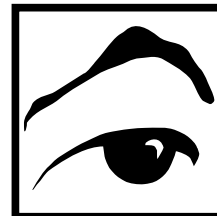


National Capital Area SKEPTICAL EYE



Vol. 11, No. 4
December 1999

• encourages critical and scientific thinking • serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims • provides extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

Ghostbusting 101

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Did you know that the modern spiritualist movement was started in 1848 by two little girls playing a prank on their family? Did you know that modern-day ghost hunters use sophisticated electronic devices to try to track psychic phenomena? Did you know that a gifted actress, using the exact same spiel every time, could fool people into thinking she was seeing the personal details of their lives and contacting spirits in the "beyond"?

All this and more was revealed at the NCAS-sponsored 1-day seminar, "Ghostbusting 101," held Saturday, October 16, 1999 in Leesburg, Virginia. This article is the first in a series discussing the seminar presentations.

NCAS president Paul Jaffe welcomed the attendees and introduced speakers. Paul asked if there were people in the audience who believed in ghosts. If there was anyone who had touched a ghost? If there was anyone who had made love to a ghost? An audience member said yes. When asked to come forward and relate the story, the obvious plant in the audience said "Ghost? I thought you said goat!" And the day was off with a laugh.

Chip Denman's topic was "If the Spirit Is Willing: a Brief History of Spiritualism." Chip said, "We can put a precise date on the beginning of spiritualism: March 31, 1848." Two young sisters, Kate and Margaretta Fox, tricked their mother into thinking they were communicating with the dead by thumping the floor with an apple tied to a string.

Where does our belief in an afterlife begin?, Chip asked. Neanderthals buried people with gifts and flowers, which suggests belief in an afterlife. But a populist belief in spirits

began with the Fox sisters in Hydesville, NY. To give the context of what was happening in the world: Morse's telegraph

was tapping out a message between Baltimore and New York; Andrew Jackson Davis "channeled" *Summerland*, an 800-page treatise on how to deal with the spirit world; gold was discovered in California; and electricity and magnetism were thought to be the keys to understanding spirit phenomena.

There was a fascination with mesmerism. Animal magnetism was given as an explanation for many physical and mental ills. Ben Franklin participated in a committee that concluded that most of the phenomena occurred in the mind of the claimant. A copy of a letter written in 1846 by skeptical 14-year-old Addison Niles to his sister Cornelia Niles, stated:

Our neighbor Herod had his head examined by the lady and by the description she gave of him one would think he was some great man. He was completely convinced of the truth of her Doctrines. The next evening we had experiments in Clarvoyance, that is a lady was introduced who when in



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Dear *Skeptical Eye* Reader,

Since 1987, NCAS has worked to promote critical thinking and the understanding of science. 1999 has been no exception. Here are some of our accomplishments from the past year:

- Making available on the World Wide Web the 1,400+ page *Condon Report on The Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*
- Making available on the World Wide Web *Cold Fusion Research*, a report released by the US Department of Energy
- Presenting the Millenium Madness weekend workshop, covering the many facets of the Y2K phenomenon
- Presenting the Ghostbusting 101 workshop, scientifically examining ghost and psychic claims
- Sponsoring monthly public programs on a wide variety of science, pseudoscience, and related subjects
- Leading and encouraging media feedback and activism through letter, email, and phone campaigns

- Supporting James Randi in his address to the U.S. Congress
- Acting as an information resource for local and national media outlets
- Covering Y2K, UFOs, and many other issues in the *Skeptical Eye*

photo of Paul Jaffe by Helen Hester-Ossa



These achievements were made possible through the efforts of NCAS members and your regular membership fees and tax-deductible donations. In 2000, we plan to continue our ongoing activities and expand with the addition of new projects. These include:

- Continuing our monthly public programs and lectures
- Developing John Stossel's news programs "The Power of Belief" and "Junk Science" into curriculum units for college and high school students
- Making back issues of the *Skeptical Eye* available online
- Continuing to serve the media as an information resource
- Presenting an annual workshop
- Making available videos of past public programs
- Expanding our offering of Web accessible research and educational resources

Please make a tax deductible donation in addition to your membership fee and/or volunteer to help support NCAS in 2000. NCAS has no paid staff, and all donations go directly to support NCAS activities and projects. As a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, all donations to NCAS are tax deductible.

We're particularly looking for someone with marketing experience to help with publicity and other projects. If you feel you can help in any capacity, please contact me at 703-329-0270 or pjaffe@mindless.com.

Yours truly,
Paul Jaffe (pjaffe@mindless.com)
President, National Capital Area Skeptics

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recycled paper

the mesmeric state could read the heading of newspapers, tell the time by watches as well with her eyes bandaged as with them open. Which she performed to the satisfaction of a great part of the audience; however Dr. Wicks insisted afterwards upon putting on another bandage and se [sic] failed entirely on account (as the Professor said) of her energies being exhausted etc. etc.”

Shades of Uri Geller!


The young Fox sisters were the nexus of psychic spiritualism. Their locale was the center of many spiritualist movements. The Fox sisters communicated by a form of knocking. People flocked on Saturdays and Sundays to hear the messages. After a while, the family moved the two younger girls to Rochester to live with their older sister Leah. On November 14, 1849, they rented the Corinthian Hall and charged \$1 for entrance. PT Barnum heard them, and hired them to work in his “museum” at an entrance cost of \$2 per person.

A committee investigated them and said they were not talking to spirits, they were

merely cracking their knees. By 1853 the mother and Katie, the youngest, moved to Washington, D.C. and gave private seances.

In 1888, Maggie gave an interview with a reporter from the NY Herald. “The dead shall not return,” she said, and went on stage to debunk the girls’ original thumpings. They went on tour to expose their own fraud.

But, people wanted to believe. One person wrote a letter indicating they were completely crushed. Others refused to give up their beliefs. The true believers said the sisters faked their confessions. The sisters began giving seances again. They said their older sister Leah pushed them to it.

If the Foxes started this ripple, others were riding the wave. By 1852 more than 2,000 mediums claimed to be in contact with the spirit world. Congress received a petition by 15,000 people asking them to investigate this phenomenon. Abe Lincoln attended a seance and said, “For those who like this sort of thing, it’s just the sort of thing they would like.” 

Next issue: Ghost hunter Joe Holbert’s “Ghosts and Electromagnetic Anomalies,” and Mike Epstein’s “High-tech Communications with the Hereafter.”

Michael Drosnin published *The Bible Codes* [Simon & Schuster] in 1997, in which he claimed messages were hidden in the ancient Hebrew text of the *Bible*. He claimed he saw the message “assassin who will assassinate” cross the text “Yitzhak Rabin,” Prime Minister of Israel at the time. Shortly thereafter, Rabin was indeed killed, showing the truth of his finding in the text. Once he had that knowledge, he looked for many other events, and found them:


- *Oswald, Marksman, and assassin who will assassinate* are all together.
- *1929, stocks, the depression, and economic collapse* are linked.
- *President Kennedy, to die, and Dallas* are together.
- *Japan, atomic holocaust, and 1945* are linked.
- *Great earthquake, LA, California, and 1994* are related.

■ *His name is Timothy, McVeigh, day 19, 9th floor, in the morning, he ambushed, he pounced, terror* are all related.

The book goes on to give many other similar examples.

What is going on here? Does the *Bible* contain such hidden messages? Was the *Bible* really dictated by God to Moses some 3,200 years ago, or was it written by men in at least four separate pieces, as assumed by most biblical scholars, about 2,500 years ago? [See *Skeptical Eye*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 21.] If written by man, how could such prophetic messages be encoded in the text?

Equidistant Letter Sequences (ELS)

Drosnin’s analysis is based upon earlier work by Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg, who published “Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis” in *Statistical Science*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1994). They 

*by Marvin V. Zelkowitz
University of Maryland*

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The Bible Codes

To date there is no good explanation of the results in the 1994 paper. The three authors do not make any claims about authorship of the original Genesis text, only that their results show that the process is not random, and you would assume it should be if men wrote the original text.

constructed a copy of Genesis without punctuation and spaces, just as in the original Hebrew text. Starting with a given letter, and a skip count of N, reading every Nth letter forms a new sequence of letters. By varying the skip count N and the starting letter, almost any word can be found somewhere in the text, and with 80,000 characters in Genesis, that gave a lot of starting positions. So far, nothing unusual.

Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg took 32 names from the *Encyclopedia of Great Men of Israel* and their corresponding birth dates and found those 64 items in Genesis using the ELS process. They then computed the minimum distance in number of characters, using a skip of no more than 50, from the name to the corresponding birth date, and computed the total distance by adding up all 32 individual distances. They then showed that this total distance was smaller than random chance predicted. But when they tried this on other Hebrew texts (e.g., the book of Isaiah, a Hebrew translation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Genesis with the letters randomized) the results were consistent with random chance. Something different was happening with the original text of Genesis that has only been explained in May 1999. We discuss this later. To date there is no good explanation of the results in the 1994 paper. The three authors do not make any claims about authorship of the original Genesis text, only that their results show that the process is not random, and you would assume it should be if men wrote the original text.

One may ask why would anyone even think of performing an ELS on the *Bible*? The idea developed during the 12th century with the development of Gematria as part of the mystical Kabbalah in medieval Judaism. Rabbis believed that God wrote the *Bible*; therefore, the *Bible* contained all possible knowledge. However, the *Bible* was written using the very human Hebrew language, which they believed could not express all possible knowledge. So additional information had to be hidden that was not expressible by direct interpretation of the 27 letters of the Hebrew alphabet (22 distinct letters plus 5 letters only used to terminate words).

With Gematria, each letter in the Hebrew alphabet took on a numeric value. The first letter, aleph, was given the value 1, Bet was given 2, Gimmel 3, Dalet 4, and so on. After 10, the next 9 letters had values 20 to 100 with the last 8 having values of 200 through 900. With this encoding, every Hebrew word had a value, and the game was to try to find relationships using numeric values for different words. Two examples:

(1) Jews have counted 613 distinct commandments in the *Bible*. The Hebrew word for Bible is Torah and has a Gematric count of 611. If you add in the two commandments God spoke directly to the Israelites in the desert during the exodus, you get 613.

(2) The Hebrew name for God has a count of 26. But the first letter in Hebrew, aleph (A), can be viewed as being made up of 2 Yod (Y) having a count of 10 each and a slanted Vav (V) having a count of 6, with a sum of 26. Thus God is 1.

Besides this counting rule, sequences of initial letters of words were also studied. It only needed the invention of the computer some 800 years later to extend this concept to the ELS.

Drosnin's Method

Michael Drosnin took the method, but not the analysis, used in the 1994 paper. For example, consider the sequence: DEFSAILKRMRTUVAREBAWAZEITOMP BAGCRQESDBIUWASSASSINIYOFMLEGWUP. If you consider a skip distance of 10, you can write the text into a block that is 10 wide:

DEFSAILKRM
RTUVAREBAW
AZEITOMPBA
GCRQESDBIU
WASSASSINI
YOFMLEGWUP

Note how RABIN and ASSASSIN now intersect? Using the Hebrew text of the entire *Bible*, this is the process that Drosnin used to find his prophetic messages. However, unlike the 1994 study, he didn't try to find minimal ELS distance, only the occurrence of the text somewhere in the *Bible*. ➡

ANALYSIS OF DROSNIN'S METHOD

Droshin's method and conclusions can be criticized from at least six points of view:

■ **Bad formal logic**—Finding an interesting ELS does not mean it must occur. (That is, A implies B does not mean B implies A.) For example, "Churchill" is linked to "assassinated," but he wasn't. So just because events in the past were found in the text, it doesn't mean future events must occur as predicted.

■ **GIGO (Garbage In-Garbage Out)**—Both the 1994 paper and Droshin's book assume they were using the original text of Genesis. But we don't know what the original text was! Hebrew spelling was not fixed until about 2,000 years ago. Hebrew has no vowels, so two silent vowel letters (A, J) and the Vav (V) were included in some words in nonstandard ways. *The Talmud*, written about 1,800 years ago, was a compilation of Jewish laws. It quotes from the *Bible* and then discusses what that passage means. But there are over 300 differences from the quoted text to what is currently in the modern Torah used as the source text for the recent studies. Such inconsistencies make the detailed analysis suspect.

■ **Bad translation**—Much is made of the connection between "Rabin" and "assassinated." But this is simply a mistranslation. In Deuteronomy, Moses describes three sanctuary cities where murderers who accidentally kill someone can go for refuge, safe from harassment from the injured family. So the passage really means "murderers who accidentally kill someone," not "assassin who will assassinate," a very different meaning.

Other mistranslations in the Droshin book are:
"After the death of Prime Minister" for;
"after the death of Abraham"
"July to Amman" for
"You will be my people. I am your God."
"Code will save" for
"the men numbered by Moses"

■ **Poor Statistical Analysis**—What words should be related? For example, Eichmann was found near Auschwitz. Was that significant? What about Hitler? What about Holocaust or its Hebrew equivalent Hashoah? Almost any German name of World War II vintage would be credited with a suc-

cess. In some cases Hebrew dates were used (e.g., 5705 was 1945, but 19 was used for Oklahoma City bombing on April 19.)

■ **Didn't Follow Protocol of 1994 Study**—The 1994 paper analyzed minimal skip distances in the ELS, but Droshin used any skip that was convenient. No scientific basis was found for that assumption.

■ **Common coincidences**—Many of the occurrences found by Droshin are just common coincidences. He challenged anyone to find assassinated premiers in *Moby Dick*. McKay found 13, including Samoza surrounded by gun (backwards), dies, and hewasshot; igandhi (Indira Gandhi) intersects thebloodydeed; among others.

Conclusions

The May 1999 edition of *Statistical Science* contains an article by Australian mathematician Brendan McKay and Israeli mathematicians Dror Bar-Natan, Maya Bar-Hillel, and Gil Kalai that seems to finally answer the enigma of the 1994 Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg paper. Although the original paper claims that birth dates and names of the 32 great men of Israel are statistically linked, there was enough freedom to use several definitions of what is a date. (That is, the First of December is also December 1, December first, 335th day of 1999, as well as other possibilities.) Each assumption of a date gives a different ELS. The assumptions made in the 1994 paper provide the optimal set of choices. Any other set gives results that are not nearly as good. So the question arises, why did the three 1994 authors choose exactly that set of definitions? Was it by chance or did they choose the one which *a priori* gave the highest significance? If by chance, then the results of the 1994 paper are intriguing; if not by chance, then there is nothing to the ELS.


Bible code "research" is still going on. For example, in the book of Numbers, you can find the number 2000 and the word for "destruction," an obvious reference to the Y2K bug. Why the Hebrew Bible should contain the year 2000 rather than the Jewish year 5760 has not been explained, but no matter what statistical research shows, there will always be believers in the bible code. ➡

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Postscript

Each year the Annals of Improbable Research awards the Ig Nobel prizes to those researchers whose research “should not or could not be reproduced.” The 1997 Ig Nobel prize for literature was awarded to Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, Yoav Rosenberg, and Michael Drosnin for their work described in this paper.

For Further Reading

Bible Code: Cracked and Crumbling, and *The Secret Code Hoax* by Ronald S. Hendel
Snake Oil for Sale, by Shlomo Sternberg,
Bible Review vol. 13, No. 4 (August, 1997)
22-25.
“Hidden Messages and the Bible Code” by
David E. Thomas, *Skeptical Inquirer*, vol.
21, no. 6, (November, 1997) 30-36. 

Natural, Shmatural, These People Scare Me!

by Sharlene Deskins

“Want to see the ‘natural’ side of the spectrum of modern pseudoscience firsthand?” said the message. “Then don’t miss the ‘Natural Living Expo’ in Bethesda on September 26. Features of the expo include acupuncture, chiropractic, psychic readings, aura photography, channeling, crystals, astrology, and dozens of other things that’ll likely get you hot under the collar.”

Paul Jaffe asked me to write about my impressions of the Natural Living Expo held in Bethesda, Maryland, on September 26, 1999. So here it is. Enjoy!

I Am Afraid

My first thought was fear. I knew just from a quick scan of the few booths visible from the lobby that the Natural Living Expo contained many things of a dubious nature. I was afraid because just reading the signs of the exhibitors indicated that no one had any interest in reality. There were large third eyes, ears with candles, and offers for advanced degrees in integrative health science. Having an intelligent conversation or learning about a new scientific theory looked like an impossibility. I was at this event because NCAS-share asked if anyone was interested in going to the Natural Living Expo. I answered because I wanted to learn some more about alternative beliefs rather than just dismissing them based on a vague impression. Only two of us were actually attending this—there were no other takers. Paul Jaffe was much braver than I and wanted to get started going to booths right away. It was hard to decide where to begin,

since everything looked equally outrageous. All manner of nonsense—except for anything related to UFOs—was present.

I was an observer as Paul tried to have a rational discussion with a “professional” astrologer. Paul gamely tried to pin down the astrologer. She was a true believer and was so arrogant as to claim she had predicted the recent earthquake in Turkey. She failed to explain why, if she really had such great prognostic skills, she didn’t notify people of this catastrophic event and save some lives. If I were her, I wouldn’t proudly boast how I had advance knowledge of a tragedy and then did nothing to prevent it. She didn’t provide us with any of her other predictions, although Paul said he would contact her to find out what she saw in store for the year 2000.

Words I Have Never Heard Before

We went to the booths to try to understand their claims and then to see if there was any validity to them. There were many times I was introduced to words and concepts I had never heard before—and if life is merciful, that I will never hear again. Those words included “shamanic,” “reiki,” “allopathy,” “chakras.” I ➡

Sharlene Deskins is employed by the United States Department of Agriculture. She has a degree in history from the University of Michigan and has lived in the metro D.C. area since 1989.

can't say that I understand this stuff, but I learned some of the concepts that true believers use to describe their claims. Apparently, chakras is a central concept wherein the energy sources of the body are located in seven power centers called chakras. Prior to the expo I never understood the concept behind healing touch. I learned at the expo that healing touch is based on the belief that waving hands over chakras helps to heal by balancing the chakras. Of course no proof was offered of the existence of chakras or the effectiveness of healing touch. These concepts, as well as many others, were just "accepted" because of the underlying belief that the scientific community doesn't know everything. Nothing I saw there made me believe in healing touch therapy.

Healing Touch

The healing touch seminar was interesting. The woman conducting it was very sympathetic. Her presentation consisted of slides showing a human body with chakras glowing around it. It was interesting art. However, the speaker provided no evidence of how it was determined where the chakras were located. Paul and I had a discussion afterward regarding the healing touch woman. I noted that, if I had cancer and had to go to the hospital, I would want someone like her to accompany me even if I had to pay her, because she was so sympathetic and kind. Of course, I would want a sympathetic person who was not a healing touch practitioner. We noted that in our society there isn't someone to fulfill that role when you're sick. The only way you get someone sympathetic to accompany you to the hospital is if you believe in healing touch or some other alternative practices. I have since learned from a friend of mine in the medical field that there are support groups and social workers who will accompany you to the hospital.

Sad Lonely People

We had a chance to talk to some of the people there and, of course, listen to them talk during seminars. The people we talked to seemed sincere and searching for answers to the angst that is standard in any life. They seemed to think that by inviting irrationality into their lives, there would follow happiness

and contentment. The attendees did not seem interested in the effectiveness of the particular school of nonsense they followed. The consensus seemed to be that the more obscure or unknown the practice, the more likely that it worked. Thus, there were all sorts of vague, unverifiable claims based on "Inka" practices or the worship of ancient Egyptian goddesses. The shamanic healing I found particularly annoying. I had recently read a book about Lewis and Clark among the Plains Indians. There was a limited discussion regarding the religious beliefs of some of the Indians that the explorers came across. I was interested in material that would provide a deeper discussion of the religious beliefs of the Plains Indians. Despite the references to Indian practices, there was nothing that I observed with a scholarly discussion of Indian religious beliefs. Instead it appeared to me to be a hodge-podge of concepts taken from the movie versions of Indian religions. It was very disappointing that no one there seemed to know or care about the true religious beliefs of the Plains Indians despite all the references to them. It would be too much work to actually try to understand the true beliefs of the Plains Indians.

Money Is the Key

Another thing I noticed was the prices connected with these "healing practices." It seemed that being spiritually healthy cannot be accomplished when you are on a budget. There were various classes offered that taught you how to use astrology to "gain insight into your personality." An organization called the Capital University of Integrative Medicine offered a master's degree in integrative medicine for a substantial sum of money. There were opportunities to schedule appointments with healers who could help to cure problems occurring from past-life trauma. One booth promoted an iris analysis that would help to improve the quality of your life by understanding your personality characteristics as shown by the eye. The biofeedback treatments were \$110 a session and a minimum of ten was recommended. And of course there were fortune tellers around and crystals for sale—I presume the purpose of the crystals was to ward off the Blair Witch. ➡

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There was so much silliness at the expo that, by the end of the day, I had a bad headache.

Clearly, the people seeking these treatments must have sufficient income to afford these cures. I wonder how the families of the people who spend this kind of money feel about it. I also wonder what would happen if people who believe in alternative healing practices spent their money on their spouse and children rather than on some bizarre healing method. I suspect that spending money on your family would help improve your relationship with them. After all, if I had a husband and he spent \$110 a week on taking me out for 10 weeks, I would be in a very good mood most of the time and I certainly wouldn't need biofeedback treatments or an astrologer. It is too bad many just squander the money on nothing that could help anyone's life.

Not Interested in Truth


I had a discussion with Paul during the expo about whether it was worth it to try to set up a booth to dispense some factual information about the various claims being made. The sad reality is that I don't believe the people at the expo were interested in the truth. They are self-deluded and believe that if something is not understood, unknown, or obscure it must have some efficacy. I only spoke to one person who actually seemed interested in whether something actually was effective. Everyone else seemed to invite the irrationality into their life and accept it without further thought. Moreover, my impression was that the people interested in the treatments offered were trying to find a way to get something for almost nothing. If you want a healthy marriage just chant a phrase 40 times—don't spent time with your spouse and show an interest in his or her life—that would not be as easy as chanting. If you want a promotion—don't work hard day and night—just use reiki to heal you mentally and spiritually. The overall principle behind many of the practices was a short-cut to prosperity. The rest of us just have to try to get prosperity by working hard and being nice to our family and friends. The expo attendees were not concerned with facts and truth but only in how what they learned would benefit them.

Why Care?

I questioned why I should care if people want to believe in chakras and biofeedback.

Most of the practices seemed ineffective but not necessarily harmful. I could not see any physical harm to people who believed in healing touch or chanting magic words. However, the harm is subtle. The people who attend make decisions. These could very well be people who determine which grants are funded or who sits on a jury and decides the amount of damages to award a plaintiff. When people cannot rationally judge the world around them, it is not surprising that they make poor decisions that ultimately harm all of us. I was recently reminded of the problem of living with irrationality when an acquaintance made an anti-Semitic remark to me. The statement was ridiculous, but then I remembered the claims at the expo. The same mind that accepts chakras without requiring evidence can, and I suspect does, just as easily believe in any popular conspiracy claim. It is not surprising to me that if people can accept without any evidence that astrology is effective, they can believe that there is a worldwide conspiracy of Jewish bankers to control the world economy. Does anyone question how much money has been spent in trying to dispel various conspiracy claims? Just think of Whitewater. I think believing in silly things is the first step to training people to accept without question other nonsensical claims about Jews, Muslims, Protestants, Hindus, and everyone else. Genocidal acts in the 20th century are more than enough proof to me that uncritical thinking is harmful to everyone.

Would I Go Again?

I would not attend another expo on alternative beliefs. It was amusing to see the various claims and, I must admit, I did learn about human behavior. However, I think that ultimately my time would be better spent resting, reading, or running rather than listening to hours of nonsense. There was so much silliness at the expo that, by the end of the day, I had a bad headache. I don't think I can stomach such silliness again, so it will be a long time (if ever) before I attend another such expo. If you should decide to attend one, remember that, unlike me, you now have some idea of what is in store for you. 



A Weekend at the Washington MUFON Symposium

by Scott Snell

It had been a harrowing week for me at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. The Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory (CGRO), orbiting a few hundred miles above the earth, was not pointing its high-gain antenna at its communication relay satellites correctly. As a result, a lot of its science data could not be collected and sent to the ground. (CGRO no longer has onboard data storage capability.) I was part of a three-person team assembled to sift through data collected from the onboard computer, looking for clues to the problem. Eventually, we were able to figure out how to recover, and CGRO returned to normal science operations. By 5 o'clock Friday afternoon (literally), I'd solved the mystery of how the trouble had started. (Yes, eventually this story will tie in with the subject of this article, albeit in Part 2.)

Tired and famished, I stopped off at home to change clothes and rushed back out to make the "dinner/buffet" at the 30th-Anniversary Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) Symposium, held at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, from July 2 through 4. I arrived to find some 300 or so guests dining in the meeting room. "New age" music played in the background, balloons shaped like ET heads floated about, and one set of multi-colored balloons had a humorous tag reading "PROJECT MOGUL DISPLAY" attached to it. (The tag referred to the secret balloon-borne program to detect Soviet nuclear-fission bomb tests through high-altitude acoustics means. One of the project's balloons is considered by skeptics to be the likely explanation for the "crashed-saucer wreckage" found near Roswell in 1947.) The dinner itself, however, was marred by a food shortage. For me, it was the most expensive salad and

hors d'oeuvres I'd ever had. Many attendees were unhappy with the situation.

The conference began on Saturday morning with a presentation by Richard H. Hall, a long-time veteran of UFO investigations. Hall was the Assistant Director of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) in the 1950s (the largest UFO group at the time) and later was chairman of the Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR). His topic was "Fifty Years of UFO Politics and Discomfort Zones," and he began with some general editorial comments and insights.

Hall attributed the media's and scientific community's apathy towards UFOs to poor presentation of the evidence by UFOlogists. But he also placed much of the blame on many scientists, deriding the "vanity, ignorance of data, and fear of ridicule" they allegedly display when confronted by UFO reports.

Referring to a reporter's question at a press conference the previous day that asked why UFOlogists don't assemble a list of their best cases and present them to the scientific community, Hall said that there are plenty of "hard-core" cases and no list need be made. As an example, he mentioned a 1952 case in which a Pan Am pilot, William Nash, saw a formation of UFOs flying below his plane.

Hall believes that UFOlogy is at the same stage that other seemingly bizarre phenomena were before acceptance by science. For instance, he noted, there was a time when mainstream science did not accept that meteorites could be stones fallen from the sky. In general, Hall's talk was not anti-science, but did take some shots at "debunkers." The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) in particular bore

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the brunt of his criticism; he described them as “neither scientific nor do they investigate.”

A brief aside revealed that Hall considers SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence, mostly conducted as part of radio-telescopic sky surveys) based on a “totally irrational belief” and that “they [SETI investigators] should look a lot closer to home.”

Hall then gave a chronological overview of UFO history from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, from his perspective within the NICAP organization. A “drought” in UFO reports, which extended from 1959 to 1963, freed NICAP to direct its energies toward pulling together the best UFO evidence to present directly to the media and the U.S. Congress. Their objective was to provide a counterpoint to the “debunking and negative” U.S. Air Force (USAF) Project Blue Book investigation. The resulting book, entitled “The UFO Evidence,” was edited by Hall and released in 1964.

He segued into a description of a UFO case that occurred soon after the book was published. This was the “Socorro case” of 1964, in which a police officer claimed to see a strange object on a New Mexico mesa with humanoid figures nearby. He saw them retreat inside the craft and lift off, leaving behind burning vegetation and indentations in the ground made by the vessel’s landing pads. Hall described the case as a baffling one, proudly saying, “There’s one for you, Mr. Skeptic,” to Philip Klass, seated in the audience. (Hall failed to inform his audience that Klass investigated the case and wrote about it

in his books *UFOs Identified* and *UFOs Explained*.)

Hall recounted a couple of UFO incidents that he believes helped spark Congressional interest in a scientific investigation of UFOs, independent of Project Blue Book. The resulting study



was conducted by the University of Colorado, with Dr. Edward Condon as its director. Hall and the director of NICAP, Major Donald Keyhoe, briefed its investigators in the early stages of the project. Apparently a “scientific underground” or “invisible college” of university scientists came out of the woodwork until the Condon report was released. Hall recommended a recent article by Dr. Michael Swords, a professor of science studies at Western Michigan University, which “...analyzes the files of the Colorado Project and Dr. Condon’s personal files and comes out with a scathing review of how unscientific the Colorado Project was.” (See http://www.cufos.org/jufosnew.html#JUFOS_NS_VOL6). Hall added, “I’m very amused by the fact that the local skeptics chapter [NCAS] puts up the Condon report on their web site as if this is a great proof of their position. I would wish everybody would look at that report and study it very carefully. It would help our cause a great deal, because it was a very unscientific study. Why? Well, that’s very complicated. Deep prejudices, resistances...”

Hall hopes that a sequel to “The UFO Evidence” that he has assembled (covering 1964 to the present) will be published and will reopen UFO research. It includes the abduction phenomenon. But most interesting to him are structured lights and colors, motions and flight patterns, and sounds of UFOs. He believes there are potential clues to the “physics of UFOs” in the patterns that he has discerned from his data.

