#### A Contactee Canon: Gray Barker's Saucerian Books

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## Abstract

Gray Barker (1925-1984) was a prominent figure in flying saucer and New Age publishing for over three decades, beginning in 1953 with the first issue of his flying saucer fanzine The Saucerian. By the end of the 1950s, he had launched a publishing imprint that brought out some of the strangest UFO-related books of the era, with a particular emphasis on flying saucer contactees. Barker also played a key role in nurturing fringe ideas that grew up around the saucer mystery, including the Mothman, the Philadelphia Experiment, and the Men in Black. Barker's publishing imprint—first known as Saucerian Publications and later renamed New Age Books—became a platform for those whose stories were too unusual, implausible, or crudely written for more mainstream publishers. Cheaply produced and published in small editions, Saucerian's books were marketed to the small core of true believers in the saucer mystery. This chapter explores Barker's career as a publisher, emphasizing his role in bringing to light contactee narratives and other outré works as well as his central role in the development of 20th-century myths and the permeation of paranormal ideas into popular culture.

#### Introduction

In one of his final books, veteran flying saucer author and publisher Gray Barker presented a "remarkable Vision" that summed up his view of the universe, God, the flying saucer mystery, and/or the meaning of his own life: "In this vision an incomprehensible Being of enormous size and power—perhaps larger than our Globe itself—dangled huge cables from the sky. Like some gargantuan giant wielding enormous fishpoles, this Force cast bait consisting of disc-shaped objects not unlike modern UFOs." (Barker 1981, 79) Barker's ironic "vision" is of God as a hoaxer, or perhaps the hoaxer as God, dangling bait with which to capture earthbound explorers of the unknown. This image is an illuminating one, illustrating how Barker saw himself as he wrote, published, and popularized narratives of flying saucers, teleportation, sinister Men in Black, monstrous aliens and mysterious Mothmen. Over a 30-year career, Barker was central in the development of all of these mysteries, and his publishing imprint—first known as Saucerian Publications and later renamed New Age Books—established itself as a home for the most outré saucer and paranormal narratives of the era.

## Barker's life and career

Gray Roscoe Barker was born May 2, 1925 in the farm town of Riffle, West Virginia (Biographical information on Barker is drawn from: Wilkinson 2010; "Gray Barker UFO Collection" 2017; Moseley and Pflock 2002; Coon 1995). He read voraciously in his youth, and was interested in writing from an early age. In 1946 he compiled a typescript book of poems, *Who Knows*, which he presented to Robert F. Kidd Library at Glenville State College (Barker 1946).<sup>1</sup> He was also interested in films, working as a film projectionist. He later relocated to Clarksburg, where he became a booking agent for several movie theaters in the area. Barker graduated from Glenville State College and served for a year as a teacher in Maryland before returning to West Virginia, where he became the manager of a drive-in movie theater. He became a masterful marketer of low-rent features in the 1950s, and by the 1970s was involved in the distribution of "B" horror movies and pornography (Wilkinson 2010).

Barker's involvement with flying saucer writing and publishing began on September 12, 1952, when a group of seven people—mostly boys between the ages of 10 and 14—sighted a saucer and a strange creature in the small town of Flatwoods, West Virginia, about 15 miles from Barker's home in Riffle. Barker immediately traveled to the town to interview the witnesses and investigate the so-called Flatwoods Monster. He wrote a report on the sighting for *Fate*, a magazine focusing on bizarre occurrences published by former science fiction editor and flying saucer pioneer Ray Palmer (Barker 1953a). Barker quickly became fascinated with the growing flying saucer trend, and began publishing his own fanzine, *The Saucerian*, in 1953. The first issue contained an expanded report of the Flatwoods Monster sighting (Barker 1953b).

In addition to publishing *The Saucerian*, Barker also wrote for a number of other periodicals, most notably Ray Palmer's *Flying Saucers* magazine, for which he provided a regular column. He also began to develop friendships with other saucer researchers, including James W. Moseley, publisher of the well-circulated saucer zine *Saucer News*, and Albert K. Bender, founder of the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB), one of dozens of saucer research organizations that served as clearinghouses of information on strange phenomena in the 1950s. Barker's relationship with Moseley was an essential part of his public persona in the saucer world. In their published writings throughout the 1950s and 60s, the two acted out a rivalry: Barker provided a platform for contactees and other fringe figures; Moseley, taking a conservative stance, debunked these claims; and

both attacked each other in print for their positions. (At one point an editorial by Barker accused Moseley of being in the employ of the US Air Force) ([Barker] 1957). In private, the two were close friends, and collaborated in the development of their public rivalry—as well as working together on several hoaxes (Moseley and Pflock 2002, passim). Moseley describes their role as "stir[ring] the ufological pot when things got dull," as in the late 1960s when there was "an extended slump in both the number and sensational content of saucer-sighting reports and a consequent drastic decline in public interest" (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 155-156).

Barker's friendship with Albert K. Bender led directly to the subject of his second major investigation, and one of his most lasting contributions to saucer culture: the "Men in Black." In 1953, Bender claimed to have discovered the secret of the flying saucers, and stated in the IFSB's newsletter that he was preparing to announce his findings to the world. Shortly afterwards—and before publishing this secret—he abruptly dropped out of saucer research and shuttered the IFSB. He told his fellow researchers that he had been frightened away by an encounter with three men dressed in black suits who questioned him about his saucer research and conclusions (Clark 1996c, 2:73-76). Barker became obsessed with Bender's "silencing" by these mysterious "Men in Black," and this incident formed the nucleus of Barker's first book, *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*, which was published in 1956.

*They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* describes a number of cases of flying saucer researchers who were threatened, intimidated, followed, or otherwise "silenced," often by a trio of mysterious black-garbed figures. Much of the material in the book is revised from reports first published in *The Saucerian*, rewritten here in a breathless,

paranoid style. Several of the narratives are introduced in the second person, maximizing the reader's identification with the unusual and frightening tales recounted. The book ends with a warning to the enlightened, saucer-investigating reader: "There exist forces or agencies which would prevent us from finding out whether or not there are ... saucers with things in them... They will be at your door, too, unless we all get wise and find out who the three men really are" (Barker 1956, 246) The Men in Black became a recurring theme in Barker's writing, and other researchers like John Keel, Kurt Glemser, and Timothy Green Beckley took up the narrative, investigating other cases of "MIB." The Men in Black eventually broke out of the niche world of ufology: Less than a decade after Barker's death in 1984, comics artist Lowell Cunningham published a comedic take on Barker's "Men in Black," which was adapted into a Hollywood film franchise beginning in 1997.

Following the release of *They Knew Too Much...*, Barker became increasingly involved in the production of books related to the flying saucer phenomenon. He also became more and more attracted to the fringe beliefs that had been growing ever since Kenneth Arnold's first saucer sighting in 1947: contactees like George Adamski, who claimed to have met a Venusian named Orthon and flown in a flying saucer; trance mediums like George van Tassel, who organized annual saucer conventions at Giant Rock Airport in California, and Mark Probert, whose channeled messages became the research subject of the Borderland Sciences Research Association; and other idiosyncratic personalities like Raymond W. Bernard, a health-food advocate who moved to Brazil in the 1950s to search for cavern entrances into the hollow interior of the Earth. At first, Barker presented these stories in *The Saucerian* and its successor periodical, *The*  *Saucerian Bulletin*, with tongue in cheek. But gradually, this mocking or critical editorial tone receded, replaced by a simple detachment. Eventually, he would take on the appearance of an advocate of the most outrageous saucer narratives, presenting contactee stories "with an open mind," sometimes hinting that kernels of unbelievable truth lurked therein.

In 1959, Barker shifted his publishing focus from magazines to monographs. He launched his publishing house in earnest in 1959 with the release of From Outer Space To You, the memoir of New Jersey-based sign painter and saucer contactee Howard Menger. The book recounts Menger's tale of his ongoing contacts with space people, which began when he encountered a mysterious Venusian woman in the woods when he was ten years old. Menger goes on to narrate space contacts that continued through his service in World War II and afterwards. From Outer Space To You is a companion to Marla Baxter's My Saturnian Lover, issued by the vanity press Vantage Books in 1958. Menger met Baxter (née Constance Weber, and later known as Connie Menger) at a lecture given by contactee George van Tassel in 1956. During telepathic journeys to other planets, Menger and Baxter realized that Menger was in fact a Saturnian named Sol do Naro, Baxter was the sister of the Venusian woman Menger met in his childhood, and that the two had had a relationship spanning several lifetimes on other worlds. Menger divorced his wife, Rose, and married Marla Baxter in 1958 (Menger 1959, passim; Clark 1996d, 2:246-249).

Following the release of *From Outer Space To You*, Barker's publishing imprint (called at various times Saucerian Books, Saucerian Publications, and Saucerian Press) became a platform for those whose stories were too unusual, implausible, or crudely

written for mainstream publishers of saucer books like Citadel Press. Published in small editions—generally 500 or 1,000 copies—Saucerian's books were marketed to the fringes and frontiers of the saucer mystery, to those true believers that embraced contactee narratives, accounts of psychic phenomena, and new age philosophy. Barker also operated as a book dealer, distributing a wide range of works on the paranormal and offering rare and out-of-print materials to his clientele. He had identified a niche market, and operated within <u>it</u> for nearly three decades.

The open-minded spirit of the saucer field likely attracted Barker, whose homosexuality placed him in a difficult position in the West Virginia of the 1950s and 1960s. He wrote long, autobiographical letters to Moseley, under the guise of being installments in a work of fiction. In these letters, Barker writes about his business affairs, his personal relationships, and about gay life in Clarksburg. The last is discussed quite openly, if euphemistically-in one letter sexual activity is jokingly referred to as "Communist indoctrination," and in another, "UFO research" (Barker 1963b, 1963c, passim). Barker was arrested in 1962 and convicted of the similarly euphemistic charge of "contributing to the delinquency of a minor" (Wilkinson 2010). He was placed on probation and ordered to meet regularly with a court-appointed psychiatrist (Wilkinson 2010).<sup>2</sup> Around the same time, Barker declared bankruptcy-most likely due to difficulties in managing his theater, but perhaps also because of the amounts of money he poured into hardcover saucer publications in 1959-1961 (Barker 1963c, passim). According to a long 1963 letter to James Moseley describing the progress of the bankruptcy proceedings, Barker took this legal step due to "the fact that the stuff I was selling and writing in book form had not been going as well as it once had" (Barker

1963c, 20). But his bankruptcy didn't stop his publishing venture. In a letter to new age author Dana Howard, he described the bankruptcy procedure as a means by which he would be able to stay in business (Barker 1963e).

Following the bankruptcy, however, Barker's publishing formats shifted. He sold *The Saucerian Bulletin* to James Moseley, who incorporated it into his *Saucer News*, and began to focus on book publishing exclusively (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 182-83). He had discovered that his niche market cared far more for the content of a book than its appearance. Saucerian's early hardcovers, like Menger's *From Outer Space To You* and T. Lobsang Rampa's *Doctor From Lhasa*, issued in cloth boards with painted dust jackets and professional typography, show a certain striving for mainstream acceptance. But in 1962, as a follow-up to Albert K. Bender's *Flying Saucers and the Three Men*, Barker experimented with a new format for *Bender Mystery Confirmed*, a compilation of letters he received from readers of Bender's books.

*Bender Mystery Confirmed* marks a seismic shift in Barker's publishing methods. In 1962, Barker acquired a small offset printing press (Barker 1962b, 2). He used this (perhaps primarily) to print flyers and circulars for his film booking business, but also began using it to produce full books for Saucerian Publications. Unlike the professionally produced and relatively well-made hardcovers of Saucerian's first three years, *Bender Mystery Confirmed* was typed on Barker's typewriter, printed on the office duplicator, and staple-bound in cardstock covers (Barker 1962b, 2-3). Barker's introduction to the book includes a passage that could be considered a statement of purpose for Saucerian Books in general: "...the book may not have the 'slick,' easy-reading characteristics of a commercially produced volume. Since this is a publication of limited circulation we believe readers prefer to receive it in this fashion. The public acceptance of the book in this form will determine how publication projects of similar nature may be carried out" (Barker 1962a, 7-8). No doubt Barker's personal finances also played a role in the shift to a production method with slimmer margins. With very few exceptions—like his own 1970 book *The Silver Bridge*—Saucerian's publications from the 1960s onwards were produced as inexpensively as possible. Barker did return to using a commercial printer in the late 1960s—Tomorrow Rivers Printers, an Amherst, Wisconsin firm owned by *Fate* magazine publisher and saucer pioneer Ray Palmer. But after Palmer's death, Barker returned to in-house production, and by the early 1980s Barker was photocopying and comb-binding most of his publications. Around the same time his primary production technique shifted, he changed the name of his imprint to New Age Books, and the press's primary mailing address changed from Clarksburg to the nearby rural community of Jane Lew.

In addition to a change in production methods, *Bender Mystery Confirmed* also marked the beginning of a new distribution method. The solicitation letter for the book lays out Saucerian's Charter Subscription program, offering discounts to customers who pre-ordered these in-house-printed publications (Barker 1963a, 4-5). The subscription program's price was much higher than the corresponding price for a periodical subscription. With the subscription service, Barker was able to use the *Saucerian Bulletin*'s subscriber list model, coupled with his in-house production method for monographs, to guarantee the ongoing sale of higher-priced materials to his niche market.

Editorially, Barker sought out strange and outlandish narratives. A 1963 solicitation letter for Laura Mundo's *Flying Saucers and the Father's Plan* contains a sort

of mission statement: "...we have received many manuscripts from authors who have interesting experiences and valuable information to impart. Heretofore these authors would not have been published, for their works were of such specialized UFO nature that no professional hard cover publisher would risk either the financial venture or popular ridicule and pressure involved" (Barker 1963a, 1). Barker was willing to take a chance on authors who were unlikely to find a mainstream publisher for their work, like John C. Sherwood, who was 17 years old when Barker published his account of Michigan saucer sightings under the title *Flying Saucers Are Watching You*. Barker occasionally agreed to publish a manuscript sight unseen, if he knew it contained material related to saucers and space men. As a result, many of Saucerian's books represent the idiosyncratic beliefs of fringe figures in the world of UFOs, often published with minimal editing. In one letter to Sherwood, Barker referred to these as his "nut books," noting that these tended to sell better than "objective type" books like Sherwood's own (Barker 1967a, 1).

Viewed as a corpus, Barker's publications take on the shape of a canon of saucer contactees and other new age figures of the 1950s and 60s. Barker sought out manuscripts by or edited books about most of the major figures of the contactee movement: George Adamski, the first author to publish an account of his encounters with space people, is represented, with *Gray Barker's Book of Adamski*, as is the second major contactee, Truman Bethurum, with *The People of the Planet Clarion*. Richard Sharpe Shaver, whose allegedly autobiographical tales of underground worlds in Ray Palmer's *Amazing Stories* presaged the flying saucer contactees in the 1940s, is the subject of two Saucerian publications, both edited by Timothy Green Beckley: *The Shaver Mystery and the Inner Earth* and *The Subterranean World*. Barker issued reprints of pamphlets by contactees and mediums like Laura Mundo, Dan Martin, Helen & Betty Mitchell, and William Ferguson; issued a series of reprints of more than a dozen pamphlets by new age seer Michael X; and published books by new figures in the world of ufology like Ted Owens and Alvin E. Moore. Viewed as a whole, the Saucerian bibliography becomes a sort of canon of the outer limits of the world of flying saucers.

# The construction of a conspiracy: The Varo Edition

In addition to publishing strange materials, Barker was a master of conspiratorial hype-building. No publication illustrates this so well as the Saucerian edition of Morris K. Jessup's book *The Case for the UFO*. Originally published in 1955, *The Case for the UFO* was an early and important book on the flying saucer phenomenon (and among the first to use the term "UFO"). The annotated Saucerian edition of the book, known as the "Varo Edition," has become a complicated ufological legend, and it is difficult at this point to know how much truth the accepted story contains. Barker played a key role in the developing and nurturing that legend (this summary of the Varo Edition draws on Vallee 1994, Moore and Berlitz 1979, and Steiger and Whritenour 1968).

