

# **The Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers: Its Origins, Purpose, and Progress**

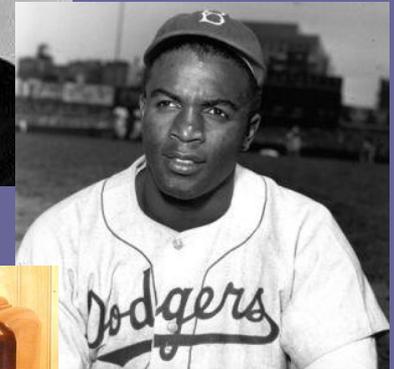
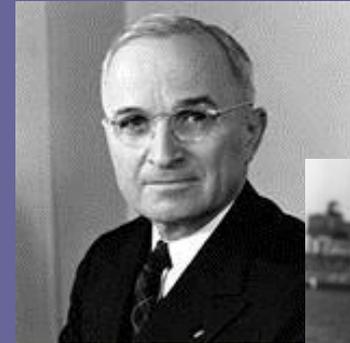
**By**

**Matthew L. Will**

**ALPO Secretary and Treasurer**

# Welcome to the Year 1947

- Harry Truman was in the White House
- Jackie Robinson was about to break the color barrier in Major League Baseball
- Television was about to overtake radio as the media of the future
- There were only a few computers in the whole world and obviously no internet!

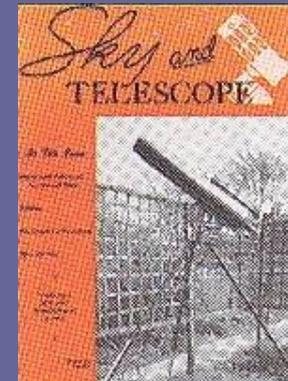
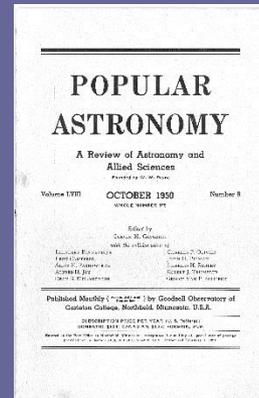


# Welcome to the Year 1947

- There were no amateur organizations currently dedicated solely to the study of the Solar System.



- Some amateur and professional level papers about Solar System astronomy appeared in current journals of the day.



# Welcome to the Year 1947

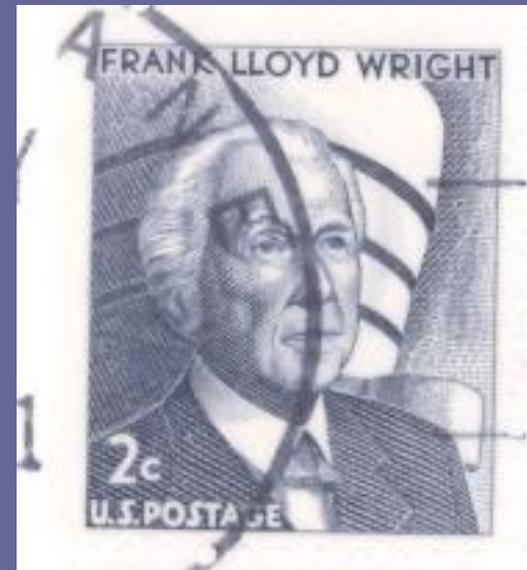
Since the late 1930s one contributor, a young man, Walter H. Haas, had written extensively about observational studies of the Moon, Mars, and Mercury, among other things, in such journals.



Credit University of Chicago

# Welcome to the Year 1947

- Mr. Haas had a network of 32 correspondents that conducted observations of the moon and planets.
- With only periodic publishing of papers, Walter had to communicate ongoing **transient occurrences and directives** for observations to individual observers by post. *Did I already say that there was no internet?*



# The Problem

- With continued and growing correspondence with individuals being time **consuming and overwhelming**, Walter had come to an important crossroads.
- How to you communicate observational news and instructions in a both easy and timely manner?

Solution – a periodical.



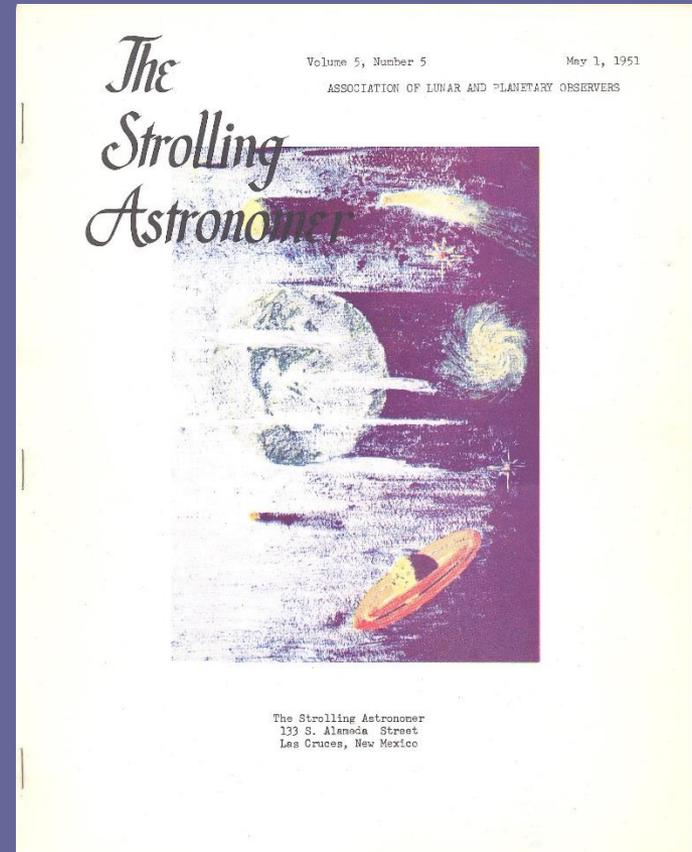
# The Solution – Journal

- Ostensibly, the creation of a periodical would reduce correspondence by broadcasting news and information.
- It would also create a **forum for other lunar and planetary researchers and observers** to write papers and others to read them.



# The Solution - Journal

- In reality, the response to the new *Strolling Astronomer* was such a success that the level of **correspondence** only INCREASED and **submissions** of all sorts kept Mr. Haas even busier!
- And so the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers was born...

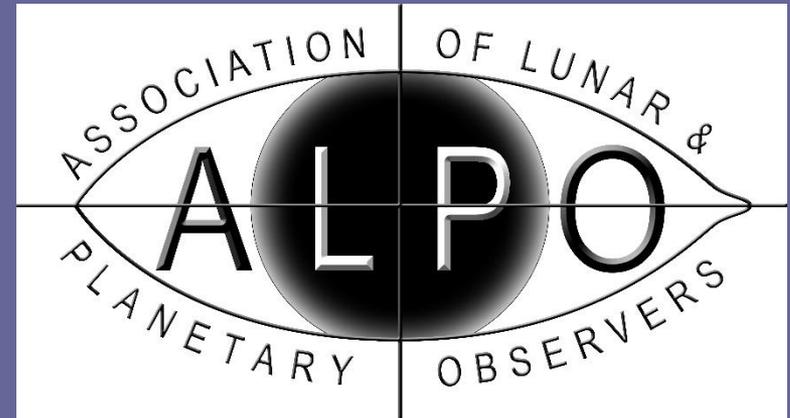


# A.L.P.O. Today

- What started out as an organization with a few observational sections and a mimeographed periodical now boast more than **17 sections devoted to managing 27 or more observational and related programs**. And with a journal that is now in electronic format.
- But our brief introduction is getting ahead of the story.

# ALPO - Prologue

The purpose of this presentation is to discover how the A.L.P.O. evolved to its **present state** and examine why the ALPO was so **successful**.



# In the Beginning...

- Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there were **no continental-wide scientific or recreational** organizations devoted to astronomy in North America.
- Britain had the jump on North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in forming professional and amateur astronomical organizations.



# The British Astronomical Association

The BAA would serve as a useful example for future North American amateurs that would want to construct an organization that was **compartmentalized** under separate **observational topics**.

However, the BAA model would never quite be duplicated this side of the Atlantic.

# Amateur Organizing In the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Most start up astronomical organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that tried to **copy the BAA failed** since **niche observational astronomical organizations** like the AAVSO and AMS had already cultivated loyal observing networks in their respected fields, having been founded about the same time.



**American Meteor Society**

**Founded 1911**



# Amateur Organizing In the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Early forerunners to the ALPO like,
  - SPA (Society of Practical Astronomy) 1909 -1917
  - AAAA (American Amateur Astronomers Association) 1935 -1938



...while covering lunar and planetary astronomy were not entirely focused on that special area of astronomy.

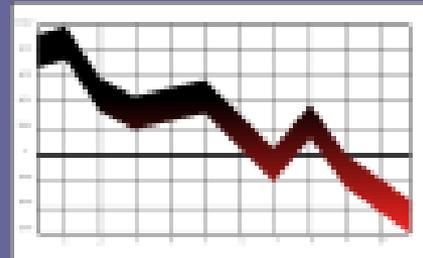
AAAA

# Amateur Organizing In the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Indeed these organizations covered **too many specialty** areas to support a wide spectrum of interest in a **cohesive manner**.
- Less cohesion of their memberships and predominance of only one or two sponsors supporting the **organizations' finances**, led to their demise.

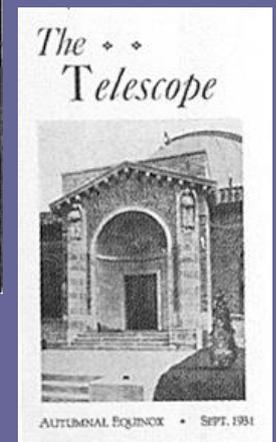
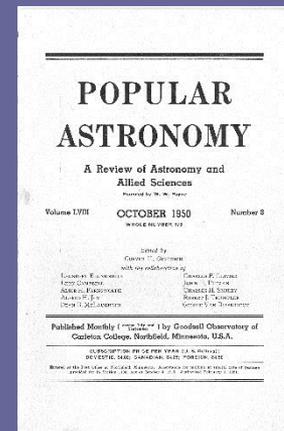
Planets      The Moon  
Variable Stars  
Meteors      Deep Sky  
Auroras      Comets

Weak Membership = No \$\$\$\$



# Amateur Organizing In the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Public education
- Amateur organizations at the local and national level
- Museums and later planetariums
- Books and periodicals



# And so we come to 1947

- We have had a couple of amateur astronomy organizations that collapsed trying to carry on a BAA approach, for a variety of reasons.
- The media market for amateur related publications was maturing.
- Amateurs had become more resourceful in building their own telescopes.



# And so we come to 1947

- So, it was logical that lunar and planetary astronomy would develop as a specialized organization as well.
- And considering all other factors, the time was ripe!

# Walter H. Haas and the Founding of the ALPO

- The Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) was founded by Walter H. Haas in March 1947, dedicated to the study of Solar System bodies and phenomena.
- Up to this point, Walter Haas had **not only actively observed the Solar System** but also **wrote papers** in the leading publications that provided a **platform** for reporting scientific observations by amateurs.

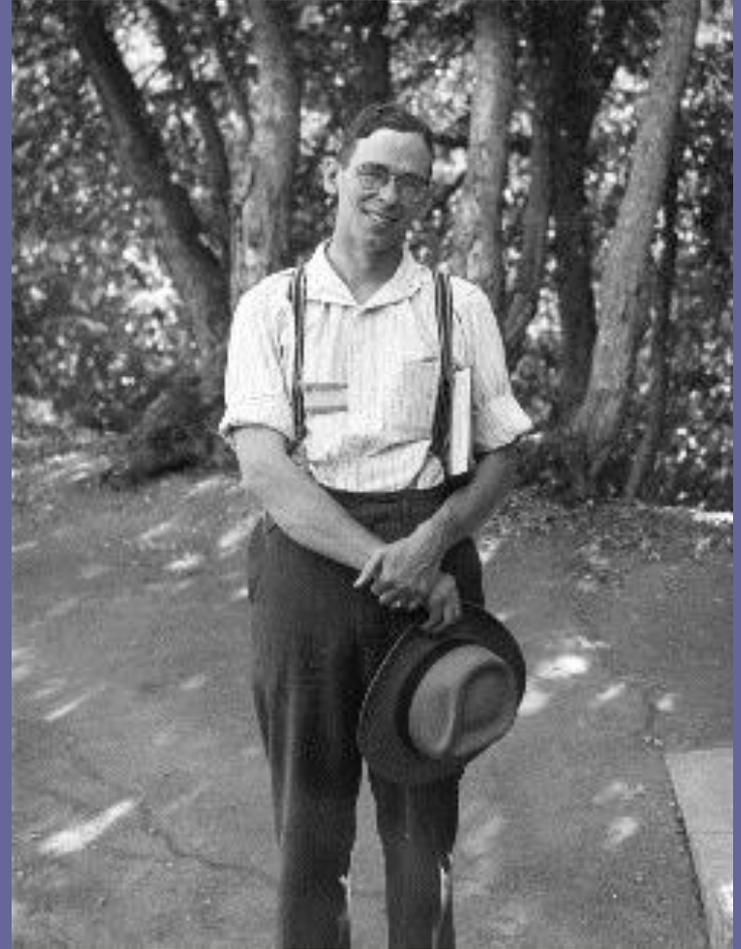


Courtesy Mary Alba

# Walter H. Haas

Walter had been interested in lunar and planetary astronomy from **childhood**, honing his skills as an observer in **adolescence**, and provide leadership in the field among amateur astronomers in **adulthood**.

Courtesy University of Chicago



# Walter H. Haas

While growing up on a farm near New Waterford, Ohio, Walter's interest in lunar and planetary astronomy attracted the attention of a benefactor, John H. Chase, Director of Playgrounds in Youngstown, Ohio. He lent, then gave Walter his 6 inch f/8 newtonian reflector.

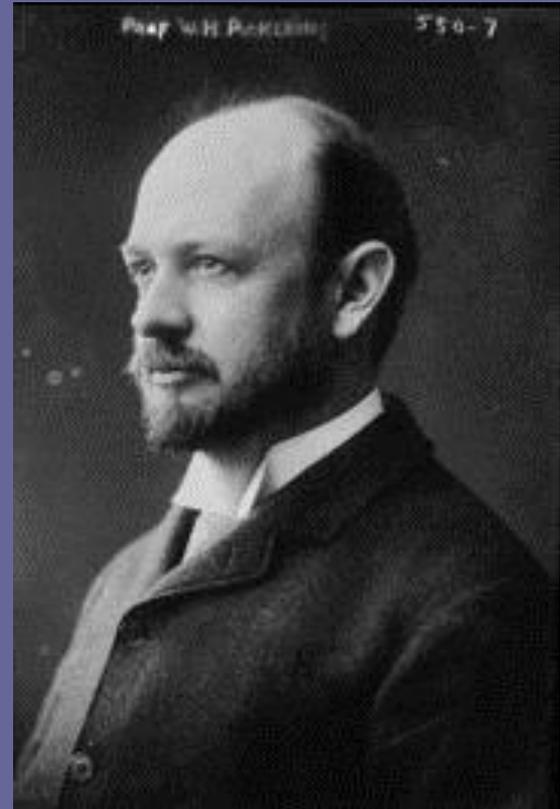
Mr. Chase introduced Walter to other telescope makers in the Youngstown area and served as a sort of mentor to Walter in his younger years.



