



# *Cincinnati Skeptic*

*Newsletter of The Association for Rational Thought*

Vol. 9 No. 6

June/July 2000

***The intensity of a conviction that a hypothesis is true has no bearing on whether it is true or not.***  
***— Peter Medawar (1915–1987) Nobel Prize in biology***

### *In this Issue:*

UFOs Soft/Hard.....	1
Tarot Card Expert.....	1
Comments Corner.....	2
In Memoriam - Howard Rissover....	3
UFOlogist Should Know.....	3
Puzzle for Thinkers.....	4
Too Many Books.....	5
May Meeting - Elections.....	8
Membership information.....	11

### *May Meeting*

#### **U.S. Playing Card Company Harbors Tarot Expert**

Art historian Ron Decker is curator of the playing card museum and library at the venerable U.S. Playing Card Co. in Norwood, Ohio. His field is Renaissance art, his special interest, Tarot cards, the ornate decks now used in English speaking countries mostly for occult practices, especially divination. The May meeting found A.R.T. members following a trail of ribbon-tethered silver moon and star balloons to the museum, a collection of hundreds of decks of historical playing cards. Members wandered the gallery of centuries-old cards and heard the latest in revisionist Tarot card history.

The playing card museum itself is fairly venerable, founded in the late nineteenth century by a USPC executive who discovered an eccentric Englishman, head of the Guild of the Worshipful Company of Playing Cards and devoted to the collection of playing cards, then considered tacky junk by most people. Eventually the collector sold his collection to the company, which offered a permanent home for it. He continued to collect cards and related books and manuscripts and gave them to the museum.

“Permanent” lasted until about 1929, when the collection was loaned to the Cincinnati Art Museum, where it seems to have been largely forgotten by all concerned. In the early 1980’s, the Art Museum, in the midst of a major renovation, rediscovered the cards and called U.S. Playing Card to ask where the company wanted the collection to stay.

By that time the card business had changed greatly, freeing up lots of space once used for manufacturing. Once again there was one executive interested in the cards. He set aside space for the

(Cont. Pg 8b)

### *April Meeting*

#### *Identifying the Unidentified:*

UFOs -Soft Evidence/Hard Science.

Ten-year-old Terry Endres corned his sister out of a favorite seat in the family car and peered out the window, across the convenience store parking lot. Across the street, above the houses, above the trees, he saw something odd, a floating space-ship-like object pasted to the evening sky. There were three rectangular windows in the middle, triangular windows fore and aft. He thought it might be a reflection of lights on the glass, but there were no lights behind him. He wound the window down, and looked again, but the clear and startling image remained. At that point, Terry called his parents and sister to look. The image remained another five seconds, and disappeared.

In the years since, Terry has seen many unidentified flying objects, but none as convincingly space-ship-like as the one he saw that night. So convincing that the experience seems to have imbued him with a continuing curiosity about what causes these events. At the April meeting, he talked about his

(Cont. Pg 7)

**President****& Membership Secretary:**

Roy Auerbach: (513) 731-2774

E-mail: raa@cinci.rr.com

**Vice President:**

Nurit Bowman(513) 731-0642

E-mail:nuritb@netscape.net

**Media Resources Coordinator:**

Joe Gastright: (606) 581-7315

E-mail: joeskep@aol.com

**Program & Membership Chairman:**

Brad Bonham: (513) 761-5613

E-mail:bonham@compuserve.com

**Newsletter Editor:**

Wolf Roder: (513) 556-3424

E-mail: wolf.roder@uc.edu

**Treasurer:**

Rick Prairie (513) 681-8444

E-mail:Richard.Prairie@uc.edu

**Investigations Officer:**

Dick McGrath(606)344-3395

**Recording Secretary :**

Virginia Jergens:(513) 871-4876

E-mail:vhj@one.net

**Publicity Coordinator:**

Gary Himes (513) 752-5135

**Web Site Manager &****SANE Manager:****(Skeptical Area Network Effort)**

David Wall (513) 321-3381

E-mail: darkon@one.net

The By-Laws require that officers for the following year be elected annually at the May meeting. They begin their duties on following July 1st.

Copyright © Association for Rational Thought (ART) of Cincinnati, Ohio, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for skeptical, non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to individual authors and to the *Cincinnati Skeptic*. We request you mail us two copies of any reprinted material.

**Comments****Corner.....****The Reformed Medicine Route to Abnormal Knowledge**

by Joe Gastright

Thompsonism and other botanical healing systems of the 1820's and 1830's became increasingly popular "alternatives" to orthodox medicine across the period. In small towns and rural areas, especially along the frontier, there were few doctors of any kind. Self help systems like Thompson's were easily taken up by ambitious amateurs who added Dr. to their name without challenge. Indeed, many traditional doctors had been trained under the apprenticeship system and had no official diploma to show for their learning. Practitioners of the many sectarian systems did suffer from another disadvantage. Not only was their medical education limited, they were increasingly drawn from the least educated portions of the population. Only Homeopathy was able to resist this decline into "folk" medicine. The better educated herb doctors saw the problem and set up a medical system of their own.

Wooster Beach (1794-1868) provides a useful guide to this attempt to put the informal techniques of the herb doctors on an orthodox medical base. At home in Connecticut, he approached a young apprentice to Dr. George A. Viesselius for help. Viesselius had identified local plants to substitute for the expensive imports in the European *materia medica* which became unavailable during the Revolutionary War. For example cinchona bark he replaced with a mixture of snakeroot and magnolia root bark and used it to treat malaria.



Beach arrived too late to talk to Viesselius himself. His young German assistant, Jacob Tidd, who had taken over the practice, proved very uncooperative. Only after he apprenticed himself did he learn the about Indian medicine and participate in its practice. Beach moved on to New York city and received a MD from the University of New York. His views on reformed medicine were rejected by the regular doctors in the city. Thus, in 1829 he founded an unchartered Medical School which he called the Reformed Medical College of New York. Graduates were given a certificate which looked just like the official State diploma. In the Great Cholera epidemic of 1832, he reported losing only twenty percent of his patients compared to the fifty lost by the regulars. On the side Beach dabbled in religious polemics and advocated a list of progressive social reforms. This sideline in strange topics remained a characteristic of Reformed Medicine and its direct offspring the Eclectic School of Medicine.

All of the college staff were graduates of regular medical schools but that in itself did not insure quality. Like many new medical schools of the period, the Reformed College was a proprietary operation. In contrast to medical schools associated with universities, the faculty of a proprietary school owned the school and shared in its profits. The departmental "chairs" on the faculty were bought and sold for sizeable sums. This practice led to recruiting students based on the weight of their purse rather than the quality of their mind. Eventually this practice died out.

Wooster Beach published three volumes on *The American Practice of Medicine* (1833) which made him the acknowledged leader in Reform Medicine. He founded the *Eclectic Medical Journal* on the basis that Reform Medicine would take the best features of all schools of medicine and not be tied only to botanical cures. He set up an apothecary which supplied his recommended *materia medica*. Each label announced itself as Beach's Medicine and included a portrait of the old practitioner.

After unsuccessful attempts to obtain a State Charter, the Reformed Medical Association took advantage of an offer of a free college site in Ohio, and opened as the Medical Department of Worthington College. It was also known as the Reformed Medical

College of Ohio since this college had no other departments. Later the college name was changed to Kenyon College. The Medical College opened in 1830 with eight students. By 1839 the small size of the community and the opening of a new Medical College in Columbus put pressure for funds and recruits on the school. The discovery of a recently interred citizen on the dissecting table at the College ended "Reform" in Worthington and founded "Eclecticism" in Ohio.

The unchartered Reformed Medical College of Ohio continued with classes at Sixth and Vine in Cincinnati from 1842 to 1845. They finally received a Charter in March 1845 as the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati. Over the next 94 years 4666 students, including 440 women, received medical degrees in 88 graduating classes. When EMI closed its doors in 1939 Eclectic Medicine and its largely unchanged emphasis on a natural *materia medica* ended. Little could they know that within fifty years every drugstore and every mall would be promoting the same herbs, weeds, and botanicals that they had worked so hard to popularize.

But with the charter in 1845 there was now a job for the young Joseph Rodes Buchanan. He was to become, with Beach, Vaughan, and Morrow, one of the four pillars of Eclectic Medicine. The Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati was acknowledged as "The Mother Institute of Reform Medicine."

## What a UFOlogist Should Know

By Terry Endres

Although the UFO mystery has endured for half a century, only in the last half of that time has the term UFOlogy been commonly used to describe it as a field of study. Unfortunately, UFOlogy is not a science, at least not in the same sense as biology and geology are. The suffix, *logy*, is not enough to legitimize the field. More accurately, UFOlogy is concerned with isolating data -- distinguishing UFOs from identifiable phenomena. Achieving this separation is where the science comes in.

Having said all this, it must be lamented that anyone can claim to be a UFOlogist; there are no academic standards to determine competence.

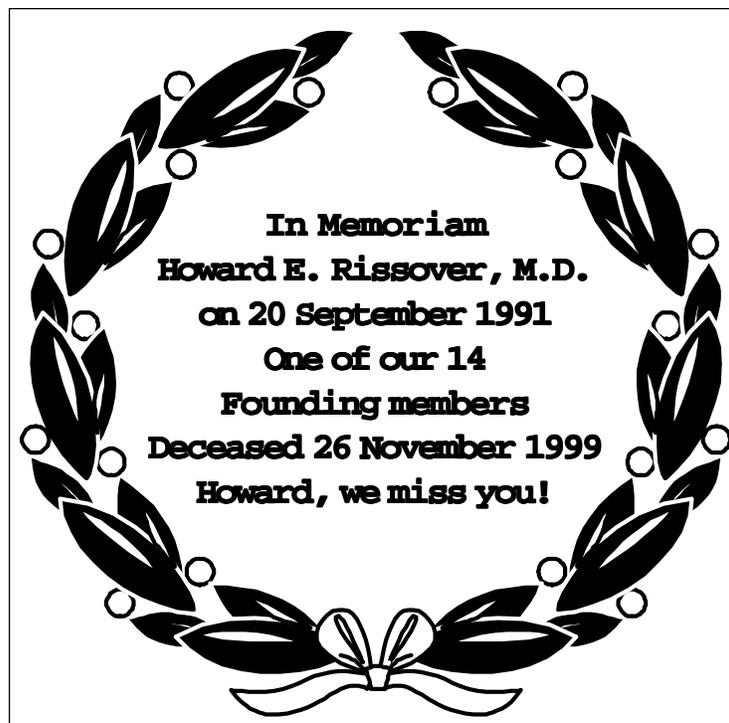
This is not to say that every UFOlogist must have half the alphabet trailing his or her name. Many fields -- such as geology, zoology, paleontology and astronomy -- have benefited greatly from the contributions of amateurs. Rather, it is important that a UFOlogist have a working knowledge of the sciences required to separate the proverbial apples from oranges.

Since UFOs are largely seen in evening skies, some elementary astronomy is useful. Venus, the brightest object in the night sky after the Moon,

draws a lot of attention when it is visible and relatively close to the horizon. Knowing when it is visible can eliminate a number of false sightings. Other planetary culprits include Mars, Jupiter and sometimes Saturn. A field guide, such as Peterson's or Audobon's, would be a useful investigative tool. Then, it is just a simple matter of having the witness indicate when and where in the sky the UFO appeared. Checking that information against planet location charts may reveal the nature of the object seen. If not, it's still a UFO and must be subjected to further scrutiny.

Non-astronomical objects must also be considered. Familiarity with the various airlines used by local airports is helpful. Knowing when News and AirCare helicopters are aloft can add to the list of possible explanations.

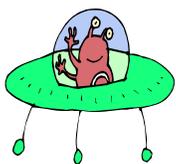
If the skies are cloudy when a sighting is made, then it's probably good to know a little about the weather. The type



and altitude of clouds can be informative. If a UFO is sighted skimming above cirrus clouds, then it has an estimated altitude of 55,000 feet. However, if the object is seen cruising below stratus clouds, it may have an altitude of only a few hundred feet. Additionally, if a UFO is seen traipsing about the lower regions of a cumulonimbus cloud, then the object may actually be a product of an electrical storm. A somewhat rare phenomenon is ball lightning, a small glowing mass of electrical plasma generated by thunderstorms.

UFOs are not restricted to rainy days. That's why serious consideration has been given recently to "earthlights", hypothetical balls of glowing plasma produced by tectonic stress. Simply stated, as large plates of the Earth's crust push into each other, the bedrock begins to buckle. Eventually, the stress exceeds the tensile strength of the rock, which will begin to fracture. These fractures release the pent up energy in the form of a plasma discharge. Historically, earthquakes have been presaged by sightings of strange lights. Theoretically, every inch of the Earth's surface is subject to tectonic stress of varying intensities. To understand the dynamics behind tectonic processes, a UFOlogist should know some geology.

Occasionally, a UFO may leave a trace of a close encounter in the form of scorched earth or grass. If weather conditions during the sighting eliminate a lightning strike, a little knowledge about soils and the effects of bacteria and fungi on vegetation provides groundwork for evaluating such evidence. Lawn care books typically provide color photos and descriptions of grass diseases. However, verifying the presence of bacteria and fungi in soil requires chemical analysis. Kits are available at some nurseries or garden centers that allow an investigator to determine the acid and



pH levels of a soil sample. Detecting bacterial intrusions requires more sophisticated techniques. Nevertheless, it is essential that soil samples be collected from the trace area and from control areas so comparisons can be made.

Finally, a UFOlogist must know some behavioral psychology. A researcher needs to understand how the human brain processes information and the conditions that can disrupt or enhance the storing of experiences. This is not about labeling UFO witnesses as crazy, but recognizing the limits of human perception and memory, and securing the most accurate data.

The point is not to kill the fun of pursuing a UFO mystery but to make the pursuit worthwhile. Furthermore, the credibility of one's findings relies on the thoroughness of the investigation. Only those cases that make it through every level of scrutiny can be classified as unknowns. Accepting questionable cases taints the database and weakens the validity of other reports. It is better to err on the side of caution than to err incautiously.

## A Puzzle for Thinkers



### Can this even be done?

Write an equation which consists of four digits 7 on the left (any number of math symbols), and which equals 100 on the right.

Something like this

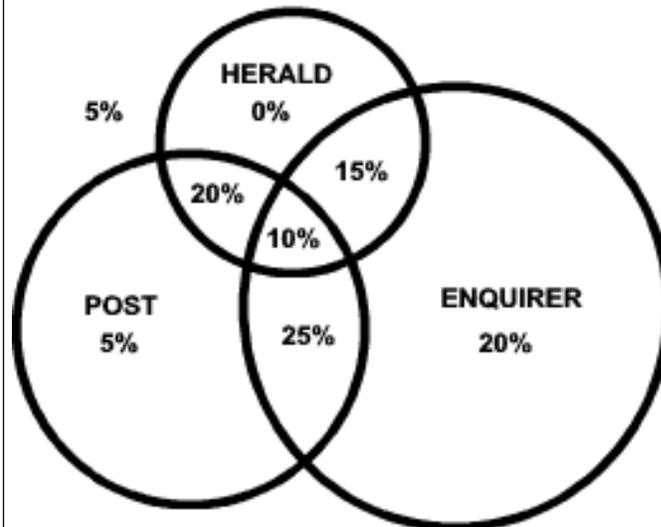
$$(7,7,7,7) = 100$$

### Solution to last month's puzzle:

Readership of three newspapers.

To solve use Venn diagrams. Start with the

### Newspaper Readership



fact that 10 percent read all three papers, the overlap of all three circles. This leaves so much for each overlap between any two papers, which in the case of the Herald exhausts the 45 percent readership. Deducting the various overlaps, leaves 20 percent reading only the Enquirer and 5 percent reading only the Post. Finally, adding all the readers together leaves 5 percent reading no paper.

And, yes Virginia, there is a Cincinnati Herald newspaper.

5 percent or 147 persons read no paper

20 percent read only the Enquirer

5 percent read only the Post

none read only the Herald

## Too Many Books.... Too Little Time....



*Lies Across America:*

*What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*

by James W. Loewen

(New York: The New Press, 1999)

The author of *Lies my teacher told me* has done it again. An absorbing book about the uses and misuses of history in the United States. This time he takes on historical markers, monuments, and museums which commemorate important, or not so important, persons, events, and places in our past. Some of these are enormous. Our tallest mountain in Alaska commemorates a President, whose accomplishments most couldn't name. Who are those faces carved out of Mt. Rushmore and Stone Mountain and why would we want to remember them? Some markers are very small, down to the discrete, little plaque on a house announcing George Washington slept here, or the historic markers along the roadsides of which there must be a million. All are grist for Loewen's mill.

A key point throughout the book is the need to be aware when and by whom the monument was placed. Historical memorials are generally built fifty or more years after an event happened or a person died, and it is the viewpoint of the builders, not of the historical personages that prevails. Viewpoints often differ and change. Would we today place the head of President Theodore Roosevelt with Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln on Mt. Rushmore? What do Indians, who by treaty were to keep the Black Hills forever, think of those four white faces? Indian youths are reported to go to considerable mountaineering danger to piss on their noses!

History is often times depicted the way we would like it to be, not the way it was. Washington may be shown kneeling a prayer at Valley Forge. He didn't, he was a deist who did not cotton to organized religion. Or showing him assuming a heroic stance in a small boat crossing the Delaware. Not true, standing is the last thing anyone would do on such journey.

Commemoration prettifies history, and draws its heroes larger than life. The darker side of American conquest, slavery, oppression, and war are rarely shown. Thus Blacks, Indians, Chinese, and Mexicans fare badly in American history. It is never mentioned the defenders of the Alamo were offered an honorable surrender, that they were the aggressors on foreign soil, which the Mexican Army defended. If

depicted at all, Blacks and Indians tend to be lesser figures below the white man on his horse, are petitioners, or in shackles.

Much of the book is devoted to the memorials of the Civil War in the southern and border states. Men who were slave holders, slave dealers, and defenders of slavery are cast as heroes in monuments constructed between 1890 and 1930. Indeed, since the North was not willing to accord Blacks equality or defend their civil rights, it was the Confederacy which ultimately won the war. In the many ante-bellum mansions which have become tourist attractions, including those of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson, slaves are rarely mentioned. That the gracious life of the period rested on the work of slaves is never indicated, neither have slave quarters been preserved or reconstructed. For all the guide books say, the master and mistress did all the maintenance and cleaning themselves.

Indeed, few Americans appreciate the extent to which slavery was a prison system. Loewen describes in some detail the one slave dealer's prison which has survived by the chance of having been turned into a school. It is now being restored. In Johnson's Crossing, Delaware, Loewen describes a preserved house, the lair of a "runaway slave snatching gang." But the descriptions at the site don't mention that.

The towns of Amherst in Massachusetts and in New York celebrate Lord Jeffrey Amherst. He is known for committing genocide (p. 415) among Indians by spreading smallpox infected blankets. Then there is King County in Washington, named for William Rufus King, a senator from Alabama and an extreme pro-slavery advocate. However, it was decided to rename the place for Martin Luther King, and they didn't even have to change the office letterhead (p. 40).

It is a book full of good stories and rarely heard history. It covers the country, but is well short of covering all historical monuments. To Loewen every one of them seems to have flaws; but hold, he does mention one accurate marker (p. 442).

— Wolf Roder

There was a young psychic from Perth  
Who was born on the day of his birth.  
He was married, they say,  
On his wife's wedding day,  
And died when he quitted this earth.

*Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials: The Rise of  
Irrationalisms and Perils of Piety*

by Wendy Kaminer

(New York: Pantheon Books, 1999)

Let me say that I like this book very much because I share Wendy Kaminer's attitudes. Hers is the rejection of all versions of the supernatural, whether it comes disguised as superstition, New Age thought, religious cult, or as major religion. She has no use for pseudo-science or medical quackery either. In a sense, she is the complete skeptic, with "I don't believe it" as the first reaction to any new claims. Perhaps, her view is excessive, and no doubt she derides some things which may at some time, in some way, some how turn out to contain truth. But it is an attitude which will not mislead you to accept the bogus.

The book thus addresses every sort of nonsense going at the present time. Her first consideration is the pious fraud of religion. She calls herself an agnostic, rather than a doctrinaire atheist. She sees no, or very little difference, between the Heaven's Gate cult and the mysteries of the Roman Catholic church, particularly in its more extreme forms. She discusses the role of sectarian ideas in the Public Square, the emergence of fundamentalism as a political force. She decries the attempt to force religious ideas, the Ten Commandments, creationism, or prayer, into the public schools. From a Jewish background herself, she remembers her bewilderment as a pupil, when forced to pray to Jesus in school.

In our technology heavy society most people can't tell science from science fiction, thus much passes for knowledge which is pure junk. Deepak Chopra and other gurus claiming justification in "quantum physics" come in for a good deal of cynical ribbing. She attacks the irrationality of the "drug war" on which we have spent billions without anything to show for it. "It has not reduced drug use; it has instead increased violent crime attendant on illegal drug trafficking, and police corruption," (p. 177). We have learned nothing from prohibition.

Kaminer goes after the public piety with which we treat the therapeutic assault on reason and rights. A total disregard for reasoning and objectivity has shaped a culture of fanciful notions of quantum medicine, recovered memory syndrome, satanic cults, and herbal remedies. Add to the misuse and misunderstanding of scientific research a complete naivete about social science, which is reflected in pop psychologies and their assumptions about human behavior, (p. 15). Where these ideas have spilled over into expert testimony in our courts, incredibly evil and unjust results have put the innocent into prison.

In the ultimate assessment, the irrational in our

culture rests on wishful thinking. Modern ideas of equality which reject deference to a knowledge elite, assert that everyone is or may be his own wisdom creator. If you feel it is true, if it speaks to you, if you can visualize it, then it is true. Questioning personal experience, whether visions of angels, tripping on a UFO, or near death experience is considered at best impolite and at worst destructive. Too many believe something is so, because they desperately need it to be true.

This book is fairly comprehensive on nonsense. As a roundup, and as an intelligent discussion of many topics, I recommend it strongly. Wendy Kaminer tries but can not always avoid the cynicism characteristic of news persons. But that is something all us skeptics have to wrestle with ourselves from time to time.

— Wolf Roder

**WANTED!!! . . . .**

**Your Favorite Superstitions!!!!**

**Collecting Superstitions for a  
Superstition Bash Party**

Send your favorites to; ART-Superstitions, P.O. Box 12896, Cincinnati, OH 45212 or e-mail me at dloughry@fuse.net.

***Without Comment . . . .***

The following courses are offered for the Summer Quarter by the University of Cincinnati *Communi*versity program:

- (1) "Aromatherapy for a Healthful Summer" offered by a Registered Nurse who also has pursued professional education in accredited seminars on Healing Touch, and Herbal Studies.
- (2) "Hypnosis: An Introduction" by two practitioners certified by the Ohio Academy of Holistic Health.

**Invitation: Science Book Club**

The Science Book Club meets regularly on the fourth Sunday of the month at the library, third floor, Room 6A, downtown Public Library, 8th and Vine.

Visitors and new members are welcome. When we finish one book, we select another to read. For more information, e-mail Bob Riehemann, briehe@a.cinternet.net. Or, for the current book, call the library at 369-6944.

## April Meeting from page 1....

methods for finding explanations for the odd things people see in the night sky.

Unlike many researchers in this field, Terry has not just thrown up his hands and decided that UFO's are the product of extraterrestrial exploration. Instead he looks for, and usually finds, ordinary terrestrial explanations. He believes that few physicists research this area because of the credulous UFOlogists already crowding the field.

His method includes going to an area in which a UFO has been reported, interviewing people who saw the object, and ferreting out likely sources of sightings, including weather, astronomical phenomena, factories and military installations. For most sightings, Terry feels fortunate if he is able to interview more than one witness. Generally the more witnesses, the easier it is to find a likely cause. If dozens of witnesses turn up, then the event is usually easy to explain.

In October 1996 he, Ron Schaffner, and Dale Farmer went to Adams County, Ohio, to investigate something which had been seen by people in several cities in the area. With the instincts of a social as well as a natural scientist, Terry noted that all the witnesses seemed sincere, and none appeared to give house room to pulp science fiction magazines or other things which might suggest a predisposition to seeing UFO's.

One witness was even able to supply him with a video tape of the alleged UFO's. On the tape a cluster of five or six lights seem to spin around, flicker and vanish. The flickering seemed reminiscent of flare. The moon was also on the tape, and as a result Terry, Dale, and Ron were able to estimate the altitude of the lights, which appeared to be about 30,000 feet above Peebles, Ohio. They were then able to determine that Peebles is in military air space. The air national guard uses the area for drills and maneuvers. One of these training exercises included making flare drops, deploying flares intended to misdirect heat-seeking missiles. The UFO's turned out to be these flares.



In early July, 1996, Terry received reports of sightings of strange red lights floating over Middletown, Ohio, accompanied by military aircraft. Witnesses described it as a burning red light. One couple reported that when they saw the object through their eight inch reflecting telescope, it resembled a flare.

One witness to the red lights claimed to have telepathic contact with the object through which he could persuade the object to follow his suggestions. No other witness mentioned this effect, so the team discounted this report, said Terry, in his straight forward "Just the facts, Ma'm" style.

As they moved across Middletown interviewing witnesses, the descriptions became better and better, suggesting that it might be coming from the AK Steel plant there. A week after they had talked to witnesses, one called and said the light had returned and that this time he made a



video tape of an airplane making an orbit around the object. Through the camcorder he could see that the flare was attached to a balloon or bag of some sort. Terry reported the observation to a local news department, and the hoaxes stopped.

Terry thinks this particular hoax could have been a flashlight but was more likely to have been a flare. A flare violates the fire code, because of the danger of landing on a house or dry field and starting a fire.

Terry is careful not to suggest to someone he is interviewing what the object seen might be. Most people he interviews do not think that what they have seen is a spaceship. Some investigators, coming at the problem from a point of view quite different from his, ask questions that could alter what the witness says through suggestion. Terry has heard an investigator ask blatantly leading questions, including, "Did you get any message from the object?" On the other end of the credulity scale according to Terry are people like Joe Nickell [a well-regarded CSICOP investigator] who prefer to disbelieve so strongly that they accept no evidence at all.

UFO's provide some physical, if short-lived, evidence for witnesses to base their observations on. Not so abductions. Terry says, he's not sure what these alleged abductions are all about, but there is no physical evidence of abductions. People who believe they are the victims of abduction by extraterrestrial aliens probably need professional help more than they need to spend time telling stories about the alleged events.

Terry observed the disadvantages of leading questions quite clearly at a psychic fair where he participated in a panel on UFO's. A woman spoke to him afterwards, telling him that she had waked to see three globes of light above her bed. The globes of light drifted out of the room and down the hall. As he was telling her that what she had seen could have been caused by many different things, including a waking dream or sleep paralysis, one of the other panelists intervened, saying that her experience was a classic beginning of an abduction experience. This remark frightened her needlessly, suggesting to her that she had been abducted based on very little evidence.

People who claim to have been abducted by extraterrestrials should not be discounted entirely, even though most of their accounts can readily be discredited. Any physical evidence should be taken into account, just as it is when claims of having been beaten, mugged or raped are

investigated and sometimes found to be false.

Terry concluded his talk with a slide show of photographs of the moon, Mars, Venus, and so on, emphasizing how poor images can lead to poor interpretations of the objects photographed. The Face on Mars, long claimed to be evidence of life on Mars, for example, when photographed with sufficient resolution, can be seen quite clearly to be a pile of rubble, even though it looked somewhat like a face when photographed at a lower resolution.

-- Reported by Virginia Jergens.



### Important News from the May Meeting



The May Membership Meeting was held Saturday, 13 May, at the U.S. Playing Card Co. Museum in Norwood. (See article p. 1). President Roy Auerbach announced plans for the October meeting to be held on Friday, 13 October. This will be a party, a "Superstition Bash," a chance to flout all your favorite superstitions. A committee is forming to plan the event. Volunteers are needed for all jobs. Call Nurit Bowman, 731-0642 or Donna Loughry, 961-7331 to volunteer or suggest a superstition that deserves a good bashing.

Secretary Virginia Jergens reported that the Executive Council has formalized the office of Webmaster to reflect the important role that our web site and e-mail discussion list have come to play in ART's work. The change to the by-laws was passed unanimously at the May Council meeting.

She also presented the Executive Council's nominations for next year's officers:

President: Roy Auerbach  
 Vice-president: Lance Moody  
 Secretary: Virginia Jergens  
 Treasurer: Rick Prairie  
 Membership Secretary: Nurit Bowman  
 Membership Committee Chair: Brad Bonham  
 Program Committee Chair: Brad Bonham  
 Meeting Organizer: Brad Bonham  
 Investigations Officer: Terry Endres  
 Newsletter Editor: Wolf Roder  
 Media Resources Coordinator: Bob Streifthau  
 Publicity Coordinator: Inez Klein  
 Webmaster: David Wall

There were no additional nominations from the floor. Elections will be held at the next membership meeting, Saturday, 10 June.

## From the May Meeting...page 1

museum, and the cards moved in, complete with a curator who had worked with the collection at the Art Museum. Five years later, Ron succeeded the original curator.

In the beginning, Tarot cards were not a focus of the museum's collection. Historians and everyone else believed that they were fortune telling cards, not the gaming cards which were the target of the collection. But recent research shows that Tarot cards were developed for use in playing a card game centuries before they were promoted as divination devices.

Like many newly found historical facts, the notion that playing cards were developed for a card game rather than for divination has had a hard time making it into the mainstream culture. Even today readers may open a reputable book and find that the author believed that Tarot cards, and indeed all cards, were developed for use in divination before they were used for gaming. Occultists in particular are annoyed at this turn of events, feeling that a gaming history sullies the mystical properties of their beloved deck.

The Tarot deck has four suits, but not the ones we see on today's playing cards. Instead of Hearts, Clubs, Spades,



and Diamonds, the Tarot deck uses Coins, Cups, Swords, and Batons, a variety of stick, sometimes a slender scepter, and in other areas, a heavy club. In many parts of the world, these four symbols are in use today on standard playing cards. Each suit has four court cards, a king, queen, knight, and a foot soldier, servant, or jack. Historians think that the queen probably

was invented for the game of Tarot. and added to the four-suited deck that we think of as our deck. That deck, minus the queen, was universal throughout Europe, at the time the Tarot deck was developing.

The game of Tarot also required picture cards in addition to the four suits. These cards were called "trionfi," the source of the English word "trump." They were trump cards, and as in many of today's card games, were more powerful than the court cards. Each of the 22 trump cards was given a different motif. Twenty-one of the cards are numbered; the last card, with no number, pictures a fool. The fool is historically unrelated to our joker.

The trump cards include a variety of themes, some of which seem odd by today's standards. Their origin and meanings are obscure. They include a wheel of fortune,

resurrection of the dead, justice, death, moon and star, pope, and oddly, a popess. Another card, usually called the hanged man, represents a man hanging upside down by an ankle.

Those who use the Tarot deck for mystic or occult practices today often interpret the hanged man as an ancient symbol of a yoga posture or of a god or hero sacrificing himself for the good of all. But the hanged man had no such mystical meanings for the fifteenth century northern Italians who originated the Tarot deck. For them, it was an everyday convention widely used as we would use a wanted poster. The upside down posture indicated that the person pictured was a criminal or traitor. This old Italian custom was echoed in more recent history when the bodies of Mussolini and his wife were strung up by their heels after they were assassinated in 1945 as World War II was coming to a close.



No one has been able to pin down a historical meaning for the trump card representing a Popess. Ron's current theory is that she represents one of the four platonic virtues, prudence or wisdom. Prudence is often depicted as a woman holding a book, as the figure of the Popess usually does. The Popess as prudence would be the fourth female representation of the four platonic virtues in the deck, in addition to justice, fortitude of spirit, and temperance, all represented by women.

The symbols represented on the trump cards vary somewhat from one Tarot deck to another. The oldest painted decks sometimes lack the devil and the tower, for example.

The important finding that Ron and his fellow researchers made is that although the symbols on the Tarot cards seem weird to us now, they were no more strange to their originators than the addresses on a Monopoly board are to us now. In other words, just gaming devices, familiar and lacking deep meaning.

As the game of Tarot developed, different versions appeared, with the trump cards in different orders. The order which survives today may come from Milan from which the deck may have been taken to Marseille. In Marseille, French titles were added to the trump cards. Earlier players had to remember what each one represented. In addition, as the game was adopted in different European countries it was given slightly different names. Tarot, the word used by the French, is the one that survives in English speaking countries today.

One of the problems facing modern researchers into the development of Tarot decks was that they didn't know how to play the game, which has died out in France and English speaking countries. Happily Tarot survived in Italy, where it

was found by Michael Dummett. Dummett frequented taverns in Sicily where variations of the game are still played and learned the game from local tavern goers. His reconstruction of the game's rules and strategies appears in his 1980 book, "The Game of Tarot."

Eighteenth century Paris is well-known as a fountain of enlightenment thinking. Less well known is that at the same time the proliferation of occult "wisdom" was also proceeding rapidly. In this intellectual ferment, the now-mysterious symbols of the Tarot deck became a treasure house of possibilities for occultists. The first person to exploit the Tarot deck for occult purposes was Etteilla (1738-1791). Etteilla may have chosen his unusual name in response to the fact that he, his brother, and his father all had the same, very conventional name, Jean Baptiste.

Having dumped "Jean Baptiste," taken up "Etteilla," and wrapped a turban around his head, Etteilla, from a working class family and poorly educated himself, became interested in the use of ordinary French decks of cards for fortune telling by ordinary citizens. He talked to working class people about what fortune telling ideas they associated with cards, and compiled all the meanings useful for telling the future. He also wrote about other forms of divination, including dropping eggs into water and throwing down combinations of shells and sticks. In a 1771 work he made, in passing, the first known mention of the association of the Tarot deck with occult practice.

Antoine Court de Gebelin (?1728-1784), who also embellished his name, likewise became interested in the Tarot deck. He came from a Protestant family who in spite of their despised religion were quite powerful in the Roman Catholic court of France. He wrote and published many books, all aimed at

proving his hypothesis that all human cultures, languages, and religions all developed from a single ancient culture, language and religion.

Court de Gebelin's theory was fairly reasonable, but his approach to historical facts was not. He came to believe, in the absence of any means of interpreting the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, which at the time were undeciphered, that the Tarot deck's trump cards were ancient Egyptian symbols, descended from Egyptian priests who had encoded their mystical faith in the cards. He also believed the deck could be used for fortune telling, the first mention of this use.

Etteilla, who claimed he knew all about this ancient Egyptian wisdom, was writing his own book on the subject, but lacked Court de Gebelin's in with the king, who was able to censor all books published in France. Through the king, Court de Gebelin was able to prevent Etteilla's books from

**Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett**  
*A Wicked Deck of Cards: the Origins of the Occult Tarot*  
 (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996)

being published for years, until he himself lost his court position. Once de Gebelin was out of the way, Etteilla was able to publish many books on the Tarot and the alleged ancient Egyptian wisdom.

All of these shenanigans occurred at a time when Europeans knew nothing about Egyptian religion or culture. The chief source of information about Egypt was Greek texts written in Egypt. There were called Hermetic texts because they blended Greek and Egyptian thought, conflating the Greek god Hermes with the Egyptian deity Thoth. Hermetic texts also included Egyptian Christianity. French writers had the Greek translated into French and thought they had their hands on authentic Egyptian religion, when what they were reading was a melange of Greek, Christian, and Egyptian thought.

Etteilla was persuasive and powerful enough to be able to convince others that he had the real dope on the Tarot. His competitor Gebelin's health deteriorated and he went to Anton Mesmer, the inventor of hypnotism, which he called Mesmerism, for a magnetic cure. This magnetic treatment involved sitting in a tub of iron filings surrounded by magnets. Etteilla outlived Court de Gebelin, who died holding on to the sides of the magnetic tub.

But Etteilla's reputation did not survive his own death in 1791. The divinatory meanings he had attributed to the Tarot cards were not sufficiently mystic or elaborate for his successors. Eliphas Levi (1820-1875) began with the Tarot de Marseille, the same deck Etteilla and de Gebelin used. He embraced Etteilla's notion that the cards could foretell the future and Court de Gebelin's notion that the cards revealed ancient Egyptian wisdom. To this he added his own contribution: Having observed that there were 22 trump cards in the deck, and that the Hebrew alphabet includes 22 letters, he decided that the Hebrew alphabet and the Tarot trump cards were clearly closely related. He put a Hebrew letter on each Trump card, and then dug through the Cabala and assigned meanings to each letter of the alphabet.



Levi was the only member of this group of occultists who was able to support himself as a professional occultist. He began his career as a priest, but had significant difficulty with the celibacy requirement. Having impregnated two women, he went on to be a social reformer and professional occultist. His many books firmly installed Tarot into the tradition of western magic, emphasizing their relation to Egyptian divination, hermeticism, and mesmerism among other occult and pseudoscientific practices.

Levi's work was extended by Paul Christian (the pen name of Jean Baptiste Pitois, 1811-1877) and Papas (1865-1916). Christian picked up on the Egyptian concepts and

Papas picked up on Hebrew Cabalism. Next time you read about New Age tourists in Egypt sitting around in pyramids, think of Paul Christian He concocted completely fabricated Egyptian religious rites for consecrating priests. The priest was said to enter the Sphinx through an entrance between its paws, climb down an iron ladder of 77 steps, the number of cards in the Tarot deck. He was required to survive a number of challenges, including temptation by beautiful dancing maidens, who offered him several cups of wine, one of which was poisoned, and so on, and on. Papas was a prolific and influential occultist who wrote widely about the Tarot, synthesizing much of the work of his predecessors.

Nevertheless history has been given its voice by modern scholarship: the Tarot deck developed in Italy as a deck for the game of Tarot. It was not associated with fortune telling or Egyptian mysticism or any other mysticism until eighteenth and nineteenth century France. -- Reported by Virginia Jergens



Remember this for the fourth of July. Flying the flag is of course a blatantly sexist, phallic ritual. The very symbolism of raising and lowering the flag every day, it is obvious.

-- bio-astrologer Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion

### *Without Comment*

## American College of Metaphysical Theology

Total Fees:

**Ph.D.** \$ 179.00    **M.A.** \$ 139.75    **B.A.** \$ 99.75

### Doctoral Degree

Features/Benefits:

- Total Fee \$ 179.00
- Entire degree can be completed in anywhere from one month to one full year's time.
- Full credit for life learning experience.
- No residency; learn within your own community
- Design your own major/study.
- Full credit for prior course work.
- Year around enrollment.
- Ministerial Credentials are included at no extra charge.

**Phone: 800-689-5102**

**Fax: 612-525-1566**

**E-mail: [info@americancollege.com](mailto:info@americancollege.com)**

**Website: [www.americancollege.com](http://www.americancollege.com)**

**The Association for Rational Thought** is an independent, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization. We share the ideas and philosophies of CSICOP, the Skeptics Society, and JREF.

**CSICOP** : the *Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal* publishes the *Skeptical Inquirer*, a journal of investigations of paranormal claims. PO. Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703, phone: 800-634-1610, fax: 716-636-1733, [www.scicop.org](http://www.scicop.org)

**The Skeptics Society**, publishes *The Skeptic Magazine*. PO Box 338, Altadena, CA 91001; phone: 626-794-3119; fax 626-794-130; [skepticmag@aol.com](mailto:skepticmag@aol.com) and [www.skeptic.com](http://www.skeptic.com).

**JREF**: the James Randi Educational Foundation publishes the *Swift Newsletter*. 201 SE Davie Blvd. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1815. phone: (954) 467-1112, fax: (954)467-1660, [www.randi.org](http://www.randi.org)

**A.R.T.** meets on the second Saturday of each month September through June, 10:00 AM at James Tavern in Blue Ash and publishes *Cincinnati Skeptic* each month. A.R.T. meetings are open to the public. A.R.T. also maintains a database of information on paranormal claims for local new media to consult and investigates local paranormal claims. A.R.T. was founded by Cincinnati area skeptics in 1991. Annual dues are \$15.00 and include a subscription to the *Cincinnati Skeptic*.

For more information call: President Roy Auerbach (513)731-2774 or Nurit Bowman, (513) 731-0642 or visit our website. **Address Changes and Corrections, Membership Questions:** Roy Auerbach (513) 731-2774 E-mail: [raa@cinci.rr.com](mailto:raa@cinci.rr.com)

**Mailing Label Information:** "00/00/00 Member": You are a member in good standing; your membership will expire on the date on the label. "Lapsed": (*highlighted*) - your membership has expired. Please send your dues as soon as possible.

**Yes!** — I want to support the important work of **The Association for Rational Thought** and receive *Cincinnati Skeptic* and meeting notices. I have enclosed funds for:

New Member       Renewing Member       Contribution       Gift membership for/by:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**We have kept dues low and will continue to do so in spite of rising costs. However, if you are able to, your additional contributions are very much appreciated. Please give generously, if possible. Thank you very much!**

**I would like to make a contribution in addition to my dues to further the important work of the Association:**

Contribution Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Dues: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Make your check payable to the **Association for Rational Thought** and mail to A.R.T., P.O. Box 12896, Cincinnati OH 45212. *Contributions are not at present tax deductible, but we are working on it.*

Request subjects for future meetings \_\_\_\_\_

Please do *not* include my name and address in mailing lists exchanged with other groups.



### *Skepticism and ART on the Electronic Media*

For the latest in skeptical news via e-mail, join SANE, the Skeptical Area Network Effort. You will find cheerful, rational messages from CSICOP, James "The Amazing" Randi, your fellow local skeptics and ART in your e-mail box every week. This is our means of staying in touch between issues of the *Cincinnati Skeptic*.

Be sure to check out our skeptical website at <http://www.cincinnati-skeptics.org> --- It contains: our BLURBS on various subjects; lots of nifty links to skeptical thinking around the world; the information for joining SANE; the basic definition of who we are, what we do, and our bylaws. In addition, you'll find such things as how to get to our meetings held at James Tavern; other ways to reach us; and how to send sample copies of the newsletter to potential members.

—David Wall, Web Site Manager

**Web:** <http://www.cincinnati-skeptics.org>

**E-mail:** [darkon@one.net](mailto:darkon@one.net)



**Association for Rational Thought**  
**P.O. Box 12896**  
**Cincinnati, OH 45212**

**Address Service Requested**

**Non-Profit Org.**  
**U. S. Postage Paid**  
**Cincinnati, OH**  
**Permit 402**

**The Association for Rational Thought** is an organization committed to encouraging rational, well-informed evaluation of fringe-science, pseudoscience, and paranormal claims. A.R.T. encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a member of A.R.T. Membership information is included elsewhere in this issue.

## **Preview Of Coming Attractions....**

**Place:** James Tavern at Cooper Road and Reed Hartman Highway. It is a great place to gather and then have the lunch/social portion of each meeting. This location is very accessible for folks wielding walkers, wheel-chairs and the like. Coffee is available with a small donation during the meeting.

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM -- program -->12:00PM - 2:00 PM -- lunch

**Please mark your calendar and plan to attend!..See you there!**

**Tenth (Final) Meeting of the 1999-2000 Season! Date and Day: 10 June 2000**

**Speaker:** Wolf Roder, Professor of Geography, University of Cincinnati.

**Topic:** What are the social sciences, and what are they trying to accomplish?

When some people mention "science" they often seem to refer to the hard sciences only, -- physics, chemistry and biology. To these people "social science" is an oxymoron. If it's social it can't be science. Yet, the social sciences, -- economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, and perhaps geography, -- firmly insist they are "sciences" too.

So what gives? By what possible definition and in which improbable contortion of philosophy can "social science" be considered proper science. If that one flies, next we'll consider Christian Science, psychic science, and parapsychology as sciences, or as Esmeralda von Löwenzahn-Dentdelion would say, also bio-astrology.

But, hey, Roder is serious, he's going to defend the social sciences as science. He claims there exists a social science, and it is a "science" in the same sense as the natural, physical, and biological sciences.

*Join us....to find out what's real and what's not!*

***Watch Your Mail For a postcard about our ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC!***