

# ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

VOL. 49, No. 3 – March 2001

## **Michael Barber** **Speaker, General Meeting, March 21**

San Francisco  
Amateur Astronomers



Sharing the Wonders  
of the Universe



**Information Hotline**  
(415) 566-2357

**Web Page**  
<http://www.zennla.com/sfaa>

We are pleased to announce that our SFAA monthly meeting speaker for March 21<sup>st</sup> will be Michael Barber, the CEO of SBIG (Santa Barbara Instrument Group). SBIG is the manufacturer of a variety of CCD Cameras that have become the instruments of choice for most astro imagers. Michael will discuss CCD imaging for beginners and intermediate users, show some incredible photos and answer your many questions about CCD imaging.

Gamma Ray Burst Transients were responsible for the birth of SBIG. The SBAG, Santa Barbara Astronomy Group, was an all-volunteer group, started up by Richard Schwartz in the 1980's. They wanted to devise some way of keeping the telescope tracking accurately enough that they could leave it unattended for the entire night. After research and development on the guider, several people (Richard Schwartz, Alan Holmes, Matt Longmire, Jack Brooks and Michael Barber) founded SBIG to make the device available commercially.

The arrangements for our speaker and the source of Michael Barber's biography, which will be on the SFAA web site, [www.zennla.com/sfaa](http://www.zennla.com/sfaa), are complements of Bob Berta.

## **Bill Stepka** **Speaker, City Star Party, March 31**

Bill grew up under the dark country skies of southwestern Wisconsin. His first naked-eye view of the Andromeda Galaxy as a child left him with a lifelong passion for Astronomy and the sciences. Bill makes his living as a landscape contractor doing development and management consulting for larger residential estates, and is studying golf course development to find a niche market in that industry. He is thrilled to have become a most minor published author, with a paper in the ASP Volume 220-"Amateur-Professional Partnerships in Astronomy". (Al Stern is in there also.) Bill is writing, what may become a series of articles, for Mercury magazine on amateur and professional collaboration in Astronomy. His topic is the Moon and he is profoundly upset that those billions of dollars thrown at the Space Station are not in a Moon Base preparing us for life on Mars!

## SFAA Officers 2001

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(415) 929-7035

*Vice-President* Bill Stepka  
(415) 928-2367

*Secretary* Renita Mock  
(415) 566-2357

*Treasurer* Chelle Owens  
(415) 479-5313

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### Telescope Loans

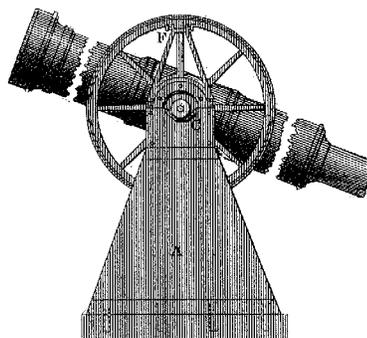
Ray Cash (415) 665-8666

## SFAA Website Update

For those of you with online access, don't forget to visit the club's website. The bulletin board area especially is a great place to post info and ask questions. Go to <http://www.zennla.com/sfaa>.

*Above the Fog* is the official bulletin of the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers. It is the forum in which club members may share their experiences, ideas, and observations. We encourage you to participate by submitting your articles, announcements, letters, photos, and drawings. We would also like to hear from our new members. Tell us about yourself – what you have done in the past and what other clubs you have joined. **The deadline for the next issue is the seventh day of the month.** Send your articles to Lorrie Boen at 765 Geary Street #302, San Francisco, CA 94109 or at [LorrenLee@aol.com](mailto:LorrenLee@aol.com).

## Club Telescopes



Long time member Ray Cash-LePennec has 3 loaner telescopes for club member use and is in charge of loaning them out. If you are interested in borrowing a club telescope, give Ray a call. There are many new members in the SFAA and they ask what kind of telescope to buy or use and this is a good way to get to know the Dobsonian type of scope and learn the sky as well.

## CLUB DATES

### **Board Meeting – March 14**

7:00 p.m. Western Addition Library – corner of Scott & Geary Sts. SF – 7:00 p.m.

