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NIAGARA WHIRLPOOL



Hugh N.A. Maclean 1915-2003



NIAGARA

WHIRLPOOL

**The Newsletter of the
Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
Niagara Centre**

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

**NEXT GENERAL MEETING WILL BE HELD ON
SEPTEMBER *25TH* AT 7:00 PM IN THE LAMARSH
ROOM AT THE NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY
ON VICTORIA AVENUE**

Niagara Centre Website:

E-mail Discussion List & Member's Only Area

The Niagara Centre has an e-mail discussion list and a member's area on the website. By subscribing to the e-mail list you will be able to post messages and carry on discussions about astronomy and activities with other Niagara Centre members. This is a great way to interact and get to know other members, or enhance your knowledge of astronomy. Please note that a log-in procedure is required to initially join the Discussion List. Complete instructions are available on the discussion list page on the website.

A member's only area of the website is also available. This area contains Niagara Centre information for the use of its members only. The member's area contains astrophotography by Niagara members, the Niagara library book list, and lots of other Centre related info of interest to members.

To receive the log-ins and passwords for the e-mail discussion list and member's area, contact John VanderBrugge or Ron Gasbarini and they will send you the needed information by e-mail.

Hugh N.A. Maclean, A Founder of the Niagara Centre, Dies at 87

By Philip Downey

Hugh Noel Alexander Maclean, a founder of the Niagara Centre, recipient of the RASC Service Award, and the man for whom asteroid 14146 Hughmaclean was recently named, died at the age of 87 on June 11, 2003. The cause was cancer.

Hugh was an active member of the Niagara Centre from its founding in 1958 until his death. He rarely missed a meeting - the final one he attended was in April - a public star night, or a chance to get out and do some observing. Even in May, with his health failing, he was up before dawn for the May 7 transit of Mercury across the face of the sun, which was unfortunately clouded out in Niagara.

Glen Pidsadnick, president of the Niagara Centre, says, "Although I didn't know Hugh as long as many others in our Centre, he has left me with the lasting impression of a humble man with a vast knowledge of astronomy, willing to share it with anybody who asked. He always attended club functions and brought his homemade 4" scope to public star nights. I've had my best views ever of Venus through that scope.

"On many occasions he would entertain us with astro slides he had taken in the 60s and 70s with homemade equipment that rivaled many of the images taken today with all the latest technology and high speed film.

"After going through items he left to the Centre I can easily see he was a craftsman. He had built many telescopes and eyepieces out of every every day materials, like a 50 mm finder scope out of a whipping-cream



aerosol can. He also had many hand-drawn charts of occultations for asteroids and comets, some as recent as 2000 - no computers for Hugh! We will all miss him."

During Hugh's 45 years with the Niagara Centre he held the positions of National Council Representative, Vice-President, and President. Hugh also served on the Board of Directors and President's Council for many of those years. He was also part of the original production team of the Niagara Whirlpool for a period of nine years, starting in 1978. (Volume 1, Issue 1 appeared in January 1980.) Centre member Ron Gasbarini fondly remembers many Saturday afternoons spent at Hugh's house, printing the newsletter on an A.B. Dick duplicating machine.

Hugh was a mentor to many of the Niagara Centre's younger members. Gasbarini, who joined the club 30 years ago at the age of 12, was for years driven to club meetings and events by Hugh. Ron has gone on to serve the Centre in almost every executive position, and currently manages the club's website. Today Ron still observes with the 8" Cave-Astrola Newtonian telescope Hugh helped him assemble 28 years ago. Ron writes, "I will always remember Hugh for his generous and caring nature. He had a strong passion for astronomy and truly enjoyed sharing his knowledge with others. His devotion to the RASC and the Niagara Centre was extraordinary and he left a lasting impression on those around him. I will miss him very much."

Peter Jedicke, a Niagara Falls native and currently the RASC's 1st National Vice-President, says, "I was always impressed with his quiet confidence and friendly smile. It was plain to see that his interest in astronomy and his concern for the Niagara Centre were deep and genuine."

Hugh's observing passion was transit timing, whether they involved stars, moons or planets. He was an active participant in many transit observation programs, as well as nova and comet search efforts.

For his work in astronomy the asteroid 14146 was named for Hugh on June 13, 2003, two days after he died. Although Hugh knew the naming was a possibility and was deeply flattered by it, the official word came two days after his death. His nomination was submitted by Robert Jedicke, a Niagara Centre member and professional astronomer formerly with the asteroid-hunting Spacewatch team in Arizona, and his brother Peter. (continued)

The Niagara Centre is honouring Hugh's memory by naming its new observatory after him. Construction of the observatory, the second at the Centre's darksky site, should begin next year.

In addition to astronomy, Hugh was also active in sports and music. He was a member of the undefeated St. Catharines lacrosse team in 1935-36 and also played for the Ontario Junior Lacrosse team. He was also a noted football and basketball player. He could often be found playing the piano or ukelele at parties. In his later years he was a frequent participant at dances across the Niagara Region



Hugh served his country during the Second World War when he was stationed in Ottawa for 37 months, as a member of the Postal Corps.

Maclean will be greatly missed. Robert Doran, who joined the Niagara Centre in 1964, says, "Hugh was an extraordinary individual. He knew astronomy well, was an excellent telescope maker and most of all, was willing to share his knowledge and talents with others. He was valuable to the Centre and worked very hard in the early years to keep it going. I will miss Hugh very much as I considered him a valued friend. I was fortunate on my trip

north last year to have been able to attend a meeting of the Centre and, as it turned out, see Hugh one last time before he passed away."

Hugh is survived by his sister Jean, his son Donald, daughter Sheila, five grandchildren, one great-grandchild, and his friend Ethel Brooks. At his memorial service they all recalled Hugh sneaking in and out of the family cottage at odd hours of the night, something that all our families can relate to.

Various items from the estate of Hugh Maclean are for sale. Hugh wanted all his astronomy belongings to stay within the club he valued so much and are now available to members. The proceeds will be donated to the club as per his wishes. Please contact John VanderBrugge to view or purchase any item.

Sky & Telescope magazines, 185 issues from 1965 to 1995 - \$75.00

Astronomy magazines, 110 issues from 1980 to the early 90's - \$50.00

SkyNews magazines, 47 issues from 1995 - 2002 - \$20.00

Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory: Star Atlas of Reference Stars & Nonstellar Objects - \$20.00

8" f/5.1 mirror, new with fresh coatings in box, ready to build your own 8" scope - \$200.00

6" mirror with mirror cell, decent shape but could use re-coating - \$20.00

2.5" secondary mirror with diagonal holder for spider, decent shape - \$10.00

box of assorted items including 3-12" glass blanks for mirror making (tools?) - \$10.00

President's Report

By Glen Pidsadnick

Was this a short summer, or was it just me? Actually, the June weather wasn't great either, but the Niagara Centre still made the best of it. We had large groups at the CCCA observatory doing repairs and upgrades, and many great nights observing and imaging Mars.

A dozen members camped out at Rock Point in Dunnville in August for a public star night. It was a little hazy, but the 100 campers seemed to enjoy the views of the moon, Mars, and deep sky objects.

Once again we had a large group at Starfest in August. Members started arriving on Tuesday and all were present on Thursday, just in time for the most spectacular lightning storm I have ever seen - two hours of continuous lightning accompanied by ever-changing high winds, hail, rain and "WOW, what a light show!" We all survived with no damage to our scopes or campsite. The rest of Starfest was great, the NYAA puts on an excellent event. If you've never attended, you don't know what you're missing.

Our annual StarBQ was a little late this year because of bad weather in July, but 28 people came out for sausage and a good time on August 30. Following that we set up nine scopes for a record crowd of 200-plus people who wanted to see Mars at the Chippawa Creek Conservation Area.

Up next is the Frozen Banana Star Party in Powassan, which many of us will be attending. Great dark skies. *Because of it our September meeting has been rescheduled to September 25.* Then we kick off fall with a public night at Stonechurch Vineyards, Friday September 26. This is always a good time.

With Mars being such a hot topic this summer and fall, we have a great opportunity to promote our hobby and our club. We must let people know Mars wasn't a one-night event, but is still around for viewing until winter. Get them out to public star nights at Firemen's Park to see what else is up there in the sky, or to a meeting to learn more. The news media got the ball rolling with all the attention on Mars, so now it's up to us to keep it going.



A great StarBQ!

Vice-President's Report

By Tim Barnes

The summer has once again come and gone, but not without a plethora of sights and events. This summer marked the planet Mars' closest approach (opposition) to Earth since 57617 B.C. I saw it through a six-inch Astro-physics refractor with a bino-viewer and it was nothing but breathtaking and a definite highlight of the summer. You don't need a \$30,000 scope to view this (but it helps), as any scope will reveal details on the planet's surface throughout the fall.

My late night visit to the observatory in the early summer showed that our efforts at renovation were well worth it. There are plenty of observing pads and the observatory looks sharp in its new coat of steel siding.



The Niagara Centre at Starfest 2003

I have had some good nights at the observatory this year. It is a valuable resource in an area riddled with light pollution.

Speaking of light, we were treated to a province-wide blackout in mid-August. All electricity was lost, including lights. I was treated to an urban view of the Milky Way and those in Toronto had skies they had not had in over 50 years. It was nice to do some observing in the middle of the city for once - if only the skies were always this good.

Starfest in Mount Forest was again a success. We retained our campsite at the entrance and were treated to four nights of clear skies and one cloudy night when we

were enveloped by the storm of storms, a lightning shower with black clouds and rain. Mars, Mars, and more Mars, must I mention the 6" Astro-physics again? The Veil Nebula was also a sight to behold in John VanderBrugge's homemade 15-inch Dobsonian telescope. It was unearthly. The scope is truly a work of art and one of the finest I have looked through and used. Good job, John!

Now that summer is over we can look forward to the sights of the fall and winter. Colder nights and clear skies are ahead of us. It should prove to be a good year. Clear skies to all.

Secretary's Report

by John VanderBrugge

We've had a full summer of events, star parties, and of course the close approach of Mars, which we will be enjoying for a while yet. Starfest went off well with another large contingent of Niagara Centre members joining the thousand-plus crowd at Starfest. We had four good nights of observing, with one night enjoying the lightning show put on by Mother Nature for our viewing pleasure.

We completed lots of work at the CCCA observatory site over the summer. A hard-working group of volunteers built four new concrete observing pads, spread four truckloads of gravel to create a larger observing and parking area (thanks Ryan for the donation of the Bobcat and your extra effort), and redesigned and painted the observatory's roof and steel siding. Les Marczi continues to do an excellent job as our Observatory Director keeping the grounds maintained and ready for all of us to use.

A reminder to all members that the observatory is a members' only site for our exclusive use. If asked its location, please refer the public to our many public star nights for viewing. Friends of members are permitted at the observatory, but only when accompanied by the member in question. Just a friendly reminder as we've had a few public show up at the observatory expecting a tour of the night sky. We spend a great deal of time doing public events. We want to keep the observatory site free for member's personal observing. This is also a security issue with the expensive equipment at the site belonging to the club and members. Thanks.

The Niagara Centre has three new members since my last report. They are Ken Crowther, Philip Hughes, and Bill McConnell. Welcome to the club, ask questions if you are unsure of something, and please join in our club activities. You'll find the Niagara Centre to be a great group of people who are willing to share the expertise and experiences with those new to astronomy.

Have a great early Fall of observing. This is the perfect weather for it. Clear skies.



