A pocket full of stars

by Garth Sweet & Colin MacDonald

We entered the giant indoor tent and took one of the 20 or so seats situated around the inner edge of it. In the centre stood a device that appeared to have come directly from some 1960s sci-fi movie — a crazy collection of lights, arms, dials and gadgets topped by a large ball-shaped projection device. The apparent operator of this strange device came in, sat at the controls and began working with various dials on a control panel. The lights dimmed to nothing with the twist of his hand, and in the now-total darkness of the tent we heard him begin."Welcome to the Dalhousie University Planetarium..."

Then the stars came out.

Dalhousie is fortunate enough to have a Spitz model A-2 Hybrid planetarium on extended loan from the Nova Scotia Museum. Built in the early 1950s, it is the oldest planetarium still in operation in Canada. So surprised was Spitz that it is still working, they have actually asked to have it returned for their museum when it is retired. Our guide to the heavens, Paul Gray, informs us that the planetarium hosts over 800 visitors a month, and is one of only two in the Atlantic Provinces. Located in Dunn 118, public viewings lasting about an hour are put on every Thursday with an informal atmosphere and no knowledge of astronomy needed.

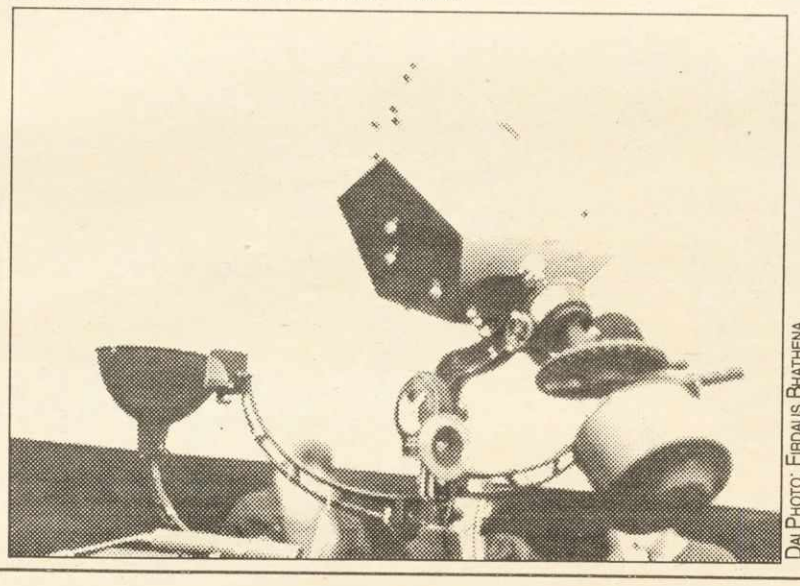
One of the first things we asked ourselves is exactly what a planetarium can do that the night sky can't. Well, besides the fact that you can view the planetarium in any weather, you can also view the sky from any point and time on the earth, and you can see what the day sky would be like if the sun didn't mask the stars.

Paul's tour through the stars began with the Big Dipper and continued southward through the night sky. As he stopped at each constellation he explained the mythology behind its name and showed us slides detailing how ancient astronomers saw pictures in the stars. After the show Paul opened the floor to take questions from the audience. He mentioned to us that he has fielded questions ranging from what happens to a bus in a black hole (asked by a boy scout) to where is Polaris (the north star).

Unfortunately our 1950s vintage planetarium is showing its years. Some stars appear out of focus and the planets can't even be displayed. Newer computerized models not only show the planets but comets too, and with enough detail that binoculars may be used to see stars more closely. Local interests have a plan afoot to acquire a new planetarium replacing the old, but have met with some government red tape. The future does look brighter, though. Recently the government granted money for a feasibility study on whether or not a new facility was warranted.

The proposed plan calls for a planetarium that could potentially seat up to 100 people and would allow a greater range of displays showing a larger variety of cosmic events than our current model. With the amazing display from our existing planetarium, we can't wait to see what an even better model could produce. Let's hope the study concludes a new one is warranted.

Why not show your support for an underutilized facility at Dal and join us every Thursday for a walk through the stars.



DalPhoto: Firdaus Bhathena

POINTLESS PONDERABLES

This week's problem: The Overlapping Crop Circles

You're a scientist investigating crop circles. Amid the endless acres of corn, you find two crop circles that overlap. Maybe this overlap can tell you something about the nature of them. Hmmm... First thing you decide to do is work out the area of the overlap between the two. Both circles are of equal size with a radius of 10m. The overlap is 2m wide at its widest point. What is its area? Answer next week.

Answer to last week's problem:

The answer is that you should switch doors. You will have a 66.7% chance of winning if you do. To see why this is so, let's say you decide to never switch doors regardless of what anyone says — how often will you win? The answer is obviously 33.3% of the time, since you have three doors to choose from and one has a car. Now, let's say you always switch doors when Monty gives you your choice — how many times will you win? Well, when you always switch doors, that means you will always win the car whenever you initially guessed wrong. This is due to the fact that Monty always eliminates (reveals) a booby prize door, narrowing your choices down to one. So then, what are your chances of guessing wrong initially? Well, 100% - 33.3% = 66.7%. Don't believe us? Try it yourself with a friend a few times (we did) and if you're still having trouble, drop up to the office and we'll explain it further. It's a hard problem to get your head around, but the numbers do work out.

Date	Description	Date	Description.
Oct 7	Oh Those Nebulae!	Feb 3	The Sky is full of Colour!
Oct 14	Island Universes.	Feb 10	The Sky of the Month.
Oct 21	Monsters in the Sky!	Feb 17	The Zodiac.
Oct 28	The Sky of the Month	Feb 24	Long Ago and Far Away...
Nov 4	The Seasons.	Mar 3	The Milky Way is not a Chocolate Bar.
Nov 11	Big Stars Blow Up, Small Ones Live Forever!	Mar 10	The Sky of the Month.
Nov 18	Stars Hang out in Gangs.	Mar 17	Long Ago and Far Away...
Nov 25	The Sky is full of Colour!	Mar 24	The Seasons.
Dec 2	The Planets.	Mar 31	The Seasons.
Dec 9	Stones that fall. from Heaven	Apr 7	The Sky is full of Colour!
		Apr 14	Big Stars Blow Up...
Dec 16	The Christmas Star!	Apr 21	Audience Night.
Dec 23	No Show	Apr 28	The Sky of the Month.
Dec 30	No Show	May 5	Monsters in the Sky.
Jan 6	Stones that fall...	May 12	Big Stars Blow Up...
Jan 13	Oh Those Nebulae!	May 19	The Seasons.
Jan 20	Big Stars Blow Up...	May 26	The Planets.
Jan 27	Stars Hang out in Gangs		

FOOD DRIVE

Tuesday to Friday
October 12 – 15, 1993

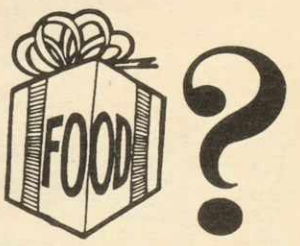
Look for drop-off boxes around campus

FAO **WORLD FOOD DAY**
October 16

Proceeds going to the Metro Food Bank

SUB Lobby

- Oct. 12 -15th DISPLAYS
- Oct. 14, Noon to 1:30 pm
Open Mike Discussion:
IS GIVING FOOD THE ANSWER?
Speakers to address various perspectives and alternatives.



- Oct. 15, 1:30 pm Prayer Service
- Metro Food Bank Pick - up at 2:00 pm

Event sponsored by the Dalhousie Chaplains' Office, Dal - Outreach and the Nova Scotia World Food Day Committee.