



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

After 20 years

by John Blanton

Wow! Time flies when you're having fun.

In the summer of 1987 a local skeptical organization reorganized and changed its name. Thus the North Texas Skeptics was born.

With this issue the NTS embarks on its second twenty years, and we commemorate by reprinting, from the Summer 1987 issue, the announcement of our formation. That first issue is available on-line at the following link:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/1987/1987summer\summer1987.htm>

Through remarkable foresight, some would say through our inability to throw away anything, we still have copies of all newsletter back issues, and for your enjoyment they are posted on-line. It all gives the appearance that somebody has too much spare time.

Vicki Hinson-Smith produced the initial issue, but we later began to see the influence of Tony Dousette, who soon took over as newsletter editor. Ronnie Hastings established our position on creationism with coverage of local "mantrack" claims. These were good times. Good times were ahead, as well.

A review of back issues reveals the evolution of the NTS, from a motley collection of skeptics and disbelievers poking fun at psychics, faith healers and young-Earth creationists to a motley collection of skeptics and disbelievers poking fun at psychics, faith healers and old-Earth creationists.

That first issue told of police investigating Gypsy fortune tellers and of plans for a trip to the "mantracks" near Glen Rose. The second issue in the fall of 1987 recorded the historical Edwards v. Aguilar case that put the kibosh on equal standing for creationism in Louisiana schools. Also in that issue, Ron Hastings wrote that Carl

EVENTS CALENDAR

2007 Elections

Saturday 13 January 2007
2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street
in Dallas

NTS Annual Board Meeting and Elections

The NTS is run by those who
show up. Show up.

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NTS Social Dinner /Board Meeting

Saturday 27 January 2007
7 p.m.
NTS Social Dinner
Good Eats
6950 Greenville Avenue
in Dallas

Let us know if you are coming.
We need to reserve a table.

Check the **NTS Hotline** for more
information at
214-335-9248.

North Texas Skeptics

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 Treasurer Mark Meyer

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 John Thomas, Attorney

The North Texas Skeptics is a tax-exempt
 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All
 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings
 on topics of current interest or social events.

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 published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics,
 P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794.

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 views of The North Texas Skeptics. Contents and logo
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Baugh (of Glen Rose “mantracks” fame) took his “human” tooth fossil
 to the Balcones Research lab near Austin, only to be told it was a fish
 tooth. Not only a fish tooth, but a paleontological fish tooth.

Later issues carried more on the Baugh fossil fish tooth story and
 also items on crystal power and parapsychology. John Thomas
 expanded into the dubious art of graphology (handwriting analysis), and
 Tony Dousette told the tale of Gerolamo Cardano, who predicted his
 own death in 1576. Desiring not to be proven wrong, he killed himself
 on the specified day.

We also took on homeopathy and ghost busters, and in December of
 1988 we held a really great party at Mel Zemek’s house. I joined up and
 attended, which is why you are now reading this history of the NTS.

In 1989 we got to see Ronnie Hastings featured on the *Nova*
 documentary *God, Darwin and the Dinosaurs*. Of course, the program
 got around to Carl Baugh’s famous “mantrack” claims, and you will
 note, if you get to watch the video, that Ron has the last word. Ron
 Hastings and Glen Kuban next took on the outlandish academic
 credentials of creationists Carl Baugh and Don Patton. We began, also,
 to see regular reports on Don Patton’s Metroplex Institute of Origin
 Science (MIOS).

All this while the MUFONs (Mutual UFO Network) were having
 their fifteen minutes, and we were coming to know and to love local
 faith healer Robert Tilton. Unfortunately, our fun with Tilton ended
 much too early after Ole Anthony and ABC’s *Prime Time Live* did an
 exposé on Tilton, after which his ministry slowly imploded.

Creationism didn’t go away with the dinosaurs. Defying Darwin’s
 theory of evolution, the young-Earth creationists are still among us. So,
 now, are the old-Earth Creationists. In March of 1992 we attended the
 symposium at Southern Methodist University that featured Intelligent
 Design champion Phillip Johnson debating rational thinking champion
 Michael Ruse. Little did we realize it, but that meeting was the initial
 gathering of the Intelligent Design movement, and some of ID’s
 heavy-hitters were there, forming alliances that years later would impact
 state and local school boards and push Intelligent Design into the
 national headlines.

Not so Intelligent Design came to our doorstep in 1995 when the
 Plano school board attempted to introduce the ID text *Of Pandas And
 People* into the science curriculum. NTS editorialized on the issue, and
 we assisted the Plano citizens group Keep Quality in Plano Schools
 (KQUIPS) in defeating the issue.

Which fairly much brings us up to the modern era of the NTS. Early
 leaders Mel Zemek, Tony Dousette, and Joe Voelkering have died. John
 Thomas and Ron Hastings continue to lend us support from the sidelines.
 Treasurer Mark Meyer has kept our accounts straight for almost all of
 this time, and Keith Blanton has been newsletter composer since 1990
 and editor mostly since then. I have been on the board of directors since
 1990 as have Pat Reeder and Laura Ainsworth. Danny Barnett has given
 the group a tremendous lift with his in-depth coverage of the shifting

field of alternative medicine. Don't forget exorcism and deliverance, as well. Ginny Vaughn became Ginny Barnett and continues to contribute to the pool of NTS intellectual property. Greg Aicklen has unraveled the Bible codes for us and also set us up initially on the Internet. Laura Ainsworth got us our own cartoon feature, and Prasad Golla continues to draw panels for the newsletter and for our Web site.

This newsletter has seen a remarkable evolution, as well. Premiere editions were produced on a dot-matrix printer. Then came laser printers, and *The Skeptic* looked quite spiffy when reproduced on an offset press and saddle stitched. The cost of offset was steep, and turn-around took several days. When we went to monthly editions, with no increase in subscription fees, in 1991 there was no way out but xerographic reproduction with a staple in the corner. In the mean time the migration to Desktop publishing allowed the entire production of an edition to be completed in an afternoon.

The Internet transformed our newsletter, as well. Writers zipped their text to the editor first modem to modem, then by e-mail. Today, with writers spread out all over the country, with the editor in one county and the printer in another county, everything goes electronically. At least one article has been submitted from an island in the middle of the Pacific ocean. Prasad once sent in a cartoon while on vacation in India. Material has been received by Keith while he was heading down the Interstate in Utah (not driving, I presume). I have received the newsletter for review and forwarded it on to Mike Selby while sitting out by the pool in Tucson, poaching on somebody's open WiFi connection. I am submitting this article using the free WiFi at a book store while on vacation in Arizona. Twenty years ago all of this would have been something to be skeptical about.

Future Meeting Dates

January 13, 2007	July 14, 2007
February 17, 2007	August 11, 2007
March 17, 2007	September 8, 2007
April 21, 2007	October 13, 2007
May 19, 2007	November 10, 2007
June 16, 2007	December 8, 2007

Our membership and our management have evolved, as well. Mike Selby and John Brandt are fair late-comers, but they have taken positions of leadership and represent the future of the NTS. The NTS is run by those who show up. Join up, show up, and sign up on January 13. It's election day and the start of another twenty years for the North Texas Skeptics. □

How it all began

From the first issue of *The Skeptic*, the forerunner of *The North Texas Skeptic*, this headline item details how the North Texas Skeptics got its start.

DSTOP reorganizes, changes name to North Texas Skeptics

The not-for-profit organization known as the North Texas Skeptics (NTS) was founded in 1983 as the Dallas Society to Oppose Pseudo-science (DSTOP), and in the spring of this year was renamed and reorganized to encourage critical examination of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscience claims, and to provide an alternative source of information to the news media and general public.

NTS encourages public education in the methods of critical thinking and scientific investigation, endorses scientific inquiry as the best approach for obtaining knowledge, and investigates paranormal phenomena and pseudo-science claims. NTS is associated with the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) with which it shares principal interests and goals. And the NTS organization is comprised of persons who reside, work, or maintain substantial interests in the North Texas area.

Goals and purposes

Copies of a new organizational charter, approved by majority vote, will be available at the next meeting and will explain in detail the goals and purposes of NTS. Briefly, NTS does endorse the principle that the scientific method is the most reliable approach for obtaining knowledge about the universe. The organization does not, however, endorse the *a priori* rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudo-science claims, but believes such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational inquiry demands.

In the North Texas area the organization will assist local schools and institutions of higher education in teaching the methods of scientific inquiry and will alert educators and students to the dangers of uncritical acceptance of paranormal phenomena and pseudo-science claims.

Additionally, NTS will monitor local media and, whenever necessary, will remind members of the press that, when report-

ing on paranormal phenomena and pseudo-science claims, journalists are not exempt from their duty to present “both sides” and to provide fair and accurate coverage.

NTS will also facilitate the scientific testing of persons who are involved in pseudo-science activities or who claim to possess paranormal abilities, and will conduct research for and provide information to CSICOP concerning local paranormal claims, pseudo-science activities, and groups which share the objectives of NTS and CSICOP.

Membership categories

Membership in the North Texas Skeptics is open to those persons in the North Texas area who share the concerns and objectives outlined above.

Members’ views may represent a broad spectrum of beliefs concerning paranormal phenomena and pseudo-science. However, all members should hold in common the principle that truth can be established only through rational inquiry, while misinformation, irrational inquiry, and fraud serve only as deterrents to truth. Membership is open to all persons, regardless of race, sex, ethnic group, age, or religion.

Following are the four membership categories: Patrons, Scientific and Technical Consultants, Fellows, and Associates.

Patrons are those individuals or organizations endorsing the goals and ideals of the North Texas Skeptics while making significant contributions of services, resources, or funds to aid in investigations, special events, print production, and other organizational business. Patrons are nominated by the board of directors and approved by the Fellows and are given formal recognition for their trust and assistance. Patrons are non-voting, unless they are also Fellows of the organization.

Scientific and Technical Consultants are those persons appointed by the board of directors to assist in investigative and educational Activities. Typically, a Consultant will be a professional or an expert, experienced in investigating paranormal phenomena, unorthodox medical claims, or other pseudo-science activities, and who has demonstrated the ability to examine such claims fairly and critically. Usually such persons will have academic training in science, medicine, psychology, technology, or related subjects. Consultants receive no payment for their Services and are non-voting unless they are also Fellows of the organization. Consultants do not speak for NTS unless approved to do so by the board.

Fellows are the voting members of the organization, and they appoint, remove, and replace the board of directors, Patrons, Fellows and Associates. Fellows also place items on the ballot and request mail-in votes, set membership dues, and act on any other business not explicitly a duty of the board of directors. Only Fellows serve as board members or committee chairpersons. They receive the organization’s newsletter and any mail-in ballots distributed by the organization. And Fellows may attend all activities at no cost or at reduced rates. Fellows may also serve as Scientific and Technical Consultants.

Associates are non-voting members who receive the organization’s newsletter and announcements of activities. Associates may attend activities at no cost or at reduced rates, may attend Fellow’s meetings as observers, may serve on committees, and may serve as Scientific or Technical Consultants.

To become a Patron, Consultant, Fellow, or Associate, please complete the membership questionnaire located elsewhere in this issue.

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

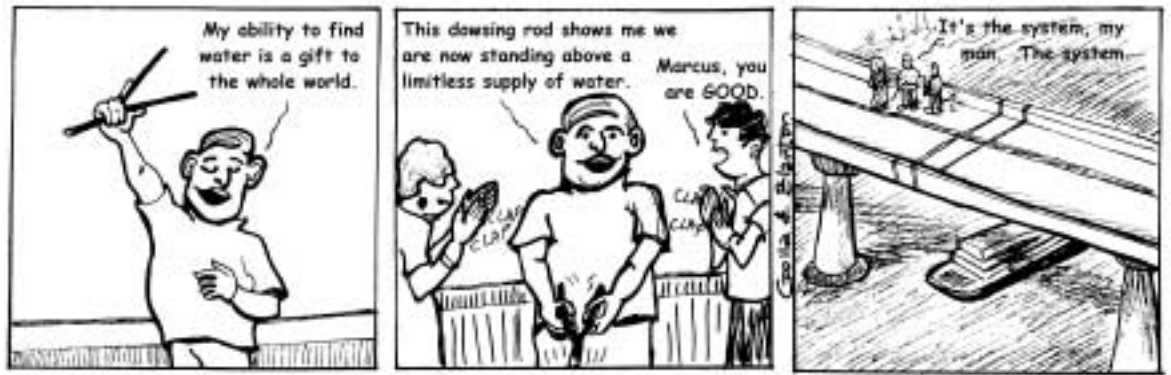
encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

