

# Phactum

The Newsletter of the  
Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking  
May/June 2008

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## PhACT Luncheon and Media Discussion Panel

Come to the **PhACT Luncheon on May 17, 2008** at Edibles Restaurant in Horsham, PA for a buffet luncheon and enlightening "*Media Integrity Panel Discussion*" featuring Philadelphia Inquirer columnist **Faye Flam**, station KYW radio news journalist **Tony Romeo**, and local Fox TV news reporter **Bruce Gordon**. The major topic of discussion will be media responsibility in the matters of presenting fair coverage of science and pseudo science topics.

This event is one of the few PhACT events that is not free. The cost is \$25, \$15 for students, but otherwise is open to all who wish to attend and have made reservations. Please send reservations and checks payable to PhACT to 639 W. Ellet Street, Philadelphia, PA 19119. Seating is limited to 40 and reservations will be honored according to postmarked date.

At noon on May 17, 2008 at Edibles Restaurant in Horsham PA. Reservations will be confirmed by email or US Mail along with directions and a map of the area.

This event will be PhACT's last intellectual activity for the 2007/2008 year. Members are invited to the PhACT picnic on Sunday, July 13, 2008. at Mondauk Commons Park in Upper Dublin. This is free but is for members and their guests only.

On Saturday, September 20 the 2008/2009 lecture series at Philadelphia Community College will resume when Dr. John Allen Paulos, a professor of mathematics at Temple University and award winning journalist, will address PhACT discussing Innumeracy, math in society, and other things that might be on his mind.

### The PhACT Council

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*Phactum* is, in theory, printed 6 times a year and is the main propaganda organ for the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking.

If you are not a member/subscriber we invite you to become one by sending \$15 for a one year membership to PhACT, \$10 for students. Donations are welcome.

Send letters of rebuttal, ideas, short essays, poetry, opinion pieces, complaints, and lavish praise to Ray Haupt, Phactum editor, at [phactpublicity@aol.com](mailto:phactpublicity@aol.com).

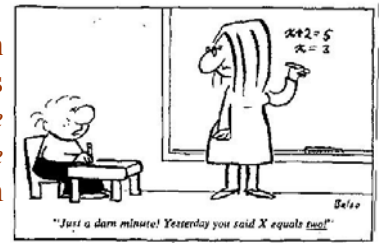
# PHACT CALENDAR

The **Physics Department of Community College of Philadelphia** hosts meetings of **PhACT** - at 2:00 PM on the third Saturday of most months at Community College of Philadelphia, 17th and Spring Garden Streets, West Building Room W2-48. **Meetings are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.**

**Saturday, May 17, 2008 - Media Integrity Panel Discussion including Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Faye Flam, KYW News Radio personality Tony Romeo, and Fox TV News reporter Bruce Gordon.** At Noon at Edible's Restaurant in Horsham, PA on Saturday May 17<sup>th</sup>, we will have a panel discussion about media issues. This costs \$25 per person and must be paid in advance. See page 1 for more details. Reservations are a must.

**Sunday, July 13, 2008 - PhACT Picnic.** Details TBA. This event is Free but is reserved for members and their guests only.

**Saturday, September 20, 2008 - Innumeracy – Math in Society by John Allen Paulos.** John has been a major source of mathematical input to the media for years and has written books including *Irreligion*, *Innumeracy*, *A Mathematician Plays The Stock Market*, *Beyond Numeracy*, *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper*, *Once Upon A Number*, and *I Think Therefore I Laugh*. You can see more information on John's writings at <http://www.math.temple.edu/~paulos/>



**Tuesday, May 6, 2008. 7:00PM** at Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010. **The Ascent of Humanity Lecture & Discussion with Charles Eisenstein.** Charles Eisenstein is the author of three books. His most recent, *The Ascent of Humanity*, is an exploration of the history and possible future of civilization from the perspective of the cultural concept of self. Eisenstein will discuss the historical process by which spirituality became a category separate from life, as well as how the conceptual divide between the sacred and the mundane originated and has grown. Formerly a faculty member of Penn State University's Department of Science, Technology, and Society, Eisenstein has also lived in Taiwan as a translator of the Chinese language. His other books include *The Yoga of Eating* and *Transformational Weight Loss*, both of which address holistic health and the transformation of human consciousness and civilization. Free and open to the public.

**Friday, May 9, 2008 at 8:00 PM. Delaware Valley Mensa General Membership Meeting.** How many religions are available to us? Why does a person embrace one religion while rejecting all the rest? How and why is your God different than my God? Why do you worship your God as you do while I worship mine as I do? If there truly is a God, then why does (S)He allow such bad things to happen to, not only his/her people, but to the rest of humanity as well? If there is one topic that creates controversy, if there is one topic that creates more questions as we struggle to find answers, religion is it.

Over the years, we have had representatives from numerous religious beliefs address the members of Delaware Valley Mensa. Tonight we continue this informal look at the world's major religions as we take a closer look at the Baha'i Faith. Susan Mojaverian is a 38 year member of the Baha'i Faith who is passionate about the promotion of unity in diversity. She has raised two wonderful children in a multicultural marriage. Ms. Mojaverian is an RN who enjoys being a Nursing Faculty member at Drexel University.



The General Membership Meeting will be held at the Police Administration Building, 750 Race Street, Philadelphia, PA. This meeting is DVM's only activity specifically open to the public, **so feel free to invite your friends and relatives.** Refreshments will be provided and door prizes will be awarded. The meeting will begin promptly at 8:00. Contact Pete Stevens ([pete.stevens@phila.gov](mailto:pete.stevens@phila.gov), 215-235-7383 ) for more information

The June GMM meeting will be on Friday, June 13, 2008. Subject to be announced.

**Saturday, May 10, 2008 at, BuxMont Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 7:00PM.** HAGP (Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia) Movie Night. The Four Horsemen: Watch the four most prominent and outspoken atheists today - Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens - sit down with each other for two hours of stimulating conversation! This is not one to miss. For more info about HAGP and other events, visit [www.hagp.org](http://www.hagp.org).

**Thursday, May 15, 2008 4-7 PM. Lecture at 5:30 PM - Weeknights at the Wagner - An Evening Series Dr. Jerrold Casway** from Howard Community College: **"The Birthplace of Philadelphia Baseball" - An Illustrated Presentation**



**Philadelphia Athletics - 1874** Don't miss the last of this year's "Weeknights" series, as we are taken back to the middle of the 19th century to explore the ballfields of North Philadelphia, where the earliest professional baseball games were played. Special attention will be given to the historic Athletic's ballfield that was located across the street from the Wagner Free Institute of Science, 1700 West Montgomery Avenue Philadelphia, PA 19121. Phone:215-763-6529. On the web: [www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org](http://www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org). This lecture is free and all are welcome. Donations are appreciated.

# PHACT CALENDAR

**Friday, June 13, 2008. At 8 PM** Mensa General Membership Meeting. Contact Pete Stevens for more information. [pete.stevens@phila.gov](mailto:pete.stevens@phila.gov), 215-235-7383

**Friday, June 13, 2008 8:00PM to Midnight. Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia's Anti-Superstition Bash 2008!** "Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center". At the Radisson-Warwick Plaza Hotel, 1701 Locust Street, Philadelphia. Featuring Special Guests: James Randi, a.k.a. "The Amazing Randi!" and Dr. Stephen Uhl, Author of *Imagine No Superstition*. General Admission: \$10. Free for children 13 and under. Tickets available at the door. For more information, call 610-430-7719 or email [fsgp@freethought.org](mailto:fsgp@freethought.org).