As the story goes, following the publication of *The Case for the UFO* in 1955, Jessup received a series of strange letters, alternately signed "Carlos M. Allende" and "Carl M. Allen." Written in a fractured style, the letters describe an experiment in the Philadelphia Naval Yard in October 1943, during which a Destroyer-class ship was rendered invisible and teleported. The strange field that enabled this had adverse effects on the sailors caught within it, including "freezing" into physical stasis, spontaneous combustion, and madness. Shortly after Jessup received these letters, an annotated copy of Bantam's paperback edition of *The Case for the UFO* was sent anonymously to the Office of Naval Research (ONR). This book contained extensive underlining and annotations in three different colors of ink, and (allegedly) in three different hands. The notes made oblique references to an ancient battle between two mysterious non-human species—and to the same experiment discussed in the letters Jessup received from Allende/Allen. For reasons that became the source of much ufological speculation, the ONR took an interest in the annotated book, and called Jessup in to comment on it. He noted the similarity in handwriting between the annotations and the Allende letters, and provided copies of these to the ONR.

The ONR hired the Varo Manufacturing Co., a small military contractor based in Garland, Texas, to transcribe the entirety of the book, including Jessup's original text as well as all of the annotations, underlines, and other markings. The transcribed text was then mimeographed in a small edition (Barker's solicitation letter for the Saucerian edition claims 25 were produced; Moore & Berlitz and Jacques Vallee state that the number was 127) (Barker 1973, 2; Moore and Berlitz 1979, 38; Vallee 1994, 54). The text prepared by Varo identifies the three annotators as "Mr. A," "Mr. B," and "Jemi," a nickname or salutation used periodically by the other two. (In his visit to the ONR, Jessup allegedly identified "Mr. A" as Allende.) Each annotation and mark is attributed to one of the three. Jessup himself was apparently sent several copies of this edition.

Jessup committed suicide in 1959, and three years after his death speculation about "the Varo edition" began circulating in earnest. The earliest published reference to the Varo edition was Riley Crabb's 1962 pamphlet *M.K. Jessup and the Allende Letters*  (Crabb 1962). Barker reprinted material from Crabb's booklet in his own *The Strange Case of Dr. M. K. Jessup* the following year (Barker 1963d). Saucer researchers eagerly searched for copies of the Varo edition, and some seem to have succeeded, including Brad Steiger, who acquired a microfilm copy while preparing his 1968 paperback *New UFO Breakthrough* (Steiger and Whritenour 1968). By the 1970s, the Philadelphia Experiment was developing into a major subcategory of paranormal research.

After years of searching, Barker obtained a copy of the Varo edition in 1972, and he printed a facsimile edition the following year. Barker's solicitation campaign for the Varo edition played up the conspiracy angle. The solicitation letter Barker sent to his mailing list came in a sealed envelope containing a warning: "NOTICE-THIS ENVELOPE CONTAINS AN AD ON CONTROVERSIAL UFO INFORMATION... If you feel you do not wish to know this information or have this information in your possession, destroy this envelope immediately or return to sender" (Barker 1973, envelope). Those who ignored the warning and opened the envelope anyway found a message marking them as one of the fearless UFO elite: "...the fact that you opened this envelope tells me something about your personal character.... YOU ARE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN THE UFO MYSTERY, and you are NOT paranoid or crazy! ... AND YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF THE IMPLICATIONS THAT THE 'FLYING SAUCER' MYSTERY might bring" (Barker 1973, 1). These "select few" were offered the book at the discounted price of \$12.50 per copy, discounted from the retail price of \$25. Many ufologists consider the Philadelphia Experiment a hoax, but a plethora of websites and books still assert its historicity (Clark 1996a, 39-42; Goerman 1980). Barker's

conspiratorial marketing campaign helped to turn the Philadelphia Experiment into the lasting mystery it has become.

