

What's Up

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All of the female freshmen who caught my column title and thought that this was going to be a spicy gossip column are going to be disappointed to learn that this is an **astronomy** column, and perhaps could have better been titled something like "Over Behrend Skies." Still, **What's Up** catches your attention or you wouldn't be reading this. Enough said? Fine. I rest my case.

The Astronomy Club had a rather cloudy Open House the week of August 27-31. (So now should I ask it? OK, "So, what ELSE is new?" Seems like it's always cloudy.)

At any rate, we did get five visitors. Most showed up on Friday, and they got pretty good views of several objects. (It was only **partly** cloudy Friday.)

Time to review a little technical jargon. We'll keep it simple okay? Why? If I'm going to tell you what we saw, you probably had better speak the language of astronomy first. So, with that in mind, here's a brief list of definitions from the glossary of Berman & Evans' **Exploring The Cosmos**:
Astrology: the pseudo-science that **claims** human events can be predicted from the positions that the sun, moon, and planets occupy in the zodiac at different times.

Astronomy: the science that deals with celestial bodies - their descriptions, radiations, movements, structures, physical and chemical characteristics, origin, evolution, and arrangement.

Galaxy: a large system of stars, dust, and gas held together by the mutual gravitational attraction of its members. i.e. The Milky Way.

Globular cluster: a compact spheroidal assemblage of tens of thousands of stars found in the halo portion of a galaxy.

Magnitude: the brightness of a celestial body based on a logarithmic scale of intensity to which the eye naturally responds.

Nebula: a bright or dark cloud of gas and dust, which may contain stars.

Open cluster: a somewhat loose assemblage of stars, numbering dozens to hundreds, with various degrees of central condensation.

Completely ignoring the first definition (I don't even want to talk about it) we have the six definitions that are all you need to know for the crash course in amateur astronomy.

If you're with me this far you're probably wondering how I know where to find the objects I just got done defining. The answer is that until I have memorized their positions, I use a reference called a sky atlas. This sky atlas is exactly what you might expect, a "road map" if you will, to the skies. It shows the constellations worked onto a grid coordinate system like latitude and longitude here on Earth.

Within the constellations are labeled the locations of the "Deep Sky" objects, the nebulae, galaxies and the open and globular clusters.

How did they get on the maps? —that's the second most popular question. The answer is that they were catalogued (discovered and recorded) several hundred years ago in two catalogues: The New General Catalogue or NGC and its predecessor the Messier Catalogue or M Catalogue.

The earlier catalogue lists 109 objects which were thought to be comet-like by the French comet hunter Charles Messier. Of course he knew them not to be comets, and so listed them to prevent any confusion. His catalogue was completed in 1781.

The much more extensive catalogue which followed was largely the work of a father and son team, William Herschel and his son John. Each recorded over 2,500 objects, John concentrating on the southern latitudes and his father stayed in England and studied the north. Their catalogue was deemed the "General Catalogue."

From this, John Dreyer compiled an even more comprehensive catalogue over the period of 1888-1908. This catalogue is known as the New General Catalogue and is supplemented with two Index Catalogues (ICs).

So, with all this understood and not wanting to risk slitting my throat with Occam's Razor (take Phil. 004, or ask Dr. Mester) I will proceed with my description.

Those present at the Open House viewed several Nebulae: M-8 The "Lagoon" Nebula, M-57 The Ring Nebula, M-27 The Dumbbell Nebula, two globular clusters, M-13 in Hercules, and M-15 in Equuleus; five galaxies M-31 The Andromeda Spiral Galaxy, and its companions M-32 and NGC-205, also NGC-404 near beta Andromeda and M-33 an On-face Spiral Galaxy in Triangulum. On-face means that from our perspective we were looking at the broadest surface of the galaxy, while some galaxies we see from the side, or edge-on.

Lastly we viewed the beautiful Double Open Clusters, h and x in Perseus.

The observatory will be open several times this year. For on-the-spot announcements listen to WBCR's public service announcements given at quarter past and quarter to the hour.

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