

1980 PLANETS

A spectacular array of planets adorns the 1980 winter skies.

Our old friend Venus is prominent in the west at sunset, about halfway to the zenith.

In the southeast and well up in the sky about 10:00 p.m. is a whole handful of planets. Extend your arm, spread your fingers, and you can cover all three - Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn. In early January their relative position could be likened to a hockey stick with the blade-end up. At the tip of the blade is Jupiter; at the heel the reddish planet Mars; and at the end of the handle Saturn (Fig. 1).

Mars is on a leftward course. In the late autumn Mars was just to the right of Jupiter (Fig. 2). On the night of December 13, 1979, there was an occultation of Mars and Jupiter - that is, Mars passed in front of Jupiter and became invisible. Unfortunately the skies here were overcast and the occurrence could not be observed.

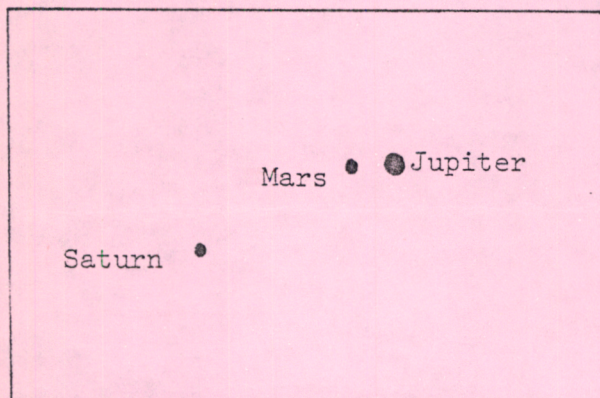


Fig. 1.

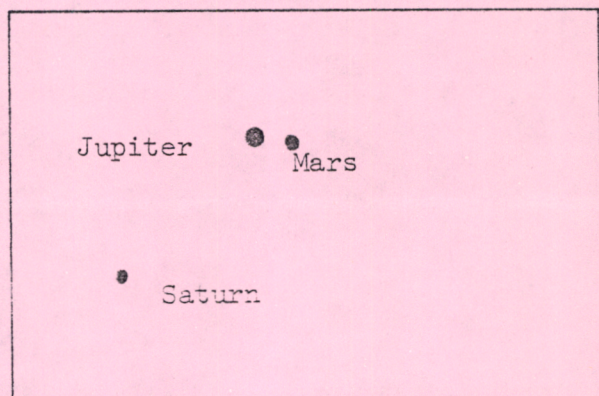


Fig. 2.

On the next clear night we saw Mars to the left of Jupiter (Fig. 1).

The leftward motion of Mars is noticeable from week to week; that hockey stick had become very long in the blade in February (Fig. 3).

Along with the trio of planets is the bright star Regulus, at the end of the handle of the Sickle in the constellation Leo.

To see the lesser stars of Leo, you will need to be away from city lights.

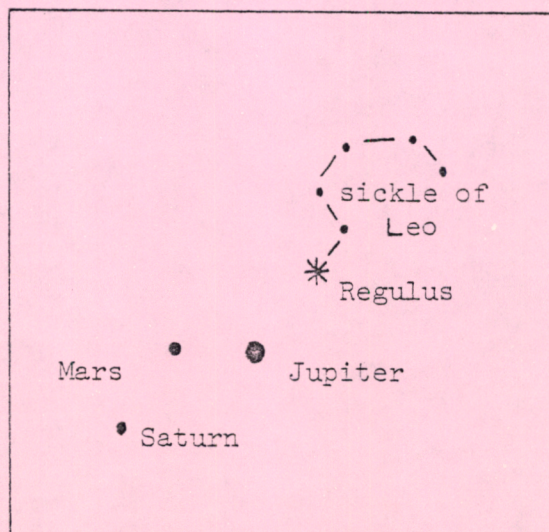


Fig. 3.