

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, January 12, 2011, Meeting

In attendance:

- Jim Baker
- Dave Bentz
- Barton Billard
- Scott Busby
- Don Clark
- George Clarke
- Brenda Conway
- Joe & Sherry Francis
- Leigh Gettier
- Ranny Heflin
- Glenn Holliday
- Jerry & Michelle Hubbell
- Dan Lien
- Shannon McCurdy
- Mike Masters
- Kelly Morgan
- Tim Plunkett
- Alan & Mary Simpson
- Javier & Ruby Valverde

President Mike Masters began the meeting at 7 p.m. Fifteen members and eight visitors were present.

Program

Dave Bentz presented this month's program on building an observatory. He started planning his observatory about 3 years ago. Completion is awaiting warm enough weather to finish the drywall. Then he can paint, install shelving, and finish the floor and pier. The reasons he gave for building a home observatory included saving time and energy involved in setting up and taking down equipment, consolidating equipment, and helping to control ambient light. In the planning stage, he chose the location with the goals of screening nearby lights and allowing a view of the sky to the south and of Polaris for alignment. He located websites with many designs and weighed cost, number of observers, quantity and type of equipment (Dobsonians need lower walls or a platform), whether to have electricity or remote connections for an automated telescope, whether to include a warm room, and desire to have a view of the sky (better accommodated with a roll-off roof rather than a dome).

He showed pictures and described the process of building. The first step was tedious. Leveling required care because a roll-off roof is not tolerant of tilt. Another early step was pouring a pier for the telescope with no floor in the way, but needing to wind up level with the floor-to-be. He put PVC pipe in the ground for possible electrical and data cable runs, and dug a trench for electrical connection back to the house. Renting a "ditch witch" made the trench go fast, but he pointed out that there was still a lot of work to put the dirt back once the cable was run.

Dave shared some of his "oops" list of things that caught him by surprise. For example, he had to get a tarp for a temporary roof when he found he could not get the observatory under roof before last winter. He also discovered he had to be careful about buying pressure-treated lumber. It warps in a few weeks and one should use it quickly. One of the resources he showed at the end of the talk was the [SkyShed](#) website. Another consideration for the shed versus dome decision was suggested in discussion at the end of Dave's talk. A shed observatory could serve the next property owner better even if he was not into astronomy. Dave said his shed could also be removed by disconnecting the electrical and the hurricane anchors.

Old Business

- Tim presented the Treasurer's report for December 31, 2010. The Club finished the year with 27 members. Six of the members had already renewed for 2011 (two of them beyond 2011). Mike reported that he sent out a reminder about dues and the optional fee for individual Astronomical League membership. The only change in the balance was for reimbursements paid out for the pizza and drinks at the November meeting and for the second tripod that Don Clark bought.

- Club loaner equipment status—Joe reported that the Orion equatorial reflector was on loan to Brenda and that the other loaners were available. Ranny bought a laser collimator to go with the Orion XT6 Dob. Joe still needs information from custodians for the catalog of equipment. The tripods recently ordered for the Personal Solar Telescope and the Comet Catcher are both now here. Scott, the new custodian of the 8-inch Dob, commented that he enjoyed the easy setup of the telescope. Bart brought up the offer of a collection of *Astronomy* magazines made by a colleague at work for discussion. Depending on the dates covered, it was suggested they could be an addition to the library, or if duplicates, something worth passing out to visitors at meetings. Mike passed out new folders with copies of *Bright Star Atlas* to go with the loaner scopes. He gave the invoice from the *Bright Star Atlas* purchase to Tim.
- Events—The December 11 backup star party and the January 8 primary star party were both cancelled. Mike showed the list of challenge objects that he circulated for the January star party, along with the list for February. They cover a range of objects, including some for beginners. He is now interested in finding new asterisms and is adding them to the [Night Sky](#) Club website page. The next primary star party date is January 29 at Caledon. Scott is hosting for the backup date, February 5, and has asked that it be for members only. Bart is presenting the program on the Kepler Mission on February 9. Glenn described plans for a Girl Scout astronomy clinic and star party April 8–9. The location is near Burgess at the end of the Northern Neck. He wanted to know whether other members were interested in attending, and if so, whether they needed to make arrangements to stay overnight. The event is on the Friday night, with a star party on Saturday. Glenn also said a Girl Scout troop would like to visit for the April 30 star party at Caledon. They are in the 11 to 14 age group. Mike said that Stratford Hall was now asking whether we could include them in our 2012 schedule.
- *Sky & Telescope* subscriptions—Jim has not found out whether the subscriptions have “taken.” Ranny received one issue. Dan Lien received the last 3 months together. Mike advised Tim to contact customer service and discuss the status.
- Club mailing lists and raclub.org domain name—Mike said that operations had ceased on raclub@m31.us. Only 16 of 29 members have signed up for Yahoo. Including non-members, rac_group has 52 total Yahoo subscribers. Ownership transfer of the raclub.org domain name is still awaiting action by Tom Pendergast. Mike said he looked at Don’s instructions and found them clear and unambiguous about how to do it. The Club has paid for the domain name up until 2014. Tim will keep in touch with Tom to see if he can get it transferred. If all else fails, raclub.net is available.

New Business

- Mike reported on a request by the Falls Run Environmental Enthusiasts for a presentation at England Run Library at 7:30 p.m. on February 17. Brenda and Scott had offered programs, and they had agreed that Scott should present his on light pollution.
- Joe reported finding a contact at University of Mary Washington (UMW) for finding a possible meeting location. Mike reviewed the options we considered before the move to Pizza Hut and suggested revisiting the process of evaluating alternate locations, including those previously considered that are still possibilities (Pizza Hut is not). Joe contacted Professor King, the Physics Department Chair at UMW, who is willing to offer us a location. Joe suggested we would want a room with parking access close enough for Club members to get to and from the room and one that would also be accessible for students. He also suggested an informal arrangement was preferable. He said that he needed to go back to Prof. King with these wishes to see if Prof. King could define a viable possibility. At the same time, it would be good to review all the options again because we might be outgrowing our current room. Mike asked whether a UMW location would be good for other meeting visitors outside of UMW students. Members were in agreement with Joe that he should seek more details on what could be arranged.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is February 9, 2011, 7:00 p.m., at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library Headquarters, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg. Introductions will begin at 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary