

An aerial photograph of an astronomical observatory site. The site is situated in a wooded area with green trees. Several buildings and structures are visible: a large, rectangular building with a corrugated metal roof on the left; a smaller, square building with a flat roof in the center; a large, circular structure with a white, dome-like roof on the right; and a long, narrow building with a flat roof at the bottom. A white car is parked on a paved area near the bottom right. Various pieces of equipment, including telescopes and other instruments, are scattered across the site. The overall scene is a detailed view of the observatory's layout and surroundings.

# History of the Madison Astronomical Society in the Modern Era

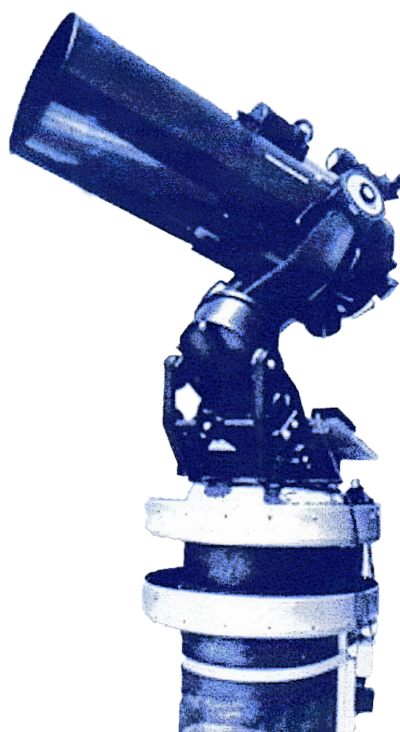
1988–2023

By John Rummel



# History of the Madison Astronomical Society in the Modern Era 1988–2023

*History of the Madison Astronomical Society in the Modern Era (1988–2023)* was written during the winter of 2022-23 and published online in March, 2023. As with the the *History of the Madison Astronomical Society 1935-1988*, this work was based on extensive reviewing of club documents, newspaper reports, original photos and other documents from current and former members, and extensive interviews with over 70 individuals. Please see *History of the Madison Astronomical Society 1935-1988* for complete credits.



The photo above is the “Doc G” 12-inch Meade LX-200, the first new telescope installed at the Yanna Research Station (see pages 4-5 below) in the roll-off building known as the Doc G Observatory. This photo appeared in a club brochure in the early 2000s and was taken by Tim Ellestad.

On the cover is an aerial drone shot of the Yanna Research Station taken by Pete Becker in May, 2018.



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## The 1990s

The 1990s were a time of radical change in the field of amateur astronomy. A revolution was underway brought about by advances in personal computers, digital photography and perhaps most importantly, the rise of the internet. For the fifteen or so years surrounding the turn of the 21st century, the hobby would be completely transformed and the Madison Astronomical Society (MAS) would be swept up in those changes. But all this is still a decade away as this chapter opens.

As the 1980s wound down, Dave Weier and Paul Fritschel were the clear leaders of the club. For the 20 years following 1972, these two almost continuously occupied one or both of the top jobs on the board. In the late 1960s, the group had experienced dwindling membership and a bit of an existential crisis. By the 1980s, that trend had reversed and growth would continue right up until the present day.

From 1984 on, the club had been fully occupied with building and equipping its new observing facility, the Yanna Research Station (YRS). (See Chapter 9 in *History of the Madison Astronomical Society, 1935–1988*.) As with any large undertaking, there were dozens of projects to do: moving buildings, installing domes, building new structures like the clubhouse and the 17" dob rolloff, laying conduit for electrical access, and dozens of weekend projects like painting, mowing and trimming. All of this required hundreds of hours of volunteer labor, and the club members eagerly stepped up to the plate. After years of coping with the limitations of the Oscar Mayer Observatory (OMO), YRS provided much darker skies and space to spread out and grow, and the club quickly took advantage.



Gil Lubcke and Dave Darling at a YRS workday probably in the late 1980s. Koster Memorial Observatory (KMO) building in background. Origin of photo unknown, probably from Dave Weier.

