

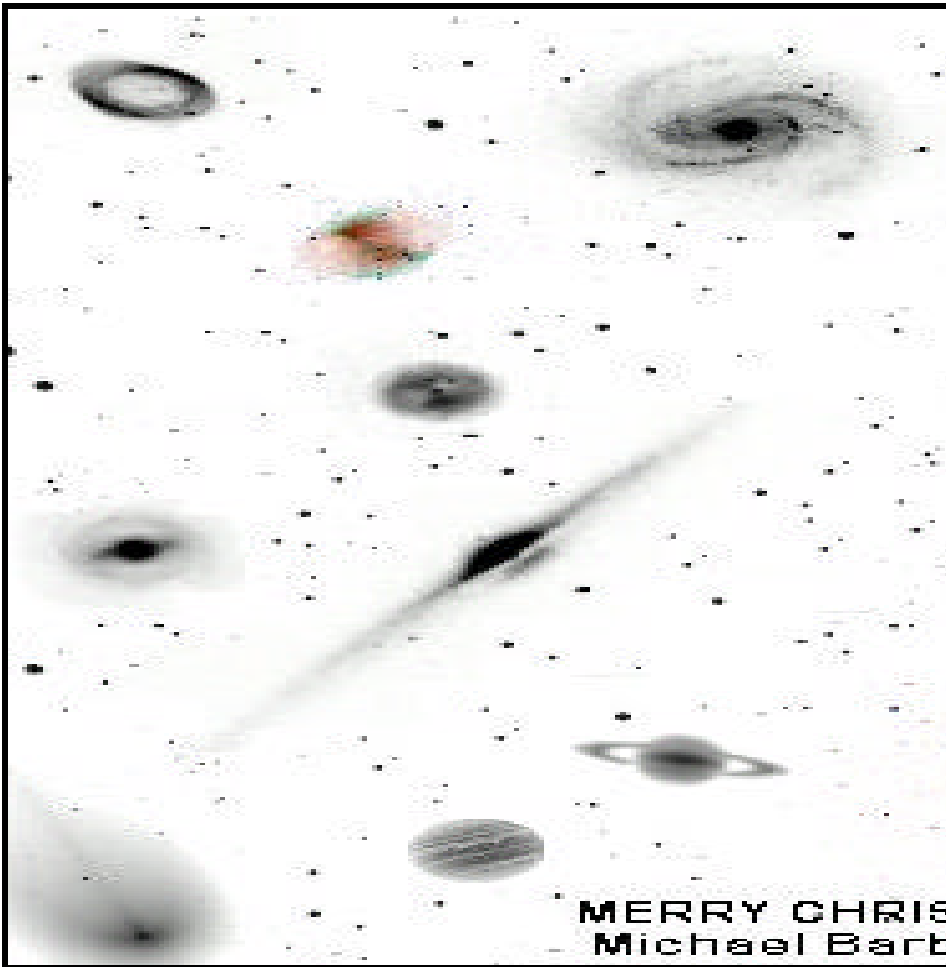
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The American Astronomer

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS

Volume 1, No. 1

December 1996



Images from a New Perspective

A Christmas mosaic of deep sky objects, you can download this image from AAAA's Stargate BBS. Stargate BBS now has a new look. It's a cleaner, more colorful look, with many new features. The software has just been upgraded to Wildcat V4.2 from V3.9, and it makes a nice difference. To read about all the new changes and features on the new software and how to use them, and how to use Stargate BBS in general, download the file WCUSER.ZIP. See the information box on page 2 for directions on how to access STARGATE BBS

1997 Texas Star Party

Moves to Utopia!

TSP is moving to a new, more southerly site near Rio Frio, Texas - west of San Antonio and just 15 miles from UTOPIA, Texas. Due to a significant increase of costs at Prude Ranch, we have arranged for Alto Frio Baptist Encampment. At the new location just 40 miles north of Uvalde, TSP will be held during the week of May 4-11, 1997.

You will love the new site! There should be little need to stay "off-site", since we will have more living space, lower prices, larger facilities, and LOW-DUST conditions! In 1997, TSP will truly be an astronomical Utopia!

The Texas Star Party will have a new look, but will still feature what you have come to expect from TSP - PITCH DARK SKIES, our famous "dark-out," daytime paper sessions, evening guest speakers, vendor displays, ham radio, weather satellite, swap meet, Observing programs/pins, and of course, the "Great Texas Giveaway"!

Most important are the naked-eye "mag 7.2" (dark!) skies and low light pollution. There is plenty of living space at VERY REASONABLE prices. Accommodations include camping, full-hookup RV, 500 lower bunkbeds, 14 family cabins with kitchen, and 52 private rooms, 42 of which are motel-like. Our 90 acre site is located on a 3/4 mile stretch of river, with plenty of swimming and canoeing available. Other facilities include a swimming pool, meeting hall, recreation room, and a dining room that seats 950.

