

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT RIVER
ASTRONOMY CLUB
An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

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Officers: President, **Bill Warren:** (770)229-6108, warren7804@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Higgins;** Secretary-Treasurer, **Steve Bentley.**

Board of Directors: **Tom Moore; Charles Anstey; Tom Danei;** and **Felix Luciano.**

Alcor/Webmaster, **Tom Moore;** Ga. Sky View Coordinator, **Steve Bentley;** Observing Chairman /Public Observing Coordinator, **Larry Higgins;** Program Co-Chairmen: **Larry Higgins** and **Bill Warren;** NASA contact: **Felix Luciano;** Event Photographer, **Tom Danei;** and Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren.**

Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org; discussion group at FRAC@yahoogroups.com.

Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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Club Calendar. Thurs., Jan. 8: FRAC meeting (7:30 p.m., Gordon College); **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 16-17** (at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 23-24:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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President's Message. The torch has passed.

Steve Knight, creator of FRAC's annual **Georgia Sky View** weekend star party and coordinator of the event since its inaugural year, 2004, has stepped down from that post after five years of dedicated service.

Steve's decision left very large shoes to fill, but FRAC's Board of Directors followed his advice and offered the job to **Steve Bentley**, who accepted the post and has been working virtually nonstop to master the skills of the position. Said Steve B., "I don't think anyone could have done as good a job as Steve (Knight) has done over the years in running GSV. Coordinating a star party is a big job, and I'll do the best I can to make **Ga. Sky View 2009** something we can all be proud of."

As **Ben Franklin** noted, nothing is certain in life except death and taxes. But here's one thing I'll guarantee you with absolute confidence: Steve B. will work as long and hard as it takes to make **GSV '09** as good as our previous GSVs have been.

When I became FRAC's president last March, one of my first acts was to call a meeting of our newly elected officers and board. At that meeting, I urged each of them to "spend ten minutes a day thinking about FRAC and how we can make it better."

I've known for a long time that Steve Bentley – and **Tom Moore** as well – are tireless, hard workers. Where I asked for ten minutes a day, though, Steve and Tom have made GSV '09 literally a full-time job. The quality of Tom's work on the FRAC website in general, and its GSV link in particular, will be evident when, as I hope you'll do, you visit our website and GSV link to see for yourself what I'm talking about.

I've also known that Steve B. is a talented individual in many ways – but I had no idea that his talents also extend to such skills as organizational ability and writing. Here's an example:

Overloaded with work of my own, I e-mailed Steve to say that, in a day or two, I'd have time to write a letter to previous GSV attendees, telling them about **GSV '09** and inviting them to visit our website and see what we have planned for this year's shindig at Camp McIntosh on Apr. 23-26, 2009.

Almost immediately after clicking on *Send*, I received a reply from Steve: "You don't have to do that, Bill. I've already done it. Look over my letter, let me know if it needs any changes, and I'll send it out." After only three days on the job, Steve had already gone through five years of GSV records and compiled a list of previous attendees, and the letter he had written was *awesome!*

I've had eighteen books published, so I know a thing or two about writing (and rewriting), although you may know it from reading the *Observer*. It would have taken me at least a full day to have written and edited such a letter to my satisfaction; Steve did it overnight, and with far less editing from me than I'd have done if I'd written it.

So *Yes*, GSV is now in new hands; the last names have just changed from Knight to Bentley.

Steve Knight did a great job with GSV for five years – and when he decided to step down he cemented his legacy by recommending Steve Bentley as his successor. Like Allstate customers, GSV has been in good hands over the past five years; I'm confident that it will continue so in the foreseeable future.

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. On Dec. 3rd, **Dr. Richard Schmude** had a book-signing at the campus bookstore at Gordon College. His latest book, *URANUS, NEPTUNE & PLUTO and How to Observe Them* (New York: Springer, 2008), is a beautiful, well written, marvelously illustrated and highly informative addition to astronomy literature.

Other book signings may be in the works (e.g., at Bookland in Griffin). If so, we'll let you know when dates are set.

Dr. Schmude presently is working on another book for Springer Publishing, this one on comets.

A day earlier, on Dec. 2nd, a sparse but enthusiastic group of about 20-25 hardy area residents ventured out to the frozen tundra of "The Garden" in Griffin to see the sky through the telescopes of **Charles Turner, Steve & Betty Bentley, Tom Moore** and **yr. editor**.

We had 21 members at our Ryan's Steak House Christmas dinner meeting on Dec. 5th: **Dan Pillatzki, Mike Stuart, Felix Luciano, Curt & Irene Cole, Charles Turner, Dwight, Betty & Elizabeth Harness, Jessie & Alex Dasher, Joel & Anne Simmons, Jerry & Beverly Williams, Steve & Betty Bentley, Tom & Brit Danei, Dr. Richard Schmude** and **yr. editor**. You missed a real treat if you

couldn't make it. Not only was the food splendid and the socializing incomparable (as always), but get this: with 21 attendees and sixteen door prizes, virtually everyone present won one. (As a matter of fact, everyone *did* go home a winner, since everyone present received an Astronomical league stick-on decal for their telescopes.) Other prizes included: a *Seasonal Star Charts*; two laminated Moon maps; three laminated Caldwell and Messier object finder charts; two Messier Handbooks from the A. L.; a lunar filter; autographed copies of both of **Dr. Richard Schmude's** books; and numerous other items, including a humorous gift donated by **Steve Bentley**: a small can of possum meat from Bill's Roadkill, Inc., of Forsyth, Ga. ("Offering the Finest in Roadkill Products Since 1966"). It wasn't really possum meat, of course, but potted meat with a fake (but very realistic-looking) label created by Steve. Still, it's unlikely that the winner enjoyed potted meat sandwiches the next day. After all, Steve might have been kidding when he said he was kidding about it being possum meat.

Charles Turner won the Grand Prize, an autographed copy of Dr. Schmude's new book, *URANUS, NEPTUNE & PLUTO and How to Observe Them*.

A special thanks goes to **Dan Pillatzki** for helping with the door prizes, and for constantly hiding bottles of tabasco and steak sauce, silverware, etc., in **yr. president's** briefcase.

"Dan, what if one of the waitresses sees these things in my briefcase and notifies the manager?," we whispered urgently at one point. *Not to worry*, Dan assured us. "I watch **Judge Judy** on TV, so I know a lot about the law, and I'll defend you in court. I'll tell the judge you're a kleptominerac."

Our Dec. 26th Cox Field observing was fogged out – sort of like **Ken Walburn**, only without his charming personality.

The following evening, Sat., Dec. 27th, was the kind that makes weather forecasters look bad.

It was supposed to be cloudy – and it *was*, until about 7:30 p.m. **Yr. editor** and **Larry Higgins** (who was antsy to get out to Cox Field again after 'way too long being unable to do so), decided to try our luck.

After all, the **Sun** had been out all afternoon in Griffin amid large but sporadic clouds.

About 7:30, though, the clouds began to scatter, leaving large portions of the sky visible for 15-20 min. at a time, after which other portions would open. We used binoculars to observe Messiers and things like the **Double Cluster (NGCs 869 & 884)** in *Perseus*, and then dragged out yr. editor's 12" Dob to find the objects listed on p. 6 of this newsletter. The open portions of sky were as crystal-clear as we've ever seen them at The Cox, with transparency about 5.8 and seeing at 4.5 (out of a possible 5) on the **Antoniadi** scale. **Andromeda Galaxy (M31)** was clearly visible naked-eye, and Larry spotted **M31 (Pinwheel Galaxy)** naked-eye as well. **Venus** was dazzlingly bright, with no twinkling at all.

It just shows to go ya: *Sometimes ya gotta take a chance, because sometimes it pays off.* This was one of those times.

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This 'n That. HELLLLLLPPP!!! *FRAC needs your help!!!* Specifically, we need to borrow or rent a digital projector for our **GSV '09** speakers to use with their power point presentations on Fri., Apr. 24th and Sat., Apr. 25th. Please give the matter some thought as to whether you know anyone, whether an individual or an organization, who might be willing to loan or rent us one for two days. (We prefer a loan, of course – but in the latter case we probably can't afford more than \$50 per day in rental fees.) If you can help, all of FRAC's officers and board members will be your love slaves for an entire weekend (or until nap time, whichever comes first.)

Seriously, though, we'll appreciate whatever help you can give us here. You can contact Steve Bentley at (478)994-4552, or at wd4ity@bellsouth.net.

*We've tried again (for the fourth time) to obtain the 12 Outreach Award certificates and pins due our members. Meanwhile, one of those members, **Curt Cole**, is still waiting for his award 15 months after he qualified for it. (The original was lost in the mail.)

*A couple of years ago a woman gave **Larry Fallin** a 4-1/2" Meade DS114AT 'scope (f/8, 910mm f.l.) with an Autostar 494 go-to controller that didn't work. Well, **Steve Bentley** has been tinkering with it, and if he can get it working he wants to offer it as a kids' doorprize at **GSV '09**, but it also needs an eyepiece or a finderscope or Telrad.

If anyone has an eyepiece you don't use much anymore -- or an extra finderscope, Telrad or Rigel Quickfinder -- to donate to the cause, there's a youngster out there who will be attending GSV '09 and will greatly appreciate your generosity. You'll be glad you did it.

Meanwhile, thanks to Larry Fallin and Steve B. for getting the ball rolling.

*There's good news for those of us who enjoy having **Larry Higgins** around: we'll be seeing more of Larry in the future: he's switching back to regular day shift work hours after eight months of 3-to-11 work.

It'll be fun hearing Larry's booming bass voice in the dark at Cox Field again; now, if we can just do something about the *other* booming sounds we've come to associate with Larry's presence...

Incidentally, Larry has resumed his former post of observing/public observing coordinator.

*Since at present we don't have an official FRAC tee shirt, the nearest equivalent you can get is one of our GSV shirts. We'll be selling them at **GSV '09**, of course – but **Steve Bentley** says he has nine shirts left over from previous GSVs that he'll offer at \$5 apiece at the Jan. meeting. Here's what he has available:

GSV '05: three size XL

GSV '07: three size S, one size XL

GSV '08: two size XXL

So here's how to do it: consider it a \$5 door prize fund contribution and go home with a FRAC tee shirt.

*Talk about somebody who's hooked as truly as a trophy bass, it's **Felix Luciano**, hooked on astrophotography. You can see his work in the FRACgroups photo album section.

Trouble is, now Felix will have to bring *two* 'scopes to Cox Field – one for his astrophotos, and

one to observe with so he won't have to sit around cleaning out his navel while waiting for his camera to do its magic.

*From **Alan Bolton**: "I have decided to sell my Meade 8-in. Schmide-Cassegrain telescope.

"As many of you know, my observing interests have migrated to small refractors, so this 'scope gets too little use these days. It is a Premier 2080 Model 40 (a precursor to Meade's current LX series). I am the original owner. The 'scope has been extremely well cared for. It has always been kept indoors in a climate-controlled environment. The optics are like new – clean and untouched. The corrector plate has never even had dew on it! I don't believe the OTA even has a scratch on it. (Please note: it does not have go-to capability or DSCs but does feature Meade's Smart Drive with Permanent Periodic Error-Correction.) It comes equipped with the following:

- *OTA and fork mount with Smart Drive;
- *Hard side foot-locker case for OTA and fork mount (chrome reinforcing on the corners has some tarnish);
- *Meade heavy-duty equatorial wedge;
- *Meade heavy-duty stainless steel field tripod;
- *6x30 finderscope;
- *Hand controller;
- *1-1/4" visual back and diagonal;
- *Meade Series 4000 26mm Super Plossl eyepiece (has a couple of minor imperfections in lens but am tossing it in anyway);
- *JMI Moto Dec (declination motor);
- *JMI Moto Focus (electric focus motor);
- *Vixen-style dovetail rail for piggybacking accessories such as camera or guide scope;
- *Three power options with all required cables and plugs: 110v AC, 12v DC, and AA battery pack; and
- *All original manuals and warranty information.

"This is a complete setup, in excellent condition, at an extremely fair price of \$695 for everything listed. Take a look for yourself: pictures are posted in my photo album on FRACgroups. If you are interested, or know someone else who might be, please e-mail me offline. Thanks for looking."

*And this, from **Joel Simmons**: "I know most of you check out the Astronomy Photo of the Day (APOD) (<http://antwerp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>); but did you know about the Lunar Photo of the Day (LPOD) at <http://lpod.wikispaces.com/>?"

*The Astronomical League has four new observing clubs offering certificates and pins for successful completion of certain tasks. (Well, that's not *entirely* true: one of them has two different names and represents a mildly amended version of an older observing club it replaced.)

Does that sound confusing? Let's see if we can clear up things, starting with the observing club with two names.

