

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, July 19, 2023, Online Meeting

In attendance:

Scott Busby, Equipment Manager  
Bart Billard, Secretary  
Linda Billard, *StarGazer* Editor  
Glenn Faini, President  
Mark McDonagh

Dick Mumford  
Mike Parker  
Matthew Scott, Treasurer  
Myron Wasiuta, Vice President

The meeting began at about 8:10 p.m. Nine members were present as the meeting was starting. Scott Busby apparently lost his connection during introductions but was back later.

## Old Business

- President's Report—Glenn Faini said he had nothing new to cover in the President's Report.
- Treasurer's Report— Matt Scott said \$47.50 funds came in, mostly for Astronomical League (AL) subscriptions, plus \$100.00 that was previously listed as outgoing for Internet services that we never used. The check was not cashed, so it was listed as incoming to balance the expenditure previously reported. The expenditures were a payment of \$89.50 to the AL for subscriptions and the \$12.00 purchase of brochures. Matt mentioned the brochures could be given out to members to pass out when doing outreach, and Glenn brought up the NASA lithographs talked about at the last meeting. Linda suggested Matt could send her images of the fronts of the brochures and the lithographs with the information he has about them for her to use in an item in the newsletter letting members know they were available. She and Matt weren't sure what to say about how members could get them. Matt told us the brochures just ordered had not been shipped yet, but he did have the lithographs.
- Vice President's Report—Myron Wasiuta said he only had a couple of outreach events in the last month, one of which was the previous weekend at Big Meadows on July 14. He said weather during the afternoon was threatening, but storms stayed north of them. Conditions improved as it got dark, with warming temperatures and dew clearing out. The seeing was spectacular. Myron said he had put the 6.5" apochromatic refractor Jerry had loaned to MSRO for Station 1 onto a different mount and started using it for outreach because Station 1 was now out of commission. Also present at the event were some electronic imaging telescopes such as the EvScope that could stream images to phones. Attendees saw a few early Perseids. Myron was really pleased with views of Venus, some deep sky objects and, at the end of the program, Saturn. About 50 people showed up. He said he sent out an email report he titled "A Night of Stars and Lightning." Glenn asked about reports on the York County Astronomical Society radio telescope. Myron said he did not anything new. As far as he knew, we were still waiting for it to go online. Glenn said the only other planned event he knew, about was the Night Sky Festival up at Shenandoah National Park August 11 to 13 and asked whether Myron or Corey Dallmeyer were participating. Myron said they were going to a multi-club event at Woodbridge Farm Brewery in Nelson County on Friday August 10. He was not sure about Corey, but he did not plan to go to the Night Sky Festival afterward.
- Secretary's Report—Bart Billard said he was behind on writing up the minutes for May and June.
- *StarGazer* Report—Glenn said he was surprised when he got Linda Billard's email about the president's report she needed for the next newsletter, thinking he had just done one. She said she knew the feeling but fortunately had a lot of material for the one coming up.
- MSRO Report—Myron talked a little more about the telescope and mount that was in Station 1. He said he secured them by moving them out of the structure, moving the mount to Station 2 and putting the telescope on another mount for outreach as he mentioned earlier. He walked out to Station 2 as he talked and showed the Station 2 telescope on the mount from Station 1. He showed the dew shield he had made for it and said Station 2 was now fully operational. He said they were getting ready to upgrade its computer so they could begin streaming observing sessions as they had wanted to for the last year. He said Shannon Morgan had been working really hard getting the network working well, the computers backed up, and software installed, so

they were very close to having a fully operational streaming-capable station. Glenn asked about the other stations. Myron said Station 3 was still active but was not being used a lot. He said Station 4 was still at Mike Klosterman's house and was almost ready. They had the roof moving by remote control, and the telescope was in the enclosure. They were currently configuring the layouts of the switches so the roof could move safely without hitting the telescope in case it did not park properly. He was expecting the station could be ready in the next month.