Spring repairs at the CCCA

Public Observing Coordinator's Report

By Darlene Marano

Hope everyone had a fantastic summer. July certainly wasn't astronomy friendly but the month of August made up for it. Our public star night at Rock Point Provincial Park on August 2nd had a slightly rough start, but ended up giving the 100 or so campers a fair glimpse of the moon and other deepsky objects. We experienced heavy cloud cover for about an hour and when we thought all was lost for another year, the sky opened up. There were a few campers that had hung around eagerly anticipating some clearing in the sky and were rewarded for their determination. I had a nice conversation that evening with the Park wardens and management who mentioned that they are frequently asked when the "Astronomers" are going to be back. The staff are anxious to have us return again next year and as this is one of my favourite star nights, I certainly look forward to it.

August 27th equaled MARS! We had more interest in this astronomical event than any other I can remember. Perhaps it was all of the media hype. While we had no formal event planned for that evening, several of us did do our own thing which naturally included friends, neighbours and family. Glen Pidsadnick and I decided to do a little observing at Fort Niagara in Niagara-on-the-Lake that evening. It was a perfect night. We held our own public star night (while not exactly planned) by entertaining a young American couple who were spending their final evening in Niagara on a leisurely bike ride around the fort. I love seeing how thrilled and grateful people are at looking through a telescope for the first time. A short while later, we were visited by a young family who were taking their Clydesdale horse and buggy for a ride in the park. Now it was my turn to be thrilled as they looked through my scope and I petted their horse. I had never seen a Clydesdale up close - he was big and beautiful even in the dark. All of our visitors that night were really nice people and it made me realize why our public star nights are so special.

Saturday, August 30th was our farewell to summer with a public star night at Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. Most of the executive received several phone calls during the week from area residents who didn't want to pass up the opportunity to catch a glimpse at Mars. The night was perfect! The "first time" observers were treated to a beautiful crescent Moon, as well as Mars, the Veil Nebula, the Andromeda Galaxy and other astronomical sights. For most of the evening I had at least 15 people lined up to look through my scope and I'm sure that my colleagues were experiencing the same thing. I believe that we had one of our best crowds ever. Quite a few of the "observers" showed great interest in joining the Centre and wanted information on the best scope for them to buy.

This evening was a great success! I can't thank all of you enough for the time you have dedicated, your patience while waiting for clear skies (sorry, out of my control) and the distance you traveled to help the Centre hold our public nights and to increase the public's interest in astronomy.

Nervous about attending a public night because you don't know a lot about astronomy? I joined the Centre about four years ago without a scope or even binoculars and very little knowledge of astronomy except that there were some wondrous things in the sky that I just had to see.



Setting up at Rock Point.

Within the first year I purchased binoculars and an 8" telescope. I joined the members at the Centre's star parties right away and with their help I learned how to set up my scope. I'm not sure who was more excited, myself or the public when I first started observing. I had no idea on how to answer some of their questions but my fellow astronomers were always there to lend a hand. Star nights are a perfect place to meet and talk to people and you would even be surprised how much you can learn from the public. I have gained some of my very best friends from my affiliation with the Centre and encourage everyone to

participate in these important Centre activities. Every day is a learning experience when it comes to astronomy but it is an enjoyable experience and one that I look forward to.

Please take note of the planned Public star nights at Stonechurch and Fireman's Park in the Event Horizon of the Whirlpool and join myself and the other Centre members in making our star nights for the 2003-2004 season a great success. I look forward to seeing you there!

Members' Observing Coordinator's Report

By Les Marzi

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable summer, I know I did. The weather wasn't the best this year for members' nights. That didn't stop diehards from coming out during the week. We had quite a few impromptu member get-togethers at the CCCA observatory.

I'd like to thank everyone who came out and gave a helping hand on the observatory. The two work parties we had were a great success. We now have four new observing pads for a total of six, and our observatory now has a new roof. With the eighty tons of new gravel brought in, it's really starting to shape up out there.

Mars has taken center stage for the past two months, and why not? it's at its closest approach to us in over 57,000 years. I've been observing and photographing the red planet since June 15. I have certainly got my fill of this historic event.

