



# AAVSO Newsletter

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## From the Director

Arne A. Henden

Summer (at least in the Northern Hemisphere) has come to a close again, and it is time for an update. In the last issue, I commented on the beauty of freshly falling snow; this time I get to complain about this summer's heat and humidity! Boston can have both, but thankfully, it usually only lasts for a couple of days before cooler weather cycles through. As an observational astronomer, I'm always thinking about weather, and always looking at the sky when I leave my office (even though I no longer have a local telescope with which to observe). In fact, it is fun to go to an AAS meeting and watch astronomers as they leave the conference building – half will look up (the observers) and half will be reading material in their hands (the theoreticians).

I recently returned from New Zealand, where I was the guest of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand (RASNZ), its variable-star section, and many local astronomical societies. My travel down was largely paid out of the RASNZ travel fund, and travel around New Zealand to speak to many societies was paid from the Gifford-Eiby Memorial Lectureship Fund and by Canterbury University. I gratefully appreciate these travel grants, and also the enormous time and effort that Pauline and Brian Loader (the treasurer and then-President of the RASNZ) put in organizing the various society talks and finding a plane schedule between the many cities involved. The local organizers (Grant Christie, Gary Sparks, Marilyn Head, Steve Butler, Ian Crumpton, John Hearnshaw, Alan Gilmore, and the Loaders) went out of their way to make our stays enjoyable.

The RASNZ variable-star section is undergoing reorganization, as its past Director (Frank Bateson) has retired. The AAVSO is giving the Australasia area as much help as possible, from offering to host their observation database and providing observing manuals and campaign targets to participating in any international variable-star meetings that they might organize. We had a small grant to bring two CCD systems to the RASNZ meeting, and the RASNZ is selecting observers to give these cameras to on long-term loan. I gave a CCD workshop, and Tom Richards has given another, very different, CCD workshop at the recent Australian NACAA conference. Together, I think the two presentations will encourage more CCD observers among their very active community.

I also met in May with the British Astronomical Association, giving an invited talk on pro-am collaboration, and with their Variable Star Section meeting a few days later, talking about my favorite star (V838 Mon). I was grateful to the BAAVSS for funding the majority of my travel costs. I was also honored at the VSS meeting to be given the first Charles Butterworth Award. The citation reads: "This, the first Charles Butterworth Award, was presented to Dr. Arne Henden, Director AAVSO, on 3rd June

2006 by the Variable Star Section of the British Astronomical Association, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the observation of variable stars." It is a very nice, unique award (mine is a square of slate with a painted representation of V838 Mon on its front), and I hope they continue to give it out in the future. The BAA and the AAVSO are planning on holding a joint meeting in England during the summer of 2008, and we will announce preliminary plans as soon as we know the details.

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AAVSO Director Arne Henden (L) accepts the first Charles Butterworth Award from BAA President Richard Miles.

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I was in Belgium for a science meeting in May, and met with the Belgian/Dutch variable star societies. I gave a paper at their joint meeting, and then talked in more detail with the officers of their societies. I think we will have closer ties with our European neighbors based on such productive meetings. It was great to spend some time with Patrick Wils, Tonny Vanmunster, Erwin van Ballegoij, and others whom I've conversed with by email but never seen in person. It never ceases to amaze me how capable and enthusiastic our observers are, and how gracious they are when hosting visitors.

I was very pleased this past month to see 25,000 PEP observations added to our International Database. Sara Beck worked long and hard to clear up the many discrepancies in the dataset, and the results show both her effort and the excellent photometry coming from our PEP observers. We expect to get the remainder of the observations checked and loaded into the database when Sara returns from her summer sailing (she owns a Friendship Sloop, the Flying Jib; a really fun older wooden sailboat, and takes it along the New England coast every year). We also want to create a better method of entering PEP data online, and performing the photometric pipeline here at HQ. Once we get organized, then we will be working with PEP members to select a Chair for that committee, and providing some new targets for the observers.

Six months between newsletters is really too long. So much takes place at Headquarters that it would take pages to cover everything. I think there will be some discussion elsewhere in this newsletter of several events, but the highlights would include: the new automated chart plotter; the Variable Star Index (VSX); the Blue and Gold observer's section of the website; the new MySQL database and its new tools; and a couple of new Java programs written by Kate Davis and Sara Beck that promise to make Headquarters even more efficient in processing observations. Things aren't slowing down much, and I often feel like I'm skiing down a Black Diamond course – somewhat under control, but having an exhilarating ride. I hope you feel the same way – variable star observing is fun!



## Message from the President

David B. Williams

We enjoyed an excellent spring meeting in Rockford. I'll admit that I wasn't a strong supporter of this invitation in past years – it's always best when meeting sites have some "sizzle" to increase attendance. But in fact we had a good turnout, saw some AAVSO'ers who don't usually come east for the fall meetings, and the program was varied and interesting. I was surprised by how many members were interested in learning how to write a scientific paper. We even got to meet a Tyrannosaurus Rex!

As usual, I returned home with fresh enthusiasm for variable star observing. And just as usual, the weather failed to cooperate. So when last Saturday looked good, I was determined to make the most of it with an all-night session at a club observatory site, one of three remote sites I can use when darker skies and unobstructed horizons are worth an hour's drive.

I had strained my lower back earlier in the week so I left the heavy equipment at home. I took my trusty collection of binoculars (6x30, 10x50, and mounted 20x60s) and a 5-inch f/5 refrac-

tor. Having checked various predictions and ephemerides, I knew there would be plenty to do with this minimal equipment. Lesson 1: plan your observing so that you get the most return for your time and effort.

I intended to catch up on many regular AAVSO stars and time the minima of three eclipsing binaries: Z Her, UX Her, and W UMi. Z Her has an inconvenient period (3.99 days) and I don't think I have caught a minimum since the 1960s, so I didn't want to miss this one.

As usual in Indiana in July, it was a very dewy night. A couple of other club members set up at sunset, looked at Jupiter and the Ring and M13, then gave up and departed before midnight. They couldn't fend off the dew. But I had the 5-inch and the 20x60s wrapped with plumber's heat tape, providing lots of warmth to keep the optics above the dew point. Lesson 2: come equipped and prepared for the prevailing conditions.

The first couple of hours were busy. I had to find each EB field, check the comparison sequence, and begin making estimates at 15-20 minute intervals. In between, I caught up on many variables I hadn't been able to observe for several weeks. Good old W Cyg was about as faint as I have ever seen it. R Sct was down in a primary minimum. R CrB and RY Sgr were both at maximum, no excitement there. But the two symbiotic variables AG Dra and Z And were brighter than I had ever seen them. Lesson 3: expect the unexpected (then look twice to make sure).

I was momentarily confused when I looked for R Cas, which was invisible in binoculars the last time I looked. Now it had popped up to sixth magnitude. And I had estimated chi Cyg at 6.1 just ten days ago, and now it was 4.4. I lowered the binoculars and looked up at Cygnus – yes, chi was a naked-eye star, plain to see.

Several times per hour, I was estimating UX Her with the 5-inch and Z Her and W UMi with the 20x60s. UX Her reached minimum first, and as it began to rise, it seemed that it was brightening faster than it had dimmed. I thought my observations were going to produce a useless, asymmetrical light curve, but I doggedly kept going, making the best estimates I could. When I plotted the data the next day, the minimum turned out to look pretty good after all! Lesson 4: estimate what you see, not what you think you should be seeing.

Around 3 a.m. even my industrial strength dew-zapping technology began to huff and wheeze. Ground mist rose from the surrounding fields of prairie grass, and I had to give the eyepieces an occasional blast from a hair dryer to keep them from fogging up, but the toasty-warm objectives on the 5-inch and the 20x60s stayed dry all night.

Just before dawn, with Venus low and bright in the east, I managed to observe Mira, the first variable star to be recognized, down in the southeastern sky, wedged between the glow of a bright gibbous moon and the horizon haze. It was a perfect end to a good night, during which I collected 43 estimates of AAVSO stars and 49 estimates for the three eclipsing binaries.

For more than 90 years, countless AAVSO'ers have experienced similar nights. There's a special satisfaction in packing up your equipment in the dawn's early light, knowing that you have collected some useful data that will be archived and made available to the research community. The weather forecasters say next weekend should be clear too. I think I'll do it all over again.



## News and Announcements

### Co-orbiting Asteroids named after John and Maire Percy

On June 16, 2006, the International Astronomical Union confirmed that a pair of asteroids has been named in honor of long-time AAVSO colleague Dr. John Percy and his wife Maire.

John, a professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Toronto, has spent much of his career interested in variable stars and has always been keenly involved in promoting science education. Maire Percy is internationally known for her work on risk factors in human disease and is an emeritus professor of physiology, obstetrics, and gynecology.

John has been a member of the AAVSO since the late 1970s, serving as President from October 1989 to September 1991. He has also served several terms on the AAVSO council and is currently chairing the education committee. The asteroids, now called Johnpercy and Mairepercy, move in related paths as they orbit the sun. Congratulations to John and Maire!

### Elizabeth Waagen receives AL's Peliter Award

We are very proud to announce that AAVSO Senior Technical Assistant, Elizabeth Waagen, has been awarded the Astronomical League's prestigious Leslie C. Peltier Award for 2006. The Astronomical League presented the award to Elizabeth for her contributions to variable star research and for her work as Interim Director, guiding the AAVSO through the difficult time during the 18 months that encompassed Janet Mattei's illness and death and the subsequent search to find a new Director. Our congratulations to Elizabeth for receiving this well deserved honor. For more information on the Leslie C. Peltier Award visit:

<http://www.astroleague.org/all/awards/peltier/peltiers.html>

### A Total Eclipse

On March 29, 2006, AAVSO staff members Gamze Menali and Sara Beck, Haldun Menali (Gamze's husband and an active AAVSO member/observer), and AAVSO member/observer Gerry Samolyk, were in Side, Turkey, to view the latest total solar eclipse. A picturesque resort town on the Mediterranean coast, Side (pronounced 'see day') made for an excellent viewing point, just a few hundred meters from the center line of the eclipse path. From this vantage point the duration of the eclipse's totality was at its maximum — about 3 minutes and 46 seconds.

A short written essay about their trip, complete with pictures and an audio segment, is currently available on the AAVSO website. You can view it at the URL: <http://www.aavso.org/news/eclipse2006.shtml>.



The AAVSO eclipse team: (front) AAVSO'er Gerry Samolyk, (back row, L-R) Sara Beck, Gamze Menali, and Haldun Menali.

### Upcoming AAVSO Meetings

Mark your calendars!

The **95th Annual Meeting of the AAVSO** will be held October 26-28, 2006, in Newton, Massachusetts. The meeting will include an open house at AAVSO Headquarters in Cambridge, scientific paper sessions, and a membership meeting, as well as a Chandra workshop hosted by long-time AAVSO member and science education expert Donna Young.

Autumn is a beautiful time to visit New England. Bring your families and stay a few extra days to enjoy the sights! Whether you have attended dozens of AAVSO meetings or are a first-time attendee, we hope to see you in Newton for the 95th Annual Meeting of the AAVSO. It is sure to be an interesting and exciting weekend. More information is available on the website at:

<http://www.aavso.org/aavso/meetings/fall06.shtml>

Future Meetings:

**Spring 2007:** Calgary, Alberta, Canada (with RASC)

**Annual 2007:** Maria Mitchell Observatory, Nantucket, MA

**Spring 2008:** UK (with BAA)

**Spring 2011:** Boston (with AAS)

### New Solar Team

AAVSO Solar Committee Chairman and Sunspot Group Leader Carl Feehrer stepped down this spring after six years of service. Since taking over in 2000, Carl skillfully evaluated and reduced sunspot observations, calculated the American Relative Sunspot Numbers, and served as editor of the monthly AAVSO *Solar Bulletin*. He also worked closely with the SID group and maintained a strong relationship with all the contributing solar observers. We are most grateful to Carl for his hard work and dedication. We look forward to his continued contributions of sunspot observations as well as his assistance in other areas and as a volunteer at Headquarters.

The new Solar Committee Chair and *Solar Bulletin* editor is Paul Mortfield. Paul is an AAVSO member and a very enthusiastic and active solar observer. Paul began observing the sun in his early teens, making sunspot counts, measuring sunspot coordinates, and was even interested in solar radio observations. He's also built several SID receivers. Newcomer Daniel Williams will take over as Sunspot Group Leader. Mike Hill will continue to serve as the solar flare/SID group leader, a position he's held since 2000.

### Extrasolar Planet Discovery

AAVSO'ers helped make the find!

We're pleased to announce that AAVSO observers **Tonny Vanmunster** and **Bruce Gary** were part of an international team that has discovered an extrasolar planet. The team of astronomers, led by Peter McCullough of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, discovered a Jupiter-sized planet orbiting a Sun-like star some 600 light-years from Earth in the constellation Corona Borealis. Vanmunster and Gary are among a group of four amateurs assisting McCullough. They used their telescopes to detect slight dips in the star's light output when the planet passed in front of the star, called a transit. The light from the star, called XO-1, dips by approximately 2 percent when the planet, XO-1b, passes in front of it. While over 180 extrasolar planets have been detected, XO-1b is only the tenth planet discovered using the transit method. Congratulations to Tonny and Bruce and the entire team on this impressive achievement!

## AAVSO Observer Awards

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The AAVSO Observer Award is a certificate presented to each variable star observer who has reached certain milestones regarding the cumulative number of observations he or she has submitted to the AAVSO International Database. The following awards were presented at the 95th Spring meeting of the AAVSO held in Rockford, Illinois, May 5-6, 2006.

### OVER 200,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

|                              |     |           |         |
|------------------------------|-----|-----------|---------|
| Wayne M. Lowder (posthumous) | USA | 1949-2005 | 209,439 |
|------------------------------|-----|-----------|---------|

### OVER 150,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS (new level)

|                   |           |           |         |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| John E. Bortle    | USA       | 1963-2005 | 171,352 |
| Marvin E. Baldwin | USA       | 1961-2004 | 175,481 |
| Edward G. Oravec  | USA       | 1943-2003 | 170,552 |
| Thomas A. Cragg   | Australia | 1945-2005 | 151,735 |

### OVER 100,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

|                 |             |           |         |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Albert F. Jones | New Zealand | 1960-2005 | 105,524 |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|---------|

### OVER 50,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

|                |         |           |        |
|----------------|---------|-----------|--------|
| Gunther Krisch | Germany | 1969-2005 | 52,378 |
|----------------|---------|-----------|--------|

### OVER 25,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

|                     |        |           |        |
|---------------------|--------|-----------|--------|
| Maciej Reszelski    | Poland | 2000-2005 | 39,751 |
| William Goff        | USA    | 1981-2005 | 33,028 |
| Laurent Bichon      | France | 1986-2005 | 27,466 |
| Robert H. Hays, Jr. | USA    | 1977-2005 | 25,428 |

### OVER 10,000 VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

|                       |           |           |        |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Stephen Kerr          | Australia | 2001-2005 | 17,833 |
| Andrzej Markiewicz    | Poland    | 1999-2005 | 11,737 |
| Hiroshi Matsuyama     | Japan     | 1978-2005 | 11,596 |
| Hartmut Bretschneider | Germany   | 1993-2005 | 10,087 |

### OVER 50,000 PEP/CCD OBSERVATIONS\*

|                  |         |           |            |
|------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Robert A. James  | USA     | 1953-2005 | 71,432 CCD |
| Tonny Vanmunster | Belgium | 1976-2005 | 62,317 CCD |
| Vance Petriew    | Canada  | 2001-2005 | 60,390 CCD |
| Shawn W. Dvorak  | USA     | 1981-2005 | 50,489 CCD |

### OVER 25,000 PEP/CCD OBSERVATIONS\*

|                     |           |           |            |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Neil D. Butterworth | Australia | 2002-2005 | 41,358 CCD |
| Richard J. Huziak   | Canada    | 1980-2005 | 37,162 CCD |
| Peter Nelson        | Australia | 1990-2005 | 28,830 CCD |
| Donn Ray Starkey    | USA       | 2001-2005 | 25,833 CCD |

### OVER 10,000 PEP/CCD OBSERVATIONS\*

|                        |              |           |            |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Richard Miles          | England      | 2004-2005 | 17,975 CCD |
| David Boyd             | England      | 2003-2005 | 14,539 CCD |
| James L. Jones         | USA          | 2003-2005 | 11,651 CCD |
| Christopher Hesseltine | USA          | 1975-2005 | 11,392 CCD |
| Timothy Crawford       | USA          | 2001-2005 | 10,892 CCD |
| Libert A.G. Monard     | South Africa | 1992-2005 | 10,398 CCD |

### OVER 2,500 PEP OBSERVATIONS\*

(CCD no longer awarded at this level)

|                  |              |           |       |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| Raymond W. Jones | South Africa | 1989-2005 | 2,671 |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|

\* Years include total AAVSO observing interval (not only PEP or CCD observing). Total includes PEP and/or CCD observations only (not observer's visual contributions).

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### ☞ In Memoriam ☞

The AAVSO extends its most sincere sympathy and condolences to the families, friends, and colleagues of the following members, colleagues, and friends who have passed away since the publication of the previous *Newsletter*.

#### Dr. Eugene C. Larr - Encinitas, CA

Eugene was a long-time AAVSO member who supported the work of the organization for many years. He was also the founder of Larr Optics and Electronics in California.

#### Carl F. Kurtz - Bethlehem, PA

A Life Member of the AAVSO, Carl joined the organization in the Fall of 1926. He taught astronomy in Westfield, NJ, and volunteered at the Sperry Observatory where he assisted the public with the use of the telescope and gave occasional lectures. He also volunteered at the Union County College campus for 15 years. Carl made 480 variable star observations, and was a true astronomy enthusiast, travelling to 71 countries that included observing 17 solar eclipses. He was 98.

#### John Baxter - Pasadena, CA

John (BJOH) was a dedicated and determined member/observer, participating in observing campaigns and contributing over 3500 binocular observations in about 18 months despite a very difficult observing situation. His observations total is actually 10,814, however, as in the 1970s he had contributed several thousand observations under the name Kenneth Sabine (SAB).

#### Barbara Silva - Stoneham, MA / AAVSO HQ

Barbara started at the AAVSO in 1979 as a data entry technician ("keypuncher" in the language of the day), becoming expert in accurately and quickly entering variable star observations, interpreting observers' handwriting, and remembering their reporting idiosyncrasies. In her 24+ years, Barbara keypunched/verified over 5.5 million observations, including 1.2 million in the 1911-1961 archival data project. She also helped with HQ projects large and small. Barbara was a true family person, with many beloved siblings and offspring. The AAVSO was her second family, and she in turn was a close member of the AAVSO family. We miss her cheery and comfortable presence, her concern and wise advice, and her sometimes wicked (but always ladylike) sense of humor.



Director Arne Henden presents observer Chris Hesseltine with his Observer Award.

## Dorrit Hoffleit's 100th Year

Long-time AAVSO member Dr. Dorrit Hoffleit was honored at Yale University last April at a symposium celebrating her Centennial Year, 2006-2007 (Dorrit's date of birth is March 12, 1907). The Symposium was organized by the faculty and staff of the Yale Astronomy Department, with many other of Dorrit's colleagues and students participating in the organizing committee.

Entitled "The Hoffleit Centennial: A Year of Celebration", the symposium featured two days of talks and poster presentations on topics that were as diverse as Dorrit Hoffleit's career itself. They included historical overviews of Hoffleit's career, of astronomy in the 20th Century, along with topics near and dear to Dorrit including astrometry, variable stars, education, and the *Bright Star Catalogue*. Astronomers and friends--many of whom were at one time Dorrit's students--came from near and far to hear historical papers on her career and contemporaries, and discussions of recent work in her fields of research.

Dorrit joined the AAVSO back in 1930--so it was appropriate that AAVSO Headquarters staff were also present: Director Arne Henden and postdoc scientist Matthew Templeton, who each presented symposium papers; technical assistants Sara Beck (one of "Dorrit's Girls" of the Maria Mitchell Observatory) and Michael Saladyga, who exhibited the AAVSO's publications by and about Dorrit; and Senior Technical Assistant Elizabeth Waagen. Among the several AAVSO members present were former President Lee Anne Willson and former councilor Barbara Welther.



Back row, L-R: Matthew Templeton, Arne Henden. Middle row, L-R: Sara Beck, Elizabeth Waagen, Michael Saladyga. In front: Dorrit Hoffleit.

Arne's talk on Dorrit's long connection with the AAVSO was illustrated with video clips from the AAVSO archives. The audience was delighted and somewhat awe-struck to see these vintage movies which showed Dorrit conversing, laughing, and just being Dorrit through the many years of AAVSO meetings. The archival footage not only highlighted the convivial professional-amateur relationships which the AAVSO has fostered since its beginning, it also showed how Dorrit herself moved so freely and engagingly between the two groups.

Matthew's talk about long-term changes in Mira variables emphasized that our knowledge of these changes is made possible only through their long-term monitoring by variable star observers. This is a topic Dorrit covered in detail in her review of the History of Mira Stars in the *Journal of the AAVSO*.

Following the second day of talks, the symposium ended with a reception and banquet in Dorrit's honor. During the banquet festivities, Dorrit was surprised with a video of greetings and tributes from her colleagues and friends, including touching testimonials by her fellow Yale faculty, the Astronomy Department staff, and current students at Yale. At the close of the evening, she was presented an album of photographic memories, and she cut into her "Dorrit Centennial Cake" to finish the banquet.

The symposium was a wonderful summing-up of Dorrit's productive lifetime (so far) over much of the last Century in service to astronomy in general, and to variable stars in particular. From her days as a student and scientist at Harvard University, through her tenures at Yale and the Maria Mitchell Observatory, to her present "retirement" of 30 years as a very active Emeritus Research Astronomer at Yale University, Dorrit has remained a valued leader, colleague, and true friend of the AAVSO.

