

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, July 11, 2012, Meeting

In attendance:

- Bart & Linda Billard
- David Buckwalter
- Scott & Debbie Busby
- George Clarke
- Joe Fordham
- Rob Friedel
- Glenn Holliday
- Jerry Hubbell
- John King
- Scott Lansdale*
- David Marlow
- Mike Masters
- Tim Plunkett

*Returning member

President Jerry Hubbell began the meeting at 7:00 p.m. after introductions. Fourteen members and one visitor were present.

Program

Scott Busby presented “The Home Observatory,” sharing his experience in designing and building a backyard observatory. Some of the reasons for building a home observatory he talked about were protection provided from wind (making observing feel warmer), shielding from light pollution, and the time-saving advantages of a permanent setup (the time it takes to get equipment out and set it up adds up when you don’t have a permanent setup). He also noted it can be a place to get away for some solitude, if you need a way to power down from all the day’s events. Related to the question of why build an observatory is the decision of whether to choose a dome or roll-off roof design. Domes offer more protection from dew, winds, and light pollution, but they limit the view of the sky and do not provide a lot of work space. The roll-off design provides a full view of the sky and more work space. There is a better chance to see approaching clouds, but dew can be a problem, and the observer is more exposed to the wind. The roll-off roof observatory looks more like a shed, which can help satisfy a homeowners’ association. It is also possible to add a warm room to get some of the protection offered by dome observatories, and combination designs exist.

Scott then illustrated the process of designing and building an observatory with pictures he took of his own observatory construction, which was nearly complete at the time of the meeting. He has posted pictures in the Yahoo [rac_group](#) photo album section, including the final completion.

Old Business

- Treasurer’s Report—Tim Plunkett presented the report for June. Four members paid Club dues, and another member paid dues to add Astronomical League membership to his Club membership. There were no expenditures during the month. Paid membership for 2012 has reached 32, with 5 members having paid dues for next year or beyond. John King asked whether the Club had any affiliation with school astronomy clubs and whether recent interest in promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education might provide an opportunity. It was noted the Club offers a student membership rate.
- Star Parties, Events, and Meetings—Weather was favorable for the primary star party on June 16. Participants reported that about 8 members and 8 visitors attended. The Belmont event the next week was attempted, but the conditions did not work out. Scott Busby reported he, Bart Billard, and Rob Friedel tried observing for a while, but retired early because of dew and clouds. It was mentioned that a forecast spread between temperature and dew point of less than 5 degrees is an indication that dew is likely to be a problem unless it is windy. The [Intellicast](#) weather forecast has the information, and the local version is linked on the Club website.

- Status of Club Loaner Equipment—The status is the same as last month (Matt has two telescopes out, Jerry has the PST, and Mike has the camera). Glenn is still trying to get a measurement of the shaft for the slow-motion control for the GEM telescope checked out to Matt. He also asked about the red bicycle lights that were tried at Caledon recently, wondering how well they worked. Although there were some problems with loose batteries (tape helps) most comments were that they were convenient, fun to use, and could be mounted a lot of ways with the magnetic feature.
- Star Party and Outreach Requests—Myron Wasiuta's outreach arranged with Ann McDuffie of the Fauquier County Library was discussed. Volunteers were encouraged to contact Myron. The dates listed were July 30 at Marshall Public Library, July 31 at Bealeton, and August 1 at Warrenton. Mike discussed the outreach for Northumberland Preservation, Inc., and concluded he had heard from enough volunteers to confirm it. More volunteers would be welcome because the turnout for the event should be high. The date set is November 10. There were no new details on the invitation from Margo Kerns for a vendor to do a clinic at the Marriott Ranch in September
- University of Mary Washington (UMW) Philharmonic Outreach—Jerry reported the results of further discussions with Kevin Bartram. Jerry would give a talk before the performance of "The Planets," and Club members will have an exhibit of equipment outside the auditorium. All that was desired during the performance was a few simple static images of the planets. Kevin Bartram was not looking for video and did not want something that would distract from the performance. Jerry said the date of the performance is October 20, which is the same night as the Lake Anna star party, so that the Club would need enough volunteers to cover both. He reported that Glenn Holiday, David Abbou, and Bart and Linda Billard were willing to support the UMW event. It was noted that four different telescope types could be represented with these volunteers and Jerry. Jerry suggested his talk could cover the differences in what was known about each of the planets at the time of the composition of "The Planets" and now.
- RAClub.org Website and Rac_group Status—Mike discussed an update of the raclub.org site to clear up confusion about the designation of Belmont star parties. In past years when we had two successive Saturday dates at Caledon, the dates were primary and backup star parties, but the backup designation did not really apply to the Belmont dates. Mike said he had updated the schedules to indicate public/private instead of primary/backup for the months where a Belmont event followed a Caledon star party. Scott talked about a beta-version Yahoo application that was on the rac_group site and was recently discontinued by Yahoo. He said it affected the equipment for sale, dark sky location map, and membership contact information areas of the site.

News/New Business

- Club Newsletter—Jerry said he had appointed a committee to try producing a quarterly Club newsletter and a draft of the first issue was now ready. He introduced Linda Billard as the editor. Linda passed around a copy of the draft and described the layout and contents. It included a welcome by the Club President, a list of new members, some feature articles, a couple of equipment tip pieces, summaries of recent presentations at the Club meetings, and stories on recent and upcoming events. One article featured the recent outreach at Pratt Park for the transit of Venus.
- Star Party Status—No new requests were received since the last meeting. The next Caledon star party date is July 14. The Belmont members-only date is July 21. A Westmoreland outreach event is scheduled for July 28.
- Glenn asked whether an update for the Club listing that Company 7 had on its website had been submitted. Bart had drafted an update and sent it to the Club officers for comment, but still needed to submit it.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is the Club picnic to be held 3 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 11, 2012, at the Caledon Picnic pavilion.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary