

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

## Minutes, May 15, 2013, Meeting

In attendance:

- Benjamin Ashley
- Terry Barker
- Bart & Linda Billard
- Don Clark
- George Clarke
- Joe Fordham
- Jerry Hubbell
- Scott Lansdale
- Melvin McDaniel
- Tim Plunkett
- John Ulrich\*

\*new member

President Jerry Hubbell began the meeting shortly after 7:00 p.m. Twelve members were present.

## Program

Jerry Hubbell began our second open forum on new astronomy gear and what members have been doing lately. He showed us a pair of 15x70 Oberwerk binoculars, which he said are about the limit for handheld stargazing. Terry said he also got a pair at a NEAF conference 5 years ago for \$90. He said this year he bought a fixture made of 1/2-inch gas pipe for holding binoculars while you sit and observe. Linda found the picture of it from the NEAF article in the latest newsletter and got it on screen for members to see.

Jerry also showed a new finder that is a smaller variation on a Telrad. It has options for three different lighted pointers. He passed around two new books: *Sketching the Moon* by Richard Handy et al., and *Atlas of the Moon* by Charles Wood and Maurice Collins. The latter uses high-resolution images from the Lunar Orbiter, and Jerry likes to check his images against the corresponding Lunar Orbiter images.

Terry also showed us an Ottewell astronomical calendar that was available at NEAF at a good discount (it is also available from Amazon), some 3D postcards, a red screen for smartphones, some magazine samples, and two books he picked up at NEAF. Ben Ashley talked about upgrading equipment to get into astronomical imaging. He now has an Explore Scientific 127-mm apochromatic triplet refractor on an Atlas mount and a Kodak chip. Ben has had some success purchasing used equipment in like-new condition. He said he has found learning to image is proving to be a long journey. For example, getting proper focus has been difficult. One lesson recently learned is to set a small region of interest on one star so that the chip only reads out a small number of pixels and provides him more rapid response to adjustments. Ben also showed a box for marine batteries from an automotive store that he modified with a fuse, a set of cigarette lighter outlets, and wires with circular lugs to screw onto the battery terminals. Scott Lansdale said he uses something similar to provide power for his laptop when he takes his VLF antenna with him to events like star parties.

Melvin McDaniel talked about graduating from using binoculars to trying out a telescope. He borrowed the club's 6-inch Orion equatorial mount telescope recently. Melvin said he was starting to learn to do polar alignment, at times well enough to only need to adjust the right ascension axis to track what he was viewing. He has started using a planisphere and the book *Night Sky* for finding things and is starting to learn to find deep space objects. We talked some about using the setting circles. It seemed like the need to use the slow motion control to move about once aligned makes setting circles more useful when moving among a group of objects in one limited part of the sky.

Joe Fordham mentioned his Garrett binoculars and a pair of recently acquired Fujinon 16x170 binoculars. He noted they Fujinon binoculars do not focus at all close, to the point where they are no good for seeing the back yard. For the family and viewing the birdfeeder, he also got a pair of Nikon Action Extreme binoculars. Joe found for really close focusing, the 6x21 Pentax Papilio binoculars are the ultimate. They focus as close as 15 inches. He also went to NEAF and won a hat (not the telescope) as a raffle prize.

Joe also said he bought a Televue Dioptrix eyepiece attachment for his astigmatism prescription. It is an improvement over wearing glasses while looking through the eyepiece, but it is not as easy to change eyepieces with it.

George Clarke said he finally got his Skypod up. The pier took quite a while. He said the combination of Daylight Savings Time and having grandkids he has to get up in the morning for school has limited his viewing activities. Linda and Bart talked about trying out some imaging with the club StarShoot Solar System camera. So far they have tried practicing with it inside, then some imaging of the Sun and Moon. Clouds have twice caused complications with the attempts to get the Sun. Bart said they still have to learn more about processing the images. Another problem imaging the Sun is glare. George said he made a disk of Styrofoam to go around the front end of his telescope as a Sun shade.