**Thursday, June 26-29, 2008** at University of Pennsylvania. **International Cultic Studies Association - 2008 Annual International Conference.** ICSA's 2008 conference has a rich program for former group members, families, mental health professionals, researchers, legal professionals, and others. More than 100 speakers - experts from around the world - will contribute to the conference. The conference includes abundant time for breaks and meals, as well as evening socials with free refreshments. This gives attendees many opportunities to talk informally with speakers and other attendees. This is *the* conference to attend, if you want to learn about this field, meet experts, sharpen your professional skills, find out about current research, or enhance your capacity to help yourself or a loved one adversely affected by a cultic experience. You must register for this event. Website: [http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv\\_conferences/conference\\_home\\_2008.asp](http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv_conferences/conference_home_2008.asp)

**Tuesday, July 1, 2008** Executive Director of the Atheist Centre in India, **Dr. G. Vijayam** carries the message of how atheists can be effective in organizing extensive social reform projects. He has presented a number of papers in national and International Conferences on atheism, humanism, rationalism, social change, ecology and environment, natural disaster preparedness, and social and political reform. He has also participated in national and international seminars on Environment, Gandhi, social change, rural development, human rights, atheism and humanism. This event will take place at the Indian restaurant Desi Village, located at 145 S. Gulph Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406. The BYO "Happy Hour" and opportunity to talk personally with Dr. Vijayam will be from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Please arrive no later than 7:00PM if you plan to order food. Dr. Vijayam's presentation will begin at 7:30PM. There is only room for 50 people. Please RSVP to [fsgp@freethought.org](mailto:fsgp@freethought.org) to secure your spot for this event! There is no charge for this event other than any food you order (please plan to pay with cash). BYOB.

The **PhACT Calendar** is open to members and non-members who wish to announce meetings and events of other groups of which they are interested or affiliated. These events should be of some general interest to the Skeptical or Scientific community and should be within a reasonable radius of Philadelphia. Send submissions to the editor at [phactpublicity@aol.com](mailto:phactpublicity@aol.com). Keep the announcements brief. Space is limited and insertions will be made on a first come-first served basis after the needs of PhACT are accomplished.

## **Wagner Free Institute of Science**

1700 West Montgomery Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19121  
ph 215-763-6529 [www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org](http://www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org)

### **"OUR FINE-FEATHERED FRIENDS" Family Open House presented by the Wagner Free Institute of Science Saturday, May 3, 12 - 4 PM Presentation at 1 PM**

There are over 8500 species of birds. Some fly, some don't. Some eat seeds, some eat fruit, and some even eat meat. Many are great swimmers, great divers, or can fly nonstop for years. Given all of these differences- what do all birds have in common? What makes a bird a bird?

Find out in this interactive program for children ages 6-12 that will reveal the adaptations that help birds survive in each of their unique environments and teach useful bird identification tips. Hands-on activities will take place in the Wagner's grounds (weather permitting), giving all a chance to observe birds in their natural habitat.



The museum's natural history collection may be viewed without attending the presentation. From 12 - 4 PM, the natural history museum will be open and Wagner educators will lead scavenger hunts and hands-on activities for children in the museum yard.



#### **The presentation will be sign language interpreted.**

12-4 PM. Institute is open to the public. Explore the museum collections in the exhibition hall.

12-4 PM. Hands-on activities for children ages 6-12. 1 PM Children's program in Victorian lecture hall.

Museum admission is free. A donation of \$8 is suggested for ages 12 and up.

*Founded in 1855, the Wagner Free Institute of Science is a museum and educational institution that is nearly unchanged from the nineteenth century. The museum building, a National Historic Landmark completed in 1865, houses a natural history collection begun by William Wagner in the early nineteenth century and expanded by naturalist Joseph Leidy in the 1880's. The collection includes skeletons, fossils, shells, minerals and mounted animals. The Museum is open to the public Tuesday-Friday, 9 AM to 4 PM.*

*The Institute's free public education courses in science are in their 152nd year, making them the oldest program devoted to free adult education in the United States. The Institute also has a strong commitment to children's education. It offers a range of programs for visiting school groups, and cultivates special partnerships with neighboring inner-city schools.*



## Help was asked ... And help was received!

In April 2008 Phactum we put in a plea for financial aid from members, and some loyal members did indeed respond. We are very grateful to those who have helped and we hope that more members will apply pen to checkbook and help PhACT financially.

PhACT's largest single expense by far is Phactum and by far the largest single expense involved with Phactum is printing. The cost of laser printer supplies is shockingly high. We have explored commercial printing in black and white which is marginally less expensive, and in color which is radically out of reach for PhACT. We had printed some editions of Phactum in the past on a very slow inkjet printer. That was a less expensive process but was also impossibly slow on a device not designed for 5,000 page printouts.

Our solutions at this point in time are to publish Phactum less often, to limit the newsletter to about 8 or 10 pages, to raise more money, or a combination of those things. This particular newsletter, May/June 2008, is 14 pages and could easily have been more.

Editing Phactum has become a fun and educational, although time consuming, hobby for me. I would not be averse to producing a monthly newsletter of greater scope but for now at least that is impossible. Furthermore, as we raise funds there are other priorities and projects for PhACT. I had listed several ideas in the last Phactum. A donation to Community College of Philadelphia scholarship fund is very high on that priority list. Other ideas include sponsoring more speaker events, perhaps in cooperation with the Wagner Free Institute of Science or some other prestigious science oriented organization. Also to sponsor educational campaigns events such as high school science fairs would be useful projects.

I had also suggested that perhaps sponsoring a Boy Scout troop outing to the Franklin Institute for science education might be a worthy project. One very generous donor objected to that notion given that organization's policies toward homosexuals and atheists. Still, he did donate and I am especially grateful to him for setting aside an objection in favor of the greater picture. That notion had come purely from me and had never been discussed at any PhACT planning meetings. When I was a kid I had myself been on a sponsored Boy Scout trip to the Franklin Institute for the purpose of earning the astronomy merit badge. To this day I am supportive of scouting, despite its flaws. In my own view it does far more good than evil.

We are all individually free to support or oppose people and groups we wish; as an organization we are not free to do so outside the goals of the organization. This issue underscores why PhACT attempts to remain as neutral as we possibly can in matters of politics and religion and to avoid divisive confrontation in those areas. On the other hand, when religion and politics collide with science we feel justified to speak out.

Meanwhile .. Phactum is operational and you are encouraged to express your opinion on things that bother or interest you and feel free to denounce the editor. Opposing points of view are welcome. Letters and articles on almost any topic are welcome, but please, no partisan politics or religion bashing outside the realms of science or pseudo-science. Original poetry and good recipes are welcome. More articles about local folklore like the one on page 10 about the Jersey Devil would be fun. How would one cook a Jersey Devil?

Please send all submissions to [phactpublicity@aol.com](mailto:phactpublicity@aol.com).

## Letters

Editor: I just submitted the following letter to the City Paper [a Philadelphia weekly] concerning a piece they did on the Socialist Workers Party's presidential campaign. The original article is at <http://www.citypaper.net/articles/2008/04/03/where-have-all-the-trotskyites-gone>.

*"Your article on the Socialist Workers Party painted it as irrelevant but benign. As a former member of their youth group, I have a different view.*

*If you want to make a statement against capitalism, go ahead and vote for their candidates -- but I'd advise strongly against getting involved with their organization, if you value your intellectual and emotional freedom. Notwithstanding their public claims about internal democracy, you may find that thinking for yourself -- even about minor questions, and even inside your own head (which they may*



**Lev Davidovich Bronstein, otherwise known as Leon Trotsky, (1879 - 1940) and Frida Kahlo (1907 - 1954)**



*ask you about) -- really isn't tolerated, and that (not necessarily pleasant) means will be found to oust you if you insist on doing so.*

*At least that's what happened to me. And reports I got from others subsequently -- e.g., of members' being encouraged to share apartments so they could vet each others' mail for "bad influences" -- indicate that my experience wasn't a fluke.*

*For more information on avoiding or getting out of abusive and manipulative groups, visit the International Cultic Studies Association (which I support but don't represent) at [www.icsahome.com](http://www.icsahome.com). They're meeting in Philadelphia this year."*

Eric Hamell  
Philadelphia

P.S. I considered also mentioning in the letter that the SWP hasn't identified itself as Trotskyist in quite a while, contrary to what the article's title had suggested. But I decided that would be a distraction from the main point.

