

August night skies give meteor showers

Avid meteor watchers will enjoy the early morning hours of August when the "Tears of St. Lawrence" will flash across the sky at the rate of about one per minute. So says University of Michigan astronomer Hazel M. Losh, who notes that the Perseid meteor shower of August is one of the most conspicuous and dependable of these annual displays. "The shower is called 'Perseid' because, when traced back, the meteors appear to intersect in the northeast in the constellation Perseus," she explains. "But they are also known as the 'Tears of St. Lawrence' because they reach a peak on Aug. 10—the feast day of that particular saint."

be most numerous around the 10th or 11th, Professor Losh says. The regularity of the activity is caused by the earth crossing the orbital path of the meteors at about the same time every year. "The ordinary meteor is a tiny bit of iron and stone that enters the earth's atmosphere from interplanetary space," she continues. "Moving at tremendous velocities, they burst into flame as a result of the high friction they encounter upon contact with the atmosphere." Most of these pinhead-sized particles are consumed. When a meteor is large enough to make it through, it falls to the earth and then becomes a meteorite. "These 'falling stars' seem to fly in all directions," the Michigan astronomer observes. "However,

the apparent divergence is caused by perspective; they are actually moving along parallel paths."

PROFESSOR LOSH says more and brighter meteors are seen after midnight, rather than before, because "at this time we are riding on the side of the earth in the direction of its orbital motion, and hence we see those coming at us head-on as well as those that pass us." The relative velocities of meteors met "head-on" tend to be greater, which increases the brightness.

In addition to its meteoric connotations, the constellation Perseus contains a famous "variable" star. "Perseus resembles a giant letter 'K' projected against the milky way," Professor Losh notes. "The

upward arm of the 'K' ends with Algor, 'The Demon,' one of the best known variable stars." She says Algor is believed to be an eclipsing binary—a bright star and a faint star revolving around each other. Every two days and 21 hours the bright one passes behind the fainter, and the subsequent light variation is easily detected to the naked eye.

THE PLANET of note during

New McKinney band plays at 'Ponch'

The Hotel Pontchartrain will present a walk down memory lane with the New McKinney Cotton Pickers Band Aug. 16 on the terrace, Jefferson and Washington boulevards. The group, which was featured

at the Newport Jazz Festival at Carnegie Hall, earlier this summer, will play from 8 p.m. to midnight. Reservations for the "Graystone Night at the Ponch" may be made by calling 341-4481.

August is Jupiter, Professor Losh says. Rising around 9 p.m. almost directly at the east point, Jupiter shines brilliantly through the night as it moves across the southern sky. Venus and Saturn are visible in the early morning hours, and Mars disappears in the west around sunset.

The length of the day will decrease during the month, perhaps being shortened by as much as one hour and 17 minutes by the 31st.

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