Tom Eichman, one of the builders of YRS in the late 80s and early 90s, remembers that there was “an intense determination to see the job done right.” When Doris Koster donated Art’s home observatory after his death in 1986 (see Chapter 9), she donated the building without the dome (which she sold separately to the UW Madison). The club was scrambling for a solution when member Ray Zit stepped up. Ray had an old silo top that he had converted to a dome years before.<sup>1</sup> Eichman recalls, “Ray had not even been on the radar for maintenance projects until he volunteered for this.” Tom Jacobs added, “The building and dome didn’t fit very well together, so we had to build some structure to hold the dome and let it rotate.” It was a huge effort, but Ray Zit’s generosity with both his time and his materials was characteristic of the club in those days. A core group sacrificed some evenings and most of their weekends for years. It was a labor of love—with a lot of sweat and calluses thrown in. Mark Bauernfeind,

an observatory director in the early 90s, recalled, “I was a worker. I was very proud of the way YRS looked.” He continued, “My involvement with the group was keeping the observatory clean and usable, some sense of order for the people who used it.” All the work was worth it when they could open the dome or roll off the roof and use those scopes for actual observing under a satisfyingly dark sky.

### MAS Meeting snapshot

March 13, 1992  
Jason Cardelli of the UW Madison astronomy department will discuss science from the Hubble Space Telescope at the MAS meeting at the M&I Bank of Hilldale, Jamestown branch.

Since the late 1960s, Gil Lubcke had been a member of the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO). Astronomy had long been recognized as one of the few sciences where amateurs could still make genuine contributions, and the AAVSO was notable in this

regard. Lubcke and others led the way toward MAS members becoming increasingly involved in astronomy as a scientific endeavor rather than simply a hobby. Monitoring the varying brightness of stars had long been a key to unraveling the mysteries of stellar physics. Amateur observations by thousands

<sup>1</sup> But challenging this version, Zit does not remember this dome or making the donation! He does recall helping in the labor of fitting and refinishing a dome and doing countless other projects at YRS, but the dome’s origin remains in dispute. I left it in the narrative because multiple other contemporaries are sure that it was Zit’s dome and donation. (The author conducted multiple personal interviews with Zit and other former members.)



This event at Westgate Mall on Madison's west side was held for several years during the 1990s. This poster is from 1991 and was found in club archives.

of dedicated AAVSO members provided the professionals with tons of raw data. Many other MAS members including Weier, Bob Manske and Neil Simmons, followed Gil in joining the AAVSO and became active reporters of their observations.

Lubcke soon left Madison for college, graduate school, etc. When he returned to live in Madison in the 80s and reconnected with the club, he commented, "The focus of MAS activities had shifted from being primarily a social organization to engaging in more scientifically oriented activities." For these years, the outreach/observing focus of the club was joined by this emphasis on the amateur/professional collaboration.

As the 1990s dawned, this trend continued and was playing a more prominent role in club affairs. Bob Manske had joined in the late 1980s and brought with him another scientific pursuit where amateurs could make an impact: carefully timing occultations of stars by asteroids or the moon. Much could be learned by timing occultation events: the shape, size and orbital characteristics of asteroids can be measured using multiple observation stations of these events strung out in a geographical line dozens of miles long. And much could be

learned to refine the orbital motions of the moon by careful timings of the disappearance and reappearance of stars during such events. As with variable star observations, professional astronomers rely on the amateur network to provide such timings.

A third scientific focus was observation of lunar transient phenomena (LTP). LTPs are intermittent and uncommon events seen on the surface of the moon that may be related to volcanism or impacts. Such observations by many amateurs (and a few professionals) challenged the conventional scientific wisdom that the moon was dead and inert. Leading the way in this area was Dave Darling, who for years was the LTP coordinator for the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO). When the Clementine mission flew to the moon in 1994, Darling was invited to be a collaborator to help choose promising observing targets. Dave had already built a large network of lunar observers which grew even larger as he created a web-based community for observers to report their findings.

#### MAS Meeting snapshot

October 11, 1996  
Walter Harris of the UW Madison astronomy department will be speaking on Comet Hyakutake and showing a video made of the comet. Meeting Friday at 7 pm at Edgewood High School, 2219 Monroe St.

