

Cincinnati Skeptic  
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Annual Report, 1995-1996

Motto of the month:

Of course we skeptics keep an open mind, but not so wide the brain falls out.

Stilgoe's Law: to test if you are really NOT superstitious.

Bring a photograph of your romantic partner, or of a son or daughter to a meeting. Here is an ice pick. Will you poke out the eyes in the picture? Will you poke out the eyes for ten dollars? Most students will not do this, the image has the power of a voodoo doll.

-- suggested by Professor John Stilgoe, Harvard Magazine, (Jan.-Feb. 1996) pp. 36-42.

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CSICOP Speakers Criticize Media

Porter Henry

"Science in the Age of (Mis)Information" was the theme of CSICOP'S(Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims Of the Paranormal) twentieth annual Congress held June 20-23 at their headquarters in Amherst, NY and at the nearby State University at Buffalo. More than one thousand persons attended, many of them from foreign countries.

Several speakers criticized the media for printing or broadcasting sensational stories of the paranormal as a means of boosting their audiences. Other speakers ranged over a wide range of subjects.

CSICOP founder Paul Kurtz pointed out that in an age of dazzling scientific achievements there is a surprisingly large undercurrent of anti-science and pseudo science. A typical "balanced" TV program consists of three long talks by believers in the paranormal followed by one or two minutes allotted to the lone skeptic on the panel.

Piero Angelo, Italian journalist, reported on the results of a skeptical TV program that ran for two hours on five different evenings. A survey of a panel of a thousand listeners showed that the program had greatly reduced panelists belief in such phenomena as Uri Geller and remote viewing, although two months later the same viewers showed an increased belief in the paranormal. He concluded that (1) TV programs can strongly influence viewer beliefs, (2) a single program is not enough to change these beliefs significantly, and (3) science must be made clear and interesting.

Philip Adams, an off-beat TV commentator from Australia, came up with such notable one-liners as: "People are

attracted by the impossible, convinced by the absurd." "People need to believe something, New Agers need to believe everything." "Doubting Thomas was the only rational man at the Last Supper." "On the Road to Damascus I'm going in the opposite direction." "We're asking people to accept science on faith." "The situation is hopeless; we must take the next step."

In a discussion of homeopathy Professor Whim Betz of Belgium explained that it originated with the discovery that large amounts of some drugs produced symptoms, whereas very small amounts of the same drug took away the symptoms. The homeopathic physician, in order to determine which natural drugs to use, asks the patient scores of questions, such as "Do you dream of rabbits?" Crushed cockroaches are one remedy occasionally used. Homeopathy is quite popular in Europe, less so in America. The British royal family has a homeopathic doctor on its staff. In France ordinary drugs must be accepted as effective by a body similar to our FDA; homeopathic drugs are exempted from this requirement.

The study of chiropractic is a hobby of Stephen Barrett, a psychiatrist from Allentown, PA. He has collected ten thousand documents and two hundred books on the subject. Chiropractors have a very wide following, but there have been no investigative reports by the media. Although there is wide variation among the beliefs of individual chiropractors, their basic belief is that all ailments are caused by nerve disorders resulting from a pinched nerve in the spine, and that spinal manipulation will help the body increase its natural disease resistance. Many chiropractors recommend that their patients come back for three treatments a week for an indefinite time, whereas osteopaths, whose training is similar to an MD's, usually recommend three to five follow-ups. In two tests, patients with an illness went to a number of chiropractors and got a different diagnosis and treatment from each one.

One "believer" on the program was Jessica Utts, Professor of Statistics at the University of California in Davis. In a thought transference experiment, sender and receiver looked at a panel of four photographs. The sender selected one and the receiver tried to identify which it was. In her experiments, the receiver named the correct picture 35 percent of the time, as compared with a 25 percent result expected by mere chance. I would think, if one of the four pictures was more pleasant or otherwise distinctive than the other three, might not both sender and receiver select it more often than the others?

Steve Allen was the speaker at the closing dinner. He kept the audience in stitches for an hour. Example: in Steve's old TV program, a seer was given an answer and had to come up with the question. Such as the answer is "chicken teriyaki;" what is the question? The question is: "Who's the oldest living aviator in the Japanese air force?"  
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President's Corner  
Twelve Hundred Skeptics and a Few Complaints  
[Wizard holding up a candle]

The First Worlds Skeptics Conference was held by CSICOP in June in Buffalo. By any standard this 20th anniversary celebration of CSICOP will be judged a vindication of the foresight and leadership of Paul Kurtz, his peers, and recruits. There is no question that the rational, objective and scientific "World View" now has an organizing center from which mystical and pseudoscientific alternatives can expect a response. The fact that 1200 persons from around the world spent no little time and money to attend this event is a tribute to the world wide need for community and learning in the face of the power of personal truth and nonsense. I drove the 500 miles from Cincinnati alone and arrived early in order to meet other skeptics and.... it didn't happen. This isn't quite true, for serendipity, and my active search actually allowed me to run into a few like souls but only by violating the rules.

I don't mean to besmirch the "Law of Cosmic Skeptical Union", but these guys can learn a little about conference development, if they want to. I have attended a few CSICOP Conferences and it is certainly not my intention to spoil anybody's parade, but things aren't all well in the land of skeptics and, who has a greater willingness to listen....? I want to tell you as well about all of the reasons you should have attended. You missed some wonderful things among the dross. Lets start on the down side. The focused, regionally produced training sessions, (Portland, Lexington, Buffalo) have been quite successful because they encourage the exchange of ideas, and they allow it to happen. As attenders increase from 150 (Regional), to 500 (Annual), to 1200 (World Wide) the possibility for personal contacts disappeared.

In Buffalo the audience was in five hotels located perhaps one half mile from the convention site. Unlike a national professional convention, even one of modest dimensions, there was no off campus convention center. Scheduled events started at 9:00 AM which required rising at 7:00 or so if you wanted to hit the book sales, get breakfast, and catch the school bus to the on campus site. The final scheduled talks ended around 10:00 PM which didn't allow much off schedule mixing.

The AM events were a mere three hours in extent. I belong to a couple of professional associations, and none has such amazing beliefs in the human capacity for retention, either physical, spiritual, or mental as to set limits. Worse yet, there was no time over three full days to meet, run down, make contact with friends, foes, or common contacts. I met S. Premand, the wonderful editor of the Indian Skeptic for three minutes before one event. The head of one of the Japanese Skeptics Associations, with an enormous stack of Prometheus Books at his side, apologized, and went to sleep during the opening session. The large hall was not only acoustically suspicious but also fitted with a woolly sound system that had everybody unhappy and confused. Beyond the cross aisle every thing sounded like mushy German, Spanish, or Australian. I recorded from row one.

The great things were, of course, finding participants with common interests and projects, and listening to the best of the presentations from the program. A greater variety of parallel sessions would certainly improve the program. I heard others mentioning round tables, poster sessions, and other informal venues as worthy additions to the standard three hour sessions. The great things from the program will have to wait till next time.

--Joe Gastright, president  
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From the Un-easy Chair

This issue is dated August/September and will be considered the beginning of a new volume, our sixth year. There will be no separate September issue, and announcement of the month's meeting is in this issue, p. 12, the back page. Starting with the October issue we plan to make the CS a monthly newsletter. A newsletter listing the meeting announcements which appears on time so we can plan attendance at the ART group meetings. This will require a much sharper concentration on having deadlines and staying within them. The calendar looks like this:

Meeting date, second Saturday, is deadline for the CS. Please let me have anything for the newsletter at that time.  
Third week, we lay out the newsletter. The absolutely last moment in which new material or changes can be made.  
Third Monday, the CS goes to press.  
Fourth Monday, the CS goes to the mail. Allow one week for delivery.

-- Wolf Roder, editor

"... of course primitive humans were contemporary with the dinosaurs. that's why they are extinct because they ate them."

-- bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Lowenzahn-Dentdelion  
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Email From Randi  
I'm honored indeed

Right on the heels of being given the opportunity to open the James Randi Educational Foundation, a privilege that is still something I'm trying to get used to, this news just arrived....

The International Astronomical Union has agreed "in honor of unparalleled work," to give my name to an asteroid. The asteroid 3163 "Randi" had, up till now, the preliminary name "1981 QM". More details:

Period of orbit: 3.71 years (1354.5 days)

Perihelion distance: 1.60 AU (Astronomical Unit)

Aphelion distance: 3.19 AU

Today, its distance from Earth is 1.52341 AU (227,898,789 km = 141,609,742 miles). The asteroid would be visible in the constellation Pisces (morning sky) its magnitude is about 17. Now, that's a VERY faint "star" and I'm told it's about 12 km. in diameter. But dammit, it's MY star, and I'm busting with pride.

This news has been published in the last edition of the Minor Planet Circulars. My sincere thanks to Andreas and Jean Dill, who applied to the IAU for this recognition. I've always known what it's like to have good friends, and this is as heavy proof as I've ever received.

Yet More Details....

The official announcement by the International Astronomical Union, published in the Minor Planet Circular (MPC) of May 3, 1996, describes my asteroid as: (3163) Randi = 1981 QM. Discovered 28 August 1981 by C.T. Kowal at Mount Palomar Observatory, California.

Named in honor of the American magician James Randi (b. 1928; real name Randall James Hamilton Zwinge) for his continuing efforts in debunking the claims of the paranormal community and exposing the tricks that charlatans use. His use of scientific techniques in many disciplines has contributed to the refutation of suspicious and fraudulent claims of paranormal results. Name proposed by A. Dill and J. Meeus.

Andreas Dill tells me that my asteroid is in excellent company. He says: "In MPC 27127 we have (4923) Clarke, named for Arthur C. Clarke, and in MPC 27128 there is (5020) Asimov." Martin Gardner's rock is 2587 Gardner.

Andreas says he will look for some more information on my asteroid such as what kind of rock it's composed of, which classification it has among the other planetoids, etc.

There has been some concern among "scientists" as to the astrological effect my rock will have on the futures of persons born while it is present in the sky. Also, since it will soon be making a close approach to Earth, whether psychic forces will be able to bring it out of orbit and send it hurtling down to decimate life on this planet. I tell you, the responsibility that goes with this honor is daunting. On the other hand, the power it confers is very satisfying. I will now accept nominations for potential targets on Earth that might receive 3163 Randi. No frivolous suggestions, please.

(NOTE: AU = astronomical unit, mean distance of the earth from the sun, about 93 million miles or 149 million kilometer.)

More E-mail from the Amazing Randi: (late 1995):

We are closing shortly on the home office site for the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF), and will be moving in soon. Books for the library, and videotapes, are coming in every day. From Martin Gardner, I got a marvelously quacky 1923 book telling the world that vaccination will never work, that homeopathy will save the species, and that auto-suggestion can cure any ailment.... Sure.

As plans for the Foundation activity begin to form up, I recognize the enormous responsibility that has been thrust upon me, the reach that the Internet/WWW facility will provide us, and the work that lies ahead. It's daunting, but everything that I've ever hoped for.

The Foundation is in Business (3 April 1996):

It is my great pleasure to announce the creation of the James Randi Educational Foundation. This is a non-profit, tax-exempt, educational foundation under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code, incorporated in the State of Delaware. The Foundation is generously funded by a sponsor in Washington D.C. who wishes, at this point in time, to remain anonymous.

The Foundation will have its home office in Florida, where a 7,000-square-foot facility is presently in preparation, to house an extensive book- and video-library facility with reference and lending capacity, a sophisticated computer setup

with a World Wide Web server and very high-speed 24-hour Internet access for researchers, students, and the media. We will be using state-of-the-art technology, and will be prepared to supply copies of photographic, video, audio and printed materials to persons who request those materials, at very little or no cost, via fax, telephone, Internet, mail or personal contact.

Most importantly, the Foundation will be prepared to conduct and/or finance original, basic, research in subjects of interest, ranging through many aspects of paranormal, occult, and supernatural claims. Working with competent scientists, technicians, and engineers who will design the experimental protocols for critically examining the claims, and will implement the experimental procedures either in-house or in their own facilities, we will also publicize the results of the inquiries.

We will conduct classes and seminars for students, teachers, the media, and the public. These meetings will deal with the goals of the Foundation.

In addition, the Foundation will be offering scholarships to students in the USA and abroad who are invited to compete by creating projects or writing essays dealing with subjects or claims generally classified as paranormal. This work will be evaluated by referees outside the Foundation on the quality of the preparation, implementation, and reporting of the results -- but not on the conclusions arrived at by the students.

We hope to interest competent academics in various fields, in joining in the work of the Foundation. In particular, we are looking for persons involved in parapsychology to co-operate and work with us. Several persons have already been approached and have expressed interest.

Within two years, we hope that the Foundation will have become self-supporting. That is, I believe, a realistic expectation. We will depend upon grants and other such funding to a large extent, since our purpose is to act as an information source available to all, at absolutely minimal cost to the client.

A Foundation newsletter seems inevitable, and should be expected by the end of this year. Whether that will develop into a journal, remains to be seen. In any case, a journal could be expected to take the form of an electronic data base, rather than a printed document.

I can assure you that the James Randi Educational Foundation will be designed and run in a manner that offers no impediment nor opposition to any of the splendid organizations already in existence around the world, that share our goals. Rather, we will seek the active involvement and co-operation of all these groups, and we will offer our full support to all of them. Our battle should be with pseudoscience, superstition, quackery, nonsense, and misinformation -- not with one another. I look forward to using this great opportunity which has been entrusted to me, for the purpose of not only educating the public, but reminding all of us that we can only succeed if we work together.

I will look forward to hearing from those of you who might wish to offer me your skills and your valued opinions in what I see as a great challenge, a fearsome responsibility -- and a glorious opportunity.

Technical assistance in a myriad of specialties will be welcome. If you have skills in computer programming, in graphics, layout, video, or in any other direction, and would like to assist us in getting off the ground, please contact me.

Those of you who might have material on hand (books, journals, articles, video/audio recordings, photographs, etc.) that could be integrated into the Foundation's data system, please contact me for information on whether we could accept such materials. The intention is to digitalize material and supply copies to clients.

We will be serving the Hispanic community as well, so that materials in Spanish -- as well as other languages -- will be welcome.

We would appreciate being placed on the mailing lists of any groups or individuals that might assist us in augmenting our data. The start-up library consists of 280 books on paranormal-and-related subjects at this point. Any contributions will be attributed to the proper sources.

When the James Randi Educational Foundation is in full operation, you will be notified by appropriate means. And of course you will be invited to visit the home office in person. The Foundation World Wide Web page is being prepared and should be available within two months.

June 1996

I'm in Amsterdam, just finishing up a film shoot that involved France and Holland. While I've been here, my new staff back in Florida has been in touch with the sponsors of the JREF, and by the time I return (tomorrow) we should be moving furniture, books, videos, etc., into the Foundation office.

For the next few days we'll be setting up the computer system. I expect the JREF WWW page will be filling up soon.

The home office includes a completely self-contained guest apartment, to accomodate visiting lecturers. We will also be starting -- within 3 months -- conversion of one area into a 200-seat auditorium and lab.

We have parking for 21 vehicles, library seating for 15, and some 800 feet of bookshelves. And, we have another 800 feet for video stacks.

The address is now official:

The James Randi Educational Foundation  
201 S.E. Davie Boulevard  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1815; U.S.A.  
The Land of the Setting Sun?

Just before I head off to Japan, I must share with you this note from a teacher in that country. He writes:

I'm an English teacher in Osaka and the other day one of my students, a recent high school graduate, had strips of tape wrapped around her thumbs and last three fingers on each hand. I inquired and she explained that it was for slimming. (Why? Did she want thin fingers?) She said that wrapping the right thumb slims the right side of your face, the left thumb the left side of your face. Index finger was for thinning arms (apparently she thought her arms were thin enough), middle finger is for the belly, and the last two fingers are for legs. She said the tape has to stay on for a month. I asked where she got it and how much it cost. "Drugstore and very cheap", she said.

I asked her if it works. And, smiling, she answered, she didn't know. I could tell she didn't take this too seriously. (So why was she doing it at all?) The sad part is that this already slim 18 year old girl wants to be thinner and some quack is exploiting this fact.

I can't wait until this advanced therapy shows up here in the USA....

--James Randi

(NOTE: let the CS editor know if it shows up here.)  
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Book Reviews

An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural

An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and  
Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural  
exposed by James Randi  
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995)

Randi gives us a fairly brief, 284 pages, compilation of the paranormal. Articles are arranged alphabetically, and relatively short, most topics are covered in less than a page. He has added a short bibliography, and a reasonably

detailed index. Randi also gives us an appendix on the Curse of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen's tomb. Most of the personnel concerned lived long healthy lives. A list of 49 End of the World Prophecies is also appended, all of which have failed.

From this book we can learn about the real Dr. Johannes Faust, who was a wandering magician in the sixteenth century. He was not a character invented by Marlowe or Goethe, or a myth created by Berlioz, Gounod, or Schubert. We can read about the I Ching or book of changes, which was written sometime between 2933 BC or 1882 AD, and is a great source of fortune telling method. We can learn to understand the ideomotor effect which is operating in dowsing, table tipping, pendulum divination, and on the Ouija Board, because the human hand will make involuntary movements when held compulsively still. Randi has an astonishing explanation for Swift's prediction of the two moons of Mars. He reports the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe (1540-1601) had suggested Mars must have two moons based on astronomical principles as then understood. Randi gives us the circuitry of the Scientologists e-meter, (p. 89), and yes, there really is a mandrake plant, *Mandragora officinarum*, with a root shaped a little like a small human person, (p. 150).

Something else we get in this encyclopedia are typical Randiisms. "A silly concept cannot be made sillier by expanding it; the quality of silliness is totally saturating and all-encompassing." (p. 95). On Hal Lindsey, "His theories are based on ponderous arithmetical calculations that entertain numerous hilarious excuses for failure along the way." (p. 144). On Maharaj Ji, "The god business is often not as enthusiastically supported as the god might wish." (p. 148). On the ability of garlic to ward off witches, demons, and vampires, "It is absolutely effective for those purposes and is also known to impart a delicious flavor to certain foods." (p. 103).

On the subject of quacks Randi quotes Benjamin Franklin to the effect "there are no greater liars in the world than quacks -- except for their patients" (p. 196), but then continues in a serious vein. "Political and legal considerations have prevented open discussion or even the questioning of procedures that are clearly without merit. The highly litigious nature of American society has effectively provided the quacks with protection, and the public suffers because it cannot afford to defend itself, and politicians fear censure." (p. 197).

Browsing in this book is enjoyable. It is a great reference and should be on the shelves of every public or school library, as well as in every newspaper office.

-- Wolf Roder

A Force Upon the Plain

A Force Upon the Plain:

The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate

by Kenneth S. Stern

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996)

The members of militias claim to be the super patriots, the only true Americans prepared to defend our country against a treasonous government planning to turn the country over to the United Nations who will install The One World government and give the country to the Mud People. The militias have inherited the past roles of the vitriolic anti-Communists, the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klans, the neo-Nazis, the Posse Comitatus, and similar extremist and racist groups. The militia culture has spawned The Order, which in the early eighties acquired millions by robbing armored cars and murdered talk show host Alan Berg because he was Jewish. The militia ideas also spawned Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City.

Kenneth Stern is chief researcher on hate groups for the American Jewish Committee and thus well placed and professionally concerned with the topic. In clear detail he lays out for us the history and present activities of the militias. He examines their antecedents, their ideas and structures, and speculates as to where it may lead us. He considers a civil war between eastern and western states not beyond the realm of possibility, (p 219).

Four issues draw average citizens into the net to listen to militia speakers. Many fear the Brady Bill is the thin edge of the wedge to take away their guns. Intensifying strictures on use of the environment and public lands is seen as federal interference with local ways of life. Fundamentalist religious ideas which see America and its Constitution as God given, and the abortion issue draw others into the net. The disaster at Waco and the shooting at Ruby Ridge have

persuaded some that perhaps the government really is after them. Underneath are strong racist and anti-Jewish attitudes, explaining the Federal Government has been taken over by "international bankers", "the illegal Federal Reserve", "the Trilateral Commission", or simply eastern elites. The militia culture is, however, by no means confined to the western regions, armed hate groups exist in all states. There is a small town and rural emphasis, urban dwellers are less likely to be concerned with gun ownership and use of natural resources.

There is no center or hierarchy to the militia movement, each group tends to be very local. Rather, communication is rapid, with the internet serving as a venue for exchanging ideas, rumors, warnings, and how to make explosives. Talk shows, especially on short wave broadcast, contribute heavily to disseminate paranoia. Stern documents a sizeable mainstream support for militia ideas, continuing even after Oklahoma City. A number of right wing Congressmen, and a large number of local elected officials either support the militia, or at least play to their ideology in the hope of garnering votes.

The United States has survived far worse episodes of racist extremism in the political process. But, any time politicians cozy up to irrational ideologies of rancor, especially when these are promoted by armed hatemongers, there is peril in the country.

-- Wolf Roder  
Dictionary of Darwinism and of Evolution

Short Book Note:

A complete reference on Darwin and evolution:

PARIS, January 1996 (AFP) - A great "Dictionary of Darwinism and of Evolution"... ... This titanesque result, with no antecedent in the matter, has taken ten years work for 150 international specialists in the biological sciences and human studies, under the direction of Patrick Tort. While striving to restore in its entirety the logic of evolution, its original concepts and modern versions, this encyclopedic dictionary initiates a historical investigation of all national Darwinisms."

Among the Editor's unusually straightforward statements:

This historical and critical synthesis of Darwinism and evolutionary theory has been compiled in order to combat the endless distortions of Darwin's ideas. Henceforth, it is demonstrated that:

Darwin is not the father of modern anti-egalitarian theories,  
Darwin is the founder neither of negative eugenics nor of dogmas of elimination,  
Darwin is not the justifier of Victorian Imperialism,  
Darwin is not responsible for "Social Darwinism".

(from Agence France Presse)  
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The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate  
by Kenneth S. Stern  
(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996)

The members of militias claim to be the super patriots, the only true Americans prepared to defend our country against a treasonous government planning to turn the country over to the United Nations who will install The One World government and give the country to the Mud People. The militias have inherited the past roles of the vitriolic anti-Communists, the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klans, the neo-Nazis, the Posse Comitatus, and similar extremist and racist groups. The militia culture has spawned The Order, which in the early eighties acquired millions by robbing

armored cars and murdered talk show host Alan Berg because he was Jewish. The militia ideas also spawned Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City.

Kenneth Stern is chief researcher on hate groups for the American Jewish Committee and thus well placed and professionally concerned with the topic. In clear detail he lays out for us the history and present activities of the militias. He examines their antecedents, their ideas and structures, and speculates as to where it may lead us. He considers a civil war between eastern and western states not beyond the realm of possibility, (p 219).

Four issues draw average citizens into the net to listen to militia speakers. Many fear the Brady Bill is the thin edge of the wedge to take away their guns. Intensifying strictures on use of the environment and public lands is seen as federal interference with local ways of life. Fundamentalist religious ideas which see America and its Constitution as God given, and the abortion issue draw others into the net. The disaster at Waco and the shooting at Ruby Ridge have persuaded some that perhaps the government really is after them. Underneath are strong racist and anti-Jewish attitudes, explaining the Federal Government has been taken over by "international bankers", "the illegal Federal Reserve", "the Trilateral Commission", or simply eastern elites. The militia culture is, however, by no means confined to the western regions, armed hate groups exist in all states. There is a small town and rural emphasis, urban dwellers are less likely to be concerned with gun ownership and use of natural resources.

There is no center or hierarchy to the militia movement, each group tends to be very local. Rather, communication is rapid, with the internet serving as a venue for exchanging ideas, rumors, warnings, and how to make explosives. Talk shows, especially on short wave broadcast, contribute heavily to disseminate paranoia. Stern documents a sizeable mainstream support for militia ideas, continuing even after Oklahoma City. A number of right wing Congressmen, and a large number of local elected officials either support the militia, or at least play to their ideology in the hope of garnering votes.

The United States has survived far worse episodes of racist extremism in the political process. But, any time politicians cozy up to irrational ideologies of rancor, especially when these are promoted by armed hatemongers, there is peril in the country.

-- Wolf Roder  
Dictionary of Darwinism and of Evolution

Short Book Note:

A complete reference on Darwin and evolution:

PARIS, January 1996 (AFP) - A great "Dictionary of Darwinism and of Evolution"... .. This titanesque result, with no antecedent in the matter, has taken ten years work for 150 international specialists in the biological sciences and human studies, under the direction of Patrick Tort. While striving to restore in its entirety the logic of evolution, its original concepts and modern versions, this encyclopedic dictionary initiates a historical investigation of all national Darwinisms."

Among the Editor's unusually straightforward statements:

This historical and critical synthesis of Darwinism and evolutionary theory has been compiled in order to combat the endless distortions of Darwin's ideas. Henceforth, it is demonstrated that:

Darwin is not the father of modern anti-egalitarian theories,  
Darwin is the founder neither of negative eugenics nor of dogmas of elimination,  
Darwin is not the justifier of Victorian Imperialism,  
Darwin is not responsible for "Social Darwinism".

(from Agence France Presse)  
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(from Agence France Presse)

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Letters

From David Wall:

I recently forwarded copies of some comments by the American Atheists on the "Mysterious Origins of Man" program to the Skeptic and Skeptics\_talk lists. I'm not sure how it happened, but somehow that post ended up on alt.paranormal and related news groups.

I received the following e-mail as a result. I thought perhaps some of you might enjoy it:

Date: Tue, 18 Jun 1996 23:41:51 -0700  
From: [deleted]

Hey Dumbo,

Why cant people like you go crawl back into your cave with your fictitious dinosaurs and your idea of "evolution". Man was created by the hand of God not spawned of some ape. Fecal matter like you stink up this world.

Sincerely,  
[deleted]

After chuckling a bit and showing the message proudly to various people, I wrote the following response:

To: [deleted]  
Cc: [another address for the same person (see below)]

Thank you for your considerate and thoughtful message. Devout Christians such as yourself are truly an inspiring example of the ideals espoused by Christianity. Torquemada would be proud of you. Since you expressed an interest in the subject, I would recommend David Attenborough's Life on Earth for your reading list. It is somewhat dated by now, but it has many pictures, which I think you will find helpful. Books by Richard Dawkins and Stephen J. Gould are also very good, but they are on a more advanced level for which you may not be ready yet.

Again, thank you for your kind note.  
[sig]

OK, so I wasn't very conciliatory. But it was fun.

David K. Wall (darkon@iac.net)

Added as I was doing the HTML for this: I cc'd the second address after I did a bit of poking around to see who this person was. I thought perhaps that getting an email to another account he hadn't mentioned might make him nervous. As it turned out, this was a early-teenager on his older brother's account. I soon received an email from the older brother apologizing for his little brother's behaviour, and thanking me for teaching the kid what happens when you walk into an intellectual battle unarmed. (quoted from memory, hence possibly inaccurate) On a less encouraging note, he recommended that I read Philip Johnson's "Darwin on Trial" (I had already read it, and consider it worthless).

From: [deleted] 2-JUL-1996  
Subject: Medical Fraud in America...

You need to hear this... Medical Fraud in America... If you know anyone with an ailment they will be amazed by this tape... How much.. >>>> FREE <<<< We will pay for the tape!

Go to our web site-----> <http://357.com/tape/tape.htm>

This information has got to get out in mass... People are suffering needlessly, dying, and not living up to their potential life-span...

Click above and find out:

-Real audio sample equipped- -Partial Typed transcript-

Some topics discussed: -

Quick fix for Arthritis, Diabetes, Hypertension, Ulcers, Alzheimer's, Osteoporosis, Menopause, PMS, Wrinkles, Gray Hair + many more.

All this stuff has been covered up by medical doctors for years.

Get this information FAST before our e-mail account gets pulled! Do not reply to this letter as you will get a autoresponder!

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In The News

Public Understanding of Science - Science Literacy

On Friday, 24 May 1996 the New York Times reported under the title "Americans Flunk Science", on a survey of N=2006 adults for the National Science Foundation. According to the NYT only about a quarter of the people obtained passing grades on the science and economic questions.

Here are the questions from the Survey as extracted from Science & Engineering Indicators (12th ed.) for 1996. In parentheses: percent answering correctly among college graduates, sub-sample size n=260. The sub-sample does not include those with more than a college education, i.e. graduate degrees. In general the likelihood of answering correctly increases with education.

Next month: the answers.

True - False Questions:

The center of the earth is very hot (83)

All radioactivity is man-made (86)

The oxygen we breathe comes from plants (90)

It is the father's gene which decides whether the baby is a boy or girl (74)

Lasers work by focusing sound waves (56)

Electrons are smaller than atoms (64)

Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria (59)

The universe began with a huge explosion (46)

The continents on which we live have been moving their location for millions of years and will continue to move in the future (89)

Human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals (61)

Cigarette smoking causes lung cancer (92)

The earliest humans lived at the same time as the dinosaurs (59)

Radioactive milk can be made safe by boiling it (70)

A majority of American workers are members of a union or other collective bargaining organization (57)

Tariffs, that is taxes on imported goods, benefit some groups at the expense of others (84)

A general increase in the tax on goods imported into the United States is likely to result in an increase in the amount of American goods sold to other countries (60)

One of the best ways to increase the productivity of labor is to encourage greater investment in equipment, machinery, and other capital (67)

In a market economy, the level of wages will depend primarily on the level of output per worker (46)

Multiple choice questions:

Which travels faster, light or sound (86)

Does the Earth go around the Sun, or does the Sun go around the Earth? (86)

How long does it take for the Earth to go around the Sun: one day, one month, or one year? (66)

If you were to hear on the news that the Federal Reserve Board is going to tighten the money supply, would you expect interest rates to go up or go down? (83)

If you had \$ 1,000 to invest and did not want to lose it, which one of the following investments would be safest for you to buy: municipal bonds, US treasury bonds, preferred stock, or common stock? (72)

Explain in your own words questions:

What is DNA? (43)

What is a molecule? (19)

Why is there a hole in the ozone layer? (31)

Where is the hole in the ozone layer? (27)

Are there any harms or dangers which might result from a hole in the ozone layer? (49)

What do you believe is the primary cause of acid rain? (11)

What does the term "free trade" mean to you? (29, 24)

Now please think of this situation: Two scientists want to know if a certain drug is effective against high blood pressure. The first scientist wants to give the drug to 1,000 people with high blood pressure and see how many experience lower blood pressure levels. The second scientist wants to give the drug to 500 people with high blood pressure, and not give the drug to another 500 people with high blood pressure, and see how many in both groups experience lower blood pressure levels. Which is the better way to test this drug? Why is it better to test the drug this way? (some understanding 63)

What does the term "theory" mean to you?

Brad Bonham commented as follows on the NYT report:

The "good" news is that the National Science Foundation runs a huge survey every two years, including these same questions (or nearly the same), and the numbers haven't varied much over the years. Americans still look stupid compared to citizens of other countries who are asked to answer these questions, but we ain't getting' any stupider at any kind of an alarming rate. (Also, there is evidence that students [vs citizens] in some individual states rank near the top in similar international comparisons -- rural/urban demographics & socio-economic factors have been proposed to explain this.)

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Annual Report, 1995-1996  
President's Report

A.R.T. had a good year, although not a great one. There were many good talks, mostly from our own membership. I gave two talks, one on creationists' views of astronomy and thermodynamics and another one on scientific method, culture, and critical thinking. As well as excellent talks by A.R.T. members including Joe Gastright and Wolf Roder, outside speakers gave good programs. My favorite among these was Artie Kidwell, who introduced us to the magician's view of the world and its chicanery. In all, the talks were interesting and enlightening.

Our newsletter has had an excellent year and is successfully transferring editorship from Dinny Jergens to Wolf Roder. Wolf's first issue, a special summer number, shows substantive and style changes reflecting the new editorship.

On a less serene note, our membership has slipped slightly. Efforts at using the newsletter as the primary recruiting tool have been stopped and will now only be used after other methods of contact insure the interest of the recipient. This will reduce a significant cost to the organization, allowing other creative forms of recruitment. Our first membership committee, led by Brad Bonham, has been formed for this purpose.

Investigations have mostly been in the arena of quack medicine with reports on therapeutic touch and magnetic healing.

Finally, media contact has had some limited success with the continuing accumulation and use of skeptical blurbs.

A.R.T. has some specific needs for the future. First, we must present programs of interest to the membership and the general community and continue our excellent newsletter efforts. We must also continue to improve our ability to affect the community through investigations and media contact. A.R.T. must find its voice. In this light, A.R.T. will probably set up its own web site this year. Finally, we must continue to find new members, expanding rather than just maintaining the current membership in the face of normal attrition. Good luck!

-Roy Auerbach, President.  
Vice-President's Report

In October, I attended the inaugural Family Friendly Library Association meeting. Deploring the anti-science, anti-intellectual, intolerant position of this group, I taped a two-minute commentary on WVXU which aired in mid-December. I also gave an interview to Randy Katz at Everybody's News and Randy extensively quoted from my remarks in his feature article on Family Friendly Libraries. I had a letter to the editor printed in the Cincinnati Enquirer and in the American Physical Society Journal, Physics and Society. The editor of this journal was extremely supportive of our position and devoted his editorial column in the same issue to intolerance by religious fanatics. I spoke on this topic to Mainstream Network in January and I am told it was quoted by some local religious groups, including the Unitarians. An article submitted to Free Inquiry is in press.

I also attended a Sunday service at Landmark Baptist Temple which featured the leader of Answers in Genesis. One of the ultimate consequences was that I was asked to debate Mike Shannon concerning Ohio HB 692 on WNKU for an hour in May of 1996. Mike is a Ph.D. who teaches preaching at Cincinnati Bible College and speech at NKU. The debate was fun and I am told that I made the strongest case. It was supported by the National Center for Science Education which provided me with a book and some relevant articles. This was actually fun. By the way, NKU wanted to portray this as a religious contest, so they did not mention my A.R.T. affiliation, only my secular humanist connections. Incidentally, the bill was defeated in the House Education Committee by about 2 to 1.

In my opinion the Vice President should have no duties and be a kind of general spokesperson for the group. By luck and not design, this is how it worked out for me and it was not too onerous a burden. There is so much related reading and investigation which goes along with public presentations that there is not time for anything else.

-Bob Riehemann, Vice-President.  
Treasurer's Report

From the viewpoint of the Association's Treasurer, the past year has been a balanced and hence a satisfactory one. Income and expenditures have run about equal. In general, income from memberships and donations amounted to \$1345; expenses, mostly from newsletters and postage, were \$1072. A slight balance remains in our account. There is no debt.

While the newsletters seemingly have been a bit more expensive than in previous years, the contents and quality have very much improved. A "quality product" is now what we have and I believe it is worth the expenditure.

With ongoing desire and work to overhaul membership dues, income will likely increase. Continued attention to obtaining additional members should likewise continue. As in all societies, however, there is both an increase and loss of members annually. Such is to be expected. On the whole, however, it has been a year of good, thought-provoking programs which we were able to maintain financially.

-Richard McGrath, Treasurer  
Secretary's Report

This year the secretary's job was divided. Brad Bonham sent lively and exceedingly colorful meeting reminder cards to the membership before each membership meeting. Bob Riehemann, Porter Henry and Virginia Jergens shared taking minutes for membership and Executive Council meetings and wrote reports on the meetings for the newsletter.

-Virginia Jergens  
Membership Secretary's Report  
Membership, September 1995 to September 1996

	Sept. '95	Sept. '96
Total (Members & Lapsed)	77	83
Members (paid up)	64	58
Lapsed (unpaid)	13	25
Courtesy	62	68

New members for this year were six. These came primarily from personal contacts and only one from "cold" addresses. We gave a few honorary memberships of one year to several of our guest speakers. Of our 58 members, 19 gave contributions over the \$15 dues. The average contribution was \$10-15 with several people contributing more.

New Contacts

The Newsletter committee decided that we would no longer mail newsletters to large numbers of "cold" addresses from various directories, because this method was not producing any new members. Out of the 461 "cold" addresses we used last year and the 200 used in the beginning of this year, there was only one person who became a member. All of the other new members came from personal contacts.

Future Plans

I will be contacting the Skeptical Enquirer for an updated list of their subscribers in this area. We should be able to get some new members through it. Also, members are requested to send names and addresses of potential members to me or Brad. We will see that they get a copy of the newsletter. We will continue to send newsletters to some "cold" addresses, but only about 40-60 names, as many as we need to meet the 200 name minimum required by our non-profit bulk mailing permit.

-Donna Loughry, Membership Secretary  
Meeting Organizer and Publicity Coordinator's Report

This year, for the first time since A.R.T. was founded in 1991, we have had an active Program Committee. In September, the Executive Council met and provided ideas for programs. When I was unable to organize a program for the year solo as usual due to changing job commitments, Brad Bonham and Bob Riehemann joined me as our first Program Committee members.

