

HELP US GROW TO SERVE  
YOU  
AND ASTRONOMY BETTER

SUPPORT THE ROYAL  
ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY  
OF CANADA



Comet Halley, as captured by an R.A.S.C. astrophotographer.

*Photo by Michael Watson*



## **OUR SOCIETY IN PERSPECTIVE**

Although you probably are well aware of the week-to-week activities of your local R.A.S.C. Centre, or, if an unattached member, with the publications of the Society, it is worthwhile to take a broader look at the role our Society plays in our world.

You belong to an organization which has a distinguished history and fulfills a special role in our country. Astronomy is almost unique amongst the sciences in the extent to which amateurs can play a role in it, both by direct observational contributions to research, and by supporting it through public education. Astronomy has a special appeal for people of all ages and from all walks of life, and by promoting the study of the universe, our Society cultivates a general appreciation for science in our society. Especially since astronomy is not extensively taught in schools, our Society contributes substantially to the public awareness of astronomy and science in general through our contacts with schoolchildren. In a period when public understanding and appreciation of science and technology is still not high, it is important that every effort be made to stimulate an interest in science in Canada.

The Society has a long history, going back to the original founding of an astronomical club in Toronto in 1868. A few years after its establishment as The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada in 1903, it expanded with the creation of the first "Centre" outside Toronto. Now our Society extends across Canada with 21 Centres established in major population centres, and we boast of 3500 members in Canada and around the world. Throughout the past century of growth, a devotion to public education in astronomy has guided the Society.

## **BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP**

Our membership fee is quite modest in comparison to the benefits received. Slightly more than half of your fee, assuming you are a Centre member, goes to support the activities of the Society at the national level, including the national publications that you receive: the OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK, the bimonthly JOURNAL, and the bimonthly



**The R.A.S.C. informs the public (Astronomy Day, 1986, at Toronto's Harbourfront.)** *Photo by Steven Spinney*

national NEWSLETTER. Amongst the national activities that you support are the sponsoring of public lectures, the dissemination of information on astronomy, the provision of awards and prizes to members, to science fairs, and to students of astronomy.

There are national programs which are designed specifically to benefit the Centres: grants for speaker exchanges, travel to General Assemblies and National Council meetings, and local projects initiated by the Centres. The National Council also plays an important coordinating role by providing a link between astronomy enthusiasts all over Canada, and by speaking out on their behalf.

The remainder of the annual fee goes to support your Centre, providing the many activities of interest to its members and to the public. These generally include regular meetings at which well-known amateur and

professional astronomers present lectures on topics of current interest, slide and film programs, and specialist study groups. Some members actively observe variable stars, lunar occultations, sunspots, meteors, comets and other phenomena. Others develop special skills in astrophotography, perhaps in a Centre observatory. Most Centres have programs of public education, such as special "star nights" when hundreds of people have an opportunity to look through telescopes — many for the first time in their lives. As a Centre member, you are probably kept informed on Centre activities and other topics through a Centre newsletter.

The observational and educational work of our members, both attached and unattached, has a tremendous value to the science of astronomy and to the general appreciation of science by the public. Were you aware that the David Dunlap Observatory near Toronto, the Hume Cronyn Observatory in London, and planetariums in Edmonton and at McMaster University in Hamilton have all come into being because of influence of our Society?

If you have friends or acquaintances who are in any way interested in astronomy, please tell them of the benefits of membership in our Society and encourage them to join us. We can grow in our efforts to reach the public only by growth in membership.

## **OUR CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC APPRECIATION OF ASTRONOMY**

The activities outlined above bring enjoyment, intellectual growth and satisfaction to our members, but they also benefit the general public through increasing their awareness of our science. The following short list outlines some of the Society activities that typically take place across the country in a year, and which are open to the public:

- 1) About 200 public lecture meetings.
- 2) About 100 "star nights" at which the public can learn about astronomy and telescopes, and actually view the heavens.
- 3) Instruction of Scouts, Guides, nature groups, etc.
- 4) Displays in shopping malls and libraries.



**The Wilson Coulee Observatory of the Calgary Centre of the R.A.S.C.**

*Photo by Don Hladiuk*

- 5) Special "Astronomy Day" events, on the designated mid-spring day when public astronomy programs are presented world-wide.
- 6) Cable television programs that are sponsored by some Centres.

