



**Eyeing the planets** — John Nicholson, right, of the South Shore Astronomical Society explains characteristics of the planet to spectators at Pond Meadow Park who attended a

"star-gazing party" sponsored by the recreation-conservation district and the South Shore group.

(Gunter photo)

## 'Star gazing' party intriguing

By MAURICE F. REARDON  
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**BRAINTREE** — The night sky over Pond Meadow last Friday looked like a handful of diamonds spilled onto black velvet, shining brightly through the clear atmosphere.

The effect was heightened by the darkness of the surrounding woods and hills at Pond Meadow which were seen only in silhouette against the skyline.

Near the entrance to the conservation-recreation district, members of the South Shore Astronomical Society found themselves the center of attention of some 60 interested "star gazers" who looked on as the society members set up their telescopes to take advantage of what Dick Cutler of Wollaston, one of the 40-member society, termed ideal viewing conditions.

The instruments being used by the astronomers ranged from John Nicholson's "Newtonian" with an eight-inch reflector to a 3.5-inch "Questa" used by Cutler.

Nicholson, a Weymouth resident, was the first to set up his long white telescope and among the first to peer into outer space was Craig Gardner of Boy Scout Troop 24, Union Congregational Church, one of a group of Scouts under the supervision of Scoutmaster Kinya Mikami and Assistant Scoutmaster Roger Peterson.

Nicholson explained that the two major planets which could be viewed clearly were Jupiter and Saturn.

Although the two planets in question appeared simply as bright stars to the naked eye, the telescopes revealed the heavenly bodies to be altogether different, including the "rings" around Saturn and the "Galilian moons" adjacent to Jupiter.

Nicholson said Jupiter is about 480 million miles from earth and Saturn about 887 million miles away.

For the adults and youngsters alike, the "star party" was both intriguing and exciting with an impatient line of people awaiting their turn at the eye piece of one of the telescopes.

Later arrivals from the society included Dr. Donald J.

Greeley of Hingham, a dentist with a penchant for outer space, and Jerry Niktsche of Taunton, both of whom got their telescopes set up to accommodate the crowd attending the event.

Deputy Fire Chief John McDonnell cooperated in the efforts to shield the scopes from ground light by temporarily turning off the bright light that illuminates the entrance to the park but which interfered with clear viewing of the planets.

It gave all viewers an eerie feeling gazing at planets so far away and speculating on the vast distances — it was almost as though one expected to see a space ship sliding across the endless void of outer space — a sort of "Star Wars" syndrome, one viewer said with a laugh.

Rick Gallagher, 13, of 50 Hudson Road, a student at South Junior High School, said he found the opportunity to view the planets first hand "very interesting — I could see them clearly."

Kathy Corcoran of 16 Ardmore St., Braintree, a student at East Junior High School said, "We studied about the planets in school of course but it was the first time I had a chance to see them through a 'scope. I enjoyed it and it made it seem so more real."

For Mary Riordan, 13, of 105 Stetson St., Braintree, also a student at East Junior, viewing the planets through a telescope "beats seeing them reflected on the walls of the Planetarium at the Museum of Science — we went there once from school on a field trip," she explained.

As far as those who attended were concerned, it was an unique experience. Not only was it educational and, in fact, awe inspiring, but it drove home to the viewers the tremendous handicaps that had to be overcome in landing a man on the moon and the tremendous feat performed by the Mars probe vehicle which sent pictures back such vast distances.

All in all it was a night to remember, a unique and interesting experience involving a glimpse into deep space.

W. T. ...