

RECALLING SFAA EARLY DAYS
(from March 1993 SFAA Newsletter)
by Jack Garriott

I promised Bill Cherrington some time ago that I would search my memory and write down my experiences around the time SFAA was organized. I've jotted down some notes and typed them up. I apologize for not remembering some of the people I knew so well in 1952. That was only 40 years ago! Here goes!

In the fall of 1951, I attended a craft show at the Emporium. There I met a very pleasant and talented gentleman in his 80s, Mr. H.A. Wallace, later to be dubbed Skipper Wallace. His homemade telescope attracted much attention. Many spectators became interested in such a project on their own, included me and my teenage son.

Noting this great interest, Mr. Wallace invited us all to come to his home on Jackson Street and receive personal instruction. Very soon several of us were attending on a regular basis to grind our own mirrors, mostly of the six-inch size. As one by one we approached the figuring stage, we decided to form a telescope-making club.

I recall the first few who signed up. Skipper Wallace was the first, and was promptly dubbed President. I was second and became Vice-President. Others that signed up included Harry Epstein and his two teenage sons, Stan Oliver and Herman Fast. I can't recall any other names. So the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers was born. The articles of incorporation were prepared by Harry Epstein, a lawyer. We called upon Betty Neal, a member of the East Bay Astronomical Society, many times for her knowledge of astronomy and organizational skills in those early days.

Skipper Wallace's goal was for every club member to build his or her own telescope. To further this resolve, he came up with a poor man's mounting of pipe fittings and irrigation pipe we could all afford. More sophisticated improvements were to follow in the years ahead, as our skills and incomes grew.

Our meetings were held for some time at the Josephine Randall Junior Museum, whose manager helped us set up a telescope making workshop in the basement. It contained grinding and polishing benches, a drill press and lathe, Foucault tester, mirror blanks, abrasives and other related tools. A very nice little library with a mimeograph machine was installed. Our interests spread to other areas of amateur astronomy, and we were soon knocking out a little Bulletin, a far cry from the present very capably written one.

When Skipper Wallace became ill, I was installed as President, Bulletin editor, program provider and what have you. All my spare time was taken up with administrative duties, and my study of astronomy suffered a little. Then our beloved Skipper passed away, leaving the SFAA with his lathe, telescope, tools and some \$500. With this as a start, the club has grown. His memory lives on.

Upon retirement I came home to Walla Walla, Washington. Old friends like Al Daggit and Herman Fast saw to it that I never failed to receive the monthly Bulletin. A few years ago I was tremendously flattered to read there that the Board had selected Betty Neal and myself for life membership. I acknowledge this honor with mixed emotions, great pride and humility. Thank you.