Scenic views are abundant in this Texas Hill Country area, with access to nearby horseback riding, river trips, the headwaters of the Guadalupe River, and the Del Rio/Ciudad Acuna, Mexico, area. San Antonio and its many attractions, including a major airport, is just 2 hours away.

Call 1-210-232-5271 at 9 AM CST on February 8th for TSP advance reservations. Watch for our flyer in January containing a TSP Registration form, and which will list the Alto Frio Baptist Encampment camping and lodging rates.

The TSP Internet Home Page has the latest and most complete news: <http://www.metronet.com/~tsp/>

To get on the TSP mailing list, send e-mail to "TSP Registrar" at KASTRO@aol.com, or write: TSP Registrar, 1326 Mistywood, Allen TX 75002



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Web Page <http://www.icstars.com/aaaa>

Issued quarterly in December, March, June and September by The American Association of Amateur Astronomers as a service to its members.

All members are encouraged to submit articles and photographs for publication. Send all materials for publication to the Editor at the address below.

The opinions expressed by contributors to the AMERICAN ASTRONOMER do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the AAAA or the Editor. Articles representing supporting or opposing views will be published promptly after receipt.

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A Member Society of
The Astronomical League

President's Letter

As President of the American Association of Amateur Astronomers, I would like to take this time to welcome you, our members, to the "Quad-A," and to share with you the first issue of our new newsletter, the *American Astronomer*. We hope that you find a home here for your interest in amateur astronomy. Our goal is to provide you with access to some of the best observing programs in the world, and to make available to you a forum to share your interest in astronomy with others. The programs sponsored by the Astronomical League offer rich and rewarding experiences in areas ranging from binocular deep sky observing to telescope deep sky observing, and from double star observing to lunar, solar, and meteor observing. Upon completion of each program, your efforts will be rewarded with a certificate and a lovely lapel pin that you can wear with pride.

The Astronomical League is constantly adding new observing programs to its agenda. In February, I will announce for the League the formation of a new club for CCD imaging. The purpose of this new club will be to address the needs of the higher technology being used in amateur astronomy today through CCD imaging. This program will allow participants to image 100 of the Arp Peculiar Galaxies. Upon completion of the program, a nice certificate will be awarded, and the images archived for future use by amateurs and professionals who might require them. Also, for those of you who are locked into observing from our heavily light polluted cities, I am working on a new club called the Urban Club. This program will identify 100 deep sky objects observable from those urban areas suffering from excess light. The purpose of this club would be to help bring astronomy back to the backyard. And if that isn't enough, next July at ALCON, we should be proposing a new club for observing the solar system. Like the Lunar and Urban clubs, this club will help bring astronomy back to the big cities.

As you can see, we have many exciting programs available for both the dark sky and light polluted sky observer, with several new and interesting programs coming on board. Stay tuned, and you will be the first to hear about them. Also, if you have any thoughts or ideas about the creation of a new observing program, please do not hesitate to contact me, and I will be glad to discuss your ideas with you. And be sure to send your letters, articles and astrophotos to newsletter editor Ed Flaspoepler for inclusion in the next issue of the *American Astronomer*.

Until next time, clear, dry skies and bloodshot eyes.

John Wagoner, President
American Association of Amateur Astronomers

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The AAAA's STARGATE BBS

214-578-7618
300, 1200, 2400 Baud
and up to 14,400 Baud

Robert Reeves of San Antonio, TX is one of the oldest and most famous astrophotographers in the Southwest. His claim to fame is beautiful black and white prints made with an eight-inch Schmidt camera. Robert is known for photographing the unusual and out of the ordinary, as well as some of the more commonplace celestial objects, and better work can be found nowhere. Robert was one of the pioneers that inspired many of the current crop of young astrophotographers.

Robert has donated some files to Stargate BBS. These cover much of his best work and can be acquired by downloading the files REEVES01.JPG through REEVES13.JPG. These are a nice addition to anyone's collection of images.

Focus on the Membership

Meet AAAA Member Lesya Andree

I want to introduce you to Lesya Andree, a resident of Oak Park, IL, a suburb of Chicago. Lesya lives with her husband of many years, and has three step-children, all grown and out of the house. This leaves her with lots of time to spend with her husband and do astronomy.

Lesya is a Registered Nurse in the Intensive Care Ward at The University of Illinois Hospital in Chicago, and guess what? This is where they film the hit television series *ER*. Lesya says that she has seen Nurse Hathaway roaming the halls, and her friends have seen George Clooney. The holidays are a particularly bad time for hospitals, so she has to put her hobby on hold until after the first of the year.

Lesya first got interested in astronomy as a child when someone gave her a copy of *The Big Picture Book of Astronomy*. The Horsehead Nebula was her favorite picture in the book. Like most of us, as she grew older, got an education, and started a career, astronomy was put on a back burner. But the flame was re-kindled when Halley's Comet came back in 1984-1986, and she has been an active participant ever since. When, as a child, she first got into the hobby, she read *Sky & Telescope* magazine and couldn't understand it. Now, as an adult, she has no problem with it.