I have had my disappointments this year too. The May 7th transit of Mercury was clouded out. Not to say I didn't try, I set up with Dennis Maheu on Northshore Blvd. in Burlington. We got there at 4 a.m., set up and waited for the Sun to rise. It rose through a thin strip of clouds, and back into another. We had about 45 seconds to find it before we lost it in the clouds again. I got one out of focus image. My second letdown was the total lunar eclipse of May 16th, all of southern Ontario was cloud covered.

The folks that attended Starfest had good weather. I visited them on Saturday. The weather was beautiful, and I felt like a kid in a candy store. I got a chance to look at and through a few of the telescopes there. My first view of the sun with an H- α Coronado filter on a TeleVue Pronto was unbelievable. There were also a lot of interesting homemade scopes to check out.

August 30th we held our annual StarBQ at the CCCA observatory, with great food and friends. Following that we had the most successful public night in years across the road and members' night at the observatory. I have to say that night was the best I have seen Mars, the skies were very steady.

Finally, I'd like recognize the passing of one of our founding members, Hugh Maclean. Hugh was a pillar in the club, always active at meetings and public venues. I was very surprised when I got a call from Hugh back in May. He wanted to know what I was doing for the transit of Mercury. I asked him how he was, he replied just fine. I knew he was very sick at the time but still he was active until the end. This was very inspiring for me, his love for amateur astronomy (and the people involved in it) has made me look at the hobby in a different light. Thanks for everything, Hugh.

Dedicated to Hugh Maclean 1915-2003



Mars with my webcam on August 30th
from the CCCA

The Darker The Better

By Wayne Liebau

Back-yard astronomers often think of bad weather as their main enemy, but in fact light pollution is worse: it's *always* there, and getting worse each year.

But we don't have to accept this as inevitable or irreversible - it's possible to "bring back the night." Efforts by RASC members elsewhere in Canada, and by dark-sky advocates around the world, prove that a dedicated few can make a big difference. It makes sense for astronomy buffs to campaign to restore our night skies here in Niagara.

Although the challenge is daunting, the old adage "many hands make light work" applies. We can all help "make light work...better."

In the campaign to limit light pollution, our main tasks are to educate (enlighten?) the general public and build widespread support for dark skies, and show individuals, businesses and governments how to achieve lower costs, greater security, and better night skies, all at the same time.

The principles are very simple. Good lighting produces adequate but not excessive light, only where and when needed, illuminates only the target area with no uplight, glare or light trespass, and is energy-efficient.

The Niagara Executive has developed strategies for dark-sky campaigning. We'll concentrate on just one of the ideas here; watch for more in future *Whirlpool* issues.

Calling all photographers! Help the Niagara Centre collect a lighting gallery - a gallery of heroes and rogues of the night. We need photos of good, bad and awful lighting, as well as before-and-after shots (both improvement and impairment).

Photos can demonstrate what's happening to our night sky, and show that it's possible to illuminate effectively and efficiently while preserving relatively dark skies.

Although such photos can be found on the Web, there's nothing like local content to bring the issue home to residents and governments in Niagara. The photos may be used at public events, in handout or display materials, on the Web, or in presentations to public officials or businesses. The photos might also be used for a "Niagara Good Lighting Award" that would reward those who take good lighting seriously.

Try to find the best and worst of local lighting, from 'security' lights that throw glare, to car lots, flashy lights on Clifton Hill, and homes and roads with full cut-off lighting. Try multiple angles and views of any location.

For all photos, please record the exact location, direction, conditions, explanation, and photographer. Photos can be emailed to jvandwil@cogeco.ca (please save in .jpg format if possible and use reasonably small file sizes). Prints or slides can be brought to meetings and given to Secretary John VanderBrugge or mailed to the Centre's P.O. Box.