The **Planetary Observers/Solar System Observing Club** and the **Solar System Observing Club**. Click on either of those links under the A. L.'s observing clubs listings, and it'll take you to the Planetary Observers/Solar System Observing Club, which replaces the older but now defunct Planetary Club.

To earn a Planetary Observers/Solar System Observers Club certificate and pin, you must complete **any 25** of 34 observing projects involving: the **Sun** (3) and the **Moon** (6); ten Inner Solar System projects (**Mercury** (1), **Venus** (3), **Mars** (2), dwarf planets (**Ceres**) 1, asteroids (2), and comets (1); and fifteen Outer Solar System projects (**Jupiter** (8), **Saturn** (4), **Uranus** (1), **Neptune** (1) and **Pluto** (1). GoTo is acceptable in this observing club.

The Dark Sky Advocate Club. To earn a certificate and pin in this club, you must accumulate at least 75 points within both the Personal Enlightenment and Public Enlightenment sections, giving a total of 150 points. Points are earned by completing projects designed to display (a) your awareness and understanding of the light pollution problem, its causes and effects on amateur astronomy and the community (Personal Enlightenment); and (b) your efforts to increase public awareness of the problem, effect changes in your community and preserve our dark skies.

Steve Bentley should be a shoo-in for a Dark Sky Advocate Club certificate and pin, since he's already doing that sort of stuff on a regular basis.

The **Galileo Club**. In this brilliantly innovative observing club, to receive a certificate and pin you'll repeat **Galileo's** observations of the heavens 400 years ago by pursuing 11 required and two optional observing projects of his. GoTo is allowed, and either a telescope or binoculars may be used. (A binocular mount is recommended if you do it that way.) All observations must be done at a magnification between 10x and 20x.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our monthly club meeting will be held on **Thurs., Jan. 8th**, at **7:30 p.m.** in **Room 208** of the **Instructional Complex Bldg.** on the **Gordon College Campus**. We're meeting there because our speaker, **Dr. Richard Schmude**, will be using the college's power point projector for his presentation on "The Cove" (i.e., the suspected meteor crater impact site near Woodbury). If you're planning to go with us in Feb. or March to visit The Cove and look for shatter cones, you need to attend this meeting and hear Richard's talk.

To get to the Gordon College campus from, say, N of Griffin, come S on U. S. Hwy. 19/41 like you're going to Cox Field, but go past the Ga. Hwy. 362 (Williamson Rd.) exit. Stay on the 4-lane, and 16.5 mi. ahead you'll come to a Ford dealership on the right. Just beyond it you'll see a BP station on the left. (There's also a small green sign on the right indicating Gordon College to the left at the intersection.) Turn left onto College St., and ½ mi. ahead you'll come to a green light. Turn right into the gated parking lot just beyond the light.

When you get out of your car, there's a 20-yd.-long tunnel that passes under the street. When you exit the tunnel, you'll see a building on your right with a larger, 4-story building behind it. The taller building is the Instructional Building where we'll conduct our meeting.

To get there from the tunnel, you can either walk up the stone steps or take the handicap access ramp to

the sidewalk and walk around the steps. Either way, go past the library on the right to reach the Instructional Complex Bldg. We'll meet in the large classroom, Room 208.

We're sorry for any inconvenience this temporary change in meeting venue causes, but it was necessary in the present case, not just because of the power point projector but also because Richard would have had a lot to carry, including samples of shatter cones.

Our two January Cox Field observing weekends will be on **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 16th-17th** and **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 23rd-24th**. The Last Qtr. Moon will be on the 17th, and the New Moon on the 26th.

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People You Should Know: Mike Stuart.

Describing someone as "a good person" or "a nice guy" can be rather trite, since most of us (except **Dan Pillatzki**) try to do good and be nice most of the time. In Mike's case, however, the terms are not merely apt; they describe perfectly the kind of person he is. Quiet yet extremely likeable, knowledgeable about astronomy without being overbearing, loyal and committed to FRAC and public observing, Mike has the rare and elusive ability to make people feel good about themselves in his presence.