Ohio Encarta Map

# Walter H. Haas

- Mr. Chase also sponsored one useful summer Walter spent in 1935 at the Woodlawn Observatory of William H. Pickering near Mandeville, Jamaica.
- Walter Haas became exposed to **lunar and planetary observing techniques from the elderly Pickering**, someone that had extensive experience.

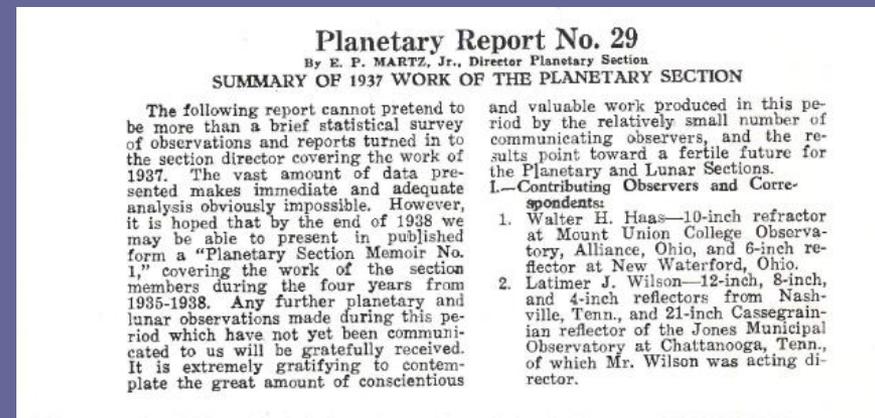
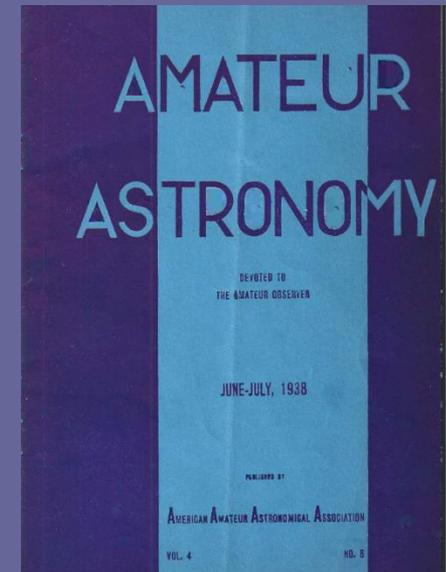
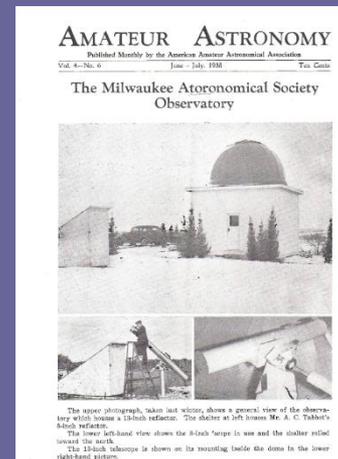


William H. Pickering

# Walter H. Haas

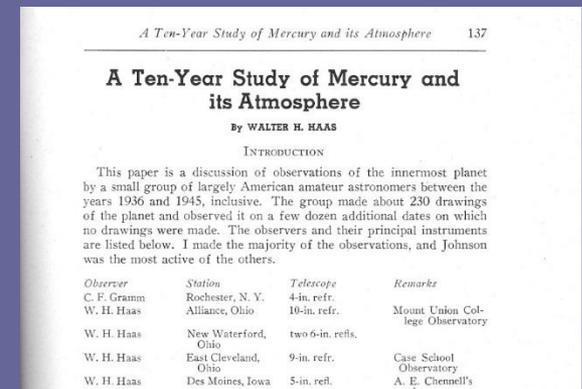
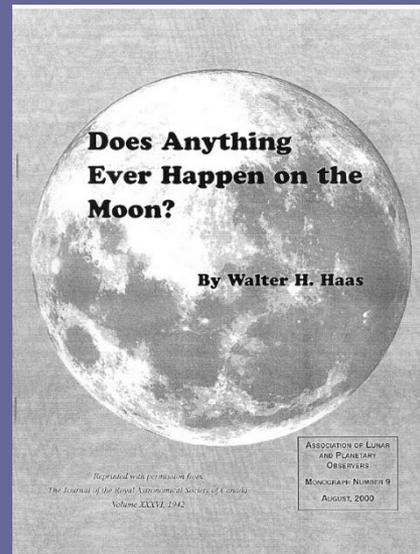
- Walter continued with his observational studies of the moon and planets while pursuing college in Ohio.
  - Those observational studies were published in the AAAA journal, *Amateur Astronomy*.
  - As he was developing as an amateur observer Walter considered his interaction with Edwin P. Martz, Jr., AAAA section leader for lunar and planetary observing, crucial to his later success as an observer.

Courtesy of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society



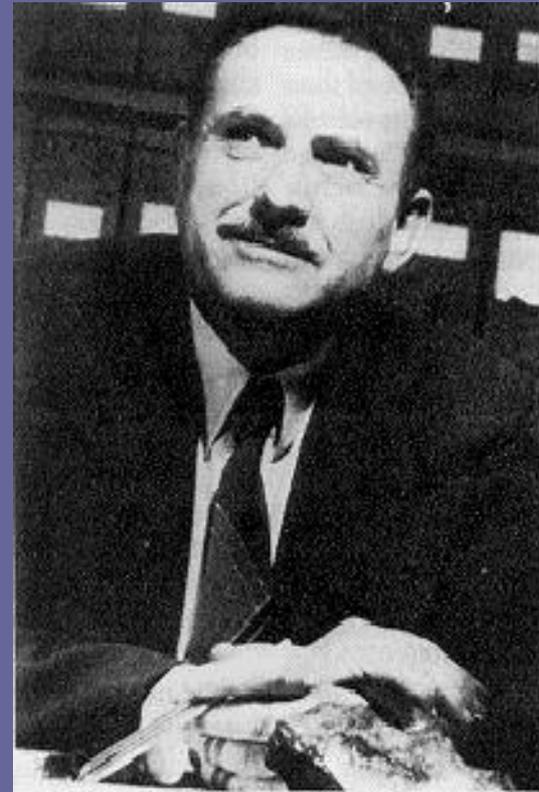
# Walter H. Haas

- With the demise of the AAAA in 1938, Walter Haas knew that he would **have to extend his horizons to other publications** here and abroad, to more fully network with others interested in his work.



# Walter H. Haas

- After World War II, Walter Haas followed his mentor, Dr. Lincoln La Paz out to New Mexico to pursue a career as a mathematics instructor at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.
- At that point in time, Walter reflected on 10 plus years of analyzing and publishing lunar and planetary observations.



Lincoln La Paz, credit Ohio State University

# Founding of the ALPO

- Walter was the **leader of his informal observing group** collecting, analyzing, and reporting the observations of his observers on various topics in a variety of publications.
- With a high volume of correspondence, communicating news and interesting items between publication of papers, a **better means of “broadcasting” information** had to be found.



