

# Phactum

The Newsletter of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking  
May 2007

editor: Ray Haupt

[www.phact.org](http://www.phact.org)

## Wanted - a Sugar Daddy to donate \$50,000

What, you might ask does a small organization with a very low operating budget want to do with \$50,000? And why should I donate? Here is why: we want to send Ted Daeschler and his friends to Summer Camp on a remote island above the Arctic Circle where they will break rocks under the watchful eyes of hungry Polar Bears. And you should donate so you can have a fossil named after you. That's why.



Actually we don't want that money, but we would be enthusiastic if it were donated to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia earmarked for Ted. Scientific Research money is abundant in some fields of study, but not so abundant in others. Unfortunately, the field of paleontology does not have that sexy planet saving image of alternative fuels research, or the humanitarian motivation of medical research, or the romance of exploring outer space. Paleontology has few of those aspects but amazingly it is a branch of science that explores who we are and where the human race and creatures before us came from. Furthermore, paleontology as a branch of biology is surely one of the most controversial of sciences since it deals with Evolution. That was what the Scopes Trial was all about in 1925 and likewise the Dover Trial in 2005. Both trials were controversial to say the least and the controversy is likely to continue for many years to come.

On pages 10 and 11 Tom Napier and Becky Strickland offer their views and more details of Dr. Daeschler's work. Be a Sugar Daddy and help send Ted to Camp.

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### 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 subscriber we invite you to become one by sending \$15 for a one year membership to PhACT, \$10 for students.

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

**Saturday, May 19, 2007** - Come and explore the Mutter Museum with other PhACT members. Meet at the Museum at 2:00 PM. Museum admission is \$12.00, children 6-17 \$8.00, seniors 65+ \$8.00. The Mutter Museum is located at 19 South Twenty-Second Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103. Phone: 215-563-3737. A bit more information about the Mutter Museum is on Page 6.

**Sunday June 24, 2007** - Annual PhACT Picnic at Mondauk Commons Park in North Wales, PA. This is a free event for members and their guests. See Page 8 for more details and directions. Come and socialize.

**Thursday, May 24, 2007** at 8:30 PM Eastern Daylight Savings Time - **A Learning How To Learn Conference Call** Sponsored by a Mastermind Group. *This event is free but requires pre-registration. The event is being led by PhACT member Harvey Mathason and is limited to 25 participants. See Page 7 for more details.*

**Friday, May 25, 2007** - 5:00 p.m -9:00 p.m. **Benjamin Rush Medicinal Plant Garden Party.** Come enjoy the Benjamin Rush Medicinal Plant 9:00 p.m. Garden in its late spring glory! The Garden was first proposed by Dr. Rush in 1787 as a place for physicians to restock their medicine chests. The Garden became a reality in 1937 as a display of the plants used for medicine during Dr. Rush's lifetime. Refreshments and tours of the plantings will be offered. **Free with Museum admission.** At the Mutter Museum.

**Thursday, May 31, 2007**— 6:15 p.m. At the Mutter Museum. College Lecture in conjunction with the American Philosophical Society and funded by the Fisher Family Foundation, "**About the Future: Science, Medicine, and the Rest of the Cosmos,**" Baruch S. Blumberg, MD, PhD, Nobel Laureate and Distinguished Scientist, Fox Chase Cancer Center. Free. To register for a College program, please call 215.563.3737, ext. 304 or email lectures@collphyphil.org.

At the **Franklin Institute** until September 30, 2007. 222 N. 20th St., Philadelphia, PA, 19103. