

2009 Astronomical League Council Minutes
ALCon 2009
Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY
August 6, 2009

Part I. Call to Order

The annual Astronomical League National Council meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by President Terry Mann.

Attendance:

Terry Mann, League President
Carroll Iorg, League Vice President
John Goss, League Secretary
Maryann Arrien, NERAL Chair
Alan Rifken, proxy for Paul Valleli, NERAL Representative
Bill Bogardus, appointed proxy by MERAL Chair for MERAL Representative
Mike Benson, SERAL Chair; SERAL Representative proxy
Ron Whitehead, GLRAL Chair; proxy for Mary Sutter, League Treasurer
Wayne Green, MARS Chair
Vern Raben, MARS Representative
Sue Rose, proxy for Tim Hunter, WRAL Representative

Later in the day: Mike Reynolds, Outreach Club Chair

There were 13 Council votes present from seven Astronomical League regions.

Quorum: Council members and proxies present, according to Bylaws Article III, Section 4, must be two-fifths (2/5 ths) of the members of the National Council (ie., ten members) to constitute a quorum provided that at least three regions are represented. **A quorum was present.**

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All persons holding a proxy serve as members of the board of directors of the Astronomical League (a.k.a., the Council), and all members are bound to confidentiality in closed sessions of Council in the same manner as elected Council members.

Part III. Reading and Approval of 2008 Council Minutes

Motion.

Vern Raben moved to approve the 2008 Council minutes.

Ron Whitehead second the motion.

It was passed unanimously.

Part IV. Officer and Committee Reports

A. President: President Terry Mann reviewed the activities of the President's office over the past year.

2008 — 2009 has been a tough year for everyone and the League has not been immune. Finances are tight, but there are no plans to increase club membership dues. Through careful allocation of League resources, the League will continue to effectively serve its membership over the next year.

There have been personnel changes at the League's national office in Kansas City. Mitch Glaze, who has been the Office Manager since the inception of the office, decided to move to Colorado so he and his family can be closer to their extended family. He has made the office what it is today and the League greatly appreciates all that he has accomplished. He will be missed.

The training of a new office person, Brenda Sparks, is underway. Everyone needs to understand that time will be required to complete the transition and everyone's patience is appreciated. Soon there will be permanent office hours posted.

Later in the day, Terry will discuss the League's projects and efforts

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concerning the International Year of Astronomy, new sales items, the revised Long Range Planning Committee, the International Space Station — Amateur Telescope, and the Reflector magazine.

The League is trying a new method for raising needed funds. Explore Scientific donated one of its new nitrogen purged 14 mm 100° wide eyepieces to the League for auctioning on eBay. (*Secretary's note: The auction raised about \$385 for the League.*) Thank you Explore Scientific!

B. Vice-President: Carroll Iorg thanked the Amateur Observers' Society of New York (AOSNY) for hosting this year's ALCon.

National Office. Carroll reiterated Terry Mann's comments about the transition at the National Office. Even though Mitch Glaze is no longer living in Kansas City, he will continue to be a resource until the transition is complete.

Awards. The League has trouble promoting the awards and getting the word out to potential, qualified candidates. Some of the judges have expressed a concern about the number and quality of nominations they receive. One thought was to contact the University of Arizona summer astronomy camp program for referrals.

Alan Rifken described his efforts reaching young people and the general public with the program "Don't be afraid of the Dark." Alan also has a video directed at people who have never been to a star party. It shows them what star parties are and what to expect at these fun gatherings.

Wayne Green discussed his efforts to reach the public. He distributes 3 x 5 cards to people, especially the young, and asks them to write what they know about astronomy and what they would like to learn about the subject. Many people ask how they can join an astronomy club.

NYAA. The first and second place National Young Astronomer Award winners are at this year's ALCon. First place finisher, Harry Gaebler, is from Bloomington, IN and second place finisher, Jordan Bramble, is from Virginia Beach, VA.