Manske became president of the club in 1991 and would hold that position for nearly the whole decade. During his tenure, the scientific



A jovial Bob Manske, most likely taken at an MAS banquet sometime in the mid-1990s. Photo from the collection of Dave Weier.

orientation of the MAS solidified and would become a big focus of monthly meetings. Weier, Manske and Darling anchored this scientific orientation and attracted many other members to become involved in these early citizen science efforts. Throughout the 1990s, most meetings began with a substantial announcement period in which Manske would detail upcoming asteroid events and would recruit members to contribute observations or join an expedition to form a line of observing stations dozens or hundreds of miles away. He would also recount the results of previous expeditions. Even for those not involved, listening to Manske talk about these events was a bit inspiring. Club members were doing actual science and contributing important bits of data to a larger cause.

But while citizen science projects had definitely risen in profile, the majority of the club was still focused on observing through the eyepiece and the simple enjoyment of socializing under the stars. Jane Breun remembers, "I felt pride in





May 1997 trip to Yerkes Observatory to observe through the historic 40" refractor. Pictured are (bottom row from left): Tom Brissette, Tim Ellestad, Doc Greiner, Dick Goddard, Joe Keyes, Bob Manske, Wynn Wacker, Eric Thiede, Mark Bauernfeind, Neil Simmons, Jim Kreamsreiter, Gil Lubcke. Middle row: unknown, Tom Hall. Top row: Tom Jacobs, Jeff Peronto, Mary Ellestad and John Briggs (Yerkes host).

my club, that members were contributing to astronomy research, but I myself did not do any of these activities." Dan Strome recalled, "I was interested in learning the sky, but never interested in variables or occultations/ grazes." Many members speak fondly of the friendships and social connections that were made possible by MAS. Les Phelps reminisced, "The club was about astronomy, but just as much about interacting with people who are science oriented." Likewise, Joe Keyes remembered, "I was never much of an observer, but I loved going out with folks and looking through their scopes."

MAS was also heavily involved in outreach during this period: astronomy days at Westgate Mall, solar telescopes on the square at the Farmer's Market,

members setting up scopes at performances of the American Players Theatre in Spring Green, and the new big event in the late 90s, the Moon Over Monona Terrace star party in downtown Madison. Members were also enthusiastically using YRS, and spontaneous star parties were common nearly every weekend, especially close to new moon. The appearance of comets Hyakutake and Hale-Bopp in 1996 and 97 also provided rich opportunities for public outreach, and thousands of people were introduced to the joys of astronomy by MAS members. Bill Ferris recalled a star party at Indian Lake County Park to view comet Hyakutake in 1996 where the high attendance shocked everyone; "The endless line of cars pouring into the parking lot reminded us of that scene from the end of the movie *Field of Dreams*," he said.

Outreach had characterized the group in the 1930s and would continue to be a strong focus well into the 21st century.

## The 2000s

The late 1990s and first decade of the 2000s heralded a sea change in the field of amateur astronomy. With the advent of new technologies, such as computer controlled telescopes and digital imaging systems, amateur astronomers were able to make deeper and more precise observations than ever before. And with the ocean of information now available at our fingertips thanks to the rise of the internet, the field was growing in directions unimaginable just a few years before. Sometime around 1997, MAS got its first website, courtesy of member Bruce Brinkerhoff.

In the late 1990s, retired University of Wisconsin engineering professor Richard "Doc" Greiner joined the group. Greiner was a self-professed gadget nerd and was very eager to devote himself to astronomy. Greiner loved building things and had both money and the desire to donate to the club. Soon after joining, he noted the absence of any modern telescopes with go-to capabilities at YRS and offered to purchase one for the club. Greiner's ambitions were substantial. Rather than just donate a new telescope, he and member Rodney Helt designed a new roll-off building

### MAS Meeting snapshot

March 13, 1998  
MAS president Bob Manske will give a talk on the upcoming occultation of Aldebaran by the crescent moon.  
Meeting Friday at 7 pm at UW Space Place, 1605 S. Park St.



**MAS Meeting snapshot**

July 14, 2000

Dr. R.A. Greiner will give a talk on the role of CCD cameras in amateur astronomy. Friday, July 14 at 7 pm at UW Space Place, 1605 S. Park St.

and constructed a sleek and professional facility at the north end of the YRS grounds. The building was christened the “Doc G Observatory” and housed a 12” Meade LX200—state of the art for 1996.

