

The Springfield

News from the STARS



Stars Club

“Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky”

SINCE 1934

January, 2004



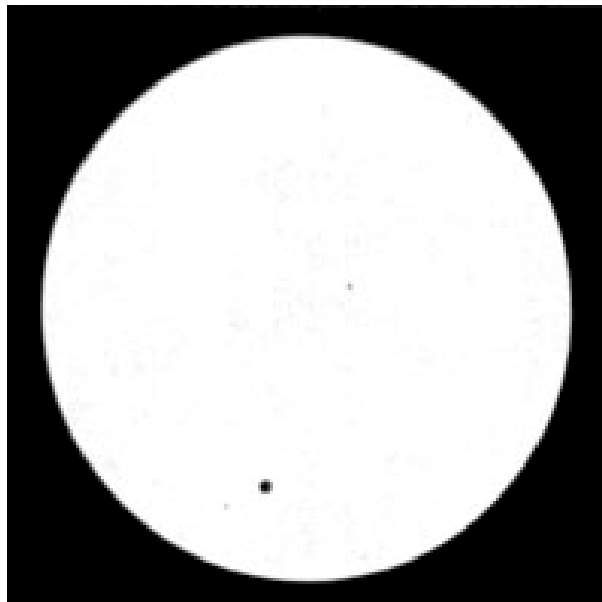
“On the Horizon”

It all began on a warm spring day in New England. Local astronomy enthusiasts awoke to find cloudless skies overhead. Anticipation grew as the morning progressed and the long-awaited event neared. Some of us had planned to travel a short distance for a better view, while others took a brief time out from work or school to enjoy the spectacle. As morning gave way to early afternoon, the sky darkened on schedule and the temperature dropped. The Moon’s shadow had arrived and we were able to take part in a rare and magical event! Little did we know what was just around the corner.

The May 10, 1994 eclipse of the Sun, which became annular as seen from a path across southern Vermont and New Hampshire, marked the beginning of an incredible run of awe-inspiring astronomical events witnessed by the Stars Club. Just two months later, we watched as the fragments of Comet Shoemaker-Levy9 crashed into Jupiter, the first time humans had witnessed such an event. Who could forget the sight of Comet Hyakutake as it passed near Polaris in March 1996, to be followed just one year later by the marathon apparition of Comet Hale-Bopp? Then, there was the 2001 Leonid meteor storm and last summer’s historic opposition of Mars.

Add the recent intense auroral displays, countless planetary conjunctions, the discovery of extrasolar planets in 1995 and many others and you have “*A Decade for the Ages*,” the subject of our May meeting. As we look back at the past ten years, we’ll also look ahead to yet another rare event, the upcoming June 8th transit of Venus. The photo above of the most recent Venus transit in 1882, taken by students at Vassar College, appeared in the February 1961 issue of *Sky & Telescope* magazine. Are there any more so-called “once-in-a-lifetime” events in store for us in the near future? Only time will tell, although we are long overdue for that elusive Milky Way supernova!

The Last Transit of Venus - Dec. 6, 1882



- *Mike Kozicki*, Editor

Help Save the Gemini

The Gemini Observatory, site of the club’s annual summer picnic and star party, needs our help. Designed and built by late Stars Club member **Dick Gerry**, the Gemini Observatory continues to serve as an inspiration to us all. But recent winters have taken their toll on the structure’s exterior. Repairs are needed in order to allow Dick’s legacy to inspire future generations. We are currently trying to organize a work party for the spring. Contributions of any kind would be appreciated. This will be a topic of discussion at the January meeting. If you wish to make a donation to this effort, contact club treasurer **Rich Sanderson**.

The Astronomy Association Dinner

The 12th Annual Astronomy Association Dinner has been tentatively scheduled for Friday, April 23rd at the American Legion Hall on Route 9 in Hadley. Social hour begins at 7:00pm with dinner at 8:00pm. For more information, contact **Tom Whitney** via email at amastro@amastro.org or by phone at (413)256-6234.

Springtime Observing Sessions

Since 1995, **Paul Cardone** has brought astronomy to hundreds of students at the MountainView School in East Longmeadow through his observing programs. A spring session has been planned for Friday, March 26th, with a cloud date of Saturday, March 27th. For more information or to volunteer to help, contact Paul.

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In honor of the many contributions to astronomy made by **Father Doug McGonagle**, the Stars Club will be conducting an observing session for St. Cecilia's Church in Wilbraham on the evening of Friday, April 23rd. The event will begin at 8:00pm during twilight with observations of the crescent Moon. In case of clouds, it will be held on the following night, Saturday, April 24th at the same time. Volunteers are needed to set up their telescopes and share their knowledge of the night sky to make this a successful event. If you are interested in participating, contact **Jack Megas** at an upcoming club meeting or by phone at (413) 782-3962.

NOTICES

Executive Committee Meeting - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held in late spring. If you have ideas for events or speakers, notices for the newsletter, or anything else you would like to bring to the club's attention, please contact one of the club officers or directors prior to April 30.

Membership Dues - Club dues for 2004 remain at \$20. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please send a check for that amount, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101. Your dues offset costs of running the club, mostly the museum room rental fee and mailings. PLEASE help to support your club!

Sky & Telescope - Club members are entitled to subscribe to Sky & Telescope magazine at the reduced rate of \$32.95 per year. Return the renewal card you received in the mail and a check for the proper amount, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101.

Arunah Hill - Don't miss the annual Winter Star Party (Jan. 17th & Feb. 21st) or Messier Marathon (March 20th). For more information, contact **Steve Pielock** at pielock@pielock.com or by phone at (413)772-6715.

THE OBSERVING LOG

Five Planets! During the second half of March, all five classical planets will be visible in the evening sky as darkness falls, spanning the ecliptic from Mercury low in the west to Jupiter just rising in the east. Saturn, situated in the constellation Gemini will be at its highest in the south. The Moon will return to the evening sky beginning on March 21st and will be in conjunction with each of the five planets in turn before becoming full in early April.

Springtime Comets! Over the last decade, we've had our share of bright springtime comets. Hyakutake and Hale-Bopp come to mind, as does Ikeya-Zhang. But wait! Here come two more! During April and May, Comet LINEAR (C/2002 T7) and Comet NEAT (C/2001 Q4) will grace our evening sky. Either one, or perhaps both may become visible to the unaided eye for a time. For the latest updates, visit Sky & Telescope's website at <http://www.skyandtelescope.com>

Transit! Not since the year 1882 has the planet Venus crossed the face of the Sun as seen from Earth. Now, it will do so twice in just eight years, beginning on the morning of June 8, 2004. The transit will already be in progress as the Sun rises over Springfield. Any possible observing parties for the event will be announced at club meetings and on the club website at <http://www.reflector.org>

Full Moon Dates: January 7, February 6, March 6, April 5, May 4, June 3

New Moon Dates: January 21, February 20, March 20, April 19, May 19, June 17

Vernal Equinox (Start of Spring) - March 20, 2004 at 1:49a.m. EST.

Summer Solstice - June 20, 2004 at 8:57p.m. EDT.