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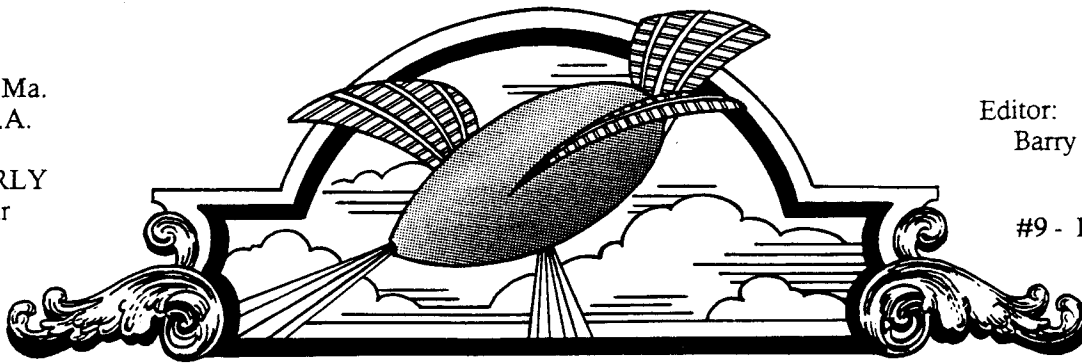
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Editor:
Barry Greenwood

#9 - February 2002

U.F.O. HISTORICAL REVIEW

EDITORIAL

Since the tragic events of September 11th, the mood of the nation has shifted towards matters of politics, economics, the military, and away from issues with which we deal, the UFO phenomena. There has been a noticeable trend of slackening press coverage and lowering memberships in UFO organizations, even before September 11th. This need not necessarily be a bad thing for UFOlogy. While America repairs and rebounds, the same can be done within this house. Being out of the limelight for an extended period can allow what has gone wrong with UFO research to be put aside. Steps can be taken to clean up, sort out, put into order what we can't find when we need it. The presentation of UFO history to the public is in dire need of an overhaul.

UHR is a publication devoted to the recovery and presentation of old information on the topic of unidentified flying objects and related matters. A great deal of time has been spent has been spent in reporting on obscure incidents, but the process of discovery, and especially the preservation of such information, has not been described in the way that we should be addressing this matter. Most of this issue will be devoted to the infrastructure of UFO history and what lies ahead.

UFO HISTORY – A CRISIS LOOMS!

As of this writing, the modern era of the UFO controversy is 54 years old. If one counts earlier manifestations of odd aerial phenomena (airships, mystery planes, ghost rockets, flying lances and shields), then the controversy is much older still. A vast majority of the record of UFOs exists on paper, with the remainder contained on audio and videotape, photographic film, electronic storage (computers), and in the memories of living witnesses and participants.

The most fragile of these records of knowledge are the memories of people involved. Once people pass on, that record is lost forever. Even living, illness or age can change an individual memory record irreparably. This is unless one or more of the other media mentioned above preserves the recollections of those individuals. Countless memory records have been lost already through death or illness. In other cases where at least some information was retrieved, we are insured that a percentage of UFO events will forever remain unexplained by way of incompleteness or ambiguity. For this reason alone, the UFO mystery will always exist, whether or not one believes they are extraterrestrial vehicles. You can never be absolutely sure that every last incident was not a spacecraft from another world. As a hypothetical, let us say a real extraterrestrial spacecraft flew over a city to take a photograph and then move along to somewhere else. If it was seen, it was so fleeting that the sighting could be dismissed as a star, meteor, balloon; etc. If it was real but of such low information content that nothing could be proven by it. Again, for this reason, the notion of UFOs as ET vehicles will always be with us.

We are all aware of the fragility of other media. Photographic film, if not carefully handled under ideal conditions, can deteriorate over time. Cheap color film can blanch inside a house with indirect lighting. Have you ever watched a family portrait hanging in a room loses its bright color and vitality? It is said that half of all theatrical movies produced before 1950 are lost through the deterioration of silver nitrate film, destroying the existing negatives. 80% of all silent films are lost forever, some of the remaining ones being only portions or even fragments. We have heard much about gun camera films of UFOs from official sources. I know of only two in hand from the Project Blue Book era, and one of them shows nothing useful (the other being the 1953 Luke Air Force Base, Arizona film). Where are all of the others? If gun camera film of the 1950s suffers the same fate as the Hollywood theatrical releases of the same period, we may have lost up to half of that record.

Audio and videotapes are no more secure. The coating on magnetic tape becomes brittle over time, flaking off with use. The average shelf life of videotape is ten years – just ten years! Additionally, other technologies are replacing audio and videotapes. In other words, the old tapes are becoming electronic antiques that will become less and less relevant over time unless steps are taken to transfer the information to a more stable containment.

Much publishing on UFOs goes to the Internet now. It is a remarkable place. Information can be written, checked for spelling and grammar, and made ready for publishing, all without going beyond your desktop. Information can be instantly sent to all corners of the world with similar receiving capabilities and be distributed rapidly. Questions can be answered in minutes instead of the days or weeks it would take to receive a letter through the mail. UFO research constitutes one of the largest uses of Internet browsing; second only to sex it is said!

The process of doing research has been enormously simplified. In years past when a small UFO wave broke out somewhere, I would have to schedule a weekend day for a visit to a large library, one that carried many newspapers. Much of the day would be spent hand-paging through dozens of newspapers and magazines. After many hours, I would have a handful of paper, along with dirty hands, a headache and an empty stomach (remember – no eating in the library!).

Now with the Internet, more newspapers everyday are creating websites with the daily news. Most important world dailies can be reached with a few button clicks. Stories can be read, downloaded and printed, all from your home. For me a dramatic thing has happened. Clipping files have become printout files since connecting to the Internet. The sources for these are the same: places that print the newspapers, but only the form is different. Where is the past photocopying a news story resulted often in smeared print, dull black and white graphics and dark or washed-out photos, we now have crisp print, colorful graphics and clear photos that can be printed onto photographic paper. Many libraries have recognized this and have been replacing their hardcopy holdings with computers for space-saving ease of use.

Does anyone see a danger in this last sentence? I'll explain.

It doesn't seem like there is any sort of problem with this as a means to preserve the history of the UFO controversy. However, unless the information on the Internet is backed-up in duplicate, the data can be removed forever in the blink of an eye, or in this case a click of a mouse. Unless an online newspaper has an electronic archive from which to retrieve information, each day's news disappears into oblivion. Many of them do not have an archive. Computer viruses can destroy electronic records easily, and in less time than it takes to strike a match. If an Internet server goes bankrupt, a website can vanish. This is why I print a copy of information in hardcopy for printout albums. Therefore, to see libraries discarding their hardcopy records in favor of electronic records is a disquieting situation.

So in all cases so far, we are dealing with keeping records of events on media which can be described as "temporary". How temporary is up to the holder of the records.

Now, what about paper? Depending on a myriad of conditions, a dedicated private record keeper of paper records can care for that information for an average period of roughly 40-60 years (assuming one starts as a teenager through old age – and this is for a truly dedicated researcher who doesn't lose interest over time). What happens when interest wanes or age catches up and unique records are held? Often uninterested relatives, the usual inheritors of such private property, do not want to be saddled with prodigious amounts of paper records with which they can do nothing. The quick solution is to throw it all out in the trash, problem solved by the Department of Public Works! This has happened more often than you think with UFO records. A local man once told me to come and get his records if anything happened to him. When it did, the man's wife, frustrated by years of his having spent too much time on UFOs, had already toss them in the trash before I was able to recover them.

In other cases, records are sold to dealers where they can, and have, disappeared into private collections. One such example are the records of Robert Giglio, a UFO investigator from New Hampshire whose records, primarily tape recordings of witnesses, were turned over to a private individual who has yet to make any of the tapes available after more than a decade. Only a tiny percentage of donated UFO files go to a public institute or relevant organization.

We are rapidly approaching a time when there promises to be a fair number of private collections from older UFO researchers waiting to be placed in an accessible location for others to consult.

Colleges and universities would seem to be the logical places to send such material. There are problems with this. There are not many such places interested in accepting UFO information, which is seen as frivolous and unimportant by a great majority of academic institutes. It helps if the donor had ties to the university, but it is nevertheless difficult to convince those institutes of the value of UFO ephemera and more difficult still if the amount of records is large. One of the few active collections is at Ohio State University, which is building a collection from donor William Jones.

Public libraries, and indeed all libraries, are clearing their shelves of books and switching to computers. There is no longer a guarantee that books in libraries will stay there forever. They are "thinned" according to use, or lack thereof. Books are now expensive, terrible eaters of shelf space and usually only the most useful are kept by libraries. Only the largest have more room to store, but even they must be mindful of space. Many store records off site now, meaning that if you go to a library to ask for an obscure volume, you will be told that it should be available in a few days. I must now make two trips that took only one before. Almost none have UFO collections that would even closely rival most long-time private UFO researchers' own records in published material.

We are left with a dilemma: How do we make accessible a comprehensive record of UFO history with few locations in which to place them? Recently I visited one of the premier technical universities in the world, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to survey what one might expect to be a large holding of UFO information with the general perception of the subject being one of a scientific mystery. Their main library held approximately one shelf foot of books on UFOs!

Private UFO organizations exist that would be glad to accept UFO material. The "Mutual UFO Network" of Colorado and the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies" in Illinois both have large holdings. But all exist on thin budgets and cramped space. MUFON is the only large organization left from the 1960s and CUFOS the only large one from the 1970s. If funds evaporate, records go into storage, out of public view. The Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), a large organization, folded in the 1980s. The files were given to private individuals who have not allowed open access to the records for over a decade. The records have not been inventoried and do not appear to be available for the foreseeable future. The MUFON and CUFOS organizations have done a public service in making records available. Much of their holdings have been duplicated to other locations to insure their survival. However, there is no guarantee of long-term survival of these organizations.

So a crisis looms for the future of UFO history, both in preservation and storage. If UFOlogy can't sell itself as a serious topic worthy of saving, then the crisis will be sooner than later.

What can be done to ease this problem?

First to preservation: There are a number of simple things that can be done to extend the lifetime of particular kinds of records. In all cases, records should never be kept in damp, unfinished cellars or uninsulated attics. Mildew is a killer in cellars while heat in attics will bake the life out of any medium, whether tape, paper or plastic.

Videos: With an average shelf life of ten years, perhaps longer with extreme care, videos must be recopied onto fresh tape. The downside is a few percent loss of signal quality. More preferable is a transfer to DVD. DVD recorders are beginning to enter the home market and will allow old tapes to be dubbed to discs with little loss in quality. They are costly at about \$800 to \$1000 and multiple formats will exist for tape standards, much the way that VHS and Beta formats existed for tapes. But it is better than losing an old program. The earliest wide-use home videos began in the late 1970s. That is over twenty years ago. Those videos are aging out of existence!

Audios: Shelf life is longer than video. Nonetheless, this tape ages as well. Transfer to fresh tape (again with slight loss), or making paper transcripts is advised after 20-30 years. With the use of paper transcripts, there will be the loss of subtle nuances, inflections in voices, which may be revealing about the emotional state of the speaker. Remarks about this can be added to a transcript but unless an original tape still exists, doubts can be raised about the subjectivity of such editorial comments. But the transcript must be accurate. Can one be sure remarks are accurate in a regular transcription by one individual? I propose a "Certified Transcript" where a transcription is made and signed, then an independent party checks the transcript against the tape and signs as well. If UFOlogy hopes to be taken seriously by scientists or historians, such guidelines need to be enacted. The advantage of transcripts is that they are easier to use for research. An important remark on tape can be located and verified on a transcript much more efficiently than replaying a tape and hoping you hear the target remark sometime within an hour or two! More preferable still would be a CD, which has a long shelf life and doesn't suffer the pitfalls of delicate tape.

Photos: Photographs can now be digitally scanned for computer storage, easily sent to others for copying, can be printed back into a paper copy, and be used in a variety of publishing ways. They can also be manipulated as never before and must be considered with a careful eye. Modern technology can change the appearance of photographs in undetectable ways. Also, a danger lurks in the technology changing to the point of making one medium incompatible with another. There was the horror story a few years back of NASA photo and data tapes from the 1960s being unreadable because of the great advances in computer science rendering the early storage technologies obsolete. Only with great effort in reconstructing an old tape machine from scattered spare parts was the information saved.

Paper: We are all familiar with basic care of paper records. Don't store them near a fireplace, keep them away from moisture, keep them in acid-free containers; etc. There are other things not so obvious that would be very helpful to preserving UFO records. The comic book industry has recognized the need to sleeve their products in plastic bags to preserve the covers and contents. It should be no less for UFO records. Some UFO periodical publications are very badly produced and will age brown no matter what is done. Bagging will keep friction on bad paper to a minimum and on better-produced publications will keep the covers fresher. Older, stapled publications, i.e. loose sheets held by one to three staples, should be immediately separated if evidence of staple rust shows and placed in archival sheet protectors for a binder. The staples not only stain the paper but also tear gaping holes in the binding location.

Newspaper clippings are another problem. Most newspapers are not printed on paper meant to last. Many older clips, with little provocation from dampness and sunlight, will turn a shade of brown that would make any beach bunny happy! And collectors in the past taped clips to albums, ID labels to clips, or repaired the clips with tape. The tape eventually dried out, severely staining portions of the clip to unreadability. Even worse, the clips couldn't be photocopied after being damaged this way. Many archives will photocopy original clips, keep the copy and throw away the original. Many times I have researched in other locations and found a folder full of clippings where the taped-on labels for the clips had dried out and fell off. A dozen or so clips would have no label, some labels were missing and I would have to guess where the rest went. Tiny labels would often fall entirely out of the folders they were in, hopelessly lost. I have a three-inch binder I call the "Tomb of the Unknowns," full of clippings which can't be identified as to source or time.

The solution requires a relatively small outlay for a long-term benefit. Clips are placed on white letter paper (acid-free) with a dab of neutral glue stick (avoid rubber cement at all costs!) to anchor it to the paper. Labels can be stuck to the clips in the same way. The finished sheets are placed in top-loading sheet protectors. If the labels fall off the paper over time, they stay in the sealed sheet and aren't lost or damaged. A box of 100 sheet protectors is about \$10 US. These are sorely needed in library collections but it is likely that budget constraints keep sheet protectors from being widely used.

There are ways to save browning and poorly photocopied clips. When a clip starts to age, run it on a computer scanner and reprint it using a good quality printer. It will be as fresh as when issued and on better paper. Photos will appear clearer too, unlike reprints done on photocopiers. You can then toss the deteriorating original.

Photocopies from the past are often the only available copies of a particular item. And they weren't always of the greatest quality. A common problem was a copier not having adequate toner, meaning a light copy that reproduced badly. I have had stunning results running such a light clip through the computer scanner and increasing the ink volume under "properties." It is like coloring in the light copy, resulting in a reproduction far superior to the original, poor photocopy. The major drawback is that computer ink is water-soluble. Don't spill liquid on the copies. The sheet protectors will defend against most accidents. You shouldn't be drinking coffee near records anyway. Do you want your descendants laughing at your careless coffee rings?

Storage: As already outlined, long-term storage of UFO records is a difficult problem. They tend to be voluminous, full of information of varying degrees of quality, and they represent a topic not looked upon with a great deal of respect by society.

