

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, February 17, 2021, Online Meeting

In attendance:

Scott Busby
Bart & Linda Billard
Philip Carter
Don Clark
Glenn Faini
Claire Gardiner

Eric Goforth
Jerry Hubbell
Mark McDonagh *
Troy Major
John Maynard and son
Matt Scott

*Joined within a few days of the meeting

The business meeting began at 7:00 p.m. Twelve members and 2 guests were present. The business meeting was preceded by introductions of attendees, club officers, and executive council members present.

Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Matt Scott reported dues payments from three new members and two renewals. He said there were two expenditures: one to MSRO representing the portion of dues collected in 2020 earmarked for the observatory support, and the other for renewal of the DSN license for 5 more years.
- Vice President's Event Report—Glenn Faini gave the vice president's report saying that the February star party was cancelled.
- Secretary's Report—Bart Billard said he had no report.
- *StarGazer* Report—Linda Billard said she just delivered the latest issue at the beginning of the month. She asked for short (or long) stories about equipment or a project anyone would like to contribute. She mentioned a project Myron Wasiuta and a student are working on at MSRO to study U Gem as an example. Jerry Hubbell suggested people could write about books they have read. Glenn Faini mentioned a dark sky website/app he thought might be more useful than the Clear Sky Chart. He used it when in North Carolina earlier this month. Linda said his example was just the type of subject she was looking for. Glenn F. also suggested featuring regular updates on MSRO. Discussion of this suggestion favored an introduction as a good start.
- MSRO Status—Jerry Hubbell talked about a few things happening in the last month or so at MSRO. There was a quarterly board of directors meeting in January. Myron had put some pieces of equipment into service. One was a 10-inch RC telescope Myron got in trade for his 14-inch Celestron, which was now in service at Station 2. (Jerry remarked that the MSRO website photo needed an update to show the RC telescope.) There was also work on upgrading an LX 200 mount with a PMC-Eight system that Jerry developed for Explore Scientific. The upgrade being done was similar to one done at MSRO for another mount. Jerry mentioned that his Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers position was changing from the section on lunar topographical studies to a new section on exoplanets.
- Communications Report—Don Clark said he had been working on the website PayPal option and that he and Matt had agreed today that it was charging the right amount. He was also looking into creating a Dropbox for website backups. Glenn F. asked about the various efforts to restore what was lost recently. When Don mentioned some newsletters were not yet restored, Linda corrected him, saying newsletters were not lost, just some posts.

Glenn F. said some of the new members still needed to join the groups.io list, and he would be sending another invite, telling them they were missing out on status of meetings, star parties, and other good things going on with the club. He said he had closed his Facebook account, and Myron had taken over administration of the Facebook page for RAC. Glenn F. had made an autoreply stating the site was not a monitored account and advising to email the club president or check the RAC website.
- Equipment Inventory—Scott Busby said lending was still limited because of Covid protocols, but noted there had not been requests for a while. He mentioned the woman who had contacted us about a month ago for help with a telescope for her 10-year-old grandson. He said he contacted

her and found out the boy had a 4.5-inch Celestron reflector on an alt-az mount. He proposed taking the telescope for a while to figure out how to operate it in aid of being able to teach them. In addition, he arranged to lend them a 6-inch Dobsonian and a couple of eyepieces from the inventory so they could try some observing while he had the Celestron. He took it to her house and showed them how to use it. Unfortunately, during the month he was checking out the Celestron and they were using the Dobsonian, he found the Celestron had, at some point, been knocked over and damaged such that it was not useable. However, with the introduction he gave her to using the Dobsonian, she was able to try it with her grandson during the month they had it, and she was impressed. Scott said he gave her some links where she could find similar telescopes, and she seemed willing to get one once she was sure her grandson's astronomy interest was deep enough to last.

Scott also told us that the Belmont Club of Women had asked him to give a presentation about light pollution some time about March 3. He said he would report to the club about how it went afterward.