In addition, the Society contributes to public awareness of astronomy through its awards to science fair winners and to university students, through the annual Helen Sawyer Hogg Public Lecture, co-sponsored by the R.A.S.C., and through its provision of resources for teachers. The annual OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK is widely used by schools, colleges and research institutes, and by individual astronomers across North America. The column "Education Notes", which regularly appears in the JOURNAL, contains articles of interest to a wide range of educators.

## **THE NEED FOR FURTHER SUPPORT**

While membership fees support the ongoing activities of the Society, they do not provide for the many new initiatives that are proposed from time to time at both the national and Centre levels. The National Council has therefore established a Centennial Fund, which will be used to support worthy new projects within the Society that are in keeping with our goals. Some of these projects are for the immediate benefit of members of the Society and others are primarily for the benefit of the general public. All of them will enhance the state of astronomy in Canada.

## **Expansion of Observational Facilities:**

Many Centres are planning the construction of small observatories for use of their members, and for public education. Although much of the cost of the materials and the labour would be provided by the Centre and its members, significant funding is still needed for such a project. Portable telescopes and instruments would also be useful for such purposes, and could be loaned to Centres and to individuals. Grants could be provided to both Centres and individuals to support the use of these facilities — to carry out specific research projects, for instance.

## **Development of New Astronomical Publications:**

National Council has often discussed the possibility of developing a short and simple version of the OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK, for use by students, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, campers and other beginners in astronomy. Such a publication would eventually be self-supporting, as is the OBSERVER'S HANDBOOK (thanks to the voluntary effort of the editor and contributors), but the start-up costs would be substantial.

## **Public Lectures on Astronomy:**

The Society already sponsors an annual Helen Sawyer Hogg Public Lecture, as well as speaker exchanges between Centres. This program could well be expanded into a series of major public lectures across the country. These would be of direct interest to members of the Society, and would have an indirect benefit by raising the profile of astronomy wherever they were held.

### **Other Public Education Initiatives:**

In addition to lectures, there are many other ways of reaching the public — radio and TV programs, for instance. Individual Centres have already had some success with such methods; an example is the "Astronomy Toronto" program produced monthly for cable TV by the Toronto Centre. Such programs are costly to produce and promote but, once available, can be aired repeatedly in various localities across the country. A small investment of Society funds would enable this to happen.

### **School Education Initiatives:**

Astronomy has a special appeal to children, yet the quantity and quality of astronomy teaching in the schools is generally low. The Society is in a position to improve the situation by developing resource material, providing additional science fair assistance and prizes, and promoting personal contact between members of the Society and local teachers and students.

### **Preservation of Astronomy Heritage Material:**

Canada is rich in astronomy heritage material, ranging from observatory sites and instruments, to written and printed archival material. Much of this is being preserved only through the initiative of local groups and individuals. Much more could be done if additional funds were available. A related project is the plan to develop our National Library into a first-class resource for the history of astronomy in Canada.

### **Promotion of Astronomy at the National Level:**

Although other organizations in Canada may promote astronomy as a field of professional research activity, astronomy is unique in its appeal to the general public, and much could be done to promote astronomy as a cultural activity, and to encourage a higher level of funding of observatories of all kinds. In this way, a small investment of money by the Society might result in a large increase in money provided by governments and private donors. Many members support a national campaign against "light pollution" —



**Four winners of the Chant Medal of the R.A.S.C.: (left to right) Damien Lemay, Warren Morrison, David Levy and Rolf Meler.**

*Photo by Steven Spinney*

a campaign which would benefit professional and amateur observers alike.

Our Society is governed at both the national and local levels by capable individuals — both professionals and laymen from many walks of life — serving as unpaid volunteers. They manage our Society in a fiscally responsible manner and have kept us free of debts. Now, when we see what our Society could do if we had the resources, we are turning to you our members, our greatest resource. Please consider supporting the Centennial Fund, or the Endowment Fund (the income from which supports the long-term growth of the Society), through a donation and help our Society to grow and to expand its many programs of education and research. The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada is a registered charitable organization which issues official receipts to donors for income tax purposes. Donations can be directed, through the Centennial Fund or the Endowment Fund, to the National Society or to a designated Centre.