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Horkheimer Awards. This year Jack Horkheimer greatly expanded his sponsorship of the League's youth service award program by increasing their number from one to four.

a. Horkheimer/Smith Award. The Horkheimer/Smith Award is named in honor of Arthur P. Smith, Jr. Art Smith was president of the Astronomical League from 1964-66, and he inspired Mr. Horkheimer to become active in astronomy.

The top finisher in the Horkheimer/Smith competition is Ryan Loomis from Waynesboro, Virginia. He and his family are members of the Shenandoah Valley Stargazers astronomy club. Ryan has earned three astronomy certificates from the League since becoming a club member. He began working with his father to develop an astronomy program called "Fun with Astronomy," which is now being used in many schools in the area. Last summer, Ryan helped organize a successful "learn to use your telescope" program for the club's open house event. It not only helped members learn more about their telescopes during the day, but it featured practical experiences during a night observing session.

b. Horkheimer/Parker Award. The Horkheimer/Parker Award is named for Don Parker. Dr. Parker, a retired physician from Coral Gables, Florida, has had a lifelong interest in astronomy. He is a past director of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (A.L.P.O.) and currently serves on the board of that organization.

Alicia Tristan is the top finisher for the 2009 Horkheimer/Parker Award. Alicia is a home-schooled senior and lives in Sugar Land, Texas. She is a member of the Fort Bend Astronomy Club. Alicia actively participates in the club's public outreach program, "Astronomy on Wheels." This program provides free star parties for schools and community groups. Alicia has compiled a comprehensive list of carbon stars magnitude 8.5 to 14 visible from North America. Recently, she developed two observing programs for her astronomy club: "Open Clusters" and "Carbon Stars." Alicia is currently completing a proposal for a new Carbon Star Observing Program for consideration by the League.

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c. Horkheimer/D’Auria Award. This award is named in honor of Matthew (Tippy) D’Auria. Tippy is an electronics engineer, and has degrees in Electronic Engineering Technology and Computer Integrated Manufacturing. He has been an active astronomer since 1980. He is the founder of the Winter Star Party, which is sponsored by the Southern Cross Astronomical Society.

Jordan Bramble, a senior at Kempsville High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia, is the top finisher for the 2009 Horkheimer/D’Auria Award. He is also the second- place finisher in the 2009 League’s National Young Astronomer Award program. Since joining the Back Bay Amateur Astronomers, Jordan has become one of the club’s most active members, whether being a fixture at club outreach events or energizing the club’s e-group with his frequent postings. His dedication to the club’s outreach was evident at last summer’s “Boardwalk Astronomy” event at the Virginia Beach resort strip, where he handled the hundreds of people who passed by his telescope with enthusiasm, remarkable knowledge of astronomy, and tireless energy. Jordan is an active participant in the club’s collaborative research efforts with the Rapid Response Robotic Telescope at the Fan Mountain Observatory near Charlottesville, Virginia. He was invited to address the first conference of this group at Norfolk State University. His presentation focused on how to attract high school-age students to astronomy and how best to employ the observatory in that effort.

d. Horkheimer/O’Meara Journalism Award. The Horkheimer/O’Meara Youth Journalism Award is dedicated to Donna & Steve O’Meara, who have both devoted their lives to education, science including astronomy, and journalism. Both are the authors of several publications and books. This competition is open to young writers ages 8-14. The submissions should be 300 to 500 words and are not limited to astronomy-related topics. Any science-related topic that interests the contestant is acceptable.

The top finisher for the 2009 Horkheimer/O’Meara Youth Journalism Award is David C. Lofts. He is an eighth grader at Covenant Christian Academy in Huntsville, Alabama. David’s essay, “Space Junk: A Growing Problem,” will appear in the September Reflector magazine.

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Mabel Sterns Award. First place finisher of this very competitive and popular award was John Hepler of the Chester County Astronomical Society near Philadelphia.

C. Secretary: John Goss reported on the various activities of the Secretary's office. All actions of the Secretary were done with the following philosophy in mind: *For the League to be successful, it must actively engage its constituent clubs and provide benefits that its members truly want. But it must not stop there, it must also promote those benefits. It must prove to its many members that it gives them what they want. Why? The League exists because of its membership, not the other way around.*

Spring Mailing. Every year the League sends out election ballots to all the MALs, Patrons, Lifetime members, and constituent clubs. The Secretary and Mitch Glaze of the National Office handled this task this year.

Annual League Reports. The call for the League annual reports was made by the Secretary this year. The Secretary also collected, compiled, and distributed the reports.

Astronomical Calendar. John Goss announced that League members will be given a substantial discount on the classic "Astronomical Calendar" by Guy Ottewell. Normal retail price with shipping runs about \$32. League price, with free shipping, will be \$20 and bulk orders of 15 or more calendars will be given an additional 10% discount. An advertisement and an announcement will appear in the September Reflector.

D. Treasurer: The budget will be discussed later in the day.

E. Executive Secretary: The Executive Secretary was not able to attend Council this year. During the past year, the Secretary assumed most of the duties of this office.

MAL Report: Because of postage increases, the International Member-At-Large program will be a drain, albeit a small one, on League finances.

Motion.

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Wayne Green moved that the International MAL dues be adjusted to adequately cover postage costs either by adding a postage surcharge or have the Reflector magazine as an optional benefit.

Maryanne Arrien seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

F. National Office Report: The Council members referred to the annual National Office report. John Goss discussed that report.

Membership numbers continued to decline. Currently, the number is 13999, but it is expected to rise as more dues payments arrive. Last year, the tally was 14,388. A discussion followed about effects of the economy and changing demographics. The League doesn't have any firm demographic numbers, just a rough estimate.

Alan Rifken suggested that we approach Meade and Celestron to ask them to insert League promotional material in the products that they sell.

Wayne Green commented that he sees that young people want to build scopes, particularly if they contain robotic features, but they don't particularly want to look through them.

From many clubs' points of view, the major benefit of League membership is the liability insurance offered through Seabury and Smith. Over the past year or two, Seabury and Smith has quit calling the National Office checking on whether applicant clubs are truly League members. This indicates that either new clubs are not seeking insurance through them, or that S&S just don't check. If they don't check, it means that this liability insurance program is not an exclusive League benefit. If it is not, then perhaps some clubs will drop the League because they can obtain this insurance package on their own.

It has been more than five years since the insurance issue has been examined by the League. It was agreed that the League should revisit the issue.

G. Webmaster: Vern Raben gave an overview of the efforts of the

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webteam which consists of himself, Paul Greuter, and Michael Hotka.

A database and supporting software were developed to maintain local club information such as mailing addresses, locations, websites, officer contacts, events, and membership information. The system was completed in March. Ten societies are currently using the system to maintain some of their club information on test basis. Some corrections and additional enhancements will be made and the software will become available to all clubs in a few months.

Approximately 500 pages have either been written or updated in the past year. New “Sky this Week” video has been released each week. The videos have a slowly increasing number of subscribers on YouTube and iTunes. The videos are viewed approximately 500 times each week on YouTube and approximately 400 times on iTunes.

The website is now using a dedicated IP and its own SSL certificate rather than a shared one. Both the store and the Drupal CMS have been configured to use SSH when sensitive pages are requested.

The website is in the process of being migrated to the next production release of the content management system, Drupal 6. This is a significant effort as the software that has been developed for the observer awards database and the local club database requires significant modification. Thus far, a Drupal 6 test site has been set up. The current website theme and the observer awards database have been ported and are being tested. Ten more software modules remain to be modified and tested. This work should be completed by late September. One potential problem is that the Webteam doesn't know who is truthfully a club member or who is an impostor.

Alan Rifken noted that the League map on the website is inactive. It would be good to have it active so that people to click on the map and have the page jump to their region. It would also be useful if Google Maps could indicate where League clubs are located.

Vern is working to make Google Maps and Google Earth compatible with the League website.

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H. League Sales: Council members referred to the League Sales report. The Sales final net income was up by a small amount. This is good considering the general state of the economy.

There is a considerable inventory on hand, about \$17,000 worth. The Sky Puppies manual and the Handbook for Astronomy Educators combined make up 23.1% of the total inventory value. Their portion of total sales is only 4%. It would be good to reduced their inventory level.

Also, "Eclipse Presentations" cd and "Introduction to the Universe Slide Sets" are "dead" items that have no perceived value. Sales has hundreds of dollars invested in them. Can another outlet be found for them?

The most popular manuals sold are the Globular Clusters, Planetary Nebulae, Universe Sampler, and Messier Objects. However, less were sold this past year than the previous year.

I. Reflector: John Goss reported that there have been several personnel changes at the Reflector. Andy Oliver will be the new editor, Anne Bauman will be the new Assistant Editor, and Terry Warner now serves as the newly created Photo Editor. The Reflector wishes to thank Terry Frazier for his services as assistant editor over the last five years.

The Reflector produced two special insert supplements: IYA and Carpe Luna. The Carpe Luna has been especially popular.

Advertising income is down, not unexpectedly. Some advertisers are behind in their payments.

Wayne Green suggested that a procedure be developed for having each region produce an insert section. That might create more regional participation.

J. ISS-AT: Terry Mann described the situation with the International Space Station — Amateur Telescope (ISS-AT).

K. Publications: Terry Mann announced that Sue Wheatley has stepped

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down as Publications Chair after many years of service. Thank you, Sue, for all that you have done for the League!

A new chair is needed to direct the publication of new observe manuals and the revision of old ones. John Goss reported that there will be an ad in the September Reflector for the Publications Chair.

L. Publicity: Terry Mann stated that there is currently no Publicity Chair. Wayne Green would like to see a notice about this in the Reflector. John Goss stated that one might appear in the December issue.

M. "Observe" Committees: Mike Benson mentioned that some people do not want their names appearing on the Observe Awards sections on the website. He also remarked that some Observe Chairs are slow to issue awards. That is being remedied.

N. Astronomy Day Awards report and discussion: Terry Mann informed the Council that the value of Astronomy Day awards has been increased to \$500.

Gary Tomlinson, Astronomy Day Coordinator, sent a report requesting discussion by the Council regarding a few matters. The Council feels that both Spring and Fall Astronomy Days are appropriate. Due to cost concerns, the League should send Astronomy Day winners their awards, but not fund their presence at the banquet.

Wayne Green suggested seeking support from a private space agency.

O. League Awards and Recognition: League President, Terry Mann, announced the winners of the annual recognition awards.

President's Award. There was no President's Award given this year.

Leslie C. Pelter Award. Gerry Samolyk of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society received this award in recognition of his many thousands of observations of variable stars.

Right Service Award. Mary Sutter, Astronomical League Treasurer, for her work in organizing and defining the duties of the Treasurer's office.

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Astronomical League Award. Alan Traino of the Rockland Astronomical Society for his efforts in establishing the Northeast Astronomy Forum (NEAF) as the nation's premier showcase and exhibition event for amateur astronomy.

P. Nominating Committee: Carroll Iorg, Chair of the Nominating Committee, reports that ballots for the League Secretary and Treasurer positions will be counted later. (*Secretary's note: The ballots were counted by the Nominating Committee that night. Joanne Haley won the Treasurer's position. She was unopposed. Bill Bogardus won the Secretary's position. The League appreciates Rob Burgess running for Secretary and encourages him to remain active in the League.*)

Q. Regions: Council members discussed regional participation problems.

Ron Whitehead described his activities as the Chair of the Great Lakes Region. He holds several meetings each year, instead of only one, at regional star parties. These actions spread regional involvement. He believes that regional chairs should tailor their approach to different groups, such as a family star party or a gathering for deep sky observing. Ron likes to present an "astro-quiz" at different gatherings of amateurs. It increases member involvement and increases good will toward the League.

John Goss expressed his desire for establishing guidelines for the regional officers. Doing so would let the officers know what they should do and what is expected of them. Most regional officers have had no guidance and have ended up doing what they thought was best given their own time constraints. John described his attempts at involving member in the Mid East Region through a "MERAL Forum" on the League web site. Details were given in the MERAL report.

