



The Astronomical League

A Federation of Astronomical Societies

Astro Note B2 – Astronomical League History and Organization

Introduction – Since before the dawn of history, humans have been impressed with the magnificence and mystery of the heavens. From the earliest times, people of wisdom have sought to understand the wonders they observed overhead. But astronomy is contagious. The general public has shown ever increasing interest in it and amateur astronomy has become a popular hobby.

Hobbyists are gregarious by nature and many amateur astronomers associated into local groups. Their purpose was both to learn about the heavens and to learn better ways of observing. In time, it became obvious that, in the same way that local clubs could help the individual, local clubs could mutually cooperate in ways that would benefit all. With this view in mind, several amateur and professional astronomers proposed that a federation of astronomical societies be formed.

The beginnings of the Astronomical League date back to 1939 when members of eleven amateur astronomical societies met in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Similar meetings followed in Pittsburgh, 1940, Washington D.C., 1941, and Detroit, 1946. At the last meeting, final plans laid the foundation for a permanent organization constituting a nationwide federation of societies.

The following convention took place in Philadelphia, July 4, 1947. There, the federation came into being: Bylaws were adopted, officers were elected, and, in due course, the name Astronomical League was selected. Shortly thereafter, the organization was incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the District of Columbia.

The Bylaws begin with a statement of purpose and objectives for the Astronomical League. Recognizing that changing times may require shifting focus, a strategic planning committee constantly reviews these objectives for relevancy to amateur astronomy today. The overall focus remains: to promote the science of astronomy. Our current mission statement continues to be:

- To promote the science of astronomy;
- By fostering astronomical education;
- By providing incentives for astronomical observation and research;
- By assisting communication among amateur astronomical societies.

Membership in the Astronomical League consists of astronomical societies located throughout the world and individual Members at Large. Currently, more than 250 societies and over 15,000 individual members, are affiliated.

In order to effectively serve this geographically dispersed group, the Astronomical League is divided into geographic regions. The boundaries of the eleven regions are chosen to permit clubs to participate in regional meetings without traveling long distances. This also permits societies within a given region to address concerns which may be local to their area. The boundaries are somewhat flexible, shifting from time to time to accommodate the needs and desires of the local groups.

The Astronomical League is primarily a volunteer organization. National and regional officers and the chairs of all standing and ad hoc committees donate their time to help the organization pursue its mission.

The affairs of the Astronomical League are administered by five officers who are elected by a vote of the members. The officers are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Secretary. The first three officers serve two-year terms while the latter two officers serve three-year terms. The terms are staggered so that continuity may be maintained as new officers are elected.

The Council is in charge of all business of the Astronomical League and directs its policies. The 27 Council members are the five national officers plus the Chairman and Representative from each of the eleven regions. These two regional officers, together with other officers who administer a region, are elected by members within each region. While Council conducts routine business of the League, any change to the By-Laws or any fundamental change in policy must be approved by a vote of the full membership.

Dues for each member society are based on the membership of that society and provide the primary revenue for activities of the Astronomical League. Other income derives from the sale of publications, sale of League memorabilia, advertising, annual conventions and donations.

Each Region is organized similar to the national body. While basic, common functions within the regions are specified in the national by-laws, each region has its own by-laws to specify its day-to-day operation. Regional activities are supported by proceeds from regional conventions and assistance from the parent organization as specified in the national By-Laws.

Recognizing that communication is the "glue" that binds any organization, our By-Laws provide that the Astronomical League publish a periodic newsletter. Named The Reflector, our newsletter is published quarterly and distributed to our entire membership of 15,000+. Each issue contains news of League business, activities of member clubs, reports of activity committees, and other items of general astronomical interest.

In 2003, The Astronomical League achieved the long-sought goal of a permanent National Office. Finally, we had a central location for communications, file storage and general operations, and we hired our first employee, an office manager. The National Office is located at 9201 Ward Parkway, Suite 100, Kansas City, MO 64114.

For more information about the Astronomical League, visit the Astronomical League Website www.astroleague.org.