## The Saucerian corpus

Over 25 years, Barker issued 86 monographs and one long-playing record under the Saucerian and New Age imprints. We can break his publishing career down into five main phases: From 1952-1958, when he published periodicals almost exclusively; from 1959-1962, the "hardcover" phase of the Saucerian Books imprint, ending with his bankruptcy; 1963-1968, the "<u>DiY</u>" phase, when Barker handled his own book production; 1969-1979, beginning with Barker's shift to using Ray Palmer's Tomorrow Rivers Printers and culminating with a relatively slow period in his publishing; and 1980-1984, when he returned to in-house production and renamed the press New Age Books. Of the monographs published by Barker, many were either compilations of previously published material or outright reprints of books first issued by other publishers. Just under half of Saucerian's titles were original monographs.

The subjects covered by Barker's press were eclectic, but the large majority of the books he issued were dedicated to either flying saucer contactees or psychic channeling. Together, these two categories account for nearly half of the imprint's output. Other topics include flying saucer sighting reports—more in the vein of "serious" ufology books on Hollow Earth theory, Men In Black, new age nutrition, the Philadelphia Experiment, and pseudo-scientific literature on free energy and saucer propulsion.

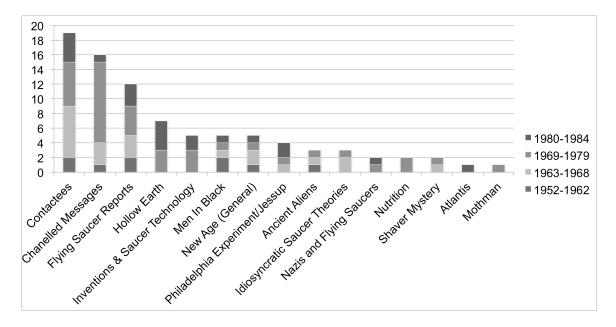


Figure 1. Subjects of books published by Gray Barker, by year.<sup>3</sup>

Who was reading these books? In 1977, researchers David Stupple and Abdollah Dashti conducted a survey of Saucerian's customer base (Stupple and Dashti 1977). They had Barker send a survey requesting information about his clientele's interests and beliefs, receiving 399 responses from the total mailing list of 4,400 individuals. They found that very few of their respondents were members of either contactee religions or scientific UFO study organizations. Fewer than half reported having had psychic experiences or UFO sightings of their own, but an overwhelming majority expressed a primary interest in contactee stories. Stupple and Dashti concluded that Saucerian's readers related to the saucer mystery independently, without either scientific or spiritual organizations as intermediaries: "They are a *mass*, bound not together, but to a common source of information... This conclusion is consistent with our field work observation that believers in flying saucer contactees are generally ordinary people with ordinary lives who have *some* extraordinary beliefs" (Stupple and Dashti 1977, 491-92).

#### Barker's hoaxes and beliefs

What did Barker himself believe? According to Moseley, his initial enthusiasm for saucers may have been the result of belief in physical discs in the sky. And he seems to have been legitimately perplexed by Bender's sudden decision to drop out after his "three men" encounter—unless, that is, the affair was a hoax concocted by Barker himself, as ufologist Lonzo Dove has proposed (Dove 1959, 6-13).<sup>4</sup> But by the early 1960s. Moseley believes his belief had evaporated, likely as a result of Bender's outrageous Men in Black story. Moseley writes: "He thought of UFOs and ufology as he did motion pictures—make-believe, wonderment, entertainment, fantasy, fun and games" (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 121). A more cynical expression of the same idea is spelled out by the title of a poem Barker sent to Moseley: "UFO is a Bucket of Shit" (Barker undated; Wilkinson 2010). But in a discussion of UFO photographs published in *Fate* magazine, Barker hints that the line between true and false is not so clear-cut. Placing words like "reliable" in scare-quotes, Barker discusses John Keel's theory that UFOs are (photographable) projections from "some unknown and incomprehensible Entity or Entities." Stopping short of stating anything like a personal belief—and possibly just parodying Keel's own style and theories—Barker recounts his "vision" of a godlike hoaxer, culminating in an enigmatic conclusion: "We don't know for certain what all of this really means," Barker writes, "we only know that there are a lot of UFO photographs published in FATE. We think they're 'authentic.' For is it not written in The Book of Wonder" (Barker 1981, 79).