The Skeptical Inquirer

is published bimonthly by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Subscriptions should be addressed to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703. Or call toll-free 1-800-634-1610. Subscription prices: one year (six issues), \$35; two years, \$60; three years, \$84. You may also visit the CSICOP Web site at <http://www.csicop.org> for more information.

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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Paranormal Challenge!

The North Texas Skeptics Paranormal Challenge Instructions
P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

The persons named below ("challengers") will pay the sum of **\$12,000** ("the challenge prize") to any person ("claimant") who can demonstrate any psychic or paranormal power or ability under scientifically valid observing conditions. Prior to any demonstration or test, challengers and claimant will enter into a complete, written agreement called "the protocol", which will set out what power or ability is to be demonstrated, how it is to be tested, and what test results will constitute success or failure. These instructions and conditions alone are not an offer. No contract to pay the challenge amount is made with any claimant until the claimant and challengers have negotiated and entered into the protocol. The protocol must incorporate the following terms and conditions:

- ❖ Claimant must describe the paranormal or psychic ability or power clearly and precisely. Claims must be specific enough to be scientifically testable. Claims must be clearly psychic or paranormal.
- ❖ Claimant must specifically describe any proposed test procedures which will be used to demonstrate the paranormal or psychic power. Claimant and challengers must agree to the test procedures to be used before any tests are performed.
- ❖ Claimant must describe exactly what test results will constitute success or failure. If success and failure will be described in terms of statistical results, such results must be significantly beyond chance expectation.
- ❖ Claimant and challengers will each be responsible for their respective expenses, such as equipment, travel, accommodations, consultant fees, or other expenses.
- ❖ In the event the claimant is successful under the terms and conditions of the protocol, challengers will immediately deliver the challenge prize to claimant or claimant's designee, in full settlement of all claims.
- ❖ Claimant and challengers waive all claims, damages, and causes of action against each other arising out of the challenge, for any injuries or damages of every kind, whether to person, property, or reputation.
- ❖ All agreements, protocols, correspondence, data, audio or video recordings, photographs or results made or obtained by either party during the challenge or negotiations leading up to the challenge may be used by either party in any way he or she may choose, including publication, and challengers and claimant both waive all exclusive rights to such information.
- ❖ This offer is made by the challengers personally and not on behalf of The North Texas Skeptics or any other agency or organization, although others may be involved in the examination of claims.

After challengers have received claimant's offer to demonstrate a claimed psychic or paranormal ability or power, challengers will promptly enter into negotiations with claimant and attempt to arrive at a written protocol satisfactory to both parties. Neither claimant nor challengers shall have any right of action or damages against the other for failure to enter into the protocol or for failure to conduct any test or demonstration.

Signed: **Gregory H. Aicklen John F. Blanton Prasad N. Golla Mike Selby John A. Thomas**

North Texas Skeptics
P.O. Box 111794
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

FIRST CLASS

Address Correction Requested

Application for Membership

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
E-Mail address _____
Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____
Occupation _____
Special expertise and/or interests _____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership agreement:

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature _____ Date _____

The North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (972) 306-3187

Indicate your choice:

Member: A voting member and newsletter recipient. Family privileges included. Annual dues \$35.00

Newsletter recipient: No membership privileges. Annual subscription rate \$15.00

Receive a \$5 discount on either of the two newsletter subscription levels above by choosing to receive your newsletter by e-mail only.

Introduce a friend to *The North Texas Skeptic*: Let us send a **FREE** three-month gift subscription of *The Skeptic* to this individual (or institution).

Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation to The North Texas Skeptics in the amount of \$ _____.

Bill me: Please bill me for the choices I have made above.

www.ntskeptics.org