

Club Reaches Out To Stars
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“The morning stars sang together and the firmament on high proclaimed the glory of God . . .”

The words of the Bible set to music in Joseph Addison’s stirring hymn, are a nightly reality to two Rohr men at Riverside, Gene Purtick, third shift inspector in Processing and Jack Lytle, Tool Liaison man, both active members of the Riverside Astronomical Society.

With Purtick, your editor spent an evening in the backyard observatory of his future father-in-law, H. E. Kaiser, formerly president of the Society.

Far Galaxies

Through Kaiser’s 12 1/2 –inch “Astrola” reflector, housed in a 16 X 16 ft. wall enclosure which Purtick helped to build, equipped with a slide-back aluminum roof constructed of surplus Rohr materials purchased through the Salvage Store, your editor saw M31, the great spiral galaxy in Andromeda, 1,700,000 light years away, and M32, its subgalaxy, 3,400,000 light years distant.

He saw M42, the hydrogen nebula in the sword of Orion with its curious trapezium of four bright stars in the “hole” of the cusps. He saw M1 – the Crab Nebula, once visible by daytime in 1051 – an exploded star now dispersing its gases in a cloud 140 light years wide at fantastic speeds. He saw the double star cluster in Perseus. He saw Mars.

He agrees with Lytle, presently secretary of the Society who said: “Any time a man gets an exalted opinion of himself or feels his personal worries are insurmountable, should look to the heavens and give his imagination endless free rein.”

Aided IGY Program

On the more mundane side, these three men and their 30 members hope to play a vital role in science, together with countless other similar clubs across America in support of the world’s great observatories and universities.

“Our Society placed second last year, observing and plotting meteorite showers in the International IGY program, in which hundreds of amateur observers and clubs participated worldwide,” Purtick says proudly.

Amateur observers play an equally significant role — acknowledged and recognized by professional astronomers – in comet seeking; in discovering novae; in work on variable stars, and stars that pulsate in brightness called ‘Cepheid Variables’; in general planetary work . . . such as unusual surface changes in our planetary system, in transits of Mercury and Venus across the sun, in man-made satellite crossings.

Both Purtick’s and Lytle’s interest in astronomy goes back some years. Lytle, a former rockhound, first president of the now-inactive Rohr group, applies particular interest through his

son John, 17, at Ramona High who is building his own eight-inch reflector, planning to major in physics in college in hopes of entering the field of astrophysics.

Purtick got the “bug” when he was nine years old and he saw his first planetarium in Pittsburgh where he grew up. In California and at Rohr for the past two years, and earlier yen to build equipment was intensified when he joined the Riverside Society and met Kaiser, who works at Norton Air Force Base. Now Purtick lives with the Kaisers, and as well as assisting in the construction of the observatory, he’s building his own eight inch F/7 to be attached as a guidescope to Kaiser’s big 12 ½-inch F/8. He’s also building a home for Pat Kaiser, his bride-to-be on the rear of the lot. Appropriately, the observatory lies between the two houses.

“Mr. Kaiser has spent more than 30 years in amateur astronomy,” Gene says loyally. He is Chief Observer for our Society.”

“That boy can stand on his own two feet and hold a candle to anyone,” Mr. Kaiser says equally staunchly.

Society Helps Juniors

The Society is an old one in Riverside, with 25 senior members, places great emphasis too, on its junior members in encouraging 10-13 year olds to become interested in astronomy. There are monthly meetings and “Star Parties” to observe special objects and field trips to Palomar, Mt. Wilson or the high desert – all with the same purpose: gazing into the illimitable reaches of star-spangled space.

And that’s the point. Anyone Purtick says, with a six-inch or larger telescope can engage in both personally satisfying and meaningful work. A nicely equipped six-inch reflector (they’re building tubes of fiberglass these days), including equatorial mount (but no drive) will run you in the neighborhood of \$300. Add drive and slow motor control, and you’ll spend around \$500. Of course, if you build your own – and this Kaiser and Purtick do – you’ll save a heap. Haunting junkyards, salvage supply houses . . . and Rohr’s own sales of surplus . . . they have built up a surprising amount of their installation.

Beyond the Beyond

Riverside, where they live half-city, half country, has outstanding night viewing conditions – “transparency”, the astronomers call it, compared, with say, smog-ridden Los Angeles basin or Long Beach.

Many members of the Society, too, have developed specialties, as in astronomical photography or spectrography, Jack Lytle points out. Technical aspects are always stressed – this is not dilettante hobby. Kaiser’s observatory shelves are filled with animals, maps, back issues of “Sky & Telescope.”

But it’s the psychological satisfaction essentially that holds men – Lytle and his son; Purtick and Kaiser; the Riverside Society and those, like your editor, or you, they bid welcome to their interest.