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Guide to the J. Allen Hynek (1910-1986) Papers

Collection Title: J. Allen Hynek (1910-1986) Papers**Dates:** 1925-1988**Identification:** 11/3/5/6**Creator:** Hynek, J. Allen (Joseph Allen), 1910-1986**Extent:** 14 Boxes**Language of Materials:** English**Abstract:** Astronomer J. Allen Hynek led Northwestern's Astronomy Department into the Space Age and became the nation's foremost expert on unidentified flying objects (UFOs). He oversaw the significant expansion of Northwestern's Astronomy Department and made important contributions to his field, most notably by successfully incorporating television technology into telescopes for the first time. However, he was best known for his work on UFOs. His work inspired the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." The Hynek Papers provide a record of Hynek's professional life but offer scant insight into his personal affairs. The papers include biographical materials, clippings, reports relating to Hynek's work on Project Stargazer, and some materials pertaining to Hynek's UFO work and his work at Northwestern.**Acquisition Information:** The J. Allen Hynek Papers comprise several accessions. Most of the clippings and correspondence were transferred to the University Archives by the Office of University Relations as Accession Number 74-44. Biographical information and teaching notes were transferred from the University Archives' Biographical and General Files as Accession Numbers 79-140 and 82-138. Materials relating to the Stargazer Project were transferred to the University Archives by the Department of Physics and Astronomy as Accession Number 88-269 on November 9, 1988. Additional newspaper clippings, notes, reprints, and materials relating to the Corralitos observatory were donated to the University Archives by Mimi Hynek as Accession Number 92-44 on May 4, 1992.**Processing Information:** Processor: Dan Schwerin, July 8, 2002.**Separated Materials:** One-half cubic foot of duplicate and extraneous material was discarded. The following four of Hynek's books were added to the University Archives' Faculty Authors Collection: Astrophysics. (Hynek, ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1951. Challenge of the Universe. (with Norman D. Anderson). Washington, D.C.: National Science Teachers Association, 1962. Astronomy One. (with Necia H. Apfel). Menlow Park, Calif.: W. A. Benjamin, 1972. The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972.**Conditions Governing Access:** Conditions governing access: None.**Repository:** Northwestern University Archives
Deering Library, Room 110
1970 Campus Dr.
Evanston, IL, 60208-2300
URL: <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/archives>
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Phone: 847-491-3354**Biographical/Historical Information**

Astronomer J. Allen Hynek led Northwestern's Astronomy Department into the Space Age and became the nation's foremost expert on unidentified flying objects (UFOs). He oversaw the significant expansion of Northwestern's Astronomy Department and made important contributions to his field, most notably by successfully incorporating television technology into telescopes for the first time. However, he was best known for his work on UFOs. First as an Air Force investigator and then as a lonely voice in the scientific community calling for more serious study of UFOs, he became the most important advocate of UFO research and inspired the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

Like Mark Twain, Hynek was born and died as Halley's Comet passed overhead. The coincidence was particularly appropriate. In an undated lecture, Hynek wrote: "There is one comet that connects the Age of Superstition with our present Age of Science—and that is Halley's Comet." He saw himself as a prophet preaching science to an age still too mired in superstition to tolerate the unexplainable. Halley's Comet was therefore the perfect metaphor for Hynek. At the bottom of the page he scrawled a few lines from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: "When beggars die, there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."

Josef Allen Hynek was born May 1, 1910 in Chicago to Czechoslovakian parents. He graduated from Crane Technical High School in 1927 and went on to the University of Chicago, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1931. As a graduate student he spent four years at the University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay, Wisconsin. He received his Ph.D. in 1935.

In 1936 Ohio State University hired Hynek as an instructor in the department of physics and astronomy. In 1939 he was promoted to assistant professor. He taught summer school at the Harvard College Observatory in 1941. While on leave from Ohio State from 1942 to 1946 Hynek worked on developing a proximity fuse for the Navy at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics laboratory. He returned to Ohio State in 1946 as associate professor and director of the McMillin Observatory. He was promoted in 1950 to full professor and became assistant dean of the Graduate School.

SEARCH



Search Inside

Explore this Finding Aid

[Summary Information](#)
[Biographical/Historical Information](#)
[Scope and Content](#)
[Subjects](#)
[Container List/Contents](#)

Print this Finding Aid

About This Site

[← Return to search results](#)

In 1948 Hynek began consulting on a new Air Force project at Wright-Paterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Its purpose was to investigate reports of unidentified flying objects. Because of his position at Ohio State, Hynek was a logical choice as a scientific advisor to the project. His involvement deepened when the Air Force reorganized its investigation as "Project Blue Book" in 1952.

Hynek took a leave from Ohio State in 1956 to join the effort to put the first satellite into space. As associate director of the optical tracking program at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Hynek was part of a team that set up a network of tracking stations around the world to observe the flight of the planned U.S. satellite. Created in 1956 as part of the International Geophysical Year (IGY), the Satellite Tracking Program (STP) established twelve tracking stations around the world, located in Florida, New Mexico, Hawaii, Curacao, Peru, Argentina, Iran, South Africa, India, Spain, Japan, and Australia. Hynek was also involved in the design of a satellite tracking camera that was created by James C. Baker and Joseph Nunn for use in the twelve STP stations. The Moonwatch Division of STP was a program that organized and assisted groups of amateur astronomers who volunteered to collect data on artificial earth satellites.

On Oct. 4, 1957 the Soviet Union announced the stunning launch of Sputnik, the first successful artificial satellite. Hynek, along with his colleague Fred Whipple, conducted two press conferences a day to report on Sputnik's progress and reassure the public of its safety. That same year, Hynek and his colleagues began a partnership with the Air Force to create a balloon-based astronomy program. Eventually dubbed Project Stargazer, the program developed slowly over the next few years, culminating in a few disappointing failures. Hynek would eventually give up on balloons, favoring instead installing a telescope on the moon.

In 1959, Hynek accepted Northwestern's offer to become chairman of its small astronomy department. Hynek brought his pioneering work on image orthicon astronomy, which combined television technology with telescopes, with him to Northwestern. The image orthicon greatly enhanced the telescopes' light gathering powers and the National Science Foundation proposed that this could be the most significant astronomical advance since photography. In 1961 he installed the first working image orthicon telescope at Organ Pass Observatory outside the town of Las Cruces, New Mexico. This observatory, also called the Organ Mountain Observatory and the FAST Observatory, was a former STP station that had recently been purchased by Northwestern. The following year, he installed a second image orthicon telescope at the Dearborn Observatory in Evanston.

Corralitos Observatory was later built on the same property as the Organ Pass Observatory, and both New Mexico observatories were used by Northwestern throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1966 the department received a big boost with the opening of the Lindheimer Astronomical Research Center on the Evanston campus. During Hynek's first years as chairman, the department, which had previously offered only one course, expanded to more than a dozen, hiring twenty new faculty members and attracting increasing numbers of graduate students. Hynek himself was a popular teacher, noted for his humor and his eccentric appearance.

While at Northwestern Hynek continued to consult on the Air Force's Project Blue Book. In March, 1966, he investigated a well-publicized UFO sighting in Michigan. His conclusion that the UFO was nothing more than swamp gas angered many in Michigan, including Rep. Gerald Ford, who hauled Hynek before a congressional committee. The fiasco must have had some impact on Hynek because by October he was publicly calling for serious study of the "persistent and disturbing phenomenon" of UFOs and criticizing his fellow scientists for dismissing all UFO spotters as "hysterics or crackpots or cranks." Newspapers around the country picked up on Hynek's apparent about-face. He intensified his message when the Air Force closed Project Blue Book after a 1969 report by Dr. Edward Condon of the University of Colorado concluded that UFOs did not merit further inquiry. After 1969, Hynek was virtually alone in the scientific community in supporting the continued study of UFOs.