Members were enthused about this new addition to the tools at YRS. Greiner was soon opening his checkbook again, this time to provide needed upgrades to the two Koster buildings. Both donated buildings

were temperamental and showing their age. Greiner’s generosity was real and his contributions were impressive. Over the course of about five years, Greiner would pay for a new Pro Dome and telescope for the Art Koster Observatory (AKO) (which had been rebuilt from the ground up in 1997), install heating and AC in the clubhouse, construct a new RA drive for the 16” Cassegrain in the Koster Memorial Observatory (KMO), and pay to move overhead power lines away from the YRS lines of sight. A hands-on machinist, Doc built numerous custom parts for these facilities. His financial donations to the club amounted to many tens of thousands of dollars over the years.

Greiner’s interest was not just in providing new buildings and equipment to the club. He was also interested in the science, and his contributions spurred interest in using the more advanced scopes and cameras now available to that end. Two new members, Greg Sellek and Matt Mills, formed the nucleus of a minor planet hunting group, taking advantage of the sensitivity of the new electronic cameras and permanently mounted 12” scopes. Greg Sellek described it this way, “The big surveys were just coming online and there were a few years there where amateurs had a real chance to contribute to measurements and discoveries.” This group registered with the Minor Planet Center and received an observatory number and began contributing observations of asteroids that helped the pros calculate precise orbits. The group would go on to record many of their own discoveries in the coming years. Sellek added, “Doc was instrumental in positioning us to have this opportunity.”



Doc Greiner, undated photo, probably sometime around 2007. Photo from online obituary at funeralinnovations.com.

**MAS Meeting snapshot**

May 9, 2003

John Rummel and Art Camosy will give a talk about seasonal changes in the sun’s angular size: teaching the concept of seasons to high school science students. Friday, May 9 at 7 pm at UW Space Place, 1605 S. Park St.

But there were seeds of discontent, too. The younger members who had organized around Greiner were ambitious and wanted to fund and build their own observatory to support their minor planet work. They proposed housing their new observatory at YRS and negotiating an agreement that would allow their group to retain ownership. In exchange, they would give MAS members a sizable percentage of the observing time in their observatory. Ideas were exchanged, but the idea proved to be untenable: questions of ownership and observing time would inevitably arise as would issues of insurance and liability. The idea eventually was dropped

but in its wake, tensions had emerged. The more established members felt that Greiner’s proposal would move the club toward privatization which ran counter to MAS’s purpose as well as its tax exempt status. Their vision for the club was one where all the facilities at YRS were club owned and available to all members equally. The placement of privately owned equipment there would jeopardize that value. The Greiner group felt that Manske was being unnecessarily controlling and was restraining growth in these new directions. Relationships were strained and some words were exchanged.

Manske had finally walked away from the club in the fall of 1999 while the above events were still playing out, and there were some other issues that added to the tension. One was the eternal question of keeping up with maintenance at YRS. Manske and the board felt they had a handle on things within the club’s budget, but Greiner’s accelerated focus on building and improvement made it harder for Manske





Jeff Shokler sharing a view of Jupiter at a Moon Over Monona Terrace public event in October, 2008. Photo by John Rummel.

to lead. “The club was not big enough for both of them,” remembered Eric Thiede in a sentiment often attributed to large egos. Joe Keyes’ impression was that Doc’s spending “just wore Bob down.” Bob Shannon, club secretary at the time, said people felt that “Doc was going to get what he wanted with his pocketbook.” He added, “Bob felt that the heart had gone out of the club.”

In the months that followed, several of the others followed Manske’s lead and left MAS: Weier, Darling and several other members decreased their involvement or stopped coming altogether. Some switched to the Milwaukee club with Manske, others just drifted away because their families were growing, their careers changing, etc.