## Old Business

- **Treasurer's Report**—Tim Plunkett said he had only the purchase of the projector to report for last month. There were no dues payments he was aware of—he asked anyone who might have paid dues to let him know. Jerry commented that the balance was still enough for an equipment purchase and asked members to consider possibilities to suggest. One suggestion was handouts. Linda already had printed copies of the club brochure for the Friday outreach. Terry suggested making copies of one of the sky maps one can download as a handout: The white space could be used to provide contact information for the club. Another suggestion was T-shirts to wear at outreach events (Comet ISON or the National Mall event were examples), hand out to new members, or sell at events. Joe suggested the club could get a go-to Dobsonian of around 14 inches aperture (someone said not so big you need a ladder) as an attraction for star parties and outreach events. Ben said some large Obsession Dobs are sold online for ridiculously low prices. Terry suggested a video eyepiece camera to put views on screen for visitors.
- **Status of Club Loaner Equipment**—Ben had no changes to report for the status of loaner equipment.
- **Star Parties, Events, and Meetings**—Bart and Linda were the only ones to go to Caledon for the May star party attempt. The forecast changed for the worse about the time they were leaving the house, and a call from Melvin let them know after they were on the way. Bart and Linda went early to try to use the club webcam with the NexStar, which has a solar filter, on the Sun. They wound up getting some experience setting up for imaging the Sun before clouds obscured it, and they also enjoyed the picnic supper they took with them. Sammy and his wife stopped to talk on their way into town and were thus aware Linda and Bart were likely to give up after eating.

Jerry gave a talk about his book to the Richmond Astronomical Society in April and sold four books. The next outreach date was May 17 at Post Oak Middle School. The next Caledon dates were June 1 and June 29. The June club meeting at Maury School is June 19. The Northumberland Preservation, Inc. outreach is tentatively set for November 19. Ben said he would like to encourage more groups asking for outreach events to come to Caledon as various Scout groups have done. Jerry told us of an invitation to the club to participate in the Astronomy Festival on the National Mall on June 14 (June 15 backup). The event has had 4,000 to 5,000 people come in past years. Jerry said he and Linda and Bart planned to go and other members were welcome. Interested members are asked to email him. He mentioned the need to get the Personal Solar Telescope from Glenn to use at the event.
- **Communications Committee Report**—Terry said that the template had been selected and he had started work on the implementation in WordPress. The prototype can be viewed at [teebark.com/rac](http://teebark.com/rac). He showed the image of the template to members. One thing to think about was the wide format of the image of the month example. It was not clear cropping would be possible for all images to match the format. Scott suggested a rotating set of images with one highlighted and one on each side as thumbnails. Jerry and Terry talked about the timeline for getting a basic structure going toward fall, with some decisions pending for how much content to include, and having it ready to go up by the end of the year. Linda concurred with that goal. The template chosen is supposed to be “responsive” (makes it look good on other platforms such as smart phones), and Terry has confirmed it seems to be working. Scott was not present to report on the Yahoo Group status. Jerry said he is doing minimal maintenance on the RAClub.org site. Linda would be the editor for the new site. Linda reported on the StarGazer newsletter status. The recent issue was the fourth newsletter released. Linda still wants people to suggest ideas—suggestions are sufficient (interest in writing the article is welcome but not

required). She suggested Joe should think about an article about binoculars. Similarly, members should think about things they are doing that we could let others know about. Linda said Bart is going to do a couple of short book reviews—other members could do book reviews, too. Jerry also asked members to keep in mind getting some group photos at events. They could accompany articles about the events.

## **News/New Business/Announcements**

- Upcoming Star Parties and Outreach Requests—Jerry mentioned the Astronomy Festival on the National Mall on June 14, which he discussed earlier in the evening. Scott said he remembered seeing something about the Washington Monument being scheduled to be lit up soon. Ben said Astronomy Day in the fall coincides with Observe the Moon Day; an old request from Wilderness Elementary asks us to do something for them on that date. We discussed the need to work out some details for a Comet ISON event: what direction we would be looking and an appropriate date and location. Should we try Pratt Park?
- Jerry announced that Astronomy FM would interview him on a May 22 show at 9:00 p.m. He said he would talk about his book and our club.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is on Wednesday, June 19, 2013, at the Heritage Center in Fredericksburg.