If you're not a photographer, don't despair - there are lots of other ways you can help out. We'll have more details in upcoming *Whirlpools*, but to get you thinking:

- Where can good quality outdoor lighting fixtures be purchased in Niagara? Are there knowledgeable or helpful salespeople or storeowners?
- There are lots of potential allies in the campaign for dark skies. Who are they? Do you have any connections?
- Are you part of, or do you know about, other organizations that might be interested in a speaker?
- Do you have any connections with schools? (Think of science fairs, projects, current events or world interest classes)
- Do you know of any publications that might print an article about dark skies?

If you vacationed in a dark-sky location this summer or went to a star party, think how great it would be to have skies more like that in Niagara. Then think of what we can do to make it happen.

There is a wealth of information on the Web: for a refresher, start with <http://www.darksky.org>, <http://www.rasc.ca/light>, or <http://members.aol.com/ctstarwchr/LiteLynx.htm> Dark skies!

Niagara Centre Store

| | |
|--|---------|
| RASC 2004 Calendars | \$13.00 |
| Beginner's Observer's Guide | \$13.00 |
| RASC 2004 Observer's Handbook | \$16.00 |
| Planispheres | \$15.00 |
| RASC Lapel Pins | \$ 6.00 |
| Centre Crest | \$ 5.00 |
| Bumper sticker | \$ 3.00 |
| RASC Cloth Crest | \$13.00 |
| Niagara Centre T-shirts are available. See Dave StremLaw for above items. | |

Magazines

Sky & Telescope, Astronomy Group rate available.

Anyone who is interested in getting the club discount for subscriptions to Astronomy or Sky & Telescope magazines should contact Dave StremLaw. With a group subscription plan you also receive 10% discounts on Sky & Telescope's wide selection of astronomy books. Sign up with Dave at the next General Meeting, or call him at 892-2767 to get these great discounts.

Niagara Centre turtleneck sweaters are now available for order. The turtlenecks are black with 'RASC Niagara' stitched into the neck in red and white. They look very sharp and are perfect for cool weather observing. The turtlenecks come in small, medium, large and extra-large. To place your order please call Joanne at (905) 295-0972 or talk to her at the September meeting.

Thinking of selling something? Free ad space for members. Contact Philip Downey - see contact information in this issue.

Event Horizon

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| September 18-21 | Frozen Banana Star Party, Powassan, Ontario. |
| September 23 | Fall equinox. |
| September 25 | General meeting, Niagara Falls Library, 7 p.m. N.B. Rescheduled from Sept. 18. |
| September 26 | Stargazing at Stonechurch Vineyards, 7-11 p.m. Be there early to set up! New moon. |
| September 27 | Members' starnight, CCCA Observatory. |
| October 6 | Mars and Moon make close pair. |
| October 16 | General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7 p.m. |
| October 18 | Firemens' Park Public Starnight, 7 p.m. |
| October 22 | Orionid meteors peak. |
| October 25 | New moon. Daylight Savings Time ends. Members' starnight, CCCA Observatory. |
| October 26 | Venus and Moon make close pair. |
| November 1 | Firemens' Park Public Starnight, 7 p.m. |
| November 5 | Double shadow transit on Jupiter. |
| November 9 | Total eclipse of the moon. |
| November 18 | Leonid meteors peak. |
| November 20 | General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7 p.m. |
| November 22 | Members' starnight, CCCA Observatory. |

Niagara Centre Ads

Slide/Negative Scanning: For anyone wanting to have their slides/negatives converted to digital files, I can scan them at high resolution, 2800 dpi, and save them onto a CD-R. Cost: \$1.00 per file, \$5.00 for CD-R. Contact Les Welgan at 905-934-4647, astro_nuts@cogeco.ca

Free telescope: I have in my possession a 4.5" Tasco reflector on an equatorial mount with slow motion controls, needs cleaning up, fine for kids, contact John VanderBrugge.

On Monday, October 20, time TBA, the Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Rees, of the Institute of Astronomy at King's College, Cambridge, will be giving a **lecture at McMaster University**. I will be leaving St. Catharines at 2:30. After the lecture we can convene at a local pub for tea. For further details e-mail Greg Willis at g.gordon.willis@sympatico.ca.

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