property, at 6700 Keysville Road, Keymar (756-2886). A map is included in this issue.

The Eagle Eye Observer

Old Mother Nature has done it again: Left us with few clear skies. But old Mother Earth is very happy all the rain we have received. That's the way it goes. Maybe in a few weeks the sky will clear and we can get down to some real observing again.

Last month I observed M27, the Dumbbell Nebula in my 8 inch telescope. It looked very much like an apple core with purples, blues, and reds emanating from within its core. M27 is located in the small constellation Vulpecula and is the brightest planetary nebula in the northern sky at magnitude 7.6. By the way, it also looks like a dumbbell used in weight lifting, which is how it got its name. A faint star near the center of the glowing mass is the cause for the large gaseous shell. The star is very hot and probably collapsing, causing gases to expand forming the nebula's characteristic shape.

Mars and Jupiter are getting close to conjunction. On December 19 at 1:46 a.m. EST they will only be 31 arcminutes (about 1/2 degree) apart. Keep watching Mars as it closes in on Jupiter -- this should be a very exciting event.

As of this writing I have not heard or seen much of Comet Wilson although a new comet has recently been discovered. Comet Sorrels is 12th magnitude and located near the Hyades star cluster in Taurus. This is remarkable because I was looking for comets in that area of the sky last month! Oh well, maybe someday I'll find "Comet Rice". Good luck, good observing, clear skies, and Happy Thanksgiving. (Steve Rice, Observing Chairman)

Astronomical League News

The Astronomical League is divided on a regional basis. The Westminster Astronomical Society is a member of the Middle East Region (MERAL). Other societies in our region include ten from Pennsylvania, two from New Jersey, one representing Delaware, three from Virginia, and six from Maryland, including WAS. A complete list is available.

The last meeting of MERAL was held on August 9, during the A.L. Convention held in Baltimore. Three issues were discussed. The first dealt with the host society for the 1987 Regional Convention. No decision was made. The next item discussed was changes in MERAL's Bylaws regarding regional conventions. A full text of the Bylaw revisions is available. The third item was the "Financial Report of MERAL From 1983 To Present." The bottom line is that the MERAL treasury has risen from \$344.68 to \$459.39 during that time. (Frank Filemyr -- A.L. Correspondent, ALCOR)

What You Missed at the October Meeting

It was hoped that members would bring photos of solar eclipses to the meeting, which they did. Curt Roelle showed photographs and slides from three types of eclipses: The total eclipse of February 26, 1979 viewed from North Dakota, the

annular eclipse of May 30, 1984 viewed from North Carolina, and the partial eclipse of October 3 of this year viewed from his back yard. Dennis Mishler surprised everyone by pulling out a movie projector and showing the film he made at the WAS eclipse party. It included time-lapse photography of the eclipse, as well as the antics and drinking habits of persons who may prefer not to be mentioned.

Blaine Roelke gave a pep talk exhorting members to join other societies in the support of astronomy, such as the L-5 and Planetary Societies. He also volunteered to handle ordering of the 1987 Ottwell Astronomy Calendars.

WAS CALENDAR

November 19 6:00 p.m. Dinner with Speaker -- Fan's Restaurant

19 7:30 p.m. WAS meeting -- Rm. 111 Lewis Hall, WMC

December 05 dusk Star Party -- Key Observatory, Keymar

Westminster Astronomical Society

3481 Salem Bottom Road
Westminster, Maryland 21157



Curt & Cheryl Roelle F-11/86
3481 Salem Bottom Road
Westminster, MD 21157