In October 1973, a furor similar to the 1966 Michigan incident erupted in Pascagoula, Mississippi, when two men reported being abducted by aliens. Hynek administered a polygraph test and trumpeted its positive results to the press, which disseminated a sketch of the aliens throughout the country. As in 1966, a rash of new UFO sightings followed, but this time Hynek did nothing to dampen the UFO fervor. Instead, Hynek took advantage of the Mississippi event to launch his Center for UFO Studies in Evanston. Intended as a clearing-house for UFO study and sightings, the Center operated a well-publicized hotline for law enforcement officers seeking help in dealing with sightings.

Largely in response to the Condon report, Hynek wrote *The UFO Experience*, which was published in 1972 by Henry Regnery Company. In the book, Hynek famously laid out the three classes of "close encounters." A close encounter of the first kind is when a UFO is simply observed and leaves no evidence. The second kind leaves physical traces such as burns and broken branches. A close encounter of the third kind is when contact is actually made. In 1977 Director Stephen Spielberg took "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" as the title of his twenty-million-dollar film about UFOs. Hynek served as technical advisor to the film and made a cameo appearance in it.

As Hynek's fame as a UFO expert grew, administrators at Northwestern became increasingly embarrassed by the resulting publicity. They were adamant that Hynek's Center for UFO Studies be kept separate from the University. Hynek retired from Northwestern in June 1978 at the age of 68, devoting most of his time thereafter to the Center. He was forced to move the cash-strapped Center to his home in 1981, however, and to disconnect the toll-free hotline in 1982. In 1981, he persuaded Northwestern to donate the now-closed Corralitos Observatory in New Mexico to a non-profit group he headed, the Corralitos Astronomical Research Association (CARA). In search of funds, Hynek moved the Center for UFO Studies to Arizona in 1984. He died on April 27, 1986 from a malignant brain tumor at Memorial Hospital in Scottsdale, Ariz. He was survived by his second wife, Miriam (Mimi) Curtis Hynek, whom he had married in 1942, and their five children. Mimi Hynek died in 1996.

Scope and Content

The Hynek Papers span the years 1953 to 1988 and fill four boxes. They provide a record of Hynek's professional life but offer scant insight into his personal affairs. Missing are any personal correspondence or private papers that might shed some light on the person behind the media-created personality.

The papers include biographical materials, clippings, reports relating to Hynek's work on Project Stargazer, and some materials pertaining to Hynek's UFO work and his work at Northwestern.

Biographical material includes various curriculum vitas through the years; press kit bios; profiles; obituaries from The Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Time, and Newsweek and a 1996 obituary for Mimi Hynek. Also included are a few pieces of promotional material and memorabilia, including a misspelled Trivial Pursuit card featuring Hynek as an answer, and some correspondence.

Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and journals cover the early 1950s to 1988 and are arranged chronologically. Most of the clippings come from the 1970s.

The clippings begin with the "Scanning the Skies" columns Hynek wrote for The Columbus Dispatch throughout the 1950s. Many of the columns are undated. The first dated column is from February 15, 1953 and the last one is dated July 19, 1959, just before Hynek's appointment to Northwestern was announced. "Scanning the Skies" explained astronomical phenomena, tracked the beginnings of the space race, and promoted the construction of a new planetarium in Columbus. While Hynek wrote most of these columns during his time at Ohio State, some were written during his leave at Harvard and the Smithsonian from 1956 to 1960. Of special note is the column from October 23, 1955, which may be Hynek's first public comment on UFOs, and the pieces relating to the launch of Sputnik in October 1957.

Most of the clippings from the early to mid 1960s concern the burgeoning U.S. Space Program, and especially Hynek's unfulfilled vision of a lunar-based or balloon-carried telescope. The clippings from 1966 document the major UFO sighting in Michigan that launched Hynek into public view as a UFO expert, the role that he was to play for the rest of his life.

The bulk of the clippings date from the 1970s, when UFOs and Hynek were most prominent. The 1972 publication of Hynek's book, *The UFO Experience*, the Oct. 1973 UFO sightings in Mississippi, the 1973 founding of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, and the Christmas 1977 release of Steven Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" were all major media moments for Hynek and are well documented.

The final clippings relate to Hynek's retirement from Northwestern, his eventual move to Arizona, and his death in 1986.

The last Clippings folder holds undated clippings.

Project Stargazer materials document Hynek's long-running effort to create a viable balloon-based astronomy program. The first twelve folders hold the multi-volume report on the early years of the project written in 1961 by Hynek's deputy at the Smithsonian and former student at Ohio, G.J. Nielson. His report covers the years 1957 – when the Air Force, Hynek, and his colleagues at the Smithsonian began discussing the balloon project – to 1961, and includes extensive documentation for each of its six volumes. The materials in the thirteenth folder add to this record a 1960 proposal and a 1964 pamphlet written by Hynek promoting the idea of balloon-borne astronomical observation. It also contains a scathing final report by Hynek after Project Stargazer lost funding and was shut down in 1966.

UFO files document the publication of Hynek's 1972 book, *The UFO Experience*, and the 1973 founding of the Center for UFO Studies. Several reviews, press releases, and excerpts from the book are included. Also included are issues of the newsletter published by the Center, *The International UFO Reporter*, from 1976 to 1978, and promotional material from the National Speakers Bureau, which organized some of Hynek's UFO lectures.

Northwestern University material includes teaching notes and interoffice correspondence. The correspondence, some of it between University Relations staff about Hynek, mostly concerns his various media appearances and other publicity efforts, including promoting his book. It reveals a tense relationship between Hynek and a university that sometimes found the UFO-related publicity embarrassing. University officials were particularly anxious that the Center for UFO Studies not be identified as a Northwestern project. For his part, Hynek expressed frustration at the lack of support he received. Teaching notes cover a wide range of topics; aside from a few lecture outlines, notes are contained on index cards arranged alphabetically by subject. Of special interest is a note about Halley's Comet, the appearance of which coincided with Hynek's birth and death.

Addition, Boxes 5-7

This addition to the J. Allen Hynek Papers fills four boxes and spans the years 1952 to 1985, with the bulk of the material dating from the early 1960s. The majority of the material in the addition is technical, including budgets, contracts, and inventories. Correspondence and status reports are also included, however, and are more accessible. The addition contains records from two of Allen Hynek's major research projects: Project Stargazer, his effort to mount a balloon-based astronomy program, and Image Orthicon, his groundbreaking marriage of television technology with telescopes. Hynek's Image Orthicon work was funded by separate contracts with NASA and the Air Force, and the files are organized accordingly. The addition also includes one folder and one tube of unidentified (possibly observatory equipment) blueprints.

Addition, Boxes 8-14

This addition to the J. Allen Hynek Papers fills seven boxes and spans the years 1925 to 1982, with the majority of the material dating from the late 1950s to early 1960s. The bulk of the addition consists of biographical materials (most dated earlier than in the original series), records of projects Hynek worked on, and UFO sighting reports.

Biographical material includes press releases, clippings, publications and notes. The newspaper clippings span the years 1956 to 1958 during which Hynek and his colleagues at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory were often cited in news reports on Sputnik and subsequent satellites, as well as the Satellite Tracking Program. Of special note within the biographical materials are several issues of the literary magazine of Crane Technical High School, which contain short stories written by Hynek. Reprints and publications folders include articles from the years 1935 to 1978 including Hynek's 1935 dissertation: "A quantitative study of certain phases of F-type spectra." There are also reprints of articles from 1953 to 1955 in which Hynek is acknowledged or thanked, as well as a folder documenting Hynek's travels and schedule during the years 1958-1960 reflects his role in promoting the satellite tracking program and involvement in various projects.

Subject files consist of six folders in the subject files that briefly cover a few of Hynek's research areas.