- **Communications Report**—Glenn said that John Maynard had backed up our website and mentioned there was going to be a \$72 web hosting fee due soon. Glenn asked Matt whether there was an automatic payment involved, and Matt said typically the webmaster paid it and asked Matt for reimbursement. He said John was aware of that and okay with doing it that way. Glenn also asked about charges for the Amazon web service John had set up for the club. Matt said the introductory free service period had run out but it appeared the usage was below a minimum so that we were still not being charged. Glenn also asked whether the Google Suite issue had been resolved with Don Clark. We had had access for a month to download past emails, but apparently it continued and accrued some charges to Don. Matt said he had emails from Don that the issue was now resolved. Matt did not know why Don had been paying the charges.
- **Club Equipment Inventory**—Scott reported that nothing had changed for the last several months. No one had borrowed any telescopes, and they were still in his basement begging for someone to check them out. Glenn asked for the status of Scott's plan to come up with recommendations for reducing the inventory. Scott said he was still working on the list of equipment he thought should be purged from the inventory. He thought he might start taking a telescope he thought could be a candidate for purging from the inventory to star parties to offer first to members before trying to sell it on eBay or through some other channel. He said he had room in his basement for the equipment the club has, and there was no pressing need to hurry up and find something to purge. Scott said there were a couple of recent acquisitions he believed he had mentioned previously. One was a Celestron 8-inch telescope on an AVX mount that was working great. Another was a NexStar 8-inch on a NexStar mount, another excellent telescope. Scott suggested more new members could help increase the demand for equipment loans.

## New Business

- **Belmont Observatory "Star Parties"**—Glenn F. offered Scott an opportunity to explain his thinking in asking not to publish star parties at Belmont. Scott said that he considered a star party a public event and that observing at Belmont was for members only; he did not think they should be announced as star parties. Belmont would remain available for any club member who wanted to arrange a visit with him to observe at Belmont or perhaps get assistance with setting up a telescope. Listing it as a star party location has resulted in some non-member inquiries about going to Belmont, and he told them they could do that if they join the club. He indicated he had some security concerns about allowing people with no connection with the club to see the remote location and the expensive equipment there.

Glenn said the newsletter and our website should list Bowling Green as our sole regular star party site. Linda said the newsletter now has that, and she would check the website.

- **Annual Membership-Only Picnic**—Glenn asked Scott to talk about his plans for the annual picnic, which would be in Belmont in September. Scott mentioned he had been concerned with the possibility of holding it in August because that was when his wife's daughter (his stepdaughter) was expecting, and they needed to have their calendar open for travel. His wife wanted to be present for the event. Scott said he would do much like the last time. He planned to purchase supplies ahead and ask for reimbursement after the picnic. He would send out a message asking for preferences (burgers or hot dogs) and quantities people wanted. It would request people to bring a side dish to share with people. Scott would also provide soft drinks for people to drink. People with special dietary needs would need to provide for themselves. Glenn asked about taking pets to the picnic. Scott said he had dogs that were not allowed to run free in the yard, but owners who would be responsible for their pets' behavior could bring them. They would need to use his designated "potty spot" for relieving themselves so stargazers would not need to worry about stepping in a surprise when walking around in the dark. Scott took a few minutes to report on a recent event involving a friend of his wife's who has a yearly visit from a group of

grandchildren (ages about 10 to 16 this year) and organizes some kind of educational event for them. This year she asked Scott to help with a “space camp” event. Over a period of about 3 hours, he told them about astronomy as a hobby, showed them his observatory, and let them view the Sun with his telescope as he told them about the sunspots. It was too hazy to show anything else, but they were very happy with the visit.

- Orange County Public Library Eclipse Event—Glenn said the Orange County Library was looking for volunteers for an event planned for the April 2024 solar eclipse. Myron said the branch was the one near the intersection of Flat Road and Route 20. He said it was close to his house but he expected he would not be home because he planned to chase the eclipse. Glenn said he planned to go to the total eclipse path, so he said he would ask members who could volunteer for the local event to chime in. Scott said he could not find a place on the center line. Everything was booked up and had prices doubled. He said he might be able to offer a live feed from his observatory to the library. He estimated the maximum eclipse would be about 60 percent in this area. He offered to contact the library and talk about the possibility of doing a live feed, asking Myron if he would be able to help him with advice about setting it up. Myron said he would.
- Upcoming Events—Glenn F. said he did not yet have dates from Corey for the James River State Park events he was planning. The park’s staff were asking us to support two events in the summer. He was not aware of a report from Glenn Holliday on the Mattaponi District Roundtable event that was scheduled for February 16. He thought they might be looking for us to support some events for them. Glenn F. had hoped Eileen Kragie could join this meeting to talk to us about the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). He had an email from her with a letter to the Northern Virginia Astronomy Association she wrote about IDA and said he would forward it to club members. He said International Dark Sky Week was coming up April 15th to 22nd, and we might want to see if we can do something in support of that.
- Dog Days of Summer at Widewater State Park—Glenn mentioned an email he sent out about this event, which he guessed might be related to the star Sirius. He encouraged any member interested in participating to contact the Park directly, as he had said in the email.
- Other Items—Glenn F. said he had just received a request from Stratford Hall for participation in an October event there. We remembered a fall event held there a few years ago on a cold, windy evening. Scott Lansdale was the president at the time and was there, along with Glenn F. Linda and Bart were there, and Linda remembered Jerry Hubbell was also. The talk turned to how busy Scott Lansdale seemed to have become, and Glenn F. asked about his interest in radio astronomy. Myron said he had actually run into Scott at the Food Lion a couple of months ago and was able to tell him about the York County radio telescope. He said he now had Scott’s contact information.

Myron said he wanted to revisit the topic about in-person meetings. He said the Charlottesville club he is also a member of was having in-person meetings, and that he felt it added a lot to the membership experience. One advantage was the great venue they had for their meetings. The Richmond club also had a good venue and was meeting in person, as was the northern Virginia club. He felt in-person meetings would help in getting new members and wanted to ask people’s opinions on attending if we could find a good venue for meeting in person. Glenn said he would, depending on the location (preferably in Fredericksburg or on his side). Myron said he did not yet have a venue in mind but was willing to start searching for one especially if he found there was interest. He said if he found something he would email Glenn so it could be put on the agenda. Glenn mentioned the time the club met at the Pizza Hut and wondered whether University of Mary Washington (UMW) might be a possibility. Myron said he might still have some contacts at UMW and would try to discuss it with them.

Myron also wanted to open up the meeting for a show-and-tell session for members to talk about what they were doing or questions they had. He kicked it off by showing the outreach scope he had put together using the Station 1 6.5-inch apochromatic refractor and an EQ6 Pro mount that Jerry had given him to use indefinitely. (It was not working properly, and Myron had made some adjustments to get it working again.) He also had a nice eyepiece case with “gigantic” Explore Scientific eyepieces that had 100-degree fields of view. He said even at lower powers, people could see stars of globular clusters as pinpoints of light instead of just some brighter stars in a background glow of light from the cluster. He said he had been observing Venus with it recently. Myron suggested taking a few minutes for other members to report on something they had been doing recently.

There was some conversation about birds, including peacocks and an emu (Glenn had encountered one that came up behind him while he was shoveling snow one time). Scot then mentioned he saw a surprising number of sunspots the day before the meeting when doing the space camp program for the home-school group. Dick Mumford confirmed to Glenn his interest in doing some observing with other members. He also mentioned for those who had a Losmandy mount that they had come out with their level 6 firmware. He had sent his Gemini 2 computer with the hand controller back for the upgrade rather than trying to do it himself. He also spent 9 years on an Astrophysics waiting list for a 130-mm scope, and his name came up last year, allowing him to order it. Based on where Dick said he lived, Glenn recommended Dick try to observe at Belmont when he was ready. Myron also offered his location as a place Dick could go observing when they found he lived near one end of Brock Road, and Dick lived near the other end.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is on Wednesday, August 16, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. It is planned as an online meeting.