Editor: Ben Stein was on Craig Ferguson tonight [a late night CBS-TV talk show host]. He claimed that Darwinists think that Darwin explains how the planets remain in orbit (i. e. astronomy). WTF?????

He also plugged a new book he has out called "*How To Supercharge Your Portfolio*". Really, Stein should stick to finance.

A forgettable interview.  
Doreva Belfiore  
Philadelphia

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## Various Ruminations

Collected/written by Ray Haupt, editor  
(with help from others)

### Sober up with Zodiac Vodka

Get a load of this little item from the Business.Com website.

*Based on non-partisan research of the fifty-five United States Presidential elections to date and the astrological signs of each winning candidate through the years, ZODIAC Vodka, a luxury potato vodka handcrafted and distilled in Idaho, USA, has concluded that the Leo, Barack Obama, will defeat the Scorpio, Hillary Clinton, for the democratic nomination, as well as, the Virgo, John McCain in the general election. These findings are based on a comparative analysis of win percentages for candidates with a given sign. Each of the twelve signs has specific election trends which ZODIAC Vodka has analyzed to predict the next President of the United States of America.*

The entire article can be found at this website: [http://www.businesswire.com/portal/site/home/news/sections/?ndmViewId=news\\_view&newsLang=en&newsId=20080401005699](http://www.businesswire.com/portal/site/home/news/sections/?ndmViewId=news_view&newsLang=en&newsId=20080401005699)

### Depilated: No hirsute logic allowed

Dr. Andrew Petto, the speaker at the April PhACT meeting, among many other topics, briefly discussed the new documentary movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* featuring actor, economist, and speech writer Ben Stein. Andrew somewhat predictably panned this movie and advised the curious among us to wait until after opening weekend, that critical time when studios determine if their production is a hit or miss. How right he was, but I did want to see it for myself before commenting in Phactum. It would hardly be fair to comment on a movie before viewing regardless of my opinion of the offering. That is especially true for this particular cinematic endeavour given the accusations leveled against critics of Intelligent Design. Furthermore, I am, like

Dr. Petto, biased toward scientific explanations of things, not metaphysical ones.

In the movie, Stein and various scientists contend that the media and a cabal of atheist academics conspire against them for their views, infringe upon academic freedom to posit ideas, and restrict funding to properly research their theories. Even worse, they say, careers are ruined and capable scientists are unable to find work in their fields of specialization. They are not entirely wrong in these contentions, but fail to mention the paucity of results obtained by Creation or Intelligent Design oriented researchers. Furthermore, there is no mention of the fact that in America many religiously affiliated universities could easily find room in their science departments for well trained researchers.

I find it fascinating that most polls of American adults indicate that a large majority are religious believers. The poll results are probably right but that in itself raises an inconvenient question: If the majority of people support Intelligent Design / Creation then why is there a lack of funding for the scientific study of said ideas? If not by government, why not privately?

The freedom to do creation research is abridged by no law, but it would be nice to have some results from time to time if researchers expect support. Then there is this: what kind of scientific researcher hotly puts forth rock solid conclusions for untestable ideas relying on unobservable facts and limber logic? I am not a scientist, so someone else must answer that question. Perhaps we can print the answer in a future Phactum. If not the world must muddle by.

Then there is the Nazi theme, often the last refuge of losers in debate. Stein, with endless montages of atrocities, lavishly links Charles Darwin to Adolf Hitler and in doing so cedes credibility to the trash can. When all else fails accuse intellectual opponents of Hitlerism. Can't you just picture the National Center for Science Education staff and Judge Jones who presided over the Dover Intelligent Design trial goose stepping around their offices?

Dr. Petto's review of *Expelled* was far too kind, and the theatre had a grand total of seventeen attendees.

### The Evolution of Hiccups

Faye Flam who is a journalist for the Philadelphia Inquirer and will be one of our media discussion panel members for the May 17 PhACT luncheon, had an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer, April 21, 2008 which among other things explains how hiccups evolved from our fishy past to modern humans. Check this website for the article:

[http://www.philly.com/inquirer/health\\_science/20080421\\_We\\_re\\_not\\_finished\\_yet.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/health_science/20080421_We_re_not_finished_yet.html)

Additionally, Faye has recently written a book entitled *The Score* which is described later in this newsletter.

### Global Warming and H.R.H, the Prince of Wales

At a dinner with the presidents of Trinidad and Tobago on March 6th, Prince Charles discussed climate change skepti-

cism. He stated, "If I may speak plainly among friends, this is sheer madness. The scientific facts are as plain as they are alarming. Worryingly in the last few months we have learnt that the North Polar ice cap is melting so fast that some scientists are predicting that in seven years it will completely disappear in summer."

Charles might possibly be right but his case is not helped by appealing to scientific opinion while he remains an enthusiast for homeopathy.

### Penis Snatching Sorcerers Terrorize Congo

Get a load of this news release from Reuters, April 22, 2008. I am not clever enough to make this up and am at a loss for words.

*KINSHASA (Reuters) - Police in Congo have arrested 13 suspected sorcerers accused of using black magic to steal or shrink men's penises after a wave of panic and attempted lynchings triggered by the alleged witchcraft.*

*Reports of so-called penis snatching are not uncommon in West Africa, where belief in traditional religions and witchcraft remains widespread, and where ritual killings to obtain blood or body parts still occur.*

*Rumours of penis theft began circulating last week in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo's sprawling capital of some 8 million inhabitants. They quickly dominated radio call-in shows, with listeners advised to beware of fellow passengers in communal taxis wearing gold rings. ...*

*"You just have to be accused of that, and people come after you. We've had a number of attempted lynchings. ... You see them covered in marks after being beaten," Kinshasa's police chief, Jean-Dieudonne Oleko, told Reuters on Tuesday.*

*Police arrested the accused sorcerers and their victims in an effort to avoid the sort of bloodshed seen in Ghana a decade ago, when 12 suspected penis snatchers were beaten to death by angry mobs. The 27 men have since been released.*

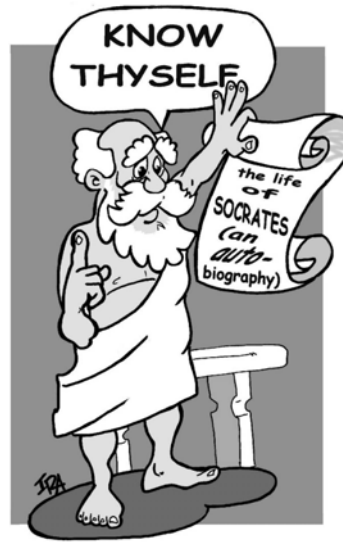
*"I'm tempted to say it's one huge joke," Oleko said. "But when you try to tell the victims that their penises are still there, they tell you that it's become tiny or that they've become impotent. To that I tell them, 'How do you know if you haven't gone home and tried it'," he said.*

*Some Kinshasa residents accuse a separatist sect from nearby Bas-Congo province of being behind the witchcraft in revenge for a recent government crackdown on its members.*

*"It's real. Just yesterday here, there was a man who was a victim. We saw. What was left was tiny," said 29-year-old Alain Kalala, who sells phone credits near a Kinshasa police station.*

### Socrates Cafe

I recently discovered the Socrates Cafe, which might be an appealing organization for Critical Thinkers. This organization is based on a book by Christopher Phillips, *Socrates Café—A Fresh Taste of Philosophy* which basically encourages Socratic Thinking and release from the shackles of dogmatism. I have not yet been to any of their events but in this region a Socrates Cafe can be found at the Springfield Free Library, in Springfield Township, Montgomery County, PA at 1600 Paper Mill Road, Wyndmoor, Pa. 19038. Meetings are at 7:30 PM on the second and fourth Monday of each month. This is free and open to the general public. For more information contact Sam Frederick at 610-291-6394.



"The unexamined life is not worth living."

### Italian Priest Arrested for Fake Exorcisms

The Telegraph, a UK newspaper, reported on April 7, 2008 that a priest in Florence, Italy is under investigation for fraud after allegedly amassing £3 million by performing fake exorcisms. Father Francesco Saverio Bazzoffi denies that he had "ever practiced" exorcisms and admitted that he did not have a licence. This news item can be found at on the internet at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2008/04/03/wexorcist103.xml>

I am pleased that Italian authorities have a licencing procedure for this activity. Is it not reassuring that the technology exists to differentiate real and fake exorcisms? I must say I am quite relieved. Perhaps the same technology can be employed to distinguish real and fake psychics.

It so happens that in April of 2007 Philadelphia authorities shut down psychics and tarot card readers throughout the city. The closure lasted only a few days and fortune telling operations were allowed to resume. Hopefully our newly elected Mayor Michael Nutter, a very decent sort of fellow, will hire some of the Italian authorities to clear the streets of fake psychics. The public will be grateful and real psychics can ply their trade free of suspicion having been certified by experts.

### Global Warming - Ethanol to the rescue

A week ago I purchased gasoline at a Getty station. On the pump was a bumper sticker style sign proudly proclaiming their product to be "Ethanol Enriched".

Now wait just one minute here. "Enriched" generally means to be made better in some way. Ethanol might make motor fuel a bit better in some ways, but it certainly does not improve the miles per gallon achievements of cars and trucks. It is pretty well agreed that a quantity of ethanol can propel a vehicle about two thirds the distance of a similar quantity of gasoline. Thus, if the fuel I purchased was

E10, 10% ethanol, I should expect roughly a 3% decrease in MPG performance from my car. What kind of “enrichment” is that?

### Lie detector department

In his weekly What's New newsletter, April 25, 2008, Dr. Robert Park had this little gem.

#### *POLYGRAPH: ARMY ISSUES HAND-HELD POLYGRAPH.*

*In a story I've been sitting on for two weeks because it seemed too far out to be real, we must tell you that the Pentagon is issuing portable lie detectors to soldiers in Afghanistan. It can't be used on U.S. personnel, but they don't lie anyhow. It has two electrodes to measure conductivity of skin and a finger clip that monitors heartbeat. It sells for \$7,500.*

*What's New is prepared to certify that it works exactly as well as the non-portable version.*

It sounds like an e-meter. It works like an e-meter. It is priced like an e-meter. Gee ... maybe it is an e-meter.

### Charleton Heston, R.I.P.

On April 5, 2008 at age 84, Charleton Heston died. Heston was born John Charles Carter on October 3, 1923 in Evanston, Illinois the son of Lilla (née Charlton) and Russell Whitford Carter, a mill operator. At age 10 his parents divorced and his mother married Chester Heston of Willmete, Illinois.

In 1941 he entered Northwestern University and while there fell in love with a young speech student named Lydia



Clarke. They were married March 14, 1944, after he had enlisted in the Army Air Forces. Their union was one of the most durable in Hollywood, lasting 64 years in a town known for its highly publicized divorces, romances and remarriages.

In 1944, Heston enlisted in the United States Army Air Forces. He served for two years as a B-25 radio operator and gunner stationed in the Alaskan Aleutian Islands with the Eleventh Air Force, rising to the rank of Staff Sergeant

After the war Heston worked as an artists model and stage actor in New York. Heston's professional film career began in 1950. Heston became an icon for portraying Moses in *The*

*Ten Commandments*, reportedly being chosen by director Cecil B. DeMille because he thought the muscular, 6 ft 3 in, square jawed Heston bore an uncanny resemblance to the statue of Moses by Michelangelo.

In 1959 Heston won Best Actor Award for his performance in the title role of *Ben Hur*. From that time onward he had many roles but has been forever identified as Moses and Ben Hur in tunic and loincloth Biblical epics.

In the 1950's Heston was politically active and had campaigned for Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy. He was involved early on in the civil rights campaign and marched with Martin Luther King at a march in Washington in 1963. In 1960 Heston was approached by the Democratic Party to run for United States Senate. He declined, determined to not give up acting. By the 1980's Heston had become opposed to affirmative action, supported gun rights, and changed his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican.

In 1998 Heston became president of the National Rifle Association insisting that all ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights be honored, not just nine. He held that post until he resigned in 2003 suffering from Alzheimer's Disease.

Heston is survived by his wife, Lydia, a son, a daughter, and three grandchildren.

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**You are invited to an Opening Reception at the gallery at Allens Lane Art Center, Friday May 16, 7:00 to 9:00 PM.** Featured will be new work by blind and visually impaired students in the ALAC's sculpture program. This event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served. The exhibition will be on display May 16 - June 13, 2008.



Allens Lane Art Center  
Allens Lane & McCallum St  
Philadelphia, PA 19119

p: 215.248.0546 - <http://www.allenslane.org>



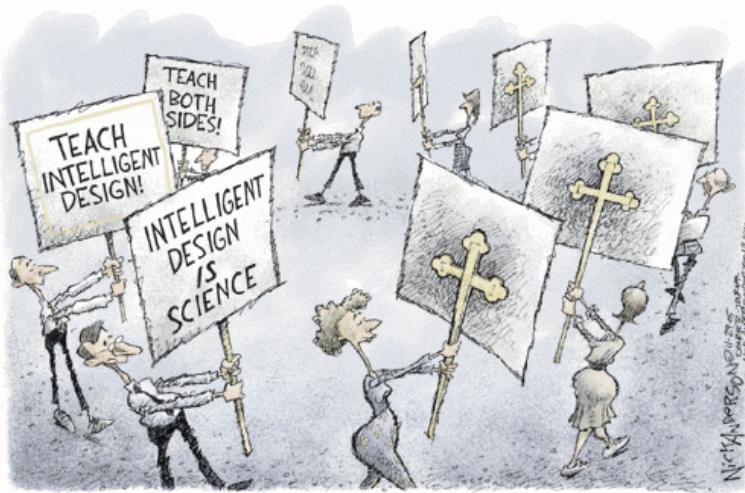
## April 2008 Meeting Report

By Becky Strickland

**126** years after Darwin died, Andrew Petto PhD. updated us on the Evolution/Intelligent Design wars.

He traces the seeds of controversy to the early 1900's when religious fervor and belief in the inerrancy of the Bible increased. The first ID proposal was presented many decades later in 1984. Since that proposal, no research has been presented, only insistence that existing research supporting evolution be reinterpreted to support ID.

The last law prohibiting the teaching of evolution was repealed in 1968. Currently, there are no laws that require teaching evolution or that prohibit teaching creationism but we do have a law providing for the separation of Church & State. And common sense tells (most of) us that what is taught in school should be accurate. Teaching creationism in the schools is controversial simply because it's not science. The real controversy, stated Petto, is why scientific ideas are resisted.



The ID camp has made numerous errors of fact & logic. They confuse Evolutionary theory with Darwinism. In fact, due to the ongoing careful examination of evidence, today's evolutionary theory is only partly Darwinism. Creationists misinterpret probability - an event that has a low probability of occurring can still happen. They seem confused by the self-correcting nature of ongoing scientific research. They are reframing science to include the supernatural. They use subtractive logic: *list the unanswered questions, declare those questions unanswerable, and conclude their alternative explanation is thus confirmed.*

ID has framed the current controversy as an issue of academic freedom, yet they are unlikely to consider 'democracy vs. communism' or 'Islam vs. Christianity' issues of academic freedom. In their own internal communications they are candid about the fact that 'this is about religion'. Their motivation, according to Petto, is fear of going to hell if they

learn about evolution.

Petto also discussed the movie *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed*, which just opened. The movie claims ID science is being excluded and that "people are losing their jobs for mentioning Intelligent Design." Visit the NCSE official website, [www.ncseweb.org](http://www.ncseweb.org) for an excellent analysis of the errors in the movie and a summary of what really happened to the people who claimed they were fired for supporting creationism.

Petto has years of experience debating creationists. He reported it is like trying to play chess with pigeons. They knock the pieces around, poop all over the board, declare themselves winners and fly away.

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## Soundbites

Compiled by Becky Strickland

♣ **BrainWork**, a neuroscience newsletter published by the Dana Foundation, reports in the current issue that a recent California study found autism rates increased after thimerosal use was discontinued in 2001. "This is another in a long series of studies looking at this issue, and no association whatsoever has been demonstrated between thimerosal and autism. It is important to recognize that different investigators in different parts of the world have converging results that indicate no association". Eric Fombonne, head of child and adolescent psychiatry at Montreal Children's Hospital.

The same issue of BrainWorks reports three different journals, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Human Molecular Genetics* and *American Journal of Human Genetics*, have recently reported studies that suggest a genetic link to autism. This new knowledge may lead to more effective treatments.

Visit [www.dana.org](http://www.dana.org) for more information and to sign up for their newsletters.

♣ "This is propaganda, a political rant disguised as a serious documentary on stifled freedom of inquiry. A documentarian is not required to be objective, but Stein's point of view is blatant advertising." Claudia Puig in a review of *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, USA Today, April 21, 2008.

♣ "Primitive life is very common and intelligent life is fairly rare. Some would say it has yet to occur on Earth." Stephen Hawking outlines his views on the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe during a lecture in Washington DC to mark NASA's 50th anniversary (Associated Press, April 21, 2008.)

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## Radiation: Myths and Misunderstandings

by Tom Napier

### Part I: Half-lives, the whole story

Some of the public's poor understanding of science can be blamed on those who use its trappings to disguise the flaws in their speculations. Much, however, is due to journalists who have a less than complete grasp of their subject matter.

The press often use the terms "radiation" and "radioactivity" interchangeably but this is incorrect. Radioactivity is a property of certain elements that store energy in the nuclei of their atoms. Such nuclei are unstable and can release their energy in the form of radiation, that is, quick-moving sub-atomic particles.

This is a one-time-only event. Before the release an atom is harmless; after it the atom either no longer has enough energy for further emission or it has changed into a different element. In some cases the new element also has surplus energy and may emit further radiation. This chain of events ends in an atom which is completely stable and never emits radiation.

There is no way to predict when a particular atom will go pop but we can determine the probability of its disintegrating within a certain time period. This probability is a constant and is characteristic of the type of atom. Except for a few atypical and unimportant cases, nothing we do changes this probability.

The continued survival of an unstable atom depends on its being on the winning side of a great many throws of an imaginary die so the likelihood of its still being intact falls as time passes. After a long enough time the atom will almost certainly have disintegrated.

This is "radioactivity," the potential to release energy in the form of "radiation." The radiation can be of different types but all have a common characteristic, very high speed. Radiation doesn't stick around. In a matter of seconds after it is emitted it is millions of miles away and no longer our concern. Of course if a particle whacks into your body on its way past it may do some damage. Then it is our concern.

### Continuous radiation

For radiation to have a significant effect there must be a continuous source of it available. An individual unstable atom doesn't fit that bill; like a land-mine it explodes only once. Things change when you have a collection of unstable atoms. Those which happened to be quick off the mark are

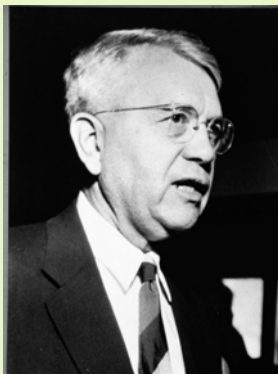
now inert but there are many which have yet to explode. The probability of a given atom disintegrating is minute but even a small piece of material contains a huge number of atoms and many disintegrate in any given time period. In a large enough sample, millions of atoms may disintegrate each second. Each in its death throes makes a tiny contribution to an almost continuous stream of radiation. This steady output of radiation is what we think of as radioactivity.

The rate of emission is proportional to the number of atoms still intact. As atoms are used up the rate constantly

falls. If nine-tenths of the atoms disintegrate in a year then after a year only 10% remain. In another year, nine-tenths of that 10% will be gone, leaving only 1%. After another year 0.1% will be left, and so on. After a few more years only a homeopathic amount of radioactive material remains and the emission of radiation falls to a negligible level. The natural way to calculate such an exponential decay would be in terms of  $e$ , the base of natural logarithms. For historical reasons we generally use the time it takes half the atoms in a sample to decay. This is the "half-life" and is characteristic of the material. Half-lives differ enormously between elements, from a tiny fraction of a second to billions of years. Not surprisingly, most of the atoms we encounter in every-day life are stable, that is, they have an infinite half-life.

### Harold Clayton Urey

1893-1981



Urey was the discoverer of deuterium, the heavy non-radioactive isotope of hydrogen, and for this work he was awarded the 1934 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. By distilling a sample of liquid hydrogen, the deuterium was concentrated and its presence demonstrated spectroscopically (1931). The following year he showed that heavy water ( $D_2O$ ) could be concentrated by electrolysis. Deuterium became an invaluable tool for studying reaction mechanisms and biochemical processes.

### Protons and neutrons

The nuclei of all atoms except hydrogen contain both protons and neutrons. An element's chemical identity depends on how many electrons its atoms have. This is the same as the number of protons in its nucleus. If you look up an element in a table you can find its "Atomic Number," that is, its proton count.

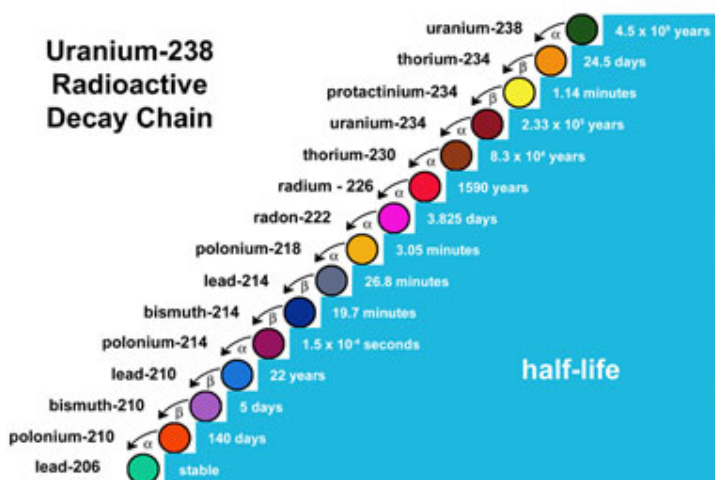
Protons repel each other unless diluted by neutrons. Every stable element has some optimum neutron number but can exist, at least briefly, even if it has more or fewer neutrons. Atoms of the same element having different numbers of neutrons are called "isotopes." An element's isotopes behave identically in chemical reactions but can be distinguished by their mass. Conveniently, neutrons weigh about the same as protons thus the "Atomic Weight" of an isotope is an integer that indicates the total number of its protons and neutrons. An atom having a neutron number beyond some optimum range eventually emits radiation and settles into a more stable state.

Ordinary hydrogen has one proton and no neutrons so

its Atomic Weight is 1. Deuterium or "heavy hydrogen" has a proton and a neutron and hence a weight of 2. It is rare but, like hydrogen, is stable. If you add a second neutron you get tritium, AW = 3. Tritium is unstable, it emits a low energy electron and decays into an isotope of helium having only one neutron (normal helium has two). The half-life of this decay is about twelve years. Some luminous watches contain tritium and thus become dimmer as the years pass.

### Setting the clock

Since radioactive atoms decay with time you might wonder why any are still around. After all, they were created in the cores of supernovae billions of years ago and have been decaying ever since. After being spread throughout space



they were ultimately incorporated into the Earth's crust. If an isotope has a long enough half-life, significant quantities of it still exist. For example, the common uranium isotope, U-238, has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. Much of the U-238 that was created five or six billion years ago is still around. The U-235 isotope which fuels nuclear reactors has a half-life of 0.7 billion years so a larger fraction of it has already decayed. Natural uranium contains only 0.7% of it.

