

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 2, No. 12

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

February, 1999

**Officers:** President, Larry Higgins; 1st Vice President/newsletter editor, Bill Warren, 229-6108 -- or, if you prefer e-mail: warren1212@mindspring.com; 2nd Vice President/Secretary-Treasurer, Ken Walburn (P. O. Box 1179, McDonough, GA 30253 / 954-9442; AICor, Neal Wellons, and Web Site Coordinator, Cody Wellons (946-5039); Librarian, Keith Cox (227-8171); Observing Chairman, Steven "Smitty" Smith (583-2200); Telephone/Hospitality Committee Chairman: Dan Pillatzki (707-0270). Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. All of these phone numbers have 770 area code prefixes. FRAC web page address: <http://welcome.to/frac>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** promptly if you have a change of address.

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**Club Calendar. Thurs., Feb. 11:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook, 7:30); **Fri., Feb. 12:** Beaverbrook "First Light"/ FRAC joint observing (BB, at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Feb. 19-20:** deep-sky observings (Cox Field, at dark).

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**Vice President's Message.** We've added 3 new members to our happy little family: **Robert Hall**, of Warner Robins; **Randy Kanipe**, of Brooks, Ga.; and **Quimby and Louisa Melton**, of Griffin. Robert, a veteran observer, is eagerly awaiting the addition of the newest member of his family, a Maksutov 'scope with great astrophotographic potential. Randy, who is also interested in astrophotography, has his sights set on an 8" Meade Starfinder. Quimby and Louisa,

newcomers to astronomy, are presently undecided as to precisely where their interests lie and will be led through the decision-making process by **Tom Moore**. I've met these folks, and I know you're gonna like all of them (except Tom).

Incidentally, when I asked Randy, a Methodist minister, to put in a few kind words for us regarding clear, haze-free skies this spring when the Coma-Virgo galaxy clusters roll around, he replied that, in these parts, at least, he thinks Baptist ministers have more influence. If that's true -- well, on the club's behalf he may have to make the switch. Having been both a Methodist and a Baptist at various times, Randy, I define a Methodist as "a Baptist who's wet behind the ears (from sprinkling)."

In addition to having a pair of speakers at our Feb. meeting that you're really gonna enjoy, we're also going to elect new officers for FRAC. The fact that our officers -- president, vice president and secretary/treasurer -- are elected for 2-yr. terms has shot down my plan to stuff the ballot box with votes for me as "Emperor For Life." The nominating committee considered me for president, but I turned it down when I found out I couldn't have interns.

I want to amend and clarify a statement I've made several times in these pages, namely, that as a FRAC member you're free to use Cox Field any time you like. You are, but **Mr. Cox** has requested that, if you want to use the field apart from our regular observing nights, you call him in advance so he'll know you're coming. I went out there at 11:30 one night to look for late-rising galaxies east of Leo, and Mr. & Mrs. Cox, seeing headlights out on the

field and not knowing who they belonged to, were rightfully disturbed that I might be someone interested in vandalism, etc., rather than a FRAC stargazer.

It's not that they don't want us to use their field; they do. They just want to know who's using the field, and when.

Mr. Cox's phone no. is (770)228-9367.

I want to thank the many of you who have stepped in and helped out whenever I've requested your assistance during the past 8 months. Your support and friendship has meant more to me than I could ever express; without it, our club literally would have ceased to exist. Our base of seasoned veteran observers is growing steadily, which means that we have more members who are capable of helping our newcomers to astronomy get started. I hope that you'll continue to help out whenever and however you can in the future. Any member who is reading this and thinks that he or she isn't important to us is badly -- and sadly -- mistaken. It's corny, but true: *Half of the word us is U.*

It's not the \$10 annual dues that makes you important to us and binds us together, it's your love for the night sky. We don't need 50 members at our meetings and observings to make them successful affairs; all we need is one person: *you*. If you don't attend our observings, you're not giving us a chance to help you learn how to explore the universe that lies beyond Earth's fragile boundaries.

At any rate, I would be remiss if I failed to mention two names from among the many who have been invaluable to me since I assumed the duties if not the title of club president last July: **Ken Walburn**, who has been unfailingly supportive of everything I've said and done, no matter how misguided or silly; and **Neal Wellons**, whose work on the club's behalf has gone largely unnoticed and unpublicized but deserves our heartfelt Thanks and a huge "M.V.P." award. As for the rest of you who have so readily pitched in with your time and hard work -- well, I've tried at every opportunity to let you know how very much you mean to me and our club.

As for me -- hey, you had your chance to

impeach me and you blew it. I'm not going anywhere; I just ain't gonna be president for the next 2 yrs. I'll still be your newsletter editor, if for no other reason than to have the privilege of teasing you in print.