Wayne Green, MARS Chair, would like clubs in Wyoming to participate more.

Mike Benson, SERAL Chair, would like to see SERAL represented at more star parties.

Maryanne Arrien, NERAL Chair, has had good success increasing good will and

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member involvement by presenting annual awards. She recommended doing this with a flair.

R. Book Service: Through her report, Chair Marilyn Unruh reported that this past year the Book Service served 17 clubs or members and processed orders for 26 items.

The Book Service reserve continued to be sufficient and the committee remains self-supporting. There is no funding request.

S. Education Committee. No report.

T. IDA: Next year's ALCon will be co-hosted by the IDA.

John Goss reported that the Reflector appreciates the quarterly IDA/Light Pollution column submitted by Tim Hunter.

U. Future Convention Proposals: ALCon 2010 will be held at the Hilton East in Tucson, Arizona on June 24 and 25. It will be co-hosted by the IDA, the Tucson Amateur Astronomical Association, and the Astronomical League. Tours are being planned to visit Kitt Peak, the Steward Mirror Laboratory, and possibly Mt. Graham.

Terry Mann would like to see future ALCons to be rotated among three different sites across the country. The League would be involved with the planning and would offer assistance with various necessary prep work, such as, among others, arranging for speakers, providing a web site, and handling registrations. The ALCon attendance has decreased over the past ten years and these steps are aimed to reverse that.

Sue Rose would like ALCon to team with other organizations, similar to what the ASONY did this year with ALPO.

V. Youth Activities Committee: Vern will set up a page on the web site for the person who wishes to lead the YAC. The position is currently vacant, although one young person has recently shown interest in the program.

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W. Other Reports:

Tours. Terry Mann described her thoughts of putting together a League tour to see the final launch of the Space Shuttle at Cape Canaveral, FL. She hope to have members view the launch from the Kennedy Space Center.

Outreach Club. Mike Reynolds told of the incredible success that the Outreach Club has had since its inception three years ago. To date, more than 400,000 people have been touched by the Club. About 250 awards have been issued so far. Because of its popularity among League members, Mike proposed a higher level award, the Lifetime Outreach Award. 1160 hours of outreach would be required for this. Mike estimated it would take upwards of 10 years for someone to achieve this.

The Master Observer program could recognize this by instituting a Master Outreach designation for the Master Observer award. Mike Benson and Mike Reynolds will work to make this happen.

It was the consensus of the Council to approve Mike Reynolds' Lifetime Outreach award.

Part V. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Mary Sutter was unable to attend the Council meeting. Each Council members was given a copy of her Treasurer's report which included the League's financial statement and the proposed budget for the coming year. Secretary John Goss reviewed the report with Council.

Sue Rose requested that the funds allotted for the Caldwell Observing Club be increased from \$25 to \$100. The change was made.

Sue Rose also asked if the other banks, such as ING, could be used because they pay higher interest.

Sue inquired why funds for printing observing manuals are taken from the general treasury instead of being charged against League Sales. (The second printing is charged against the League Sales budget.) It was originally done

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this way to make sure that a new manual doesn't put League Sales in the red for a number of years until sales of the manual begin to pay for itself.

The Reflector production costs constitute a large part of the League's expenses. A discussion followed about putting the Reflector online in an effort to save a substantial amount of money on postage and printing. Members might like to have past issue posted online. Another thought was to put all Reflectors online except a year-end "super" issue which would be mailed.

The general consensus was that the Reflector should continue to be mailed, but the day for an online version is approaching.

Part VI. Trust Fund

During the past year, \$500 out of the \$990.05 of the Trust Fund interest was budgeted to fund the Dark Sky Advocate program.

This year, Bert Stevens' term ends as a Trust Fund trustee. He has indicated that he would like to serve again.

Motion

Mike Benson moved that Bert Stevens continue in his role as trustee.

Wayne Green seconds the motion.

The motion passes unanimously.

Bert's term will expire on August 31, 2014.

Next year, David Bachtell term expires.

Part VII. Old Business

No old business was reported nor discussed.

Part VIII. New Business

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A. New “Observe” Award Proposals: Four new observe club proposals and two requests for observing recognition were brought before Council.

1. Southern Arp. Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers member Al Lamperti described his “Southern Arp” program. It is similar to the current Arp club, but deals with the southern half of the celestial sphere. Council discussion indicated that members liked the program. The Council felt more thought was needed as to how it would mesh with the current, or Northern, Arp program. The proposal was tabled until next year so this could be resolved.

2. Flat Galaxies. Al Lamperti described his second program, the Flat Galaxies Observing Club. Council liked the proposal. Due to budget constraints, Council stipulated that the program begin on July 1, 2010. This will be a good addition to the Observe Clubs meant for advanced observers.

3. Variable Stars. Robert Togni developed a variable star observing program which uses material found on the AASO web site. The estimated start up cost was \$500. Council approved the proposal.

4. Carbon Stars. Alicia Tristan submitted an observing program for members to find 100 “Carbon” stars. This will be a good program for intermediate level observers. The Council approved the proposal. (*Secretary’s Note: The associated observing guide was inadvertently not discussed. It is the Executive Council’s intent to find adequate funding for the guide which is a very helpful component to the Carbon Star Club.*)

5. Venus Transit Club. Next year, Bob Gent and Aaron Clevenson will bring to the Council plans for a club dedicated to observing the Venus transit in 2012.

Some Council members wondered if Mercury transits could be incorporated into it.

No action was needed by Council at this point.

6. Messier Marathon Certificate. Aaron Clevenson submitted a proposal for a

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certificate recognizing people who complete the annual Messier Marathon in late March. This in no way would conflict with the League's Messier Club. No funding was requested.

Council approved this proposal. No further action was required by Council.

B. Long Range Planning Committee. Ron Whitehead approached the Council to describe the LRPC which he chairs.

The Long Range Planning Committee will examine all aspects of League operations and where the League should be headed. It will

- develop an internal and external rolling plan
- study the League and its environment
- have all activities traceable to the Mission Statement

This will be an ongoing committee.

C. Honorary Member Nominations: Terry Mann called for nominations for Astronomical League Honorary Members. The names Tippy D'Auria, and Steve and Donna O'Meara were presented. They were approved by consensus.

Motion

Wayne Green moved that the League should place the Honorary Members' names on the web site.

Sue Rose seconded the motion.

It was passed unanimously.

D. Dark Skies Discovery Sites: Terry Mann discussed her role in the IYA Dark Skies Discovery Sites program. This program brings the issue of light pollution to the public by "dark sky awareness through celestial observation." Programs are presented to the public at various dark sites, including parks, observatories, and individuals' backyards.

These sites can achieve "Dark Sky Discovery Site" status by holding a specific number of light pollution oriented activities for a specific number of people over a specific period of time. The more people who actually witness the negative affects of light pollution, the more likely that positive action will

be taken against this pervasive problem.

E. Value enhanced items to be sold by the League.

Ron Whitehead approached Council to discuss a possible program for raising fund for the League. He proposes placing the League's logo or other designations on "value added products." He gave high end tool boxes crafted by Gerstner and Sons as an example. Members could order these tool boxes converted in eyepiece/accessory boxes. There is a relatively high markup for items such as these, but members may want them anyway because of the image that they convey. The boxes would be a good fit for home observatories.

There doesn't seem to be a downside other than most League members would not participate in these offers due to their high perceived cost.

Some one needs to head this project.

Motion.

Maryanne Arrien made a motion that the Executive Committee investigate the tool chest by Gerstner and Sons as a means of fundraising.

Terry Mann seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Part IX. Approval of Budget

Motion.

Wayne Green moved that the budget be approved with the revisions suggested.

Sue Rose seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Part X. Adjournment

Motion

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Vern Raben moved that the Council meeting be adjourned.
Mike Benson seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.

End of the 2009 astronomical League Council Meeting minutes.

Submitted by

John Jardine Goss
Astronomical League Secretary, September 1, 2005 - August 31, 2009