Our first program last fall was Joe Gastright's lively introduction to Halloween customs. Other programs included magician Artie Kidwell's demonstration of the arts of deception, Roy Auerbach's talk on how creationists distort principles of physics and geology to promote their religious views, and Wolf Roder's exploration of three examples of the difficulty of accurately separating science from non-science. I want to thank Brad and Bob for their hard work in developing and presenting a year of entertaining and informative programs.

Because of considerable demands in the program area, I accomplished less work in publicity. Our ability to get a news release to the press in a timely fashion was greatly improved when Donna Loughry accepted the job of faxing press releases, which she can do from her computer. I transferred the mailing and faxing lists to Donna along with guidelines for the preparation of a standard press release. In my opinion, we greatly need to put more time and energy into developing a stronger publicity program. Developing A.R.T.'s strength depends on focused attention to this area.

-Mary Pacinda, Meeting Organizer and Publicity Coordinator  
Investigations Officer's Report

An extensive report on the investigation of Therapeutic Touch activities was presented to the May meeting. This has been further expanded on page one of the June 1996 Newsletter.

-Joe Gastright, Investigations Officer  
Media Resources Coordinator's Report

As Media Coordinator my job was to stay in touch with the news media, especially to inform them about pseudo-science, quackery, and other nonsense in the community. To do this I kept a list of News Release Drafts for a variety of bunkum issues which may come up.

The News Release Drafts were formerly known as Skeptical Blurbs. I renamed them because I found as I used them that it was never possible to use a blurb "as is." Instead, the material had to be rewritten to focus on the immediate issue. The rewritten drafts are issued to the media as news releases. In the course of the year I edited many of the old blurbs and consolidated the list. A list of News Release Drafts was published in December 1995 (vol 5, no. 2) p. 6 as part of A Catalogue of Bunkum.

I obtained a complete list of media FAX numbers so I could send a FAX of our news releases to all local news media when the need arises. This list is being installed in several members' computers, so that we can distribute news releases. The process of creating a computer distribution FAX list requires some experience and double checking. None of the releases we sent succeeded in reaching all the media, and some went to only one or two newspapers.

I prepared news releases for these topics: Alien Autopsy Film, Homeopathy, Psychic fairs, and Creationism.

-Wolf Roder, Media Resources Coordinator  
Newsletter Editor's Report

Cincinnati Skeptic has just completed its fifth year. The Newsletter Committee published four issues, October, December, February and April, each 12 pages, up from an average of 9.5 pages per issue during 1994-95. Print quality greatly improved when we moved from xerography to laser printing from an electronic Postscript file. Costs were about the same as last year, averaging 89 cents per mailed copy and 75 cents per copy used for other purposes, such as handing to prospective members, sending to CSICOP for the regional skeptics group newsletter exchange.

Two major policy changes occurred during the year. Almost since its inception, the newsletter has been used for two purposes: informing current A.R.T. members and attracting new members. Thus each issue was mailed to current members and to a group of prospective members. Each prospective member received two issues of the newsletter. The newsletter committee asked Donna Loughry, faithful keeper of the mailing lists, to check her records to see how many new members were actually recruited in this way. She found almost no new members who joined because of having received the newsletter. With the approval of the Executive Council, the newsletter committee dropped the use of the newsletter to recruit member. Mailings which in the past ranged as high as 400 copies per issue were cut to 200 copies

per issue, the minimum required for the use of our non-profit bulk mailing permit. Now the newsletter is mailed to members and a list of local libraries, organizations, and TV, radio and newspaper reporters.

The Newsletter Committee suggested to the Executive Council that the money saved in eliminating mailings to prospective members be used to set up a web page to make material like the newsletter and skeptical blurbs available to A.R.T. members and other skeptics with access to the Internet. A web page could also offer links to other skeptical groups and information sources worldwide. Andrew Jergens, A.R.T. member and computer programmer, is chair of the new web page committee, in charge of designing and implementing the project, which the Executive Council has approved.

The Newsletter Committee also met with next year's incoming newsletter committee, Wolf Roder, Editor, and Donna Loughry, mailing lists, to turn over the newsletter files, share information about the newsletter, and plan for the coming year. The files included an archive collection of all of the newsletters published in the past five years, extra back issues, articles that arrived too late to go into the April 1996 issue, past expense reports, postal information and other materials.

Extraordinary thanks are due my fellow committee members for their hard work, adherence to a difficult publishing schedule, and willingness to help each other out whenever the need arose: Peter Jergens, Lay Out Editor; Donna Loughry, Mailing Database Manger and Membership Secretary; and Brad Bonham, Production Manager. Special thanks also to all the A.R.T. members who took seriously the statement in our By-Laws that all members are newsletter reporters and wrote articles, book reviews, letters to the editor, and reports for the newsletter: Porter Henry, Andrew Jergens, Andrew Lutes, Bob Riehemann, and Wolf Roder.

I greatly enjoyed my five years as editor of Cincinnati Skeptic, and am proud of the progress we have made since the first issue that Porter Henry hastily put together when A.R.T. was founded in 1991. And I look forward to seeing what improvements the creative hand of our new editor, Wolf Roder, will make.

-Virginia Jergens, Newsletter Editor

The Annual Report was edited by Virginia Jergens.  
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