Whatever his personal beliefs, Barker stayed in the UFO business, likely because it was fun. But he certainly thought of himself, not as a scientist or researcher or prophet, but as an entertainer. And in this role, he was responsible for more than a few hoaxes. Perhaps the best known is the "Straith Letter": Barker and Moseley obtained a piece of stolen State Department stationary, and typed a letter, signed by the nonexistent government official "R.E. Straith," to George Adamski (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 124-127). Adamski proudly shared the letter with his followers—but rather than reveal the hoax and show up Adamski, Barker played it straight, denying any involvement in an article on the "strange case" of the letter published nearly a decade later in *Gray Barker's Book of Adamski* (Barker 1966, 61-78). Barker and Moseley also filmed a model of a saucer in West Virginia, and showed the "Lost Creek Saucer" at lectures and sold <u>Super 8</u> copies of the film in the pages of *Saucer News* (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 199-201; Wilkinson 2010).

One of Barker's hoaxes likely had a business motive: Moseley recounts a story about the "Better Book League," which allegedly contacted an associate of contactee Laura Mundo and offered to pay her organization, the Planetary Research Center, to take her book *Flying Saucers and the Father's Plan* off the market. Moseley reveals that the BBL, rather than a Bender-style saucer silencing, was in fact a hoax perpetrated by Barker because he "just got bored" (Moseley and Pflock 2002, 171). The correspondence between Mundo and Barker in the Gray Barker Collection reveals a different potential motive: Mundo had originally self-published *Flying Saucers and the Father's Plan* (a transcribed lecture about George Adamski's saucer contacts) in 1962 with a statement indicating that it could <u>be</u> "re-copied and passed on to others, free" (Mundo 1962, inside front cover). Barker contacted Mundo about reprinting the book that same year, and she agreed—but she rejected his offer of royalties, and insisted that the book not by copyrighted, stating her belief that doing so would be "against universal law" (Mundo 1963a, 1). Barker proceeded in preparing his edition of the work, releasing it in 1963. After receiving her copies of the Saucerian edition of the book, Mundo wrote to Barker to express her dismay over changes made to the manuscript, particularly the omission of supplemental material (Mundo 1963b, 1). Shortly afterward, Mundo informed Barker she would be producing her own revised edition, which would be nearer to her original manuscript. Barker could revise and reissue his own version, but her version would be distributed free of charge to anyone who requested it, "and will be competition for you" (Mundo 1963c, 1). Since Barker had agreed to publish the work without copyright, he had no real recourse against the author undercutting his edition, which he no doubt saw has her pirating her own work. Mundo's revised edition of the book appeared shortly afterwards, under the title The Father's Plan and Flying Saucers, and it included a brief introduction concerning Barker, protesting perhaps too much that the issuing of this new edition was "in NO WAY an attempt to belittle Gray Barker, the editor" (Mundo 1964, i). In the context of the correspondence between Barker and Mundo, the "Better Book League" hoax was almost certainly an effort to convince Mundo to stop distributing her free edition of the book until Barker had had a chance to recoup his expenses on the Saucerian edition—particularly since it was one of the first books he issued following his bankruptcy in 1963.

Barker's aim in ufology was not to investigate or prove the existence of strange physical phenomena, but to capture something of the unique personalities of those who believed in them. In his introduction to *Gray Barker at Giant Rock*, Moseley writes: "[Gray's] works are generally beloved not just for the hard information they contain, but for the realness of the people involved with UFO sightings and events" (Barker 1976, 2). In his career as a publisher, Barker let these personalities speak for themselves: The volatile psychic Ted Owens, who took credit for guiding hurricanes to punish America for not listening to the messages he brought from space intelligences; John W. Dean, who painstakingly collated and compared the experiences of folksy, rural contactees; Truman Bethurum, who writes of his childhood in the last days of the American frontier before he met the beautiful spacewoman Aura Rhanes; and Howard and Connie Menger, whose shared contactee story includes reincarnation, a torrid affair, and love songs written on Saturn. As both author and publisher, Barker hoped to capture, not sightings or theories or truth, but *people*, the strange and unique figures that populated the saucer world of the mid-twentieth century.