Lesya currently owns a wonderful 15-inch f/5 Tectron telescope, which is

her favorite observing instrument, a 6-inch f/10 Dobsonian scope which she uses to observe with in her backyard in light-polluted Chicago, and a pair of 8X56mm Celestron binoculars. With these binoculars, she was able to acquire the Astronomical League's Binocular Messier Certificate and pin.

Lesya has observed all of the Messier objects with a telescope, but is waiting until she can DRAW each of the objects, as well as observe them, before she turns in her observations for the League's telescopic Messier Club Certificate. Finally, she has completed almost all of the observations needed for the Astronomical League's Herschel 400 Club. She only has a few objects left to go, and plans to finish them up this spring. As anyone can plainly see, Lesya keeps very busy working on her various observing programs.

So where does one go to escape the light pollution of a metropolitan area of twelve million people like Chicago when one wants to get some serious observing done? Lesya and her husband own a camper which they take to a lake about 100 miles due west of Chicago. Lesya says that the light pollution is minimal there and she can take in some really good dark skies. She enjoys observing everything, but at first had difficulty with planetaries because they were so hard to find. But now, if you were to press her, she will admit that bright nebulae are her favorite objects. Lesya hopes to be at the 1997 Texas Star Party, so if you see her there, please stop and say hello.



Spotlight on Observing Programs

In this issue I would like to highlight the Astronomical League's Binocular Messier Club. What a great way to start out in astronomy, or if you are an experienced observer, a new way of looking at the night sky. Binoculars allow you to stand back and look at the objects at a distance. You not only get to see the object, but the area around the object as well. This gives you a whole new perspective on things. Binocular astronomy allows you to observe a variety of objects in the heavens including galaxies, open clusters, globular clusters, nebula, and planetaries.

The purpose of the Binocular Messier Club is to observe just 50 of the 110 available Messier objects. You may choose any of the 110 Messier objects to observe, but guidelines are available to help you choose the best ones. Any pair of binoculars may be used, but those with objectives between 35mm and 80mm are recommended. This nice thing about this club is that it doesn't cost much to participate in it, and it makes getting into astronomy very inexpensive. An adequate pair of 7x35mm binoculars cost between \$30.00 and \$40.00, while a decent pair of 7x50mm or 10x50mm binoculars can be had for \$75.00 to \$100.00. Another benefit of binocular astronomy is that binoculars are very portable. It takes nothing to put them on the front seat of the car and drive out into the country where the skies are darker. And if you are flying to visit someone who happens to have darker skies, just include them in your luggage.

By participating in this club, you will find that binocular astronomy can be very rewarding. Also, at the completion of the program, you will receive a nice certificate and pin. For full details on the club and a list of the 110 Messier objects, send a business sized SASE to: *John Wagoner, AL Binocular Co-ordinator, 1409 Sequoia, Plano, Tx. 75023*. I hope to see the names of AAAA members on future certificates.

I had to stop driving my car for a while ... the tires got dizzy.

Steven Wright

Newbie News

If you are a newcomer to the hobby of astronomy, and have questions about equipment, eyepieces, telescopes, or astronomy in general, let us know and we will try to answer your questions. Send or e-mail your questions to Newbie News, AAAA, 3131 Custer Road, Suite 175/175, Plano, TX 75075, or send your e-mail to aaaa@corvus.com.

M42 - The Great Nebula in Orion

One of the most easily recognized constellations, Orion lies near to the Milky Way, and thus contains many open clusters and some of the best nebulae in the heavens. Led by the bright stars Betelgeuse and Rigel, this constellation holds many fine telescopic and binocular objects, along with some of the most photographed regions of the sky. Its arrival in the night sky signals the beginning of the winter observing season, with its crisp, clear nights and fine "seeing". So bundle up, make some coffee or hot chocolate, and get out under the stars for some of the finest observing of the year!

M-42 The Great Nebula. One of the finest sights in the sky, this nebula is easily visible to the naked eye as the "fuzzy" star in the middle of Orion's sword. It appears distinctly nebulous in binoculars or finder scopes, and shows an amazing amount of detail through the telescope. It is fully a degree in extent, with a wealth of fine curling wisps of nebulosity curving out from the brightest region surrounding the four relatively bright stars known as the Trapezium. On good nights with low power, I have even been able to see colors in this object. The region around the Trapezium appears as a cold steel blue color, while the wispy regions further away can appear as a soft ruddy pink. Slightly separated from the main nebulosity, is M-43. This nebula is seen as a comma shaped cloud surrounding an eighth magnitude star just north of the Great Nebula. The more time you spend in this area, the more fine detail you can see.

*Article by Rick Raasch
Photo by Ed Flaspoebler*



Members of the American Association of Amateur Astronomers enjoy all benefits of membership in the Astronomical League.



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