One of the first things newcomers learn about our club is that The newsletter editor always has the last word. I intend to extend my target base considerably, starting immediately. If you find me kidding you in these pages, just remember the words of King Solomon, amended slightly here: "He chasteneth whom he loveth." And I do care about you, from the greatest among you to **Dan Pillatzki**. (Gotcha!)

I hope to live as long as Methuselah; if I do, somewhere near the end of those 968 years I expect to see **Mike Stuart** and **John Wallace** getting their Messier pins, and **Tom Moore** finishing his Lunar Club list.

-Bill Warren

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**Last Month's Meetings/Activities.** We had 12 in attendance at our Jan. meeting. The following night, **Tom** and **Katie Moore** and I staged separate viewings on either side of the BB gym at the same time, unaware of each other's presence. (With pot-hole skies overhead, I hadn't expected anyone to show up and therefore didn't check behind the school where the observing was supposed to be held.) **Tom** and I also had a very nice observing with about 30 Jackson Road Elementary 5th-graders and parents on Jan. 19th. Eighteen members and visitors attended our Cox Field observings on Jan. 15th-16th.

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**Membership Renewals Due in February:**  
None.

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**February Meetings/Activities.** If you want to know the ins and outs and do's and don'ts of getting started in astrophotography, you won't

want to miss the presentation by **Ken Wilson** and **Chuck Beckham** at our meeting on **Thurs., Feb. 11th.**

The following night, **Fri., Feb. 12th**, we'll hold our regular BB/FRAC joint observing *in front of* (not in back of) Beaverbrook gym.

Our Cox Field deep-sky observing weekend will be **Fri.-Sat., Feb. 19th-20th.**

The topic of our March meeting will be "Finding the Spring Messiers."

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**The Sky in January.** Venus and Jupiter put on a lovely dance in the evening sky in February, closing to within 2° of each other on **Feb. 21st**, 1° -- that's 2 Moon-widths -- on **Feb. 22nd**, and less than 1/4° apart on **Feb. 23rd**, giving them the appearance of celestial Siamese twins. Higher in the sky, **Saturn** will still trail Jupiter across the sky; to the lower right of Jupiter and Venus, low in the SSW sky at twilight, **Mercury** will be just above the horizon. **Mars** joins the planetary parade in late evening, forming a nice wide pair with bright **Spica** in *Virgo*. April will bring Mars to opposition and give us our best view of it since 1990.

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### Infamous Dates in the History of FRAC

compiled by **Bill Warren**

*9:30 p.m., Feb. 12, 1997:* **Larry Higgins, Ken Walburn** and **Bill Warren** meet at Bill's apartment to discuss forming a Flint River area astronomy club.

*9:32 p.m., Feb. 12, 1997:* **Ken Walburn** falls asleep.

*11:47 p.m., May 2, 1997:* Attempting to join **Phil Sacco** and others in a deep cosmological discussion at the Peach State Star Gaze, **Ken Walburn** asks, "Speaking of Big Bangs, can anyone tell me where the john is?"

*7:50 p.m., Nov. 13, 1997:* While cleaning his eyeglasses during a club meeting, **John**

**Wallace** discovers that he has mistakenly joined the Flint River Astronomy Club, and not the Kiwanis Club.

*8:43 p.m., March 27, 1998:* **Bill Warren**, yr. humble reporter, is miraculously and spontaneously cured of the night blindness that has rendered observing impossible for the past 18 months, when the lens cap falls off his 3-1/2" refractor.

*June 28, 1998 (time unknown):* Tired of getting his beard caught in his focuser, **Smitty** shaves, discovers that he looks exactly like Brad Pitt, and grows back his beard to avoid being mobbed by female autograph-seekers and groupies at FRAC's public observings.

*10:15 p.m., Aug. 21, 1998:* An excited **Mike Stuart** discovers and names the "Dancing Planetary Nebula," a wildly gyrating deep-sky object just north of M22 in Sagittarius. After calling the International Astronomical Union to notify them of his find, at home later that evening Mike makes another shocking discovery: a dead moth in his telescope tube.

*5:15 a.m., Dec. 15th, 1998:* **Tom Moore** makes his first detailed telescopic study of Mars, low in the eastern sky, from his backyard, noting the red planet's "unusual brightness, stationary position and oddly rectangular shape." **Katie** doesn't have the heart to tell him that he's been viewing the taillight of a neighbor's truck.

*11:32 a.m., Dec. 29th, 1998:* The loud, shrieking sound you heard that morning wasn't an emergency vehicle rushing to a fender bender on Hwy. 19/41, it was **Dan Pillatzki** in Hampton, after discovering that his daughter **Megan** has played "connect the-dots" with a Magic Marker in his new Cambridge Star Atlas.

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