After Manske’s departure, VP Neil Simmons served as president for a half-year to finish Bob’s term. Doc Greiner would go on to serve two terms as president of MAS (from 1999–2001) followed by a year with Greg Sellek at the helm. But plans for the minor planet group’s new

observatory were moved out of the purview of MAS. The group built a series of their own facilities elsewhere in Dane County and eventually moved their operations to remote dark sky sites in New Mexico. Though Greiner and several members of the minor planet group stayed active in MAS for many more years, the science they did was increasingly separate from MAS and YRS. For those years in the early 2000s, the club seemed to retreat to the idea of community and the joy of holding public events. Outreach continued to boom and many members were taking advantage of the advances in digital photography to experiment with taking impressive images of the faint fuzzies they could only glimpse before.

In spite of this tense episode right at the outset of the decade, MAS continued to grow and thrive for the balance of the 2000s. Members Neil Robinson, Jeff Shokler and Don Martin took turns as president and kept the club on a steady course through a period of rapid technological change and continued focus on outreach. Though some missed the emphasis on scientific data gathering, most members felt that the soul of the club was observing at the eyepiece, learning the sky, and introducing others to the pleasures of observing the planets, or the moon, or the faint fuzzies. The emphasis on outreach continued as MAS participated yearly in the Moon Over Monona Terrace event, which would grow each year and evolve into one of the largest star party events in the midwest.

Other regular outreach opportunities included a New Year’s Eve event with the city of Madison, regular star parties at Donald County Park and Devils Lake State Park, and many mutual events with the Madison Metropolitan School District Planetarium and UW Madison Space Place. MAS membership grew from a low point of about a dozen members in the late 1960s to over 100 members by the year 2010.



Two generations of MAS leaders. From the left: Dan Strome, Don Martin, Mary Ellestad, Wynn Wacker, John Rummel, Chris Zeltner, Neil Robinson, Martin Mika, Tim Ellestad and Mark Hanson. The AKO can be seen in the background left and part of the tin shed housing the 17.5 inch dob on the right. Tom Ferch photo, taken at the picnic at YRS in June 2010.



## The 2010s and Beyond

By the second decade of the 21st century, the club had attained a settled maturity. The tumultuous politics of the early 2000s was in the rearview mirror and mostly forgotten. Between 1998 and 2010, the club had seen six different presidents. For the similar period ending at this writing in early 2023, it has had just three. And membership has continued to grow. At this writing, MAS's membership exceeds 130 people for the first time in its history. The club has an active Facebook group that is followed by well



Tom Ferch presiding over a meeting at Space Place's classroom, our meeting venue since 2007. Laurence Mohr just to Tom's left seated in front row looking toward back. Ed Proctor photo, probably 2016.

over 800. Though the COVID-19 pandemic affected meeting attendance for the past three years, the pandemic forced the club to expand its presence to the online world of livestreaming, giving that expanded social media audience (not to mention those with mobility challenges) a chance to participate without having to leave home.

In 2010, the author was encouraged to finally take his turn at leadership. I had been a member since the mid-90s and had seen most of the above transpire firsthand. I had been the newsletter editor for 12 years, probably the longest continuous run of a club publication. One of our priorities was to explore how our meetings could be improved

by separating the business portion of the discussions from the public meetings/guest speakers. For years our visitors and guests—who we were hoping to impress—were invariably exposed to seemingly endless deliberations of insurance policies and tree trimming. When I was elected president in 2010, the board made the decision to move the business portion of the meeting to a separate night. The membership would still be invited to business meetings, but from now on public nights would be dedicated to welcoming visitors, providing time for social interactions, and hearing an interesting talk by a member or an invited speaker. This new format allowed us to refocus on publicizing the club (made easier thanks to Facebook and Google), improving our web presence, and coordination with Madison's other two primary astronomy/education entities—the planetarium at Memorial High School and the UW Madison's Space Place.

And YRS has continued to grow. The KMO—the second of Art Koster's two observatories—was finally removed in 2011. Just months later, another building was added. After Doc Greiner and the minor planet group moved their observing to robotic facilities in New Mexico, there was a roll-off building near Evansville that was no longer being used. Matt Mills had built it for the minor planet hunters and now decided to donate it to the club on the condition that MAS would move it. Under the leadership of Les Phelps, a huge volunteer effort was undertaken to prepare the new site at YRS, detach, lift, and transport the building from Evansville, and place it on its new foundation. Mills asked only that it be named in Doc's honor. It is now the Doc Greiner Research Observatory and houses two permanent piers.<sup>2</sup>

Tom Ferch was an important partner in my stint at the head of the club. As VP, he deftly solved a number of issues that had dogged the club for years. Tom followed my five years at the helm with three of his own. The club is now under the capable leadership of

### MAS Meeting snapshot

December 9, 2016  
Annual MAS solstice party and telescope clinic. Avtar Roopra will give a short talk on telescope type, operation and purchasing advice. This will be followed by a social time to enjoy refreshments and have guests present their problem telescopes to members for problem-solving. Friday, December 9 at Space Place, 2300 S. Park St.

<sup>2</sup> When in Evansville, this building originally housed a 16" Schmidt Cassegrain scope, also owned by Mills. In 2020, Mills would donate that telescope to Promega Corporation where it would take its place in the refurbished Oscar Mayer Observatory, now renamed the Bell Burnell Observatory. Matt Mills also donated numerous telescopes and mounts to MAS over the 2010-present era.



Laurence Mohr. By our count, Laurence is the 35th president of MAS and is now in his fifth year in that role. Many others have continued the tradition set years ago of volunteering their time to improve the club: Tim and Mary Ellestad, Les Phelps, Matt Mills, Chris Zeltner, Jeff Shokler, Dan Strome, Wynn Wacker, Martin Mika, Jurgen Patau, and dozens of others. MAS is a *society*, an aggregate of people working together in a more or less ordered community. MAS members can be proud of their collective history, the present state of the club, and its future.

## Conclusion

Despite sweeping changes to society as a whole and the state of technology, the hobby of amateur astronomy remains remarkably similar to when MAS was founded in 1935. Members still enjoy looking at celestial objects with telescopes or binoculars. Some enjoy the challenge of taking pictures of the objects they view. Others simply sit back and take in the sky with the naked eye. Some take the science seriously; to others, it's just a hobby. People join a club like MAS and enjoy attending meetings and hearing speakers talk about research at the university, or a fellow member's talk about a recent trip to observe a total solar eclipse. Most of all, members enjoy the chance to meet others who are passionate about a subject they love. As former treasurer Bob Shannon put it, "Connecting with people helped to connect me with the universe." Former Explorer Scout Jeff Stewart said, "MAS connected me with some like-minded people who became some of the long-lasting friends during and after college."

# People

**Fritschel, Paul** (1944–). Born in St. Louis, Fritschel went to college and graduate school in Madison and was a scientist at the UW Madison for his whole career, first in the Department of Dairy Science and then in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering. He joined MAS in 1972 and was a member of the board of directors for most of the next 20 or so years. Fritschel was a leader of the club during the crucial time of its transition from the OMO to the Yanna Research Station and contributed greatly to the effort of building that observing site for the club. He was a recreational pilot who was friends with Carl Fosmark, which is how Fosmark came to donate a building to the club's new observatory in 1984. Fritschel retired from the university in 2001 and still lives in Fitchburg with his wife, Patti.



Paul Fritschel. Photo courtesy Tim Baker. 1980.



"Doc" Greiner in an undated photo (Madison.com), most likely a UW Madison file shot from the 1980s.

**Greiner, Richard "Doc"** (1931–2015). Greiner was a professor of electrical and computer engineering at UW Madison from 1957 to 1992. "Doc" (as he was known to everyone) joined MAS in 1995 and remained active in the club until his death. He served two terms as its president, from 1999–2001. Doc was a generous benefactor of the club and donated equipment, time and money in the interest of modernizing its observing facility, the Yanna Research Station. There are two buildings there today with Doc's name on them and his fingerprints are on many other projects and improvements. In addition to astronomy, Doc was passionate about photography, gardening, music, geology, Chevrolet Corvettes, and glass fusing, among many other hobbies. Shortly before his death, his collection of over 10,000 music LPs and CDs was donated to WHA radio station, and his mineral collection was gratefully accepted by the UW Madison Geology Department and named in his honor.