Radioactive materials with short half-lives exist in nature but only because they are continually created by the decay of a longer-lived isotope. Radium, for example, has a half-life of only 1620 years and should be long gone. However, as U-238 decays it creates a new but unstable atom (thorium) with a short half-life. This decays into yet another unstable isotope and so on. After 14 steps the end result is stable lead. Radium is a few steps down this chain. It is being slowly but continually formed and relatively quickly destroyed. The net result is that all uranium contains a tiny amount of radium. Extracting radium for medical purposes was a minor (and dangerous) industry in the early twentieth century. Today we use artificially created isotopes instead. Radium, once the most expensive element one could buy, is now treated as hazardous waste.

Radium, by the way, decays into that basement bogey,

radon. As radon has a four-day half-life the amount of it that occurs naturally is minute. Unfortunately, it is a gas so you can breathe it in. Its decay generates alpha particles in your lungs and this is not good.

In the next Phactum I'll explain what alpha and other particles are and where they come from.

*Tom Napier is an arch skeptic, a long time member of PhACT, and is a physicist by profession.*

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## A Full House for The Science Guy

by Tom Napier

By pure chance, and with five days notice, I discovered that Bill Nye, TV's "Science Guy" and well-known skeptic, would be appearing at Hatboro-Horsham High School on March 11. As this was three miles down the road from me I immediately signed up for both Nye's evening talk and the reception the same afternoon. I also attempted to contact interested PhACT members.

These events were arranged by the Hatboro-Horsham Educational Foundation ([hhf.org](http://hhf.org)) which organizes cultural events and provides grants to local educators. The apparent object of the reception was to provide attendees with signed photographs of themselves with the great man, not to permit conversation with him. He and I tried but after a few moments I was shooed aside by the photographer who was eager to proceed with the next face in line. Shades of Santa or the Easter Bunny.

I wondered if the evening's entertainment would be a version of Nye's TV show with its spectacular physics demonstrations. It turned out to be an illustrated talk about the joy of discovery mingled with appeals for exploration in space and conservation down below. Luckily, my reception ticket included reserved seating as I had trouble finding a parking spot and the huge auditorium was already packed when I arrived.

Nye, whose qualifications are in mechanical engineering, had worked for Boeing on the design of the 747. He had been a part-time comedian before creating his popular "Science Guy" TV show in the 1990s. He still does occasional design jobs for NASA and he showed us pictures taken by Mars landers and rovers dating back to the 1976 Viking lander. We saw NASA's infamous early Viking photograph that showed a blue sky. Nye compared this with a shot taken after the mission engineers had straightened out the color balance. It showed Mars in its true colors with an unearthly salmon-pink sky. He mentioned that the sky's color can be seen on a shadowed white surface. The Spirit and Opportunity rovers both carry a Nye-designed gnomon with a white surround to show the sky's color. The rovers' mobil-

ity prevented this device from having fixed hour markers like a sun-dial but it is inscribed with a sun-dial-like motto, "Two planets -- one Sun," and messages to future human explorers. He showed the before-and-after photographs from orbit that revealed that water still occasionally flows on Mars. We also saw a spectacular rover image of layered cliffs and the recent avalanche photo. Things are happening up there that we just didn't know about.

Nye showed us a slide of the launch of the New Horizons probe and outlined its path past Jupiter that will bring it to Pluto in 2015. This probe is the fastest object we have ever launched. It passed the Moon's orbit in only nine hours, not the Apollo missions' three days. He also mentioned the proposal

by the Planetary Society to place a transponder in orbit around the 900 foot asteroid Apophis. In 2029 this asteroid will miss the Earth by 20,000 miles but it might, just conceivably, hit us in 2036. A transponder would permit much more accurate monitoring of the asteroid's position and velocity and give a better estimate of the risk of a collision.

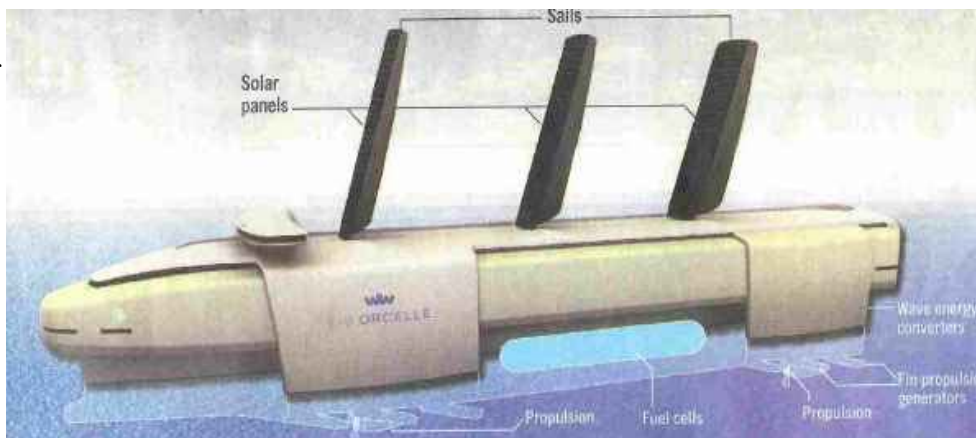
Returning to Earth, Nye explained how his discussions with climatologists had convinced him that the Earth is indeed warming at an unusually rapid rate. He endorses the well-known "hockey-stick" curve and discussed what we can do to mitigate warming. He explained that much of the increase in greenhouse gases is due to the increase in the world's population, pointing out that this has more than doubled in his lifetime. He has visited China and India and has seen at first-hand their primitive human- or animal-powered transportation. This will ultimately be replaced by gasoline-powered vehicles. By contrast, he lauded European countries' provision of bicycle lanes alongside their roadways. These encourage the widespread use of that human-powered but most efficient of vehicles.

He mentioned that Norwegians and Germans pay around \$12 a gallon for gas and claimed that if we all drove 46 mpg Priuses rather than 10 mpg SUVs we could get by with a quarter of our present oil consumption. We were asked to reflect on the difference this would make to the disposition of our country's armed forces.

Nye had leased a GM EV-1 all-electric car and, like the other users, had been bitterly disappointed when GM withdrew them and crushed them. If we used plug-in electric cars, power companies could use customers' car batteries as a distributed storage system to even out their peak loads. A question he did not address was what battery technology

would provide an adequate energy density without depleting the resources needed to make the batteries.

The introduction of more efficient vehicles requires a culture change. As an example of how rapidly this can happen, Nye pointed out that in 1915 armies rode horses and urban transportation was horse-drawn. Twenty years later armies rode tanks and horse-drawn vehicles were rare. As an example



**Proposed wind/solar/wave powered cargo ship, Orcell**

of a possible future change-driver Nye mentioned bucky-balls, the spherical carbon molecules of whose existence we were unaware just two decades ago. These have the potential to revolutionize both electricity transmission and structural engineering.

Nye contrasted the elegant simplicity

of modern wind turbines with the untidy appearance of an earlier and much-loved wind-power technology, the tall ship. He hopes that those who resist the building of wind-farms on aesthetic grounds will come to love them too.

Practicing what he preaches, Nye has installed a solar water heater and 4 kW of solar cells on the roof of his house. His electric meter runs backwards much of the day and his monthly electricity and gas bills are in the single digits.

Nye's presentation had three on-going themes. One was the sheer joy of discovery which attends a career in science. Another was that, as a scientist or engineer you had the potential to "Change the world." This slogan was regularly shouted back to him by the many children in the audience. Finally, he pointed out, anyone making a breakthrough in energy technology is going to become extremely rich.

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**“Nonconformists travel as a rule in bunches. You rarely find a nonconformist who goes it alone. And woe to him inside a nonconformist clique who does not conform with nonconformity .”**

**Eric Hoffer (1902 - 1983)**



**THE  
JERSEY  
DEVIL**

## The History and Folklore of the Jersey Devil

by Don Nigroni

During the Phenomenal Week of January 17-22, 1909, mysterious footprints were seen in the snow throughout the Delaware Valley from Trenton, New Jersey to Salem, New Jersey. This article tells the story of the creature held accountable for this strange occurrence, namely, the infamous Jersey Devil.