### **SFAA General Meeting – March 21**

Refreshments at 7:00 p.m.

Speakers begin at 7:30 p.m.

Morrison Planetarium, Golden Gate Park

### **City Star Party**

February 24 at 6:00 p.m.

March 31 at 6:00 p.m.

## *From the President*

We had a very nice Annual Dinner at The Basque Cultural Center in January. Thanks to all those who helped arrange it, and to those who attended. Congratulations are very much in order for the award winners who are listed separately within this bulletin. We would also like to thank Orion Telescopes for sponsoring our Literary Award program.

There are lots of interesting events coming up for the SFAA: a KQED pledge drive night, a star party at Hume Observatory, the AANC conference, Astronomy day 2001, and more. Be sure to read about them in this bulletin. As you may get this bulletin before our February meeting, I would like to remind you that Dr. Jeff Moore from the NASA/AMES Galileo Imaging Team will be our speaker on Wednesday February 21<sup>st</sup>. He will be talking about the findings of the Galileo Mission, which has been gathering fascinating information about Jupiter and the four Galilean moons of Jupiter.

The guest speaker at our first Point Lobos star party of the year, on Saturday February 24<sup>th</sup> will be our own Fraser Reich. A brief synopsis of his talk follows. Lets show up and support him on his presentation, have some fun meeting the public, and enjoy some observing from Point Lobos.

I am pleased to announce that it has been arranged that John Dobson will be our guest speaker at our September meeting. John, as most of you know, is the originator of the Dobsonian telescope mount design; is the guru of the sidewalk astronomy movement; and the teacher of telescope making and cosmology classes. He is a member of many Astronomy clubs including the Springfield Telescope Makers (that coordinates Stellafane) and the SFAA where he is an Honorary Director. The meeting will be a question and answer session so bring your questions for John. More on this later.

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**The Secret Lives of Stars  
A talk for the City Star Party  
February 24<sup>th</sup> 2001  
Fraser Reich**

As amateur astronomers we prize such sights as the Messier objects because...well..., because there really is something to 'see'. Open star clusters, globular star clusters, emission nebulae and so on become the 'tools-of-the-trade' that we delight to show to the public precisely because of their visual impact. Yet I am surprised by how many people ask me: "Can I see a (particular) star?" Normally, I politely explain that there is not much to see, and wouldn't they prefer to observe something with visual details? Naturally they agree- after all it's my telescope, just like it used to be 'my ball' in elementary school soccer. Actually, it was at an elementary school observation session the other week that I had something of an epiphany, and, to stretch the

religious metaphor further, experienced some repentance over my prior attitude on the subject. An eight-year old boy waited patiently in a long queue as we observed Saturn, only to reach the ladder and plead with me 'Please can I see a Red Giant star?' (Out of the mouths of babes and children...).

This started me thinking. If a person wants to see stars, I need to show them stars; not only with my telescope, but also with the aid of the more important instrument of their own imaginations. So we did; we looked at Betelgeuse and Aldebaran, and we compared these to Rigel and various other stars in the OBAFGKM stellar classes. I became unexpectedly and spontaneously enthusiastic for the subject of stellar evolution (Saturn class was temporarily suspended). I was reminded that we often take for granted one of the great achievements of 20<sup>th</sup> century astronomy; namely the development of a coherent theory for the lifecycle of stars, and particularly the description of how the coalescing mass of the star determines its career and the final fate which

awaits it. It's these latter topics that naturally fascinate most people; after all who can resist talk of white dwarves, neutron stars and black holes?

And so, although the visual impact of a star through a telescope is rather underwhelming, nonetheless it is a wonderful catalyst to thinking about the exciting and violent processes taking place inside stars. That's what we'll consider in this month's City Star Party talk: "The Secret

Lives of Stars". After the talk, I'll be using my telescope to compare and contrast star colors, and we'll try and look at as many examples of the different spectral classes as the seeing permits. I hope to have a handout for members of the public to take away for future reference. This could also be used by my fellow amateur astronomers who would like to help me with the night's educational goal.