**Jacobs, Tom** (1946–). Jacobs got his first telescope as a sixth grader (3-inch Edmund Scientific reflector) and was an active amateur astronomer as a kid. After other pursuits intervened in high school and college, his interest was renewed as an adult. He joined MAS around 1981 after noticing the observatory on the hill in Fitchburg. He asked around, found out about the monthly meetings and started to attend. Tom served as the club's newsletter editor and served many terms on the board, including several as the observatory director. Jacobs was instrumental in the acquisition of land from Leroy Yanna and the formation of the Yanna Research Station. Jacobs spent his career working for Thermo Fischer Scientific as a project manager and software engineer, designing scientific instruments. He retired in 2012 after 23 years. In 2018 he and his wife, Jane, moved to Phoenix, AZ.



Tom Jacobs. Undated photo but most likely from Astronomical League convention in 1993.



Bob Manske. Photo from collection of Dave Weier. 1993.

**Manske, Robert "Bob"** (1941–2016). After serving in the Air Force, Manske spent his career as a computer programmer for Swiss Colony. He served as president of the club from 1991–1999 and went on later to serve as president of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society. Bob was passionate about astronomy and enjoyed sharing the hobby with anyone who expressed an interest. He was a patient teacher and taught many the craft of carefully timing occultations of stars by asteroids or the moon. Many members remember the expeditions he organized to place telescopic stations along a line to capture the "shadow" of the distant bodies. His leadership of MAS resulted in



increased public outreach in the 1990s, and he spearheaded MAS's hosting of a national convention of the Astronomical League in Madison in 1993. Bob oversaw a period of unprecedented growth of the club and development of its observing site, the Yanna Research Station. He was a long-time member of the AAVSO and International Occultation Time Association (IOTA) and contributed thousands of observations to those organizations. Away from the eyepiece, Bob was a devotee of ancient languages, military history and the Green Bay Packers.

**Weier, Dave** (1948–). Weier worked as a lab technician for Marshall Labs for 21 years and later was an early computer tech support for Microsoft and some of their internet subcontractors, after which he worked for Sintel and TDS Telecom. Weier joined MAS in about 1971 and has the distinction of being one of its longest serving officers. He was president for at least eight years during the 1970s and 80s and spent even longer stints as vice president. His leadership coincided with the group's acquisition of YRS in the 1980s and the building of the observatory that the club enjoys today. Even after leaving the board in 1995, Weier continued on as an active member for the next ten years. He was a decades-long member of the AAVSO and was a fixture at YRS, using the 17.5" dob to observe his variables. In the late 1970s and early 80s, Weier was a leader of the Explorer Post within MAS and mentored dozens of young people, many of whom became members of the club and developed a lifelong pursuit of amateur astronomy. Weier's interest in astronomy was piqued as a 9-year-old kid when his parents spent weekends at a cottage on Lake Mills where he had a great view of the stars. Weier retired in 2012 and lives in Cottage Grove, WI, with his wife, Jane.



Dave Weier. Photo from collection of Dave Darling, 1992.

**Zit, Ray** (1942–). Working as a chef in Madison and elsewhere for his entire career, Zit cannot remember a time when he wasn't interested in cooking and food prep. When living in the Milwaukee area around age 20, he met some members of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society and was bitten by the astronomy bug and introduced to observing variable stars. Ray built a number of telescopes and observatories during the 70s and 80s and eventually considered himself much more of a builder and fixer than an astronomer. He's not sure exactly how and when he learned about the Madison Astronomical Society but believes it was probably while attending a meeting of the Astronomical League in Illinois sometime in the 70s. Zit's contributions to the building and renovation at the Yanna Research Station are considerable. He served on the MAS board as both treasurer and observatory director. He was also very active in the Milwaukee club after he left MAS and has a roll-off building named for him there. Ray is retired and lives in Cottage Grove, WI, with his wife.



Ray Zit. Photo from the collection of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society, about 1980.

### About the author

John Rummel joined the Madison Astronomical Society in 1996, far too late to have known some of the most interesting characters in its history. Early on he served as publicity coordinator for the club and was very active in its many outreach efforts. He was its longest serving newsletter editor from 1999-2011. He also served as a liaison between the MAS and the Madison School District's planetarium and helped craft a cohesive outreach effort on behalf of those two organizations as well as the University of Wisconsin's Space Place. From 2010-2015, John served as the president of the society, and from 2010 to the present, he has been its meeting planner and organizer. To that list of roles, John now wishes to claim the title of Club Historian.