Mike Stuart's roots in FRAC go back to Oct., 1997, when he and daughter **Danielle**, then a 5th-grader at Beaverbrook, joined the club. He didn't have a 'scope then, so he borrowed the school's 6" reflector. He now has a 10" Meade DSE Dobsonian and 10x50 binoculars. In an era in which GoTo 'scopes proliferate, Mike remains among the best in FRAC at finding things manually by star-hopping. Since, like **yr. editor**, Mike enjoys the challenge of tracking down elusive objects with star charts, you'll often find us working together at Cox Field observings, searching for the same things and Mike usually finding them first.

Mike's observing preferences are broad. He earned his Messier pin in 2003 and a Lunar Club pin in 2006, and he is presently working on the Globular Club and Lunar II Club lists – he's the only person in FRAC ever to pursue the latter, and we wish him success in his pursuit. But he also enjoys planetary

observing (especially **Saturn**) and special observing treats such as comets.

Says Mike, "I have had a lot of help over the years from different members who were glad to lend a hand or share their experiences, and I must say that I have never met a more talented, knowledgeable and innovative group of people. I'm proud to be a part of FRAC."

Mike lives in Griffin with his wife **Lynn**. They have two children, **Shane**, 23, and **Danielle**, 20. Mike works at the 1888 Mills Griffin plant.

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The Sky in January. Three naked-eye planets – **Mercury**, **Jupiter** and **Venus** -- will be visible during part or all of January. (Make that four if you look down at the **Earth** beneath your feet.)

The new year starts with Mercury (mag. 0.7) and Jupiter together, low in the SW sky. At mag. -1.9, Jupiter will, of course, be the brighter of the two. On **Jan. 1st**, the two planets will be 2° apart – two pinky-widths with your hand extended fully against the sky.

Venus (mag. -4.4) will be up all month in the SW sky although, like Mercury and Jupiter, it will set shortly after sundown. Both Mercury and Venus will show distinct **Moon**-like phases in telescopes.

Uranus (mag. 5.9) can be seen in Jan. near the mag. 5.6 star **96 Aquarii**, its small but easily identifiable blue-green disk visible in binocs. For about a week around **Jan. 24th**, Uranus and Jupiter will share the same binocular field.

Neptune (mag. 8) will be a bluish telescopic disk during the first ten days in Jan. *Astronomy* tells you how to find it on p. 54 of the Jan. '09 issue.

Saturn (mag. 0.9), its rings thinned to a barely perceptible line across the planet in our line of sight, rises in the E after midnight.

Elsewhere...

With *Orion* dominating the evening sky, you aren't likely to run out of beautiful and fascinating deep-sky objects to observe in January. Some of the things you might want to track down include:

***M42**. We've never met anyone in astronomy who says he gets tired of **Orion Nebula**. Telescopically, at least, the **Trapezium** and M42's

majestic nebulosity easily rate No. 1 in popularity among all deep-sky viewing pleasures.

***M78**, the brightest reflection nebula in the sky. Three words to describe it: *headlights in fog*.

*The "**37**" asterism (**NGC 2169**) in *Orion*: forming an equilateral triangle with the 4th-mag. stars **Xi** and **Nu Orionis** above **Betelgeuse**, "37" looks like a basketball scoreboard with a couple of bulbs burned out. It's an incredible chance arrangement of stars.

*The "**Christmas Tree**" (**NGC 2264**) and **Cone Nebula** in *Monoceros*: A large, bright cluster with the mag. 5 double star **S Mon** marking the tree's base and lines of stars radiating outward above it forming the tree's limbs. Cone Nebula is a dark nebula above the treetop, possibly visible under ideal conditions with a nebula filter and certainly with an h-Beta filter, as a star-poor, conical space.

***Hubble's Variable Nebula** (**NGC 2261**) in *Monoceros*. Located near the Christmas Tree and between the mag. 4 stars **S Mon** and **R Mon**, NGC 2261 looks very much like a fainter version of **Comet Hale-Bopp** – a small, triangular nebulous patch with the variable star **R Mon** forming the "comet's" head. The funny part is, the star's light reveals the nebulosity but isn't responsible for its variable brightness, which is unpredictable and largely unexplained. (The other funny part is, Hubble didn't discover the nebula or its variability; one of his graduate assistants did. Hubble's role was limited to taking credit for the discovery. Rank hath its privileges.)

***M37** open cluster in *Auriga*. If you've never studied this cluster at high magnification in a telescope, indulge yourself: it's easy to find and well worth the trip. *Diamonds on black velvet*, filling the high-power field of view with hundreds of stars.

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