**KQED**

**PLEDGE DRIVE  
2001**



**Tuesday, March 6  
6:50 to 11:00 p.m.**

**Come spend a fun-filled evening helping raise money to keep KQED-TV's great programming on the air.**

**Programs scheduled for SFAA's pledge night are  
"The Best of Cosmos"  
and  
"The Colors of Infinity."**

**Last day to sign up is Monday, February 19**

**Please contact  
SFAA Secretary  
(415) 566-2357, ext. 2  
to sign up.**



***Fremont Peak Observatory - New web site***

The Fremont Peak Observatory Association is pleased to introduce its new web site, in time for the 2001 season of public programs at the observatory. <http://www.fpoa.net/>

The web site features observatory information, program schedules, directions, hints and tips, photos, and the promise of more FPO stories, photos, and information to come.

Please replace the link at your next opportunity. (The old link is <http://home.att.net/~fpoa/>)

## SFAA SPEAKERS CALENDAR 2001

<b>February 21, 2001</b>	Dr. Jeff Moore from NASA AMES Galileo Imaging Team will be speaking about the findings of the Galileo Mission which has been gathering fascinating information about Jupiter and the four Galilean moons of Jupiter.
<b>March 21, 2001</b>	Michael Barber, the CEO of SBIG (Santa Barbara Instrument Group), will discuss CCD imaging for beginners and intermediate users, show some incredible photos and answer your many questions about CCD imaging. SBIG is the manufacturer of a variety of CCD Cameras that have become the instruments of choice for most astro imagers
<b>April thru August 2001</b>	Speakers to be announced
<b>September 19, 2001</b>	John Dobson, the originator of the Dobsonian telescope mount design; the guru of the side walk astronomy movement; and teacher of telescope making and cosmology classes will be answering our questions. The meeting will be a question and answer session so bring your questions for John.
<b>October &amp; November 2001</b>	Speakers to be announced.
<b>December 19, 2001</b>	Members' night. SFAA members talk about their astronomical experiences.

## When E.T. Phones...SETI and the Social Implications of Contact

**Sunday, March 18, 2001, 3:00 pm**

Morrison Auditorium, California Academy of Sciences - Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

For over 40 years, we have been searching for signals from an extraterrestrial intelligence. We haven't heard anything conclusive... yet. But one day we might. And if we do, how will it affect human societies, philosophies, and beliefs? What could happen?

The SETI Institute, The Planetary Society Bay Area Volunteer Network, and the California Academy of Sciences present a panel discussion with:

- Seth Shostak – Astronomer; SETI Institute Public Programs Scientist
- Doug Vakoch – Psychologist; SETI Institute Social Scientist
- Dan Werthimer - SETI@home Chief Scientist; SERENDIP Project Director
- Thomas McDonough - Planetary Society SETI Coordinator

Advance ticket orders by mail: \$3.00. (At the door: \$5.00) Send check payable to The Planetary Society, and a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

TPS/SETI Institute Event  
c/o Barbara Raskin  
1530 Bay Laurel Dr.  
Menlo Park, CA, 94025.

Orders received after March 10, or without SASE, will be held at the Morrison Auditorium. Tickets are limited and non-refundable.

Visit the Planetary Society at <http://planetary.org> and the SETI Institute at <http://www.seti.org>

## 2000 SFAA AWARD WINNERS

### SFAA Awards

Herman Fast	Jane Houston Jones
Service	Lorrie Boen
Observer of the Year	Steve Overholt

### Literary Awards *sponsored by Orion Telescopes*

1 <sup>st</sup> place tie	“First Hand”	Tina Dentclaw
	“On the Sidewalk with John”	Morris Jones
2 <sup>nd</sup> place tie	“You Silly Goose”	Michael Portuesi
	“A Letter From Lindsay”	Jane Houston Jones

### Astrophotography Awards

1 <sup>st</sup> place	NGC 2359	Bob Berta
2 <sup>nd</sup> place	M31	Bert KatzungM31
3 <sup>rd</sup> place	Aurora	Dennis Tye

## "CRASHING ASTEROIDS, EXPLODING STARS, AND CANNIBAL GALAXIES"

A full day explaining "The Violent Universe" will be presented on March 24th from 9 am to 5:30 pm at the University of California, Berkeley. Led by astronomer and popular lecturer Andrew Fraknoi, the non-technical, multi-media program will focus on some of the most exciting (and destructive) phenomena in the cosmos.