Barker's interest in the depiction of a milieu, rather than the investigation of strange occurrences, is on display in his 1970 book *The Silver Bridge*. Along with fellow ufologists John Keel and Ivan T. Sanderson, Barker was among the first Fortean investigators to take notice of reports of a strange, birdlike creature seen in the town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia in late 1966. An early mention of the creature, along with an illustration of it by regular Saucerian Books artist Gene Duplantier that is still frequently used as an illustration of its appearance, was published in Barker's periodical *Spacecraft News* in spring 1967 (Barker 1967b, cover). Barker quickly got to work on a book on the events in the Point Pleasant area, sharing notes with Keel and initially planning to co-author the book with him. Barker told his associate John C. Sherwood, "I have deliberately stuck in fictional chapters based roughly on cases I had heard about. Throughout the fictional chapters is an undertone which explains the sightings from a

psychological viewpoint, though this is never stated" (quoted in Sherwood 2002). *The Silver Bridge* makes little effort at presenting a factual account, instead presenting a patchwork quilt of vignettes, written in a poetic style. Its emphasis is on capturing an atmosphere of "high strangeness" and the various characters caught up in it—including speculative narratives about the experiences of a Man in Black and spaceman Indrid Cold. Contrast this with Keel's own *The Mothman Prophecies*, published five years later, itself a fine example of literary Forteana, but markedly more straightforward an account of a series of strange occurrences (Keel 1975). Despite its unusual tone, as the first published book-length account of the Mothman sightings and related events, *The Silver Bridge* has earned an important place in the history of the paranormal.

# **Conclusion**

Barker played a central role in the ufological world of the 1950s-1970s, and was a prime mover in lasting Fortean mysteries like the Men in Black, the Mothman, and the Philadelphia Experiment. In addition to their lasting impact on the world of paranormal research, Barker's ideas have broken through into popular culture more broadly. The heirs of his work include franchises like *The X-Files* (1993-2002, 2016-2018) and the *Men In Black* comics (1990-1991) and films (1997-2012). The conspiratorial legends he initiated and encouraged have arguably contributed to the ongoing presence of conspiracism as a way of thinking in American culture. But the unusual nature of his role in ufology renders him a background figure in most histories. For sociological studies of the contactee movement, he is a mere publisher, not a contactee himself, and thus only of passing interest. For dedicated investigators of mysterious phenomena, he is a hoax artist

and a publicity hound. (A comment on the Mothman Wiki warns Fortean investigators: "Be wary that material touched by Gray Barker's hand may be tainted by self-serving deceit") (Mothman Historian 2016). For investigators like these, Barker's role in history is to be downplayed—particularly in matters like the Philadelphia Experiment and the Men in Black, where his involvement at early stages of the narrative could prove an embarrassing weak point in a carefully assembled conspiracy theory. But Barker is far more than this: a publisher and a hoaxer, to be sure, but both of these are part of his grander role in the cultural narrative <u>of ufology</u>: that of mythmaker.

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<sup>1</sup> The book is now held by West Virginia University.

 $^{2}$  Barker also mentions visits to a psychiatrist, though he does not specify that the visits were court-ordered, in a letter to Moseley (Barker 1963c, 2).

<sup>3</sup> The data underlying this chart, including a complete list of monographic and serial publications considered in this chapter, is available online at <u>https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17T-S11dpEo6OEXWXjePOqKV0gGZfrxhVibfWIz-VOyo</u> or <u>https://tinyurl.com/yabnct4q</u>.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome Clark dismisses Dove's theory, and suggests that few, if any, took it seriously (Clark 1996b, 71).