He lamented the current non-acceptance of UFOlogy as a science. “...I’m very disappointed and disillusioned that our major institutions have failed us so badly. ...[I]t’s just too much to swallow. It’s very revolutionary...you’re asking people to accept that there’s an almost miraculous technology flying around here, it borders on the super- ➡

natural... [But] when you analyze it closely, there are clues that the physics is not that different, it's most likely [just] a projection of ours, [studying it] could advance our science a great deal.

"It's a difficult pill to swallow, for science would have to...admit that it was wrong for a long period of time. The implication is that our science is not the pinnacle of achievement in the universe. Politically it [UFOlogy] is a hot potato...and it needs the support of the scientific community. The media cannot get beyond seeing it as a sociological phenomenon... It's a self-reinforcing pattern of circular reasoning that blinds them [the political, scientific, and media establishment] to what is going on. They think we are self-deluded. My conclusion is that *they* are self-deluded by their own biases..."

Hall warned the attendees that UFOlogists must police their own ranks and stick to scientific principles. He stated that it is not a religion, but "believers" are contaminating the field.

Jenny Randles, a British UFOlogist, followed with her talk entitled, "A Walk on the Wild Side." It was an overview of incredible UFO-related anecdotes, energy fields, doorways to other realities, telepathic contacts with ETs, Men In Black (MIB) cases, and so forth. She believes that MIBs are from the British Ministry of Defence (at least the ones reported in the United Kingdom) and merely "play-act" the role, behaving eccentrically and requesting that witnesses say nothing about their UFO experience. Their goal, she stated, was to leave the witness in a quandary. If the witness complies with the MIB demand for silence, the case gets suppressed. "If they do go public, then their credibility is tarnished, just as the MIB warns, simply because they describe the apparently absurd nature of the MIB visit." (But what if the witness only tells about the UFO incident and omits the "absurd" MIB tale?)

Kelly Cahill started the afternoon session with a recounting of her 1993 abduction, along with a few other witnesses who were driving in separate cars, by a huge UFO along the side of a road near Melbourne, Australia.

She claims that physical evidence of the incident was present on the bodies of the abducted, and in soil and plant



samples taken from the site of the abduction. She was deeply disappointed at the lack of interest by mainstream science in her case, despite the benefit of multiple witnesses and physical traces. (Further details of her story can be seen at <http://www.powerup.com.au/%7Egwheeler/kellyc1.txt>.)

Robert Swiatek, an examiner at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, then gave a talk on the Washington National Airport radar UFOs of 1952. The presentation was essentially a rehash of familiar and purportedly mysterious aspects of the case.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA, now the FAA) investigated the case and issued its report in 1953. (See http://www.cufon.org/cufon/Wash_Nat/Wash_faa.htm and also <http://www.ncas.org/condon/s3chap05.htm#c2a>) The report's authors concluded that the UFO radar contacts were the result of radar beams reflecting off the boundary formed by a layer of warm air above a layer of cooler air (i.e., a temperature inversion), contacting ground objects, and returning along the transmission path to the detector.

Swiatek dismissed the CAA investigation with a single sentence, saying that it does not explain how "ground clutter" could move in excess of 7,000 miles per hour and correlate with visual sightings. However, Swiatek did not mention this passage from the CAA report: "It is believed that previous reports of sudden accelerations of targets to supersonic velocities were due to a controller's transfer of identity from a faded target to another target ➡"

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Oddly, it was only then that Maccabee requested the original negatives. When he examined them, he discovered that the two photos were not only non-consecutive, they weren't even on the same roll of film!

which was just appearing on a different section of the scope." And this sentence from the Condon Report was also neglected: "The radar tracks reported, at various times, from Washington National Airport, Andrews AFB, and Bolling AFB are generally not correlated with each other, with airborne radar/visual observations, or with ground visual reports, except in a very general way, e.g., a star sighted on the azimuth supplied by the radar track."

Betty Ann Luca, described as a "UFO experimenter," was the next speaker. Luca, formerly named Andreasson, was the subject of a 1979 book entitled *The Andreasson Affair*, which detailed her encounters with aliens. Her presentation at the symposium was a rambling tale of "Elders," "Watchers," implants, alien-human hybrids, estrogen-poisoning, and other fantastic claims and philosophies advanced without benefit of evidence.

Dr. Bruce Maccabee, a research physicist at the Naval Surface Weapons Center in Silver Spring, followed with his scheduled talk on a crashed-saucer incident from 1950 [see following story].

He also gave two unscheduled talks at the symposium. The first was entitled "Missing Time Discovered Through Photo Analysis." A woman in Phoenix (unnamed, she and her husband both were identified only as "doctors") contacted Maccabee and gave him two photos she had taken from a balcony outside her bedroom window. The story behind the photos seemed peculiar. She took them on February 6, 1995, but put them away until December of 1997, "...after the Discovery Channel had aired [a program of UFO home videos] and I was asked to release one of my photos..." In a rather confusing explanation, the woman claimed that she had originally thought she'd only gotten one of the two 1995 photos to show anything, but found that she had a good second photo during the 1997 search of her UFO photo collection. She sought out Maccabee in April, 1998, after her survey of UFOlogy suggested that he was a good candidate to analyze photos and videos she had taken of mysterious nighttime lights in the sky on a number of occasions. She did not want to "go public" with

them until they had been analyzed. While talking with Maccabee, she said, "...by the way, I have some photos of my first sighting, back in February, 1995..." and that is how the photos came to Maccabee's attention.

Her story was that her husband called her to the bedroom window to see lights he had spotted outside. She saw three lights, arranged in a triangular formation. She went to get her camera and made two exposures as one of the lights faded in place. Eventually all three vanished. She and her husband agreed that the sighting lasted no more than three minutes.

The prints showed a nighttime view of the city's skyline, with a couple of "blobs" of light that appeared to be below the skyline, and to have moved between the first and second exposure.

Maccabee's analysis included an examination of how much the brightness of the objects had intrinsically changed between the first and second photo (requiring correction for imperfections in the photo developing process, among other things). To do this, he used the city skyline for calibration, assuming that it would remain essentially constant in brightness at the time of each exposure.

Maccabee's comparison of the two prints revealed an intriguing detail. The skyline was markedly different! Maccabee believed the change in lighting indicated a radically different time of night when the two pictures were taken, despite the photographer's claim to have taken them in quick succession at about 8 PM. As a result of this finding, Maccabee asked her to take photos of the skyline from her balcony at half-hour intervals over the course of an evening. The photos showed that the skyline remains basically unchanged until about 11 PM, presumably when many homeowners and shops turn off their lights.

Oddly, it was only then that Maccabee requested the original negatives. When he examined them, he discovered that the two photos were not only non-consecutive, they weren't even on the same roll of film! His painstaking analysis of the photos' skyline and the collection of more skyline data had allowed him to get the "right" answer, that there were big problems with the woman's story, but he had done it "the hard way." The first

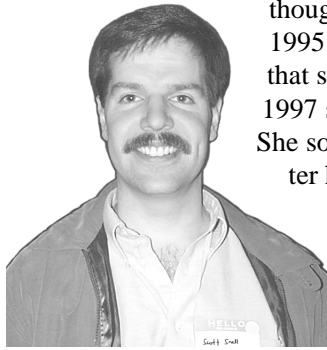


photo of Scott Snell by H. Hester-Ossa

photo was the fifth of 24 exposures, and the second photo was the eighth frame of the next roll.

Amazingly, the inconsistencies between the witness's story and her photographs did not suggest a hoax to Maccabee. Instead, he concluded that the woman took the first picture at 8 PM, was abducted along with her husband by the occupants of the UFOs, was returned sometime after 11 PM, and took the second photo, believing it to have occurred immediately after the first exposure. For some reason, she has no recollection of taking the interim photos or changing the film in the camera. Many of the interim photos were blank or missing from the collection of negatives, but one showed nothing but the UFOs, without the skyline. They were in the exact same position in the frame as the next photo, which was the "second" exposure presented to Maccabee. This might imply double-exposure experimentation or preparation to some investigators, but Maccabee did not raise this possibility.

His presentation and his stunning conclusion ended there. I approached Maccabee to make sure I had understood him. I complimented Maccabee on his finding the subtle but powerful evidence of the skyline and said, "...don't you think the evidence suggests that a hoax has occurred?" Maccabee

replied, "No. The witness is a very credible, respected member of her community. She would not have lied about it." I said, "So, in a way, your talk hinges on your 'credibility detector,' don't you think? What about other cases in which respected members of the community turn out to have been deceptive about something?" I didn't even bother mentioning President Clinton, but I did refer to a former Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) who apparently wore combat valor medals that he was not authorized to wear. (*Newsweek* magazine was about to write a story about it and the CNO committed suicide subsequently.) Maccabee tried to make distinctions between that case and this UFO story, but his response trailed off and he explained instead how he asks his witnesses to perform experiments that could disprove their own claims (as he did in this case, asking the woman to take photos of the skyline over the course of an evening). He believes that this approach will expose a hoaxer, presumably because they will resist such requests, fearing that their deception will be revealed. Apparently he reasons that anyone who cooperates is not a hoaxer!

More to come in Part 2...



other related MUFON news

Investigation Shows No Link Between Saucer Crash Tale and 1950 UFO Report

by Scott Snell

Second in notoriety only to the infamous Roswell saucer crash, the tale of a crashed saucer near the Texas-Mexico border has fascinated UFOlogists for more than 20 years. (Its appearances in UFO lore include a brief reference in the hoaxed "MJ-12" TOP-SECRET documents, released in 1987, which seem to show that the federal government re-

covered parts of a wrecked alien spacecraft and its occupants near Roswell in 1947.)

Dr. Bruce Maccabee, a research physicist at the Naval Surface Weapons Center in Silver Spring, presented a MUFON Symposium paper about the incident entitled "Immediate Saucer Alert! The Mystery of December 6, 1950." Essentially, Maccabee noted a time

He stressed that the military would not send interceptors after bogus radar contacts.

correlation between three events: 1) a December 6 "Air Alert" of New England (and probably other) USAF installations, resulting from multiple radar UFOs detected near Maine, on an incoming course; 2) an urgent memo, dated December 8, from the FBI's Richmond office to Director J. Edgar Hoover, indicating that U.S. Army Intelligence was on "immediate high alert for any data whatsoever concerning flying saucers" and that the data should be communicated to Air Force Intelligence; and 3) the Texas crashed-saucer story reported by a retired USAF colonel in 1977, which some UFOlogists date to early December, 1950.

The first two events are well-documented. President Truman and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, described the air alert incident in their respective memoirs. The alert lasted for about an hour, and there was concern that the UFOs might represent a Soviet air attack on the U.S. Maccabee made a point of noting that Acheson stated, in a recollection published in the 1986 book *The Wise Men*, that the objects were detected near Alaska. Acheson's own memoirs, dating from the late 1960s, do not say that the mysterious activity was in the Alaskan area. Nevertheless, some inconsistencies in Acheson's story (the heading of the UFOs and their estimated arrival time in the Washington, DC area) suggest that he misunderstood what he was told or received garbled information. Given his background as an attorney and role as a diplomat, rather than being a military man, this would not be surprising. (Maccabee, however, did not seem to consider this possibility. He found a report in the *New York Times* that said there was a military alert in Alaska on the night of December 6. He wondered if there might a connection to Acheson's version of the UFO story. But he did not say whether he had confirmed that the Alaskan alert was unique. Conceivably it might have been one of a number

of alerts during that anxious time in American history.)

The memoirs, and a memo written to the Secretary of Defense by a USAF officer on the day of the incident,



basically jibe on the details. Mysterious radar contacts were received, interceptors were dispatched to the area, and the radar contacts "faded away." The contacts were attributed to atmospheric effects (or geese, in Acheson's version). A "friendly flight" was found in the vicinity, but whether it played an unwitting role in the phenomenon was never established.

