

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, November 18, 2015, Meeting

In attendance:

Bart & Linda Billard
George Clarke
Ron Henke
Glenn Holliday
Jerry Hubbell

Tim Plunkett
Ryan Rapoza
Bill Setzer
Tom Watson

The meeting began with pizza at about 7 p.m. Ten members were present. Ballots were passed out for the officer election.

Old Business

- Update on the Next Newsletter Status—Linda Billard said she was expecting articles from Tom Watson on meteorites, Jerry Hubbell on progress of the Mark Slade Observatory project, Bart Billard on occultation, Glenn Holliday on the Kenmore outreach event, and she was planning a couple of articles herself. Glenn said he had sent something out, but he and Linda were not certain a copy went to her. She asked him to resend it to her.
- Communications Committee Report—Glenn said he had no news to report.
- Treasurer's Report—Tim Plunkett reported dues payments by two new members last month. He recorded these as 2016 dues payments. One included Astronomical League dues and the other a donation. There were no expenditures last month. Ron Henke asked about the number of paid memberships (20) this year compared with previous years. Jerry commented that often about 25 percent of dues payments in any year represent new members, but many of them do not return as core members.
- Event Calendar and Caledon Schedule for 2016—Ron said he hesitates to schedule more than one event plus one meeting in a single month. Linda suggested that some events could justify two in 1 month.

Ron reported that John Bachman from Stratford Hall told him conflicts limit the choice of dates to October 6, with no rain date. He also told Ron they want us to do an event in 2017 with solar observations, followed by dinner at Stratford Hall, and then lunar observations after dinner. He said we should pick the date.

Ron told us that Dr. Lubowich was considering Saturday, the 11th, or Sunday, the 12th, of June for the National Mall event next year. There was also a possibility of choosing a July date. Jerry said he preferred June over July.

Ron said March is our first month next year with an outreach event scheduled, the Marine Corps Museum on the 12th. We have a Caledon star party scheduled for the 5th. The first Stafford Parks outreach is April 16, at Curtis Park. The second will be in September at Pratt Park. Ron noted he and his wife are scheduled to move to Arizona at the end of August.

Ron said he talked with Charlene from Northumberland Preservation, Inc. about us picking the date for next year's event. (This year's event was cancelled because of bad weather.) He learned availability of [facilities] dictates it has to be a spring or fall date. May seemed like a good possibility if it fits the definition of "spring." Glenn suggested the first week offers a crescent Moon that sets early enough for some deep sky. Jerry said the first quarter phase would make for good lunar observing on the 14th.

Ron changed the topic back to January and February, when we have planned to try some remote observing projects as the meeting programs. He showed us he had purchased a copy of Jerry and Linda's new book, written with Rich Williams of SSON, on the topic. He said he was reading what it had to say about what sort of pictures to schedule. For example, we could try to get "pretty pictures" or science data. We discussed ideas, including astrometry and light curves of asteroids, and light curves for variable stars or exoplanet transits.

- George Washington Foundation Outreach at Kenmore—Glenn said it went pretty well although he did not get the full 30 minutes he was led to expect for his presentation before the next group

was brought in. It was a pretty night. It turned out someone was outside to talk about and show constellations. Glenn thought they could have coordinated if they had known about each other in advance.

New Business and Astronomy News

- Mark Slade Observatory Report—Jerry gave an update on the progress of the observatory project. Mark Slade had planned to build an observatory, but passed away early this year. Mark's widow and Myron Wasiutta discussed what to do with the equipment Mark left to her, and they agreed that Myron should use it to build an observatory in Mark's memory. The goal is to have remote control access for RAC members and Myron's Culpepper astronomy group. The equipment Mark left includes a dome and 12-inch Meade telescope. Some additional needs are an adapter skirt to fit the dome onto the structure planned to house the telescope equipment, and Maxim DL observatory control software. Jerry showed drawings of the observatory design, including a warm-room addition planned for later.

Ron suggested that the club should contribute \$1,000 toward construction of the observatory. Jerry said we would need to have a committee to manage access to the telescope. He thought there could be some training involved for a member to get access to the telescope, including some hands-on training at the observatory.

Jerry made a motion for the club to contribute \$1,000 for observatory construction, and his motion was seconded by Tom Watson. The motion passed on a show of hands.

Ron also asked whether the club would need to raise its dues. There was discussion with opinions that dues had remained the same a very long time ("forever") and it was about time to raise them. Some suggested \$20, and \$25 was also suggested. George Clarke made a motion to raise the dues to \$20 for now and revisit the question of whether it needs to be any more next year. Tim observed that \$20 was a convenient amount to collect at club meetings. Linda seconded the motion. Jerry offered the amendment that only the \$5 increment would be allocated toward the observatory, and George agreed. The motion passed on a show of hands.

Jerry continued his presentation with a picture sent by Myron because a virus prevented him from attending the meeting. It showed two framed walls and the pier. The pier has been cleaned up, sanded, and painted. The walls of the dome support structure have a modular design allowing them to be bolted together. The observatory will be located on the deck where Myron formerly had a dome for his telescope, but the modular design will allow a later move to a location where it can have more complete sky coverage. Jerry said next meeting there would be an update report on the project and on the committee for managing the project and observatory use later on. He said an attached warm room would be added later on, but more time is needed to plan its design.

- Officer election results—Linda reported there was one write-in vote for Jerry as president. There were eight ballots accepting all candidates, and the ballot with the write-in vote also accepted all of the other candidates. The result was all incumbents were re-elected.
- Other news—Glenn said the Scout group that was rained out want to reschedule for December 5 in Culpepper County and asked anyone interested to get in touch with him.

Tom said he is working on a multiple mirror telescope design. It is on a small-scale compared with state-of-the-art observatories, but would provide a large-scale amateur telescope at low cost if successful.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, December 16, 2015, at the Central Rappahannock Heritage Center. The program will be "A Tribute to Mark Slade," presented by Myron Wasiuta.