

Slide 01 Leo Brenner and the Moon

Slide 02 When all else fails, owners of binoculars or telescopes can always observe the moon. Our celestial neighbor is available at least a few times every month, and its craters, mountains, valleys, and lava plains seem endless in their variety. Every mark or splotch has its story, and none is stranger than the tale of a crater named after Leo Brenner.

Slide 03 He was born in 1855 in Trieste, then in Austria, as Spiridion Gopcevic, son of a rich ship owner, who committed suicide when Spiridion was only six. He and his mother resettled in Vienna, but she died soon thereafter.

Little is known about his youth after his mother's death. He reappeared as an author of several minor novels and non-fiction works about politics and war. He married a wealthy wife and settled with her on the island of Lussin in the Adriatic Sea. (Croatia)

Slide 04 He gave up his journalistic career, changed his name to Leo Brenner and decided to become an astronomer. With his wife's money he built an ornate observatory with a 7" refractor telescope as the primary instrument. He named it "Manora-Sternwarte" in honor of his wife. The telescope was particularly suited to observe the planets and the Moon. Brenner's observations, which were widely published in the scientific journals of the time, gained the admiration of many astronomers.

Slide 05 Sadly, some began to doubt his work. Every time someone made a discovery, he managed to make a spectacular observation of it.

He calculated the rotational period of Venus to a completely unreasonable exactitude 23 hours 57 minutes and 36.2396 seconds. An amazing feat considering that Venus is completely covered with an unbroken layer of clouds leaving no visible features for even an approximate calculation.

Since Venus is close to earth size, I feel, Brenner figured that its rotational period should be similar. Obviously he decided to continue the deception by citing a number to a grotesque accuracy. A Venusian day is actually 243 earth days!

Slide 06 After Percival Lowell announced the discovery of canals on Mars, Brenner “discovered” hundreds of the waterways built by intelligent Martians and drew a detailed map of it!

Astronomers had recently discovered Sirius’ faint companion. Brenner published measurements of the distance from Sirius even though the companion far beyond the reach of his telescope. It would truly have to be a “magic” tube.

Slide 07 Brenner did not take criticisms of his work well. His comments and letters in reply were so threatening, rude and extreme that people began to suspect that he was not mentally right, in fact, crazy. Scientific journals soon refused to publish his articles, so Brenner began publishing his own journal until 1909 long after anyone was reading it.

Slide 08 In 1909, he sold his observatory, became Count Spiridion Gopchevic, moved to San Francisco and wrote two operas. Later he moved to Austria wrote a few novels and disappeared into oblivion.

Slide 09 After all this Brenner still had a few friends. One of them was the noted lunar mapper, Philipp Fauth and it is to him that we have a small crater next to the large walled plain called Merius.