**D**uring the Phenomenal Week of January 17–22, 1909, the Leeds Devil, aka the Jersey Devil, was seen and his hoof prints found in the snow in numerous places throughout the lower Delaware River area. As we approach the hundredth anniversary of this spectacular event, it seems only appropriate that we commemorate the strange creature who was held responsible for the hysteria that gripped this region for a short time during a cold, stormy winter a hundred years ago.

Nonetheless, there were really two separate and distinct early traditions which become conflated by 1905 by which time the Jersey Devil, then called the Leeds's devil, was said to have been born to a Mother Leeds in 1808 in Bordentown, New Jersey due to a mother's curse on her second child and was being depicted as just a traditional devil.



However, according to one of the two early traditions, the Jersey Devil was born in Burlington City, New Jersey along the Delaware River, in 1735, to a Mother Leeds and was the offspring of a witch and the Prince of Darkness. By 1859 this horse-headed monster was called the Leeds's devil and by 1899 he was referred to as the Leeds' devil.

According to the other early tradition, the Jersey Devil was born at Evesham, New Jersey in 1787, also to a Mother Leeds and was the result of a mother's curse on her first child. By 1887, this creature was described as having a head shaped like an owl, with a monkey's face that had big black eyes, white cheeks and a black streak over each eye while the rest of the head was gray, and the monster had beautiful feathers with a black dot near the tip of each feather. This monster was being referred to as the Leeds devil in 1887.

The earliest known published account of the Jersey Devil appeared in an Atlantic Monthly magazine article in the May 1859 issue by W. F. Mayer entitled In the Pines. In this article Mayer writes about his trip from New York City, where he lives, to visit a friend of his, Mr. B., who lives in the Big House at Hanover Furnace. Hanover Furnace is a little bit north of Whitesbog. One day Mayer and Mr. B. are riding their horses out in the Pine Barrens when they come across two tents in a clearing. Out of one of the tents emerges a man about 50 years old and out of the other tent comes a

woman about 80 years old. The woman is Hannah Butler, known as the Queen of the Pine Rats, and the man is her nephew. Mr. B. gives Hannah Butler some tomatoes and her nephew remarks that there is a storm brewing in the distance. Hannah Butler says that there was a storm like that when she saw the Leeds's devil. At this point the nephew becomes very agitated and nervous and tells his aunt to hush up and that she shouldn't be always talking about the Leeds's devil. The nephew is nervous because of a superstitious belief. If you and a friend are in a room and are talking about John Doe and John Doe suddenly and unexpectedly walks into the room, you say, "Speak of the Devil." You say "Speak of the Devil" in this context because there was a superstitious belief which at least went back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when there was a proverbial saying "Talk of the Devil and he'll appear." So if you spoke of the Devil, he would appear, hence, you didn't want to speak of the Devil. At this point Mayer and Mr. B. decide to head back to the Big House to seek shelter from the storm.

Mayer and Mr. B. get soaking wet, return to the Big House, change into dry clothes and Mr. B. proceeds to tell Mayer the story of the Leeds's devil. According to Mr. B., the Leeds's devil was born in Burlington City along the Delaware River in 1735 to a Mother Leeds. Mother Leeds was an amateur witch, she had relations with the Prince of Darkness and the offspring was the Leeds's devil. The Leeds's devil had a horse's head, bat's wings and a serpent's tail. The child proceeded to pommel his mother, fly out the window into the village and molest and harass people for many days. At which point he was exorcised for 100 years by a holy man. When this 100 year period was drawing to a close the people in the Pine Barrens became agitated and fearful that the Leeds's devil would rise among the pines. However, according to Mr. B., the only person known to have seen the Leeds's devil since this 100 year period ended was Hannah Butler and Mr. B. attributed her sighting to her seeing perhaps a tree stump or a bear late at night whilst under the influence of jersey lightning.



The next important primary source document concerning this horse-headed monster is a New York Herald syndicated newspaper article which appeared in many newspapers across the U.S. in 1899 entitled Jersey Sees a Devil: Leeds' Monster Reappears Among the Pines. There had recently been sightings

of the Leeds' devil, as he was now being called, which prompted the writing of this article. According to the New York Herald account, the Leeds' devil was born in Burlington City along the Delaware River in 1735 to a Mother Leeds. Mother Leeds was an amateur witch, she had relations with the Prince of Darkness and the offspring was a normal child which changed into the Leeds' devil. The Leeds' devil looked like the Leeds's devil except the human torso was now the body of a serpent, the human arms and legs were now the legs of a bull with cloven hooves and the serpent's tail was now forked and pointed and the size of the creature has grown enormously, having been originally the size of a human being but is now being depicted as somewhere between 15 and 20 feet long from horse's head to the end of his serpent's tail. The child then proceeds to pommel his mother and her companions, presumably the midwives, fly up the chimney, instead of out the window, and molest and harass people for several years, instead of for many days. At this point the Herald article says that there are two traditions, one that he was active during the Revolutionary War period, but that there is a more distinct tradition that he was exorcised for 100 years. The monster then rises among the pines in 1839. He was born in 1735, is out and about for several years and then exorcised presumably in 1739 since he is seen again in 1839. Then he is seen again before the Civil War. The Civil War was from 1861 to 1865 so he was seen around 1860. And then he is seen once again in 1899 and these latest sightings prompted the writing of the New York Herald syndicated newspaper article.

The Herald article also mentions that the Leeds' devil has three companions: a beautiful golden-haired woman in white, the ghost of a headless pirate from Barnegat Bay and the ghost of a pirate from Cape May County who plied the Spanish Main. These are three separate ghost stories which by 1899 have become conflated with the Jersey Devil legend.

According to one of the two early traditions, the Jersey Devil was the offspring of a witch and the Prince of Darkness. The other early tradition attributes his origin to a mother's curse. This story can be found appearing as far away as Galveston, Texas in The Galveston Daily News on November 24, 1887. According to this account, a Mother Leeds in Evesham, New Jersey became pregnant and didn't want the child. She then cursed her first child by saying "I hope it will be a devil." The child was born as an owl-like monster and flew out the chimney.

There was a 2002 movie entitled 13<sup>th</sup> Child: Legend of the Jersey Devil. By then and really well before that time, the leading legend was that the Jersey Devil was due to a mother's curse and was the 13<sup>th</sup> child.

However, it should be noted that thirteen was not always considered an unlucky number. In Medieval England if you had twelve eggs, a dozen eggs, and then got another egg, you'd have thirteen eggs, a baker's dozen. There was nothing sinister about that. Also at this period, thirteen was associated with Christ and the twelve apostles. However, a strange belief did arise in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was believed that if you had thirteen people at a diner table, one of them would die within the year. So you didn't want to have thirteen people at a diner table. Nonetheless, thirteen was not considered unlucky in any other context at that time. It wasn't until the 1890s that thirteen was considered an unlucky number and as the twentieth century progressed the belief that thirteen was an unlucky number grew stronger and stronger to the point where houses were number 11, 12 A, 12 B, 14, to the point where floors in hotels were numbered 11, 12, 14. And this belief that thirteen was an unlucky number influenced the Jersey Devil legend to the point where the leading legend became that the Jersey Devil was due to a mother's curse and was the thirteenth child.

Another version of the origin of the Jersey Devil attributes his birth not to a mother's curse but to a gypsy curse. This late version can be traced back at least to a two volume work by Alfred M. Heston written for the Atlantic County Historical Society in 1926 entitled Jersey Waggon Jaunts, wagon with two g's. According to Heston, a gypsy requested food from a woman who then refused to give food to the gypsy. The gypsy cursed the woman and the woman's first born child was a monster.

There are many other places in New Jersey which claim the honor of being the birthplace of the Jersey Devil beside the three that I've already mentioned, namely, Burlington City and Evesham, both in Burlington County, and Bordentown, near Trenton. Some of the other places making that claim are Leeds Point and nearby Oyster Creek, Pleasantville, just outside Atlantic City, Estellville, an old glass manufacturing town where the stone remains of the glass manufacturing factory still exist, in Estell Manor County Park, and Lower Bank, just down the road from Historic Batsto Village.

