

THE MADISON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, INC.

The earliest plans for the creation of an Astronomical Society in Madison can be traced back to October, 1930, when Mr. William R. Binney and Mr. John M. English discussed their common interest in lens grinding and observing as well as the possibility of attracting other would-be astronomers to probe the mystery of the stellar world. Soon after Dr. C. M. Huffer, a member of the Astronomy Department of the University of Wisconsin, who knew about Dr. Binney's hobby, was invited to dinner by Dr. J. S. Supernaw, a prominent Madison physician. The host, as it turned out, was also interested in amateur astronomy. Ideas were exchanged and finally, early in 1931, the Madison Astronomical Society was actually launched through the combined efforts of the four pioneers and a few friends.

After a year of informal meetings at various places (a private garage, the Madison General Hospital, the Forest Products Laboratory, the University Extension Division, et al.,) the Society became the protegee of the Astronomy Department and met at the Washburn Observatory until June, 1959; since September, 1959, when the Astronomy Department moved to its present quarters, all regular meetings have been held in room 6515 Sterling Hall.

The Madison Astronomical Society had ambitious plans from the very beginning. In May, 1935, under the presidency of Dr. J. S. Supernaw, it began to publish monthly *The Madison Bulletin*. Vol. I, No. I announced in all candor: "Contributions are solicited but cannot be paid for." That very same month and year the Society joined forces with the Milwaukee Astronomical Society, the Missouri-Southern Illinois Observers and the Amateur Telescope Makers of Chicago and began to publish a mimeographed bulletin called *Amateur Astronomy* which was sold, like the *Bulletin*, for the awesome sum of ten cents a copy.

Under the impetus of several lecture series on astronomy organized by the Extension Division the Society flourished and on September 12, 1956 it celebrated a quarter century of existence at its first meeting of the 1956-57 season. Mr. John M. English, who had been one of its most devoted members, then read a paper entitled *History of the Club*.

For many years the guiding spirit of the organization was Dr. C. M. Huffer, who virtually became the permanent secretary until the summer of 1959 when he was elected president. With the cooperation of his gracious wife, Dr. Huffer drew up a constitution, scheduled programs, promoted various projects and attracted new members. Dr. and Mrs. Huffer moved to San Diego, California in the summer of 1961.

In 1956, through the good offices of Miss Charlotte Steward, the Society was invited to install its first building at the site of the Bjorksten Laboratories. In 1960 two units were given to the Society by the State legislature -- the old University observatory and transit room. This double structure was moved to its present location in the summer of 1960 with the financial support of the Oscar Mayer Company of Madison. In recent times the building has been repaired, repainted and insulated.

On December 15, 1962 the Society became officially incorporated under the presidency of Mr. George N. Harris.

The Society has both regional and national affiliations. The North Central Branch of the Astronomical League, to which our organization belongs, was created primarily through the efforts of two members of the Madison Astronomical Society, namely, Dr. C. M. Huffer, who was chairman at the organizational meeting (St. Paul, Minn., Aug. 7, 1947), and Mr. Harold B. Porterfield, who acted as secretary. Mr. Porterfield wrote the first constitution for the region and later became chairman of the North Central Branch for three years. In 1954 the Society co-sponsored the national convention of the Astronomical League (July 2 - 5) and four years later, under the presidency of Mrs. Charles E. Hemingway, it organized and sponsored the regional meeting of the North Central Branch (May 21 - 22, 1960).

The members of the Society are people representing a wide variety of interests: business men, state employees, professionals, retired "young men and women", teachers, housewives, and students from both college and high school circles.

No special preparation is needed to join it's ranks. The only requirement is a genuine interest in all phases of astronomical observation and study. The annual fee is \$2.00 a year per family. The Society encourages the cooperation of its members but never requires it officially.

The members of the Board of Directors are seven in number : president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and three directors. The Society also has several standing committees whose function is to expedite business and social matters with minimum impositions on the members of the group.

The Society meets once a month between September and June on the second Friday of the month. The meetings are held at 8:00 p. m., either at 6515 Sterling Hall (under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin's Astronomy Department), or at the Oscar Mayer Observatory, the Society's official residence, located at the Fitchburg Research Park (Bjorksten Laboratories), on the Fish Hatchery Road.

Two highlights of the Society's activities are the yearly banquet in the spring and the annual picnic in June. The regular programs include formal lectures by experts, viewing and discussion of films, and informal talks and reports by the Society's members. Of particular importance are the star parties held at private homes or at the Oscar Mayer Observatory for the purpose of observing or instructing new members and visitors in the use of astronomical equipment.

The society now operates a 6 inch clockdriven reflector, a variable frequency oscillator, three astrocameras (7 inch, 12 inch and 24 inch focal length), five apogee instruments (SAO Moonwatch), and timing equipment.

Among the Society's plans for the immediate future are the installation of a four and one-half inch refractor donated by the Oscar Mayer Company, and the erection of a ten inch reflector and mount. The Society also owns one 6 inch and two 10 inch mirrors, which will become part of the equipment to be used by members on a loan basis.

The Society has grown into a double group of amateur astronomers -- the Junior and Senior Divisions.

JUNIOR DIVISION

The Junior Division, composed of enterprising young "astronomers" of high school age, has functioned under the guidance of Mr. Edward P. Baillie, senior member advisor. It meets regularly and schedules its own special activities. Among these have been the publication of a mimeographed bulletin, Star Trails, the drawing up of questionnaires on astronomical matters, and the organization of educational programs to provide school children from the fourth through the eighth grades with an opportunity to observe the skies

SENIOR DIVISION

Among its outstanding activities are the preparation of timely articles for local newspapers and the tracking of visible satellites. The team predicted on the UW extra fast CDC 1604 computer many visible passes; it also developed techniques for photographing satellites down to 8th magnitude (astrophotography projects, 1961-62). Several of its members own professional or semi-professional telescopes and at least two have their own private observatories.

How To Reach The Oscar Mayer Observatory (M. A. S., Incorporated)

1. Go to Park Street
2. Follow Fitchburg Street and Fish Hatchery Road
3. Turn left at the Bjorksten property

Our meetings are open to the public. All people -- young and not-so-young -- are invited to join! For information on membership, call the Society's president: