

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, January 15, 2020, Meeting

In attendance:

Jean Benson
Bart Billard
Scott Busby
Don Clark
Glenn Faini

Glenn Holliday
Troy Major
Tim Plunkett
Matt Scott

The meeting began a few minutes after 7 p.m. Nine members were present.

Program

We spent some time talking about new gear as the January program topic. Bart Billard brought a QHY5L-II camera. He said he had purchased it to try out with his interferometer project. The goal is to get spectra with higher resolution than available with gratings like those used at MSRO. The new camera could get up to twice the resolution possible with the Imaging Source camera Bart was currently using, and more than four times the resolution of the MSRO gratings. Troy Major said he got a new dual-speed focuser for one of his telescopes. Glenn Faini talked about a device he got to provide a Wi-Fi connection between his telescope mount and a laptop or other device to control the telescope. However, he found the connection was not very reliable at home and would be even more of a problem at the star parties with other Wi-Fi signal within range. When the connection dropped, he would have to start over with aligning the mount to the sky. Glenn F. said he decided to return the Wi-Fi adapter. He also got a second Bahtinov focus mask for his refractors. Scott Busby said his Bahtinov focus mask was the only thing he could use to successfully focus his big telescope. Its helical focuser rotates the camera as focus is adjusted.

Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Tim Plunkett gave the report for December. He took in three dues payments and paid out \$200 to MSRO from the extra dues collected for MSRO support during 2019. Tim said we now have 11 paid members for 2020. Matt Scott and Glenn F. are discussing a change of banks to Atlantic Union. The current bank would be hard to get to once work starts on the William Street bridge. There was a question about whether RAC needed an employer identification number but apparently a current copy of the Bylaws and one of the minutes showing the officers' election would suffice. Bart confirmed the November election minutes were available as a PDF on the club website. We discussed closing the old bank account for the transfer and agreed it would not be an expenditure requiring a vote.
- Vice President's Event Report—Glenn Holliday said the December 28 star party at Caledon was a good night with lots of people attending. Glenn F. read his email in which he reported 3 members, 5 telescopes, 1 ranger, and 18 guests. Views featured Venus, the 2-day-old Moon, and Orion. There was also a King George High School star party, but only one of the school's astronomy club members was there.
- Incorporation or Nonprofit status for RAC—Glenn H discussed our recent vote to find out about incorporating and obtaining nonprofit status and the recent member survey that was motivated in part to get a sense of the support for the idea. He said Scott's assessment of the responses to the survey indicated a lack of interest in going ahead. Scott suggested tax-exempt status was not that important to donors these days (under the new tax law). He also said he had felt he could safely take a deduction for a contribution he made when MSRO was getting started a few years ago. Glenn H. confirmed he had read some information from the IRS that seemed to confirm Scott's interpretation that the MSRO donation was deductible. He also said our income has never been high enough that we would have to file a tax return. (There were questions whether the Virginia threshold might be low enough to require state tax returns, but later in the meeting, Glenn H. reported googling the limit and finding it was \$5,000.) Tim brought up the quid pro quo requirements Jerry Hubbell had discussed concerning whether RAC should treat its contributions to MSRO as donations or payments for services at market rates. He asked whether RAC might have to charge market rates for our services if we became a nonprofit. Glenn F. asked whether

RAC would want to seek grants and suggested it did not seem likely. Glenn H. suggested making a motion to change our minds and not move forward, which Glenn F. did. Jean Benson seconded. There was discussion about whether to remove the question of incorporating and limit the motion to not moving forward on tax-exempt status. One comment was that incorporating would not protect us from the copyright trolls already harassing us. No one was sure how expensive it was to incorporate. The unchanged motion was voted by a show of hands and passed unanimously.

- Secretary's Report—Bart said he still needed to post the December minutes on the club website. He had received comments on the draft he sent to the Executive Council.
- *StarGazer* Report—Bart said Linda had had a good response for articles to put in the next newsletter. A couple had been submitted and she had 2 or 3 more promised from Glenn F., Jerry Hubbell, and Myron Wasiuta. He said she told him to say she was still interested if anyone had something to offer.
- Mark Slade Remote Observatory (MSRO) update—Jerry and Myron were not at the meeting, so the report was skipped.
- Communications Committee Report—Don Clark said the switch to the Night Sky Network (NSN) Calendar did not work for January, but he and Terry Barker worked out the problem and February seems OK. A little later, he added that any club member with an NSN login could now use the calendar to submit star party reports to NSN.
- Club Yahoo Group—Scott said the Yahoo group should probably not be on the agenda any more. A replacement would be an item under new business.
- Club Equipment Inventory—Scott said he was waiting for a decision on how loan equipment information would be publicized (e.g., newsletter or website?).

New Business

- Bylaws Revision—Glenn F. said the revisions this time were minor changes and that he had sent them out to members. He said there should be time for comments and preparation for a vote to approve them at the February meeting.
- Brochure Revision—Glenn F. said he and Linda updated the brochure. They decided to remove the calendar and put the membership application on the back. It allows us to have a single item to hand out.
- Email List Server—Glenn F. said Yahoo appeared had become too unreliable and we needed to replace it. One issue was a number of members were not on Yahoo and another was problems with people being able to join now. We discussed what we wanted: a way for members to send email to a club address that goes to all members. Glenn H. described the old email server the club president had had in his basement. Don said he would look for more options.
- Twitter Account—Glenn F. said Tom Watson would deactivate the Twitter Account.
- Other Items—Don said he found an application called PhotoPills that can help you plan to get an astronomical object like the Moon in the frame by timing a photo from a given place. Glenn F. said he was looking for program topics for this year and suggested he might work with Linda to send out a message like the one they put together for requesting newsletter ideas. Don said he had set up a "sandbox" for testing use of PayPal for dues payments. Scott brought up the list server topic again, suggesting forums as a way to communicate and asked whether Hostek offers something. Don said he thought groups.io was like a bunch of forums. Scott asked about Cloudy Nights for example. One observation offered was that people would need to go to the forum website to see messages. Glenn F. suggested possibly he, as club President, was the only one who needed to send messages to all club members. He could occasionally facilitate communications by forwarding a message from an individual to everyone. It might be accomplished by him having a group in his address book with member email addresses and forwarding messages intended for the club using BCCs to the group. Glenn H. said he found Hostek does have some kind of list server and forum support. Scott mentioned seeing a news report about an asteroid found with an orbit entirely inside of the orbit of Venus.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, February 19, 2020, at the Headquarters Library on Caroline Street, downtown Fredericksburg. We will be in room L2, downstairs near the elevator.