It was a privilege for us to have been able to be part of the Hoffleit Centennial Year Symposium. It was our opportunity to celebrate the great "Blessing" we have all been given in Dorrit's lifetime in astronomy, variable star research, and the AAVSO.

Michael Saladyga & Matthew Templeton  
AAVSO Headquarters

## AAVSO Across the Country

This spring three of our members attended conferences across the country representing the AAVSO. In April, Mike Linnolt attended Maker Faire in San Mateo, California. Hosted by Make Magazine, Maker Faire is a highly publicized DIY/Citizen Science event. This year's conference drew a large number of attendees, some 20,000 according to the organizers, from all over the west coast. Mike manned a table and distributed AAVSO literature and membership forms and answered questions on variable star observing. He also brought a projector to demonstrate to attendees the real-time AAVSO Light Curve Generator and Quick Look data from the website. Mike reports that a wide range of people were in attendance, from beginners, amateurs with CCD's, to representatives of TASS, Stanford SID research, and a theoretical physicist studying accretion disks in CV's.

On that same weekend, member Charles Munoz represented the AAVSO at the Rainwater Observatory's Mid-South Star Gaze in French Camp, Mississippi. Charles handed out several AAVSO promotional items, including our new full-color brochure. He also had a PowerPoint presentation about the AAVSO available for viewing.

Also, in late April, another long-time member, Jim Fox, attended the North Central Region Astronomical League (NCRAL) meeting in Appleton, Wisconsin. Jim reports that over 200 people attended the event. He handed out AAVSO brochures and other materials to the attendees.

We are grateful to Mike, Charles, and Jim for helping to spread the word! We know that our members and observers are constantly attending conferences and star parties all over the world. If you are interested in representing the AAVSO and would like to discuss receiving some promotional and/or presentation materials, please contact Headquarters.

# The 95th AAVSO Spring Meeting

May 5-6, 2006 - Rockford, Illinois



## Meeting Memories

By Roger S. Kolman, Glen Ellyn, IL

AAVSO meetings always give members the opportunity to become reinvigorated, charge their batteries, and get ready to go out and observe, observe, observe! The 2006 meeting in Rockford was no exception to this rule. I left for the meeting, following the class I was teaching at Harper College - roughly 2 hours from Rockford - on Thursday afternoon. When I arrived at the Holiday Inn, I was greeted by Rebecca Turner, who provided information about the meeting. Since I had materials to prepare for my classes the next week (finals were coming up), I retired to my room for an evening of grading papers (boring!).

At about midnight, I was rather hungry, so I went to the Steak & Shake across the road - and there were Barry and Carol Beaman! We spent quality time catching up on the past year and looking forward to the meeting the next day. Friday morning was an outstanding workshop on publishing papers. This covered virtually all aspects of the topic, including poster presentations. I had heard that the workshops held at AAVSO meetings were superbly planned and executed, but experiencing one was incredible. I would encourage anyone who was not at the meeting, yet would like to know the ins and outs of scientific astronomical publication, to study the PowerPoint presentations of the papers that are available on-line on the AAVSO website.

I joined the Education and Outreach Committee for a working lunch. One of the missions of the AAVSO is to increase the number and quality of citizen scientists (as John Percy calls amateur devotees of the sci-



L-R: Barry Beaman, Roger Kolman, and Carol Beaman.

ences) as well as the public-at-large. There will be interesting things happening with initiatives such as Hands-On Astrophysics, the Mentoring Program, and cooperative ventures with the Astronomical League in coming months.

The afternoon session contained a potpourri of interesting talks on a variety of subjects. Being a visual observer, I felt somewhat like a dinosaur listening to the marvelous things that are being done in the CCD world, efforts that rival those of professional astronomers. However, just as birds are the surviving relatives of the dinosaurs (more on dinosaurs later) and serve a purpose today, we visual observers still make the bulk of variable star observations and those observations are as important now as ever!

Friday evening was the Star-BQ at the Rockford club's observatory. Bill Dillon and I decided to be brave and drive ourselves rather than take the bus. Bill and I had shared a room at a previous meeting and had a lot to catch up on as we drove. Seeing old friends is one of the great draws of these meetings.

A late season cold front had come through the area and IT WAS COLD! How cold was it? Well, our contingent from Norway pointed out that it was like Norway in January! Brrr!