# Founding of the ALPO

- Walter envisioned a periodical that ...
  - would have a more formal, scientific format that could relate observational analysis more informatively
  - with visual content, unlike written correspondence could

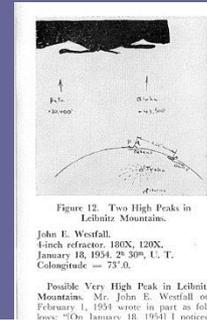


Figure 12. Two High Peaks in Lethiniz Mountains.  
John E. Westfall.  
4-inch refractor, 180X, 120X.  
January 18, 1954, 29° 30' N, U. T.,  
Longitude = 75° 0.  
Possible Very High Peak in Lethiniz Mountains. Mr. John E. Westfall on February 1, 1954 wrote in part as follows: "On January 18, 1954 I noticed"

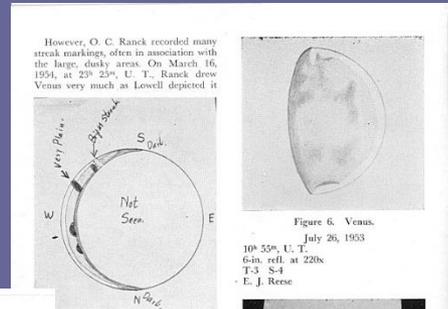


Figure 4. Venus.  
March 31, 1953  
15° U. T.  
refr. at 180X  
S-2 to 4  
J. Ranck



Figure 6. Venus.  
July 26, 1953  
10° 35' U. T.  
6-in. refl. at 220x  
T-3 S-4  
E. J. Reese

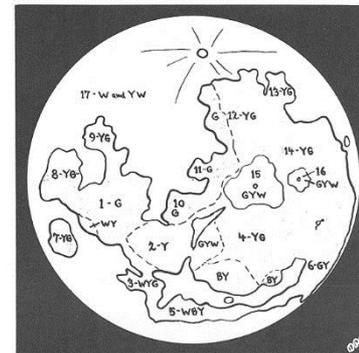


Figure 5. Venus.  
March 16, 1953  
30° U. T.  
in. refl. at 100x  
es C. Bartlett, Jr.

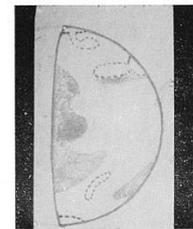


Figure 7. Venus.  
June 25, 1953  
17° 50' U. T.  
6-in. refl. at 135x  
T-4 to 5 S-2 to 3  
Thomas A. Cragg



4. Haas, Walter H., "Color Changes on the Moon", *Popular Astronomy*, p. 337, 1937.

## THE USE OF FILTERS FOR OBSERVING FINE MARTIAN SURFACE DETAIL AND ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA

BY CHARLES CAPEN, JR.

### The Problem

The reflected light of Mars is strong during and near times of opposition. Because of this fact, observers of Mars may employ filters which will increase contrast of detail.

The reflected sunlight from Mars is diffused or scattered during transmission

# Founding of the ALPO

- To add solidity to the group, Walter proposed that the observing network be identified as an organization.
- Thus, the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers was born...

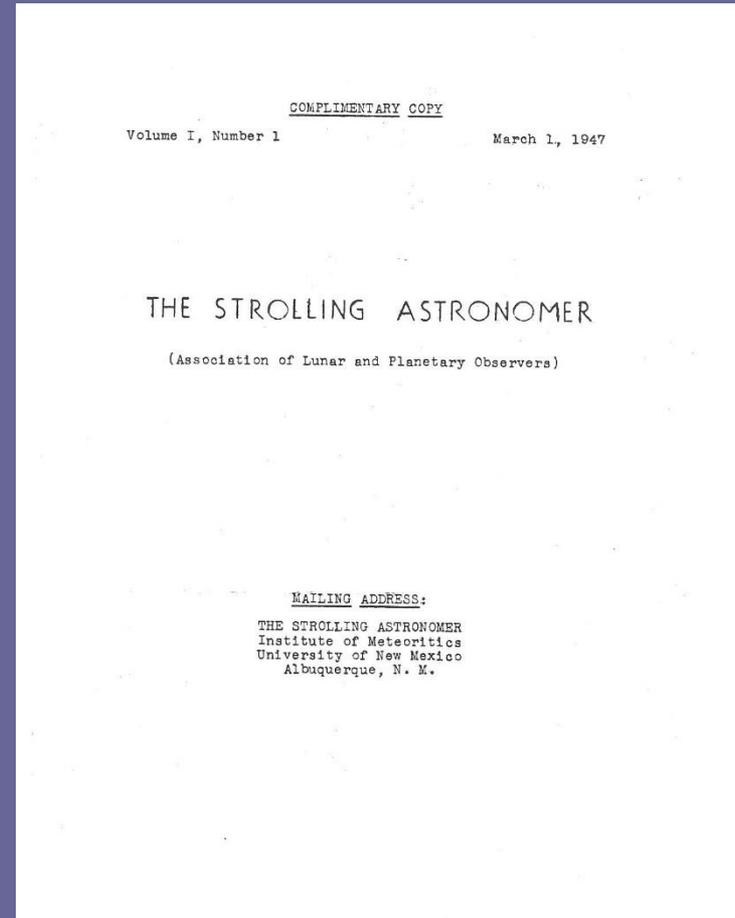
# Founding of the ALPO

- In March of 1947, with the help of Eudine Foster, a writer and part-time secretary, Walter Haas produced a six-page invitation that became the inaugural issue of the organization's publication.



# Founding of the ALPO

- Walter listed himself as the editor, with Lincoln La Paz, head of the Mathematics Dept. at the University of New Mexico, as counselor.
- As the stencils for the first issue were completed, the publication still needed a name. Foster suggested it be titled, *The Strolling Astronomer*.

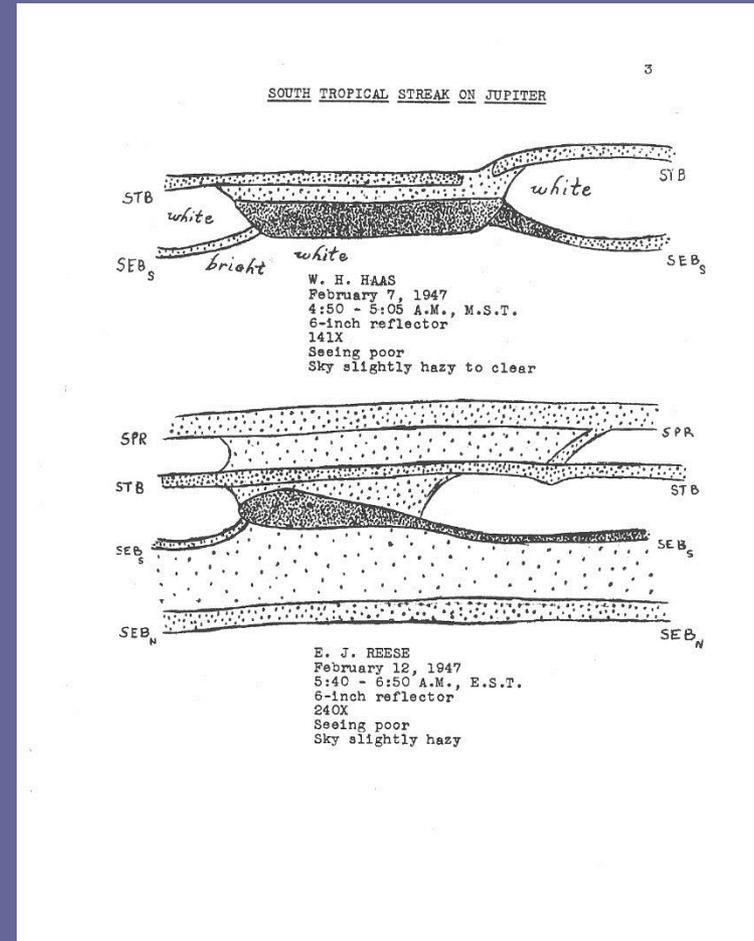


# Founding of the ALPO

- Within about a month, the formation of the ALPO was noticed in a number of nationally circulated periodicals such as:

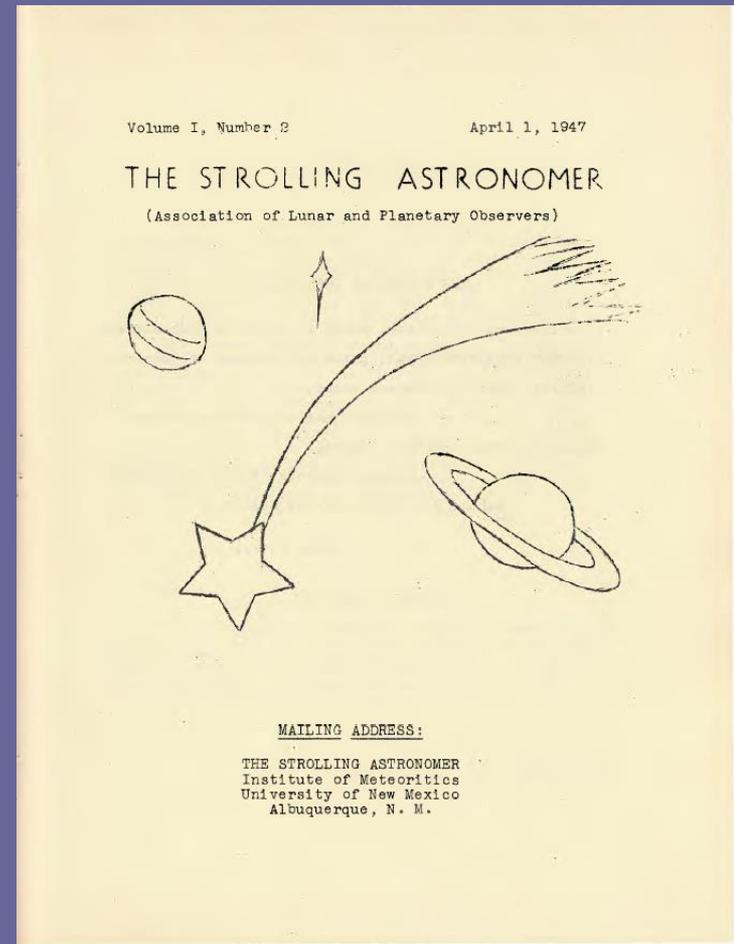
- *Sky and Telescope*
- *Popular Astronomy*
- *Texas Observers Bulletin*

Each publication welcomed this new organization that would fill the void in this important area of astronomy.



# Founding of the ALPO

- With the second issue of the “Stroller”, as it would be affectionately called by future members, 34 observers responded to joining the ALPO.



# Founding of the ALPO

- That issue listed the first contributed article to *The Strolling Astronomer*, a discussion by Frank Vaughn concerning small telescope use among amateurs, that reflected Walter's own ideas about their abandonment and neglect as true scientific instruments that could advance lunar and planetary astronomy.

## *Valuable Contributions to Astronomy by Owners of Small Telescopes*

By  
FRANK R. VAUGHN

It is thought by the writer that many telescopes of "amateur" size lying idle in garages, basements, storerooms, and attics, might well be engaged as valuable tools in the progress of knowledge.

There are perhaps three chief reasons for this:

(1) the "amateur telescope maker" has found more pleasure in construction than in observation -- hence, after a period of "looking at the sky", the telescope has been of no further use to him (except perhaps to show to friends, or to "gaze" sporadically); (2) that the possessor of the telescope simply thinks that nothing of value can be contributed by him in this day of giant observatories and advanced techniques; (3) that the telescope-owner merely had a passing fancy, which soon died.

For those in the third group there is little here of potential interest; to those in the first and second categories, I should like to point out a few things, and to raise a few questions which may prove somewhat surprising.

# What made the ALPO a success in contrast to SPA and AAAA?

- The ALPO was able to take lunar and planetary astronomy to the next level.
- ALPO observers were focused on lunar and planetary astronomy and were the only group doing this in North America.
- Walter had also engendered some loyalty from his observer network that spread to the rest of his newly founded membership.

What made the ALPO a success in contrast to SPA and AAAA?

Several points can be made to illustrate why the ALPO has been successful in its 70 year history.

# The Rise of the ALPO

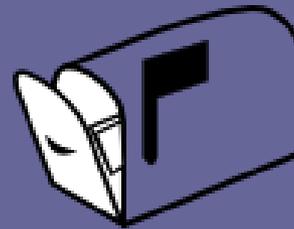
## The Fruits and Labor of Success

*Point One. The ALPO never had a shortage of leaders to assume control and responsibility of observing sections.*

# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

- A consequence of a growing membership in the ALPO was the **increased level** of submitted observations for Walter to review and analyze.
- More and more, Walter could not accommodate enough time **analyzing and commenting** on observations while still trying to **compose, edit and print** scientific papers based on them in *The Strolling Astronomer* on a monthly basis.



# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

- Late in 1949, Walter saw a need to organize the ALPO into a BAA-like structure, with sections responsible for collecting and analyzing observations on certain Solar System bodies, managed by a section “recorder”, as they were called back then.
- Walter was ambivalent about this arrangement since it conveyed control of observational data to others, but was a necessary step to insure that the ALPO function as intended.



# The Rise of the ALPO

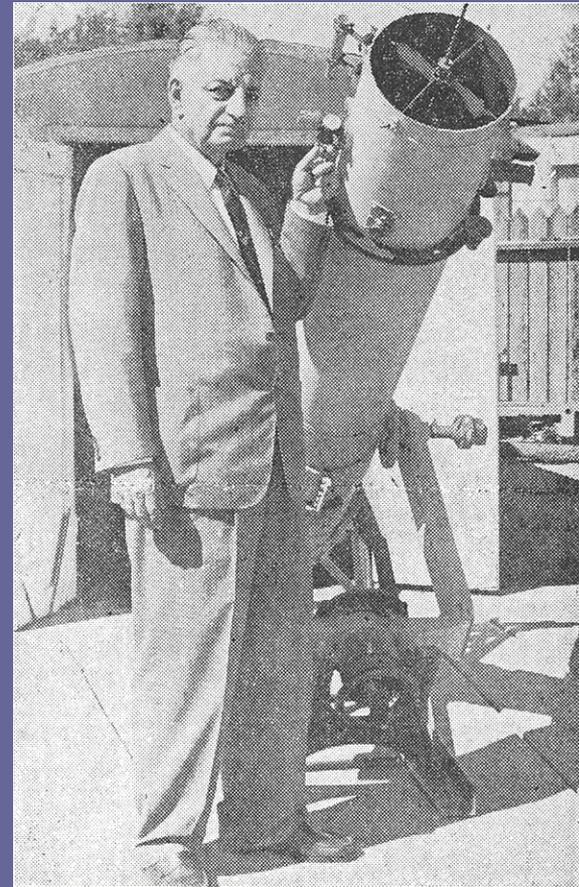
## The Fruits and Labor of Success

*Point Two. ALPO staff and members made suggestions to Director Haas that were timely and insightful that strengthen the ALPO's intellectual, aesthetic and financial integrity.*

# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

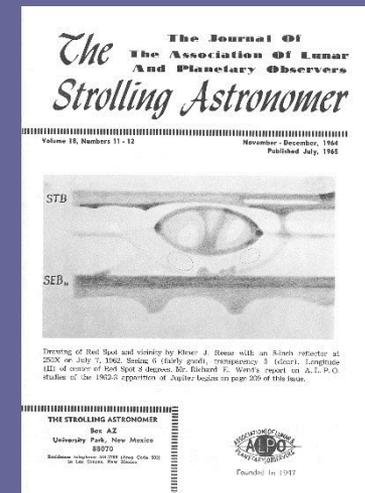
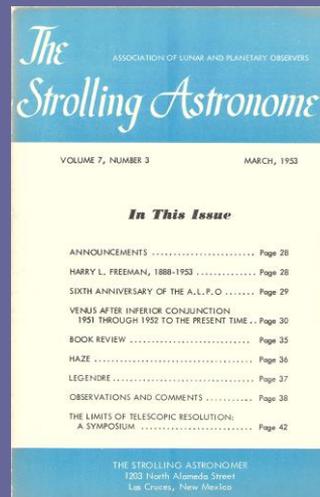
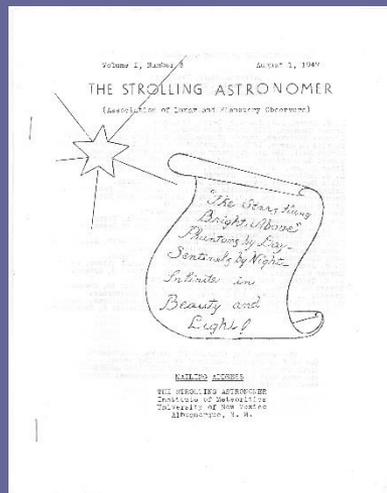
- The rapid rise in membership in the early years meant increased revenue as well as the opportunity to publish a better journal.
- David Barcroft recommended that Walter assign the task of printing the journal, including sale of advertising, to the Stevens Agency in 1952.



# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

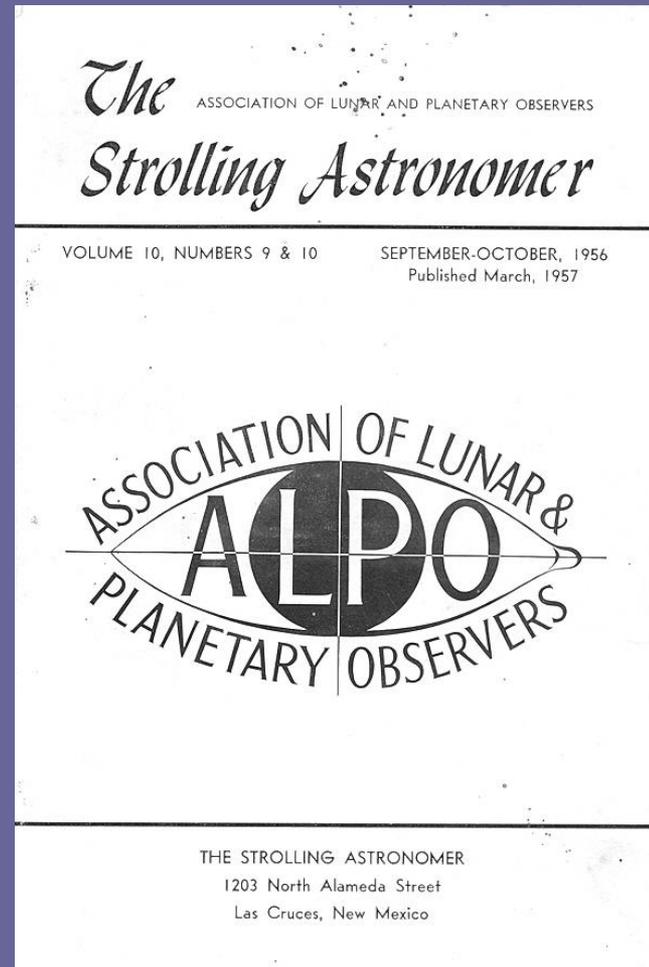
- This greatly improved the print quality of *The Strolling Astronomer* departing from the mimeographic print and using modern printing techniques allowed for more reproductions of observations with better fidelity to the originals.



# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

Edgar Paulton, a commercial artist by profession and Chairman of the Observing Group of the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York City designed this attractive emblem for the ALPO in 1956. It as been used ever since on ALPO literature and letterhead.



# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

And if it could be said that the ALPO had a “Betsy Ross”, Walter’s wife Peggy certainly played that role and then some. Peggy, served as a part time typist for the Journal, ALPO Librarian for its book-lending service, and of course, maker of the banner hung for many years at ALPO conventions.



Peggy Haas, credit Walter H. Haas

# The Rise of the ALPO

## The Fruits and Labor of Success

*Point Three. The ALPO had the volunteer staff to handle various periods of expansion with new concepts invented along the way.*

# The Ever Expanding ALPO

- Like the expanding universe, the ALPO's horizons seemed to accelerate from the late 1950s through the 1960s and onward.
- More interest in astronomy in general brought in new members and observers as interest in space exploration soared.



# The Ever Expanding ALPO

- By the mid 1960s the ALPO's membership had risen to **860 members** world-wide. Such rapid growth from only 400 or so members in the late 1950s **brought on problems** for the ALPO as it continued to manage its observing programs.





# The Ever Expanding ALPO

- Furthermore, the ALPO members would occasionally suggest the formation of a new observing program or section.
- One way Walter helped with the ever increasing observational data streaming into the sections was to appoint assistant recorders to aid the lead recorders.

Solar Section?

Meteors Section?

Lunar Domes Survey?

Minor Planets Section?

Lunar Libration Clouds?

**VOLUNTEERS  
PLEASE!!!!**

# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

*Point Four. The ALPO had the ability now as back then to be self-critical even if it meant speaking out on sensitive issues.*

# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

In the 1960s, Clark Chapman, an ALPO staff member, studying to be a professional and others were concerned that the observational work done by the ALPO members that were published in *The Strolling Astronomer*, weren't attracting interest from professional lunar and planetary astronomers.



# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- The work, dedication, and value of the ALPO observing programs strengthened Chapman's conviction that *The Strolling Astronomer* should be taken as a serious journal when encountered by professional astronomers.

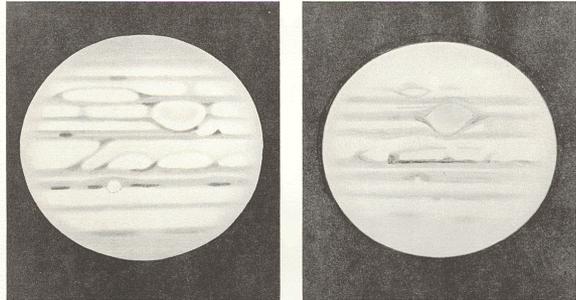


# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

Chapman reported his concerns about this to the ALPO in an article he contributed for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *The Strolling Astronomer*, in 1967.

*The* **The Journal Of**  
**The Association Of Lunar**  
**And Planetary Observers**  
*Strolling Astronomer*  
**Twentieth Anniversary Issue**

Volume 20, Numbers 7 - 8  
July - August, 1966  
Published September, 1967



The Giant Planet Jupiter in 1947, the year of the founding of the A.L.P.O., and in the present year. Left drawing by Elmer J. Reese on June 10, 1947 at 4 hrs., 25 mins., Universal Time with a 6-inch reflector at 240X, fair seeing and good transparency. C.M. = 271° in System I and 210° in System II. Red Spot and Hollow a little right of the C.M. Right drawing by Stanley M. Shartle on April 2, 1967 at 1 hr., 45 mins., U.T. with a 12.5-inch Cassegrain at 596X, fairly good seeing and good transparency. C.M. = 210° by System I and 20° by System II. Red Spot near C.M.