The most spectacular events concerning the Jersey Devil occurred during the Phenomenal Week of January 17 to January 22, 1909 when he was thought to be due to a curse by Mother Leeds, who had already had many children and didn't want any more, and was being called the Leeds Devil or the Jersey Devil. At the time he was depicted in a vast variety of ways, most prominently as having a horse's head, wings on his back and horse's shod hooves at the end of his lower extremities, with various other combinations of animal

**9<sup>TH</sup> AND ARCH  
MUSEUM**  
T. F. HOPKINS ..... Manager

**CAUGHT!!!  
AND HERE!!!  
ALIVE!!!**

THE



**LEEDS DEVIL**  
Captured Friday After  
Terrific Struggle

EXHIBITED EXCLUSIVELY HERE AT  
\$1000.00 A WEEK.  
The Fearful, Frightful,  
Feroocious Monster Which  
Has Been Terrorizing  
Two States

**Swims! Flies! Gallops!**  
Exhibited Securely Chained  
in a Massive Steel Cage.

**A LIVING DRAGON**  
More Fearsome Than  
the Fabled Monsters  
of Mythology.  
DON'T MISS THE  
SIGHT OF A LIFETIME.

BIG STRING OF  
SENSATIONS IN  
CURIO HALL.

**THEATRE**  
GRAND CONTINUOUS VAUDEVILLE  
**10c ADMITS TO ALL**



parts for the rest of his body.

On Sunday, January 17, 1909, mysterious tracks were found in the snow in Gloucester City, NJ, across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. Similar tracks were subsequently found in over two dozen cities along the lower Delaware River, including in Burlington City, NJ and Philadelphia on Monday, in Riverside, NJ and North Crosswicks, NJ on Tuesday, in Bristol, PA on Wednesday, in Trenton, NJ and Lawrenceville, NJ on Thursday and again in Burlington City on Friday. These mysterious footprints in the snow were the imprints of horseshoes made by a bi-pedal creature walking with one foot almost directly in front of the other, not in a zigzag manner. Their dimensions varied such as being 3 inches long by 2 ½ inches wide or 2 ½ inches long by 1 ¼ inches wide, nonetheless, they were in the shape of a horseshoe that would have been used by a small pony, and the imprints were 10 inches apart, a similar stride to that made by a man walking. The strange tracks appeared over a 70 mile area during the six day period and sometimes went on for many miles. They went through backyards and open fields, but they were also found in inaccessible places like on the roofs of houses and in yards surrounded by high fences.



In an article for *Fortean Studies*, Volume 1 (1994), Mike Dash noted that during his researches he came across 21 cases of mysterious footprints occurring between 1840 and 1957, 14 of them were cases of strange tracks in the snow, one of them being the hoof prints that appeared during the Phenomenal Week of 1909. However, the most famous case of mysterious footprints in the snow was the Great Devon Mystery of 1855. People in Devonshire awoke on Friday, February 9, 1855 to find strange hoofprints in the snow. Devonshire is in the West Country of England, 175 miles west of London. The strange tracks were the imprints of horseshoes made by a bi-pedal creature walking with one foot almost directly in front of the other, not in a zigzag manner, and were 4 inches long by 2 ¾ inches wide and were 8 inches apart. The tracks covered a 30 mile area and had they been continuous, which they weren't, they would have stretched for over 100 miles. The tracks appeared in inaccessible places like on the roofs of houses and in yards surrounded by high walls and they became known as the Devil's Footprints or the Devil's Hoofprints.

What happened in Devon and the Delaware Valley is apparently similar to what's happening in the Pacific Northwest with Bigfoot. There practical jokers are taking wooden boards, carving them in the shape of big feet and strapping the boards to their shoes. They are then walking around the Pacific Northwest making tracks. In the Great Devon Mys-

tery case and during the Phenomenal Week of 1909, what seems to have happened is that practical jokers were taking small horseshoes, horseshoes meant for ponies, tacking them to the front of their shoes and then tip-toeing through the snow making the imprints of small horseshoe tracks in the snow of a bi-pedal creature. Also, in both cases, some more enterprising and agile hoaxers were leaving some tracks in inaccessible places, such as on the roofs of houses, and they seem to have been using stilts.

Following the Phenomenal Week of 1909, there were some other incidents which caused quite a stir. In 1951 in Gibbstown, which is in Gloucester County just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, there were sightings of the Jersey Devil. Groups of local residents went out into the woods looking for the creature. The police went out into the woods and conducted intensive searches. Nothing was found. The Police Chief quickly became fed up with the influx of hordes of curiosity seekers coming into Gibbstown and he posted signs around trees which said: The Jersey Devil is a Hoax.

In 1952 in Whitesbog, which today is a historic cranberry village in the Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, mysterious tracks were found in the dirt. The local police investigated and a game warden was called in. It was determined that the tracks were made by a bear's paw which was attached to a long pole and the device was soon discovered.

As a lifetime resident of the Delaware Valley and as we approach the hundredth anniversary of the Phenomenal Week, all I can say about the upcoming week of January 17-22, 2009 is, "Let's hope for snow!"

*Don Nigroni received a BS in economics in 1971 from St. Joseph's University and a MA in philosophy from Notre Dame in 1973. He retired last year after working 32 years as an economist for the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and now has much more time to enjoy hiking, mountain biking, kayaking and bird watching.*

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A politician needs the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year. And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen.

**Sir Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965)**





# PHACT

Phila. Assoc. for Critical Thinking  
639 W. Ellet Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19119



**Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi**  
(1832 - 1903)

## *USS Philadelphia*

The fourth ship in the United States Navy named *Philadelphia* was a protected cruiser whose keel was laid down March 1888 by Wm. Cramp and Sons, in Philadelphia. *Philadelphia* was launched September 1889; sponsored by Miss Minnie Wanamaker, daughter of local merchant and philanthropist John Wanamaker. *Philadelphia* was commissioned July 1890, Capt. B. F. Bradford in command.

A protected cruiser was a vessel whose armament was arranged in broadside positions similar to that of a sailing vessel. *Philadelphia*, however, was a coal fired steam vessel.

The William Cramp and Sons shipyard was located on the Delaware River and occupied about a quarter mile of riverfront between Susquehanna and Norris Streets. Founded in 1830, the Cramp shipyard produced the only clipper ships ever built in Philadelphia, and later in the century the highly regarded company built battleships *USS Massachusetts* and *USS Indiana* as well as cruiser *USS Philadelphia*.

*Philadelphia* was designated in August 1890 as flagship of Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, commanding the North Atlantic Squadron. The squadron cruised the West Indies and the eastern seaboard until March 1893.

In June 1893 *Philadelphia* was reassigned to the Pacific Station and steamed via Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Callao,



Peru. *Philadelphia* arrived San Francisco August 1893. As the flagship of the Commander-in-chief, Pacific Station, she cruised with the squadron, engaging in drills and maneuvers, and visiting various ports on the west coast of the United States, Mexico, and South America, and in the Hawaiian Islands. She arrived at the Mare Island Navy Yard October 1897 and decommissioned there in December.

*Philadelphia* was recommissioned July 1898 and became the flagship of Rear Admiral J. N. Miller, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Station. She steamed from San Francisco to participate in the ceremonies attending the assumption of sovereignty by the United States over the Hawaiian Islands.

*Philadelphia* served as flagship of the Pacific Station until 6 February 1900, when Rear Admiral Kautz transferred his flag to *USS Iowa*, a battleship. The cruiser continued Pacific operations until 1902, conducting training cruises, drills, target practice, and port visits. Needing extensive repairs, she was ordered to the Puget Sound Navy Yard for decommissioning, at Puget Sound September 1902.

*Philadelphia* was housed over and became a receiving ship at Puget Sound Navy Yard May 1904. She continued this service until November 1912, when she became a prison ship. Resuming service as a receiving ship January 1916, she so remained until struck from the Navy List November 1926. Cruiser *Philadelphia* was sold at public auction at the Puget Sound Navy Yard in 1927.