Maccabee gave speed estimates for the UFOs, inferred from position and range guesses for whichever radar installations (their identities and capabilities being unknown) detected them. On this point, he seemed to be treading on thin ground, propagating uncertainties somewhat recklessly. His values ranged from 300 to 1,200 miles per hour. Whether he was attempting to characterize anything other than radar contacts of atmospheric phenomena, however, seemed dubious.

He stressed that the military would not send interceptors after bogus radar contacts. And yet, less than 2 years later, they did just that in the famous Washington, DC, radar UFO incidents. False radar contacts were not fully recognized as such in the early years of radar technology. Moreover, the nation was on the edge of war hysteria because Communist China had entered the Korean War only 11 days before. Even if the contacts might be false, it was understandable that the USAF would take no chances, given the world situation at the time. Maccabee did not dismiss the importance of the context of the incident, but downplayed it, seemingly because of the allure of the third (alleged) event: the wreck of a flying saucer.

In that incident, retired USAF Colonel Robert Willingham claimed that he was testing "what turned out to be" the F-94 interceptor at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas when "they" (presumably the flight controllers) saw a UFO on their radar scope. He and his unnamed radar operator, seated behind him, made visual contact with the object, which made amazing maneuvers. He stated that the North American Aerospace Defense Command's (NORAD) Distant Early Warning (DEW) radars tracked the object to the Mexico border, where it apparently crashed. ➡

crashed saucer continued from previous page

(Maccabee noted that the DEW line was in Alaska and Canada, its radars would not sweep Texas airspace, and it did not become operational until 1953, but attributed this problem in the colonel's story to a faulty memory.) The colonel and his radar operator took a light plane down to the site later and encountered armed guards surrounding the area. He found a piece of metal with unusual properties and took it with him. He delivered the metal to the U.S. Marine Corps' testing lab in Hagerstown, Maryland, but when he returned later for the test results, he was told the person he had given it to did not work there. Furthermore, he was told not to discuss the incident and signed a secrecy oath.

Supplementing this anecdote are some alleged formerly TOP SECRET documents that state that Carswell AFB in Fort Worth, Texas, recovered a "foreign object" on December 6 or 7. Unfortunately, UFOlogist Todd Zechel, who claims to have had these documents since the mid-1970s, did not share them with Maccabee.

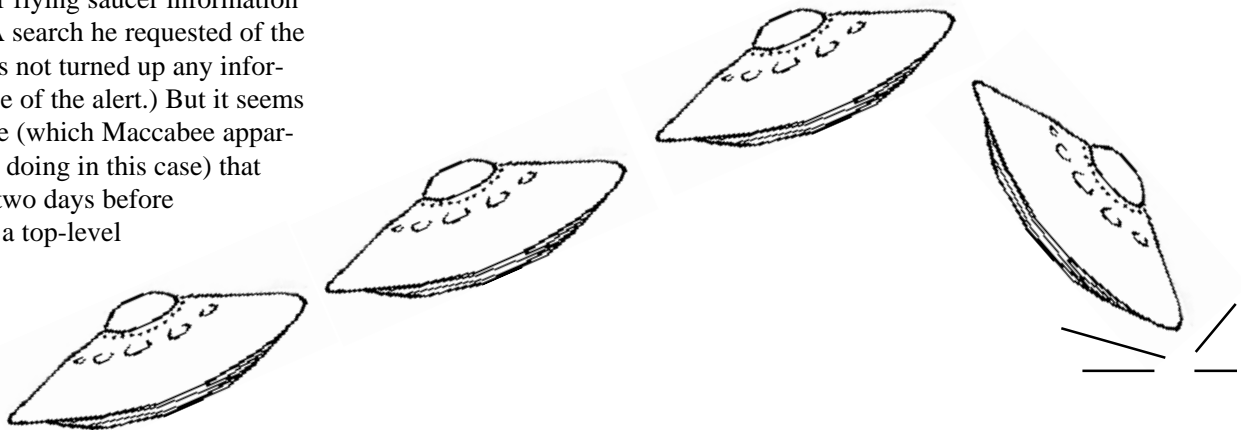
Maccabee added, "For what it's worth, the controversial 'Eisenhower Briefing Document' [one of the "MJ-12" documents]...also claims a crash near the Texas-Mexico border on December 6." (The document, described by the FBI as "bogus," can be seen on page 7 of <http://foia.fbi.gov/majestic/majestic.pdf>)

On the other hand, the urgent FBI memo that says that Army Intelligence was on high alert for data regarding flying saucers on December 8 is genuine and can be viewed at <http://foia.fbi.gov/ufo/ufo10.pdf> (page 54).

Maccabee hopes that there may be archived USAF documents that clarify the reason for the alert for flying saucer information on December 8. (A search he requested of the Army's records has not turned up any information on the cause of the alert.) But it seems plausible to assume (which Maccabee apparently refrains from doing in this case) that the radar contacts two days before could have caused a top-level

push to heighten knowledge of and readiness for similar phenomena when the nation was at war. This would not necessarily suggest some exotic explanation for the radar contacts or the government's interest in flying saucers.

That part comes only from the crashed-saucer story. The date of the alleged incident seemed strangely detached from the witness's own account, as Maccabee related it. The published version of Maccabee's talk in the symposium proceedings shows that the date of December, 1950, actually comes from research performed by Zechel (and independently by UFOlogist Kevin Randle). However, one detail of Willingham's story demolishes the assertion of a December, 1950, date. He stated that he flew out of Dyess Air Force Base. In the course of routine background fact-checking for this article, I discovered that *groundbreaking* of the base did not occur until 1953 (see <http://www.dyess.af.mil/public/history/dhistory.htm>). (Tye Army Air Field previously occupied the site, but was closed at the end of World War II.) This strongly suggests that Willingham never claimed a 1950 date, but that it was solely "grafted" by UFOlogists who sought to find an interesting cause for the FBI memo of December 8. It also provides further reason to believe that the "Eisenhower Briefing Document" was falsified by whoever its perpetrators were to correlate with the (now revealed to be untenable) December, 1950, date for the Willingham report. ☒



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