New Business

- Bylaws Revision—Glenn F. asked for comments on the Bylaws revision that was discussed last meeting on January 20 and sent to the club for review. He asked for a voice vote on ratification, and the revision was approved unanimously. We concluded that the version sent for review was properly formatted and ready for posting on the website (and Bart's minutes would officially record the vote of approval).
- Membership Renewals—Glenn F. mentioned 13 of last year's members had not yet renewed and said he would send out a reminder on March 1 to renew by the end of the month. He noted we already had 35 members this year.
- March Star Party and Club Meeting—Glenn F. announced the next star party date was March 13 and said it would be the Messier Marathon star party. He said the March meeting date would be the 17th. Glenn suggested having 35 members this early in the year was promising, and we might be on track to exceed the total of 43 members reached in 2020. Jerry said he thought being able to pay online was helping a lot.
- Possible Expenditures—Glenn F. asked Jerry to talk about his proposal at the last meeting for a committee to consider possible expenditures using some of the cash in the treasury. Jerry noted the club donated \$1000 toward building MSRO 5 years ago, and suggested we might find something else to support interest in astronomy. He suggested some sort of contribution toward helping new members or supporting a child or student with an astronomy project. Glenn mentioned getting requests for help from people with one of the poor-quality, "hobby killer" telescopes and wondered whether the club might have use for some 6-inch Dobsonian telescopes to lend out to help people like that. Troy Major said he had a 6-inch Dob sitting in his shed that he could donate. Scott said "You know where I live" to Troy's offer to take it to him. He added he felt our inventory was already adequate for the low demand we currently had, and he disagreed with the idea of purchasing more. Philip Carter suggested we might have a need to "market" loaner equipment and the club, saying he more-or-less "stumbled" on our club. Glenn F. asked Scott whether we needed to thin out some of the less useful equipment from the inventory and redirect the proceeds for improvements on any of the telescopes. Scott said there was some equipment that was not very usable that we might be able to unload (maybe on eBay) but he was not sure how much we could get for it. It would allow us to reduce some of the inventory and redirect assets for establishing standardized equipment packages, for example some for beginners and some for more advanced users. He thought we could use three or four packages like the 6-inch Sky-Watcher Dobsonian with a couple of eyepieces. He found it a joy to use, easy to transport, and ideal for a beginner learning about astronomy. He mentioned a 10-inch Dobsonian and an 8-inch that would be suitable for a more advanced beginner or even an advanced user, and also a high-quality refractor that was in need of a suitable mount. Glenn said he was in favor of weeding out some of the less useful equipment and redirecting the funds raised in that manner. Scott said he would need authority from the club for being able to liquidate some of the excess equipment for whatever he could get for it, then to make it known to the club what funds he raised, and then to use those proceeds for improved packages for lending out. Glenn said he would read through the Bylaws to see how we should proceed with that. Scott said he could offer the surplus equipment for members first. Claire Gardiner asked whether there was

an inventory she could look over. Scott offered to send a copy to her if she would email him a request.

- Other New Business—Glenn F. asked for other new business anyone would like to discuss. Mark McDonagh mentioned noticing some problems on the website with links that go to a “localhost” address instead of resolving correctly. Don recognized the problem and said he knew what he needed to do to fix it. It was related to the crash we had recently. He told Mark to send them to him if he found any more. Mark also said he had found some good recommendations for resources on our website but wondered whether any of us had recommendations for apps for beginners, or whether we would recommend actual paper charts and books for beginners. Glenn F. said he found that with books and paper charts he learned more about the sky and where to find things, while using computers or go-to telescopes let him find things easily but did not help him get a mental picture of the sky. He offered to send out an email with some suggestions, and Mark said he would probably join the club in a few days, so Glenn said he would wait a bit and send the suggestions out to the club list to start a discussion. Scott indicated he could also help people with such questions, and said he could host an outing at his place. Phillip Carter said he had thousands of questions and would have to start prioritizing them.

At the end of the meeting, discussion turned to equipment. Troy talked about the mirrorless camera and the ASI camera he was using. Glenn asked about the IR filter, saying he was unaware of IR filters that could be turned on and off instead of being physically removed from the sensor. Troy confirmed his mirrorless camera had a setting for turning off the IR filter.

Scott closed with a brief presentation of his new acquisition, a large slice of a found (in 1997 in Africa) Pallasite meteorite. He said the light areas were metal and the dark areas were peridot olivine crystal (a light behind the slice would show through them). They originate from between the crust and mantle of asteroids that broke up. He estimated it was about 1/8 inch thick and weighed about 2/3 of a pound.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, March 17, 2021. It is planned as an online Zoom meeting.