The dinner was fantastic! The Beamans really know how to throw a party! There was enough food to feed an army. Following dinner, we proceeded (quickly) to the warmth of the observatory where John Percy gave an informative and humorous talk entitled "Variable Stars, Gee Whiz!" in plain talk (and cartoons) he gave inspiration to the assembly.

Following the talk, a late session was held at the Holiday Inn lounge until closing time! Members of the group, whose names will be withheld to protect the guilty, shared many stories and anecdotes, some real, some imaginary.

Saturday morning consisted of the membership meeting and awards. We shared in congratulating our colleagues who reached observing milestones.

The paper session in the afternoon was, for the most part, the Aaron Price show. It is truly amazing to see the energy that this young man puts forth. The AAVSO is very fortunate to have someone of his vigor, capability, and enthusiasm at Headquarters.

One of the amusing moments at the meeting came during a talk given by Walter MacDonald II - A Dome on a Home: The Story of Winchester Observatory - a talk relating his adventures in building a dome in the attic of a house he had renovated. As he was describing the features of his fully automated facility, a member of the audience asked him how kindly his wife took to all this. When he related that he was single, the audience gave a knowing "Oh, well!" to him. You had to be there to appreciate it!

Saturday evening was spent at the Burpee Museum of Natural History. Yes, it is named for the Burpee Seed Company! They had a wonderful exhibit of prehistoric life including a complete skeleton of a young T-Rex named Jane. (I told you we would get back to dinosaurs.) I believe she won the honor of being the oldest variable star observer at the meeting.

After a sumptuous dinner, Dr. Karen Meech treated us to a talk on the Deep Impact project. She provided us with rare insights into the results of the mission to Comet Temple last year. This highly successful probe gave scientists a good idea of how comets form, as well as leaving questions needing answers. But, after all, isn't that what real science is about? It is not a static pursuit, but rather a dynamic, changing one.

Following the talk, President David Williams gave his agenda for the future of the AAVSO. (Included were his plans for world domination!) And so, the curtain dropped on the 2006 Spring Meeting of the AAVSO - at least the formal part. Once again, upon our return to Holiday Inn Central, an informal late night session was held, which included closing the lounge. Following that, several of us ended up in Mike Simonsen's room for a late night talk-fest. It was just like the old days!

It was a great pleasure to see many old friends and to make new acquaintances. I came away quite impressed with the professional leadership being provided by our new Director, Dr. Arne Henden and hope that he will have a long tenure. Viva Henden and Viva AAVSO!



## More from Rockford

By Walter MacDonald II (MDW)

Winchester Observatory - Winchester, Ontario, Canada

The spring meeting was held this year at Rockford, Illinois. All I needed was sufficient justification to get myself to attend. Fortunately my sister had wanted me to visit her in Kansas City for some time, and Rockford is conveniently located about half way there from my home base in Canada. Then too, Arne had suggested I give a presentation on my robotic rooftop observatory at the meeting. So with the prospect of being able to combine two trips into one, to be more than just a spectator at the meeting, and to actually meet in person the many AAVSO'ers with whom I had previously only corresponded in cyberspace, I quickly registered for the spring meeting on the AAVSO website!

As luck would have it, the weather cooperated almost perfectly for my trip. My observatory experienced five clear nights in a row leading up to my departure for the meeting. Then there was nothing but cloud and rain at home for the two weeks I was away! Even better, I experienced no precipitation for almost my whole trip (just in Michigan and Ontario on the way back). So in retrospect, it turned out to be a great time to be away from home and on the road!



"Jane" the T-Rex at the Burpee Museum.

I set out on my automotive odyssey at 6 a.m. on Wednesday (May 3rd). Twelve hours and about 1200 km later (including a couple of hours inching my way through Chicago's afternoon rush) I arrived at Rockford and checked in at the hotel. My roommate, Arto Oksanen, flew in from Finland and didn't arrive until around midnight local time (breakfast time for him!).

Thursday was the day for the big council meeting. There was some confusion about the start time for this meeting as it had been moved earlier in the morning. Rumor has it that at least one particularly enthusiastic council member thought (quite naturally and understandably) that the start time listed was in UT, and so found himself standing alone in the hotel lobby at 4 a.m.!

For those of us lucky enough to not be on council, Thursday was a free day. A tour of Rockford was offered by some of the locals, but I decided to strike out on my own and visit the Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden. It was interesting to see how the flora in Rockford was several weeks ahead of those in Ontario (Kansas City was similarly several weeks ahead of Rockford). Rockford also has a large number of apple trees all over town, and all were completely covered in blooms at this time, providing a very nice backdrop for our meeting.

Rockford is perhaps most famous for being the home of AstroPhysics, the makers of those nice APO refractors and telescope mounts. Alas, my fantasy of going on a factory tour (complete with free samples, of course) as part of the meeting did not materialize! However, one indirect contact we had with AstroPhysics occurred during Friday evening's outing to Lockwood Observatory. This facility belongs to the Rockford Amateur Astronomers and features a custom-built 10-inch AstroPhysics telescope in a 14-foot Ash dome. Unfortunately it was cloudy at the time so we didn't get to observe with it.

Friday's workshop on writing and publishing scientific papers was very informative. Even poster papers were covered, and there were a couple available at the back of the meeting room to look at during the meeting. As it turns out the meeting room was a "hot-spot" (not just because we were there!) so those who had brought their notebook computers with them could be online during the entire meeting. Whenever a speaker mentioned a website or a particular software package, anyone who was online could then surf or download right away. Technology can be quite wonderful at times!

The two scientific paper sessions (held Friday afternoon and Saturday) each had a really great range of speakers and topics and all were very interesting (kudos to the meeting organizers!). Fortunately for those who weren't in attendance, much of this material may be found on the AAVSO website. Some of the "extra-cool" topics (at least from my own biased perspective) involved extrasolar planetary transits, automated photometry, and the upcoming automated chart plotter; I'm sure also that everyone was particularly envious of Mario Motta's 32" scope. I know I was!

The hotel bar was well utilized for the late night portions of the unofficial program and many interesting discussions were had there. The highlight for me was being bear-hugged by Mike Simonsen. After 25 years of membership in the AAVSO, I have finally been officially initiated!

Time had flown by so fast, and all too soon the spring meeting was winding down. The final venue for the meeting was the Burpee museum. Here we spent some time browsing the exhibits (including dinosaurs!), then enjoying the cash bar, and finally finishing up with a world-class banquet.

For a few of us, Sunday morning brought a bonus feature - a tour of Yerkes Observatory, which had been arranged by Vance Petriew. Located in William's Bay, Wisconsin, Yerkes is only an hour's drive from Rockford. Our small group had a very complete tour of this great facility. We even got to go for a ride on the movable floor in the main dome! That alone was worth the price of admission! Afterwards we spent some time roaming the grounds. It was a great way to cap off such an enjoyable meeting!



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## The AAVSO on the Web Technology News

### Introducing VSX

We are happy to announce the addition of a new and very useful tool on the AAVSO website: The International Variable Star Index (VSX). This program serves two distinct functions: an easy portal to access information about variable stars that is far more extensive than the GCVS; and a method of uploading variable star information. The information access includes all known cross-references, basic parameters such as period and variability type, and finding charts. The upload feature permits information updates on known variables as well as entering new variable stars into the system.

VSX was conceived and created by amateur astronomer Christopher Watson in response to the specific desires of the members of the AAVSO's Chart Team and the Comparison Star Database Working Group, as well as the broader perceived need for a globally-accessible central "clearing-house" for all up-to-the-minute information on variable stars, both established and suspected. The VSX web site was designed to be the on-line medium by which variable star data are made available to the public, and through which the data are maintained, revised, and commented upon. This database literally comes alive with input from the world of registered contributors. Check out VSX on the AAVSO website at: <http://www.aavso.org/vsx/>.

## Blue & Gold

The Blue&Gold section of the AAVSO website is a password protected area reserved for AAVSO Members and AAVSO Observers. If you are an AAVSO member (you pay dues), you will have 'GOLD' status, which gives you unlimited access to ALL features so you may:

- \* Submit Observations online (WebObs)
- \* Update Your Personal AAVSO Records
- \* Update Your MyNewsFlash Profile
- \* Request to use the Sonoita Robotic Telescope for observing (Coming Soon)
- \* Submit an article to JAAVSO w/ no page charge (Coming Soon)
- \* Access Special Deals on Books and Stellar Gifts (Coming Soon)

If you are NOT a member, but you would like to contribute observations to the AAVSO, we welcome your observations! You will be able to enter this section but you will have 'BLUE' access, which limits your activity to the online submission of observations (WebObs) and updating your AAVSO records and profiles. Consider joining the AAVSO to have full access to all the Blue&Gold features.

Kate Davis, AAVSO Headquarters