**THE STROLLING ASTRONOMER**  
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Residence telephone 524-2786 (Area Code 505)  
in Las Cruces, New Mexico



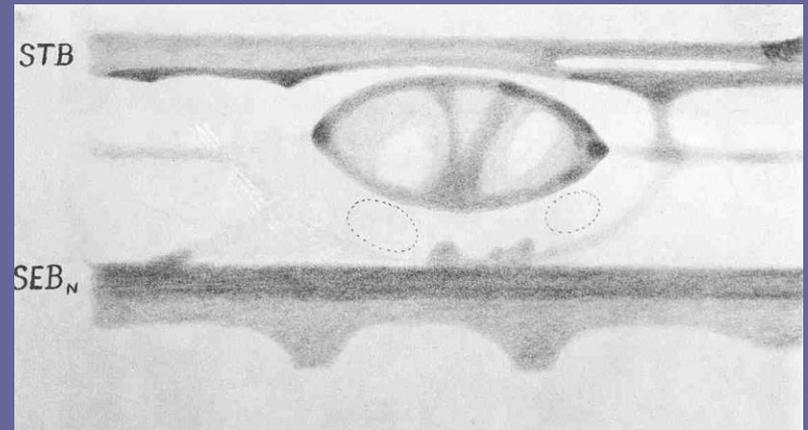
# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

Chapman led off with two positive assessments about amateur involvement in Solar System astronomy.

- As Lunar Training Program Director, Chapman noted that most prospective ALPO observers **make useable observations**.
- As one transitioning into professional astronomy, he realized that observations of the moon and planets by amateurs could be of **value in professional research studies**.

# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

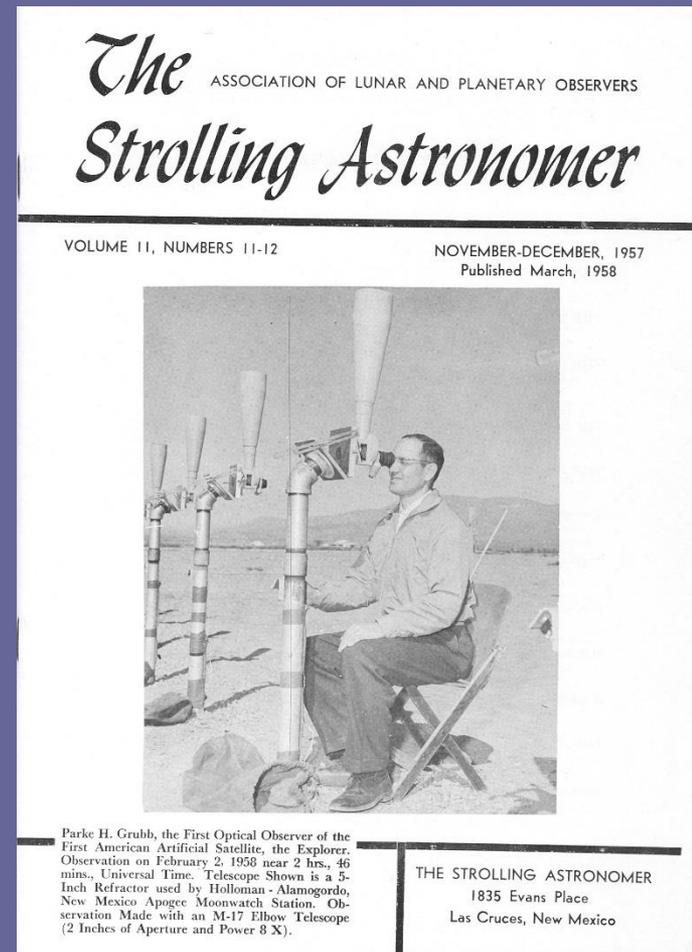
- Chapman cited examples where amateur observations were used in professional research, but was dismayed that many observations and observing programs were still being ignored by the pros.



Jupiter's Red Spot drawn by Elmer Reese, used for determining its rotation by professionals

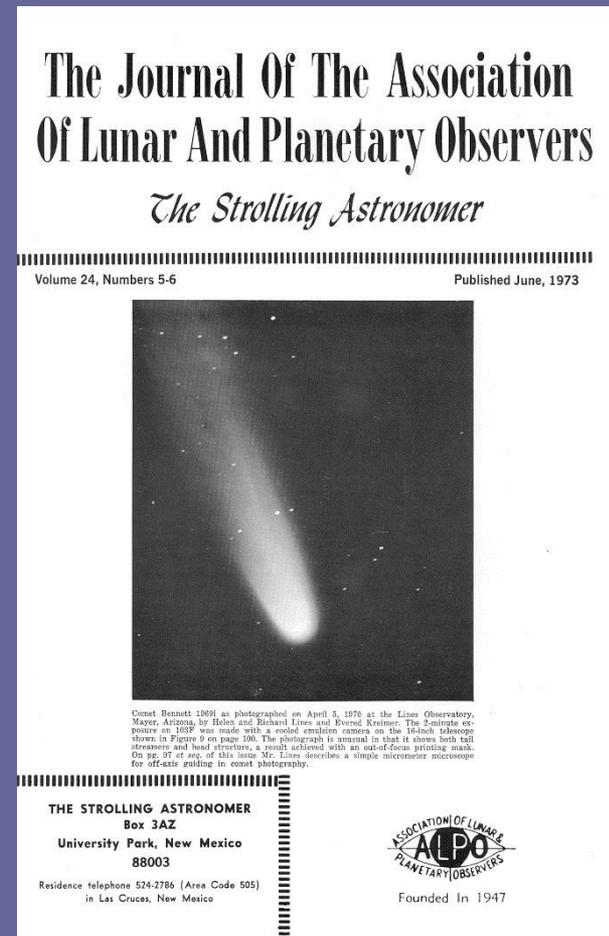
# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- Chapman felt that part of the problem was with the title “The Strolling Astronomer”. It connoted a less serious attitude on the cover of the ALPO periodical, he thought.
- Chapman suggested the more formal “Journal of the ALPO” as a proper and more formal title that could receive recognition among professionals as a serious research journal.



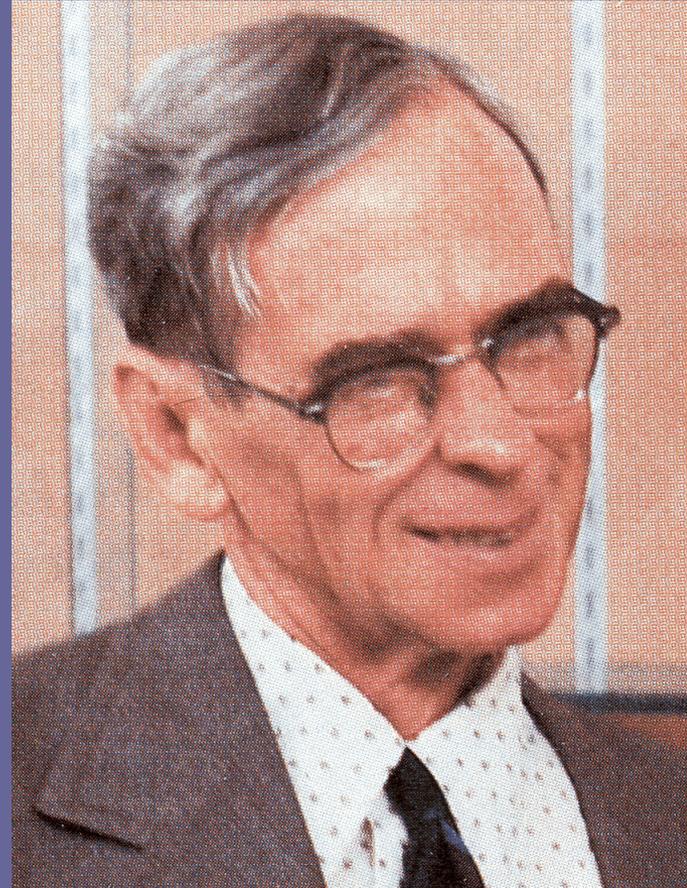
# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- Eventually, the longer “Journal of the ALPO” title was shared on the front cover with the title “The Strolling Astronomer” and members began referring to our periodical as the “Journal” more often and the “Stroller” less often.



# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

Walter Haas stated in that same 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue that he was grateful that the concerns expressed by Chapman and others. **It showed signs of a maturing organization** that could be self critical of its operations and purpose.



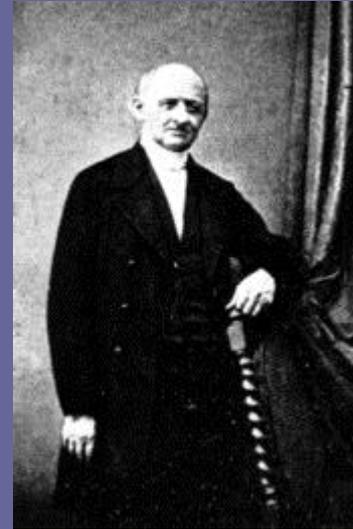
Credit, Sky & Telescope

# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- Walter admitted that up to that time (1967) ALPO observational data had not been fully utilized by professionals. Walter was not, however, concerned with what he regarded as **philosophical questions of use and value.**
- Instead Walter reasoned that “**immediate use**” and “**demonstrated value**” should not be the most important objectives on which the ALPO and its observers should evaluate their work.

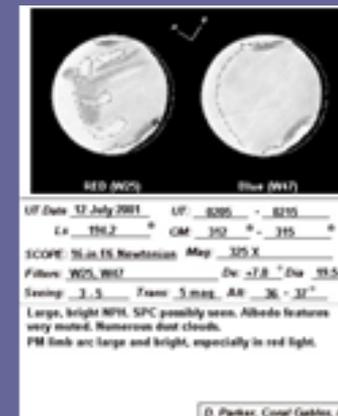
# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- As an example, Walter recalled Heinrich Schwabe's systematic observations of the sun that uncovered the periodicity of sunspots, when professional astronomers were still content to think of them as a completely random matter.
- Walter stated, however, the amateur should not disregard scientific opinion at the given time. **We should value the present knowledge**, its development and interpretation, advanced by minds of the past and present.



# Purpose and Concerns for the Future

- In light of this, Walter felt that the amateur should **develop and value his or her independence of thought** in advancing knowledge from scientific observation.
- This would be the true value of amateur observation. **Observing for posterity and the record as opposed to immediate need or gratification.**



# In Summation

- It can be said that the ALPO of the past had met its goals of:
  - Surveillance of the Solar System bodies and phenomena
  - Succeeded in the study and analysis of the observational data
  - And published not only timely reports but in depth studies that went beyond mere reporting.
- All this occurred because of the character of the ALPO and that it was a group that really cared about the advancement of lunar and planetary astronomy.

# The ALPO Today

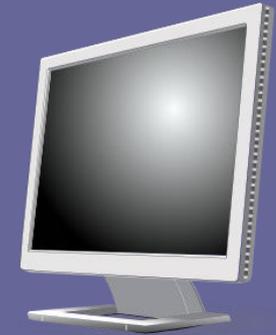
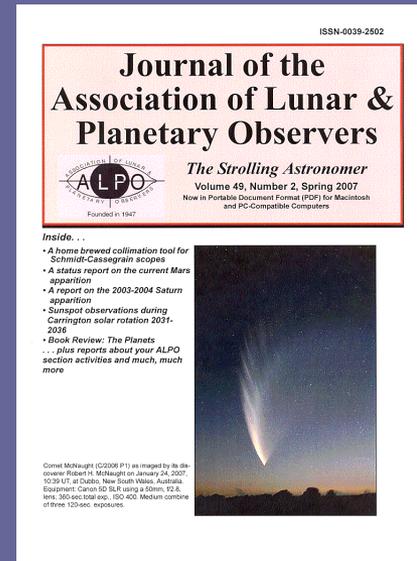
- The ALPO continues to coordinate many observing or technical programs related to Solar System astronomy, tapping into vast networks of observers.



- Credit Daniele Gasparri, Anthony Wesley, Gary Walker, Larry Owens,

# The ALPO Today

- The ALPO has stayed modern in embracing electronic media of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



# The ALPO Today

- **The ALPO Staff, Officers, and Board continue to donate their time to provide unpaid, committed, voluntary support of the ALPO programs and services.**



# Conclusion

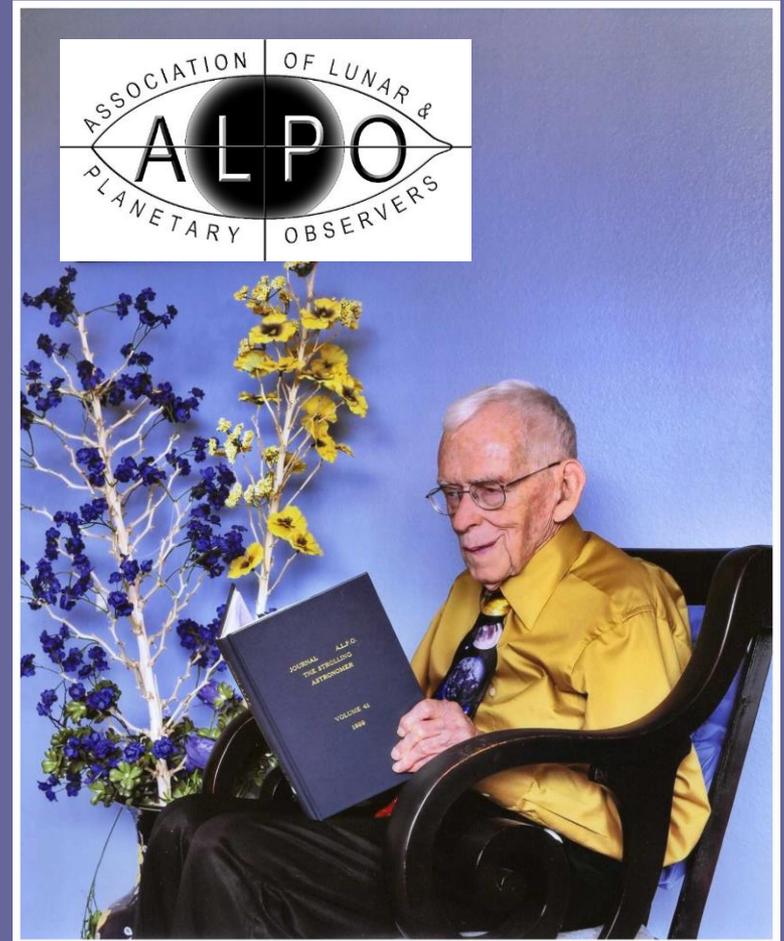
The ALPO has throughout its history, evolved and adapted to the times that it has operated in.

It's people that have come from all walks of life have applied themselves to accomplish great science.

And its accomplishments have been legendary in the annals of lunar and planetary astronomy.

# Conclusion

The ALPO will continue to thrive and grow and expand in more ways to embrace Solar System astronomy and continue to be a focal point for amateur studies of our Solar System, as intended by our founder Walter Haas all those years ago...



Courtesy Mary Abba

# Acknowledgements

- *Getting Organized: A History of Amateur Astronomy in the United States*, by Thomas R. Williams, Dissertation, Rice University
- *Reconsidering The History of the AAVSO – Part 1*, by Thomas R. Williams, Journal JAAVSO, Vol. 29, P. 132 – 147
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