Several ideas can be offered. Draft a letter for mass mailing to colleges and universities attempting to identify which ones are not only willing to accept UFO archival material, but are willing to preserve and build upon it. The letter should be under a group banner rather than under one individual's name. A fact sheet giving the best pitch for saving what society sees to be frivolous information should accompany it. We know much of it is quite valuable, but they don't. Some UFOs may be sightings of meteorites that are recoverable if a scientist knows specifics of

when and where they were seen. Some may be ball lightning. Even if this is successful, information will still be somewhat isolated. Research at, say, a Harvard UFO collection will be expensive for a San Diego resident. Ephemeral UFO records (tapes, case files, letters, government documents) should be scanned and copied for distribution to regional holding centers. If original information is destroyed, it will continue to exist on a computer disc or microfilm. At this moment I have a 214 volume UFO clipping collection. Copies of some of the pages are in the hands of others, but most aren't. If the house goes up in flames so does the collection – for good.

Few significant funding sources exist to finance retrieval and storage efforts. Cash-strapped researchers struggle to do what they can out of pocket. Unfortunately it is not enough to save a percentage of important information from disappearing.

If you think any danger is overstated read on.

A newspaper, the New York World-Journal-Tribune, went out of business in 1967. The morgue of the combined former three newspapers consisted of 256 three-drawer cabinets and 500 storage boxes. The information was donated to the University of Missouri-Columbia for safe keeping where it was first stored in an underground ammunition dump. It was later moved to a limestone cavern near Kansas City as a temporary move while a permanent building to store archives was erected. But since one university department erected the building, it assessed high fees to other departments (including the one overseeing the morgue). It was determined that the fees were too high to store the collection. In March 1982 a university committee of history professors decided that the morgue was of “doubtful value” and decided to destroy the collection.

The College of Journalism of South Carolina University learned of the pending destruction order, essentially the dumping of the collection into a landfill, and asked for its donation to the University. The move was made.

However, while praising the value of the collection, SCU decided to seek a grant to convert the collection to microfilm. The Hearst Corporation provided the grant and soon after the microfilming was completed, the hardcopy of the archive was destroyed anyway! It doesn't appear that any attempt was made to solicit the morgue to another location where it could have been preserved. So neither the paper collection nor any index to it survives.

Once a donated collection passes to another, it becomes the property of that person or institute. It can be decided that information is useless and can therefore be disposed to a landfill or a furnace legally. The action to destroy a collection can be done before anyone interested enough in its survival can even know about the decision.

If the newspaper morgue of three former merged New York City newspapers is deemed not worth saving (by two colleges no less), then what can we expect of donated UFO collections? Once they get into an academic setting the clock may start ticking to their demise. What to UFO researchers is seen as priceless history is seen by many others as a voluminous pile of scrap paper that is costly to store and preserve. How the value of the information is sold to a skeptical outside world may be the key to the survival of UFO history.

10-11-65

By Tom Sawyer

Mysterious Sky Objects Reported

Eight railroad men made UFO sightings Wednesday at 10:31 p.m. The UFO stands for Unidentified Flying Objects.

Paul Vance, the first to sight the objects, said there were four, coming in from the north

and in formation. He said they had a "dull silver" color.

All the men were positive the objects were not aircraft or shooting stars. The objects made no sound.

Vance said three of the objects, estimated at 5000 feet,

peeled off to the left as the men viewed them; and the fourth, when overhead, in a straight line. Eventually the three split from their formation.

Neither officials at Dow AFB nor at the Charleston radar station had made sightings.

Others who saw the objects were Jim Roach, Francis Drew, Leo McInnis, Delton Lawrence, Leslie Snyder, Richard Jordan and Charles McInnis. The men all work at the Maine Central Railroad round house just off Main Street.

An example of how modern technology can be applied to preservation work in UFO history. On the left is a clipping sent by a U.S. clipping service in 1965. It is barely legible in its original and certainly reproduces badly. On the right is a copy processed through a relatively inexpensive computer scanner and printer. The item is brought to life once again. All text is UNRETOUCHED.

News (e)
BANGOR, Me.
Cir. 77,616

AUG 5 1965

"Fly Over Bangor"

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