Topics to be covered include:

- What Killed the Dinosaurs: Asteroid and Comet Impacts
- Supernova: Exploding Stars as Crucibles of Life and Death
- The Black Hole: Collapsed Stars and Space Warps
- Gamma-ray Bursts: Awesome Explosions in a Galaxy
- Far, Far Away
- Cannibal Galaxies: Star Groups that Swallow Neighbors

For images that relate to the subject of this lecture, please go to:

<http://impact.arc.nasa.gov/gallery/index.htm> (images of asteroid impact scenarios)

<http://www.eso.org/outreach/info-events/ut1fl/astroim-nebula.html#phot-40f-99> (Crab Nebula, remnant of an exploded star)

No background in science or math will be assumed. The instructor specializes in explaining scientific ideas in everyday language and with humor. The program is perfect for anyone interested in astronomy aged 14 or older. The program is cosponsored by UC Berkeley Extension and the Astronomical Society of the Pacific.

For more information or to register, see: <http://www.learningsphere.org/astronomy.htm> or call the UC Berkeley Extension at (510) 642-4111.

Morrison Planetarium's  
**Benjamin Dean Lecture Series**

*presents*

**March 6**

**Dr. Lynn Rothschild**

NASA Ames Research Center

***The Good (?) Old Days: Life in the PreCambrian***

Understanding how the hostile Earth of a few hundred million years ago became inhabitable may help us deal with the changing environmental conditions we are creating today.

**April 24**

**Dr. Kenneth Nealon**

JPL

*Searching for Life in the Universe: Lessons from Earth*

With life on Earth as our only model, can we develop non-Earth-centric methods for detecting extraterrestrial life elsewhere in the solar system?

**May 15**

**Dr. Chris McKay**

NASA Ames Research Center

***Life in the Cold and Dry: Earth, Mars and Europa***

Studies in the polar regions of Earth may provide a basis for the search for life on Mars and Europa.

All programs begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Planetarium - Tickets are \$3.00 each  
DEAN LECTURE INFORMATION LINE at (415) 750-7141



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**St. Anselms School Star Party February 28**

Jane Houston Jones

Each year I hold a Project Astro event at St. Anselms School in San Anselmo with my Project Astro partner, Anita Pisciotto, the 6th and 7th grade science teacher for the school. This year the star party is on Wednesday, February 28th. The rain-out make-up date is the next day, Thursday, March 1. The whole school is invited and many parents and neighbors attend.

There is always a need for more telescopes, so if this interests you, drop me a note and I'll give you directions. The great thing about this school is we astronomers can drive right in to the blacktop area and setup our scopes next to our cars. It makes for quick setup and easy get-away. Plus they usually have hot chocolate, cider, cookies and all that good astro-food. Last year Mojo and I held the star party a couple days after we got married, so we called it a honey-moon party - since there was a partial eclipse that night.

Founded in September 1952, the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers (SFAA) is an association of people who share a common interest in astronomy and other related sciences. Our membership consists of people from all walks of life, educational backgrounds and ages. Many SFAA members own their own telescopes; some have been made by hand in local telescope-making classes and vary in size from 6 to 25 inches.

**Treasurer, SFAA, 13 Mabry Way, San Rafael, CA 94903**

make checks payable to **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers** and mail to:

- \$25 enclosed, individual membership
- \$30 enclosed, foreign membership
- \$30 enclosed, family membership
- \$30 enclosed, institutional membership
- \$8 enclosed, youth membership (under 18)

**Select one category:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
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Name: Telephone:

## **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers Membership Application**

### **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers**

c/o Morrison Planetarium  
California Academy of Sciences  
Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94118

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**In This Issue of SFAA's  
Above the Fog**

- **March Speakers**
- **From the President**
- **Announcements**
- **2000 SFAA Award Winners**
- **2001 Speakers**
- **and more...**