

THE SPECTRUM

THE BUFFALO ASTRONOMICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 1963

B.A.A. MEETS JAN. 11th

The first meeting of the new year will be held as usual on the second Friday of the month, Jan. 11th, at 7:45 sharp in the Science Museum. The meeting will be started promptly and the business meeting will be very short. Please plan to be on time so as not to miss any of the main talk.

We will feature Edith Geiger's speech entitled "Our Neighboring Worlds" based in part on one of Peter M. Hillman's radio lectures but greatly enlarged by a discussion of the many controversial theories appearing in recent articles and books on the subject.

The Constellation of the month talk which was postponed because of the testimonial party for Ernie Both will be given at this meeting. Thomas Peltz will discuss Auriga and will distribute sheets with a chart and data about the constellation for us to take home.

There will be the usual social period which, given the controversial nature of the main talk, should also be a time for lively discussion.

Mrs. Rabe will be in charge of the refreshments.

NUGGETS DEPARTMENT

In 1877 Asaph Hall, an American astronomer, discovered the two satellites of Mars and named them Phobos (fear) and Deimos (terror) after the two horses, which in Greek mythology drew the chariot of Mars.

But 150 years before, Jonathan Swift in his book "Gulliver's Travels" described the fictional discovery by a master race of absent minded scholars of "two losses stars or satellites of Mars, whereof the innermost is distant from the center of the primary planet exactly three of the diameters, and the outermost five; the former revolves in the space of 10 hours, and the latter in $21\frac{1}{2}$"

This passage or anecdote was written to lampoon the British Royal Society in general and Isaac Newton's laws of gravity in particular which were regarded with some derision by the educated men of England at that time. The example he chose turned out to be such a close parallel to reality that this uncanny description has been one of the great wonders of literature.

The moral of this tale is: let us not scoff lest posterity scoff at us.

10 FT. DO NOT ALWAYS = 10FT.

Some lunar photographs taken recently with the 10 foot reflector of the Lick Observatory are of excellent quality and are almost comparable with what can be observed visually, under good conditions, with the Kellogg Observatory 10 foot telescope.

The above statement, while true in all respects, tends to be misleading because it apparently states that the two telescopes mentioned are of the same size. In reality, however, the 10 foot aperture reflector is a much larger instrument than the 10 foot length refractor of the Kellogg Observatory.

It is interesting to note that while the telescope has existed for more than 350 years, the present system of using aperture to denote the size of a telescope has only been in universal use for less than 100 years. Before this present usage came into effect, the most popular method of rating telescopes was by their foot length. Gazing through a nineteenth century telescope makers catalogue we find instruments described as "four foot telescope" - six foot equatorial" etc. One hundred years ago telescopes were literally sold by the foot!

This system of measurement applied to reflectors as well as refractors and we find Herschel's famous 48" aperture reflector described by contemporary writers as the "forty foot telescope".

During the latter half of the nineteenth century when photographic and spectrographic techniques of observa-

tion were developed the importance of aperture in telescopes was more fully realized and led to the gradual adoption of the present system of using the aperture of a telescope to indicate its size.

ELEMENTARY STUDY GROUP

The Elementary Study Group will meet the first and third Thursdays of January at 8:00 P.M. in the Museum of Science. The current subject is "Natural Satellites" - the earth's moon and the moons of other planets.

ADVANCED STUDY GROUP

The Advanced Study Group will hold its next meeting on Saturday, January 19th at 2:00 in the museum. This promises to be a particularly interesting and worthwhile session. Lou Reinagel will give a report on "Mariner II and how it works" from the I.G. Bulletin on the Venus Probe. Lou will also acquaint the members with Double Stars and the techniques involved in gathering information about them.

OBSERVATORY NEWS

Cherry hardwood paneling that will be used on the walls of the Newstead Observatory has been generously donated to the B.A.A. by Mr. Richard Hunt of Hunt Imported Cars, Buffalo, N.Y. When work is resumed on the observatory this coming spring and the paneling is installed, the result will be a very elegant room in which to study and work or just relax and warm up.

GREETINGS

The B.A.A. officers and editors join in wishing you all a good year of astronomical observation, study and just plain fun.

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