

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, November 17, 2021, Online Meeting

In attendance:

Scott Busby
Bart & Linda Billard
Glenn Faini
Jerry Hubbell

Troy Major
John Maynard & William
Mark McDonagh
Myron Wasiuta

The meeting began at about 7:15 p.m. Ten members were present.

Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Matt Scott reported one new member joined in October. He also sent fees to the Astronomical League (AL) for three members. He and Jerry Hubbell discussed Matt's problems communicating with AL about updating information about RAC on its website. Jerry said he would try talking to a person he knows there. Glenn Faini said we were now up to 62 members for 2021, and 7 so far for 2022. He included some members who joined this month.
- Vice President's Report—Glenn F. mentioned the extra October star party on the 30th that had to be cancelled because of a conflicting Caledon event. He said the November 13 star party was very well-attended. (He had shown some pictures and chatted about the star party and meeting with some King George High School teachers before the start of the business meeting.) He saw 10 telescopes, but was not sure he saw all the members who attended.
- Secretary's Report—Bart Billard said he still needed to post October's minutes.
- *StarGazer* Report—Linda Billard she had nothing to report on the next *StarGazer*, having just put out the most recent one at the beginning of this month.
- MSRO Report—Myron Wasiuta said they had just learned about a nova in M31 undergoing an outburst. It was an interesting coincidence because he was working on a mosaic of M31 and had a number of images of parts of the galaxy already taken in recent days. Unfortunately, this nova was far enough out in a spiral arm that he had not yet imaged it (and thus could not see how the area looked before the outburst). He did manage to image it with an hour of exposure time the same day he learned of the discovery, and he was continuing to follow it. He described the mechanism for the outbursts involving a binary system with a white dwarf and a companion star orbiting close enough to lose material that transfers to the white dwarf via an "accretion disk." The buildup reaches a point where a thermonuclear reaction detonates, and the explosion causes the brightness to increase as much as seven magnitudes. Myron said this particular recurrent nova has the shortest period between outbursts of any known nova anywhere: about 1 year. The reason for the short period is believed to be that the white dwarf is approaching the Chandrasekhar limit and is close to becoming a type 1a supernova (*close* meaning 5,000 to 50,000 years). He also reported on the problem with tracking on the StationTHREE telescope (the 102-mm refractor). He found the problem was a result of wear on one of the belts used to couple the motors to the right ascension and declination gears. A rough spot owing to the wear on one of the belts caused tracking errors whenever it reached the gears. He said he had ordered and received replacements, and once he had installed the new belts, the telescope tracked beautifully. He said he would soon be able to offer the first virtual star party, featuring star clusters and other objects in Cassiopeia using the repaired telescope. Jerry said he had recently had a session with John Maynard, introducing him to remotely operating the StationONE telescope. John confirmed it was an excellent experience and said he learned a lot. Myron said he would use the free version of Zoom for the virtual star party and planned two 40-minute sessions with an intermission in between. He hoped to have an interactive event with questions and observations from the participants.
- Communications—Glenn F. said he had made some updates to the home page and was trying to be more careful to keep the star party and meeting information up to date. He removed references to meeting at the library because of their current procedures for allocating meeting rooms. He also said at the star party he heard from Troy Major about someone asking about the lack of updates on the club Facebook page. He suggested the Facebook page might not be clear

enough about not being updated and referring users to our website for updates about RAC or emailing the RAC president. Myron said he could look into that and said the MSRO Facebook page was also more of a placeholder to direct users to the MSRO Science website. However, when Glenn F. suggested removing content that might lead users to think the Facebook pages were active, Myron was reluctant to do that with MSRO's Facebook page because of the many images documenting past work that are posted there. Moving on to the Groups.io list, Glenn F. said it was running smoothly, and all but a small number of RAC members were signed up. Jerry asked whether we had a question about allowing former members on Groups.io. The current policy was to purge the Groups.io list of RAC members who did not renew, once the grace period expired. Jerry and Myron explained that Tom Pendergast was one of the charter members of the club and put a lot of time and effort into keeping it running. He was in favor of making Tom an honorary member to allow him to keep up with what we were doing. Glenn was agreeable, and thought Tom Pendergast could become a liaison for his group out west, similar to Jim Browder for the Richmond group. He was somewhat concerned about creating too many exceptions and decided he should look at our Bylaws to see whether any revisions might be needed to allow past officers or executive council members to have a lifetime Groups.io membership.

- Equipment Inventory—Scott Busby said the equipment inventory status had not changed. He mentioned that Sabrina Maxwell visited the previous Saturday for help with her telescope. They managed to get over a learning curve and get it reasonably polar aligned. She viewed the Moon and Saturn. Later they went into his observatory where he showed her how he captured images of the Moon. They got some measurements of the Moon and some images of the Pleiades. Jerry asked him about a telescope he had taken to Myron's house to try to troubleshoot. Scott said it was a member's 8-inch SCT that wouldn't focus, and he learned quite a bit as they stripped it down and eventually found the problem (caused by over-torquing the focuser) and managed to get it working.

New Business

- Officer Nominations —Glenn F. had Bart review the nominations made in October: Myron had volunteered to be the Vice President and was nominated, and Matt and Bart had agreed to continue as Treasurer and Secretary. Glenn F. asked whether anyone wanted to volunteer for a position or offer a nomination. Linda nominated Glenn F. to another term as President, and she was seconded by Scott. Scott asked about the low attendance at our Zoom meetings. Glenn F. suggested that many members joined to look for support or help with something rather than for social interactions. He agreed with Scott that there were a number of members he only saw at star parties. Myron mentioned programs should help, perhaps with some emphasis on topics for beginners. Glenn F. did not really think the two recent programs had had much effect on participation though. Linda offered her experience with her two other groups to suggest presentations do help attract attendance and suggested ones on techniques, or how to do something were the most successful, saying Myron's virtual star party idea might work out to be such a draw for participation. Myron suggested another survey to find presentation topics of interest to members. A number of other thoughts were discussed, such as advertising presentations more effectively, contacting former President Ron Henke about possible presenters from his Tucson astronomy club. Volunteer work and being an officer was also discussed, in particular the *StarGazer* newsletter, which was nearing 10 years of continuous publication. Finally, we agreed it was time to close the officer nominations. As there was only one candidate for each office, Glenn F. moved to accept the slate of officers for 2022 by acclamation. John seconded, and the motion passed on a voice vote with no objections.
- Star Parties for 2022—Glenn F. said he was thinking he would continue to have to show up at star parties to assure RAC representation but suggested finding a member willing to "sponsor" each star party.
- In-Person Meetings—Glenn F. said he was happy to continue using Zoom for meetings. Jerry asked whether we should ask members whether a change of day or time might help attendance. He noted that using Zoom would make a change easier with no room reservation involved. Glenn F. agreed to ask.
- Presentations—Glenn F. mentioned the recent presentations in September and October on the Green Bank Observatory and Mars Rovers. So far, he only had a presentation on Galaxies by David Eicher lined up for December. He suggested finding cloud storage to make presentations

available for viewing longer than the space available through our Zoom subscription would allow. John said YouTube charged 2.3 cents/month for up to 50TB. Glenn F. thought we would need to ask presenters for permission before making their presentations available. He also noted the possibility of copyright violations we would need to watch out for. Mark McDonagh suggested using a members-only part of the club website, and Glenn F. said he would think about appointment of a club member to handle this.

- Other Items—Myron reported on the James River Star Party held recently. He said the park had a great facility, and Marty, the head ranger, wanted to increase stargazing opportunities. The ranger was looking for clubs to act as sponsors for a weekend or two each. He would want a commitment of at least one or two members with telescopes and a program. Jerry suggested discussing vendor participation, saying he could act as a RAC member and an Explore Scientific representative. Myron said he was encouraging Marty to consider offering a cabin or two. Glenn F. said our next star party would be on December 11 and feature the first quarter Moon. He thought the King George High School group might be back. Troy confirmed they would. Glenn F. also mentioned our next meeting would be December 15, with David Eicher presenting on galaxies.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, December 15, 2021. It is planned as an online meeting. Officer elections are on the agenda.