During the years following the launchings of the first artificial earth satellites, Hynek collected teletype news reports released by the Soviet news agency TASS. These are arranged chronologically and by topic.

IGY-STP (International Geophysical Year - Satellite Tracking Program) files are divided into three groups: the first section contains general information, correspondence, memos, and press releases regarding STP and the IGY generally. The second section consists of materials relating to the satellite tracking stations: the design of the stations and the telescope cameras, the costs for materials and personnel, and photographs of the stations and the equipment. Of special interest is the folder of Hynek's trip reports, which appear to be transcriptions of audio tapes documenting Hynek's experience traveling to prospective sites around the world (including Iran, Curacao, and Spain) in an effort to establish tracking stations. The last section of STP-related material concerns the Moonwatch division and includes a newsletter for Moonwatch participants as well as a manuscript "A Moonwatcher's Manual," written by Hynek.

Project Stargazer materials provide additional documentation of Hynek's balloon-based astronomy program. This includes three folders of correspondence spanning the dates 1959 to 1966, arranged chronologically. There is also a folder of many photographs, negatives, and contact sheets (both B&W and color images) of the successful launching of the Stargazer balloon in China Lake, California in 1962, in which pilot Joseph Kittinger and astronomer William C. White rose to an altitude of 82,200 feet.

Image orthicon materials include general information on the image orthicon technology used at both the New Mexico observatory and the Dearborn Observatory in Evanston. There are several folders of photographs taken with the image orthicon enabled telescopes of specific events and also general or unidentified images. UFO files are organized alphabetically by folder and chronologically within the folder. This material pertains to Hynek's investigations of UFO phenomena, dating from 1959 to 1971. The first four folders contain correspondence from people reporting UFO sightings as well as a number of letters from school children wanting more information about UFOs in general. The next several folders contain newspaper clippings and publications related to UFO sightings and investigation as well as a small number of photographs of popular depictions of aliens and UFOs. The next thirty-three folders document individual sighting reports and investigations, and are arranged alphabetically by the last name of the person reporting the sighting or the location of the sighting. These folders contain correspondence (mostly with William Powers, Hynek's associate, or with Hynek), sight reports (hand-written notations of what the person saw), calculations, typed reports (mostly by William Powers). [Note: For William Powers, see also Faculty Biographical Files, Archives Room 110.] Some of the reports were written for or published in Project Blue Book (the U.S. Military's files on UFOs). The last two folders contain negatives and photographs of purported UFOs, usually sent to Hynek in letters reporting a sighting or obtained from witnesses of investigated sightings.

The materials relating to Hynek's establishment of the two New Mexico Observatories, Organ Pass and Corralitos, include correspondence between staff based in New Mexico and Dearborn Observatory administration in Evanston, photographs of both observatories, and documents pertaining to the transfer of ownership of the Corralitos Observatory to Hynek's non-profit group, CARA.

The final section of the addition contains miscellaneous Photographs and negatives collected by Hynek, arranged chronologically. They include photographs of colleagues at a colloquium, portraits of visiting professors, pictures of observatory equipment, and unidentified astronomical photographs taken through telescopes.

Arrangement of Materials

The papers include biographical materials, clippings, reports relating to Hynek's work on Project Stargazer, and some materials pertaining to Hynek's UFO work and his work at Northwestern. Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and journals cover the early 1950s to 1988 and are arranged chronologically. Northwestern University materials include teaching notes. Aside from a few lecture outlines, notes are contained on index cards arranged alphabetically by subject.

Subjects

Personal Name

Hynek, J. Allen (Joseph Allen), 1910-1986

Subjects

Artificial satellites--Tracking

Astronomers--United States

Unidentified flying objects--Sightings and encounters

Container List / Contents

[Expand All](#) [Collapse All](#)

+ Biographical
+ Clippings
+ Project Stargazer
+ U.F.O.
+ Addition 1, 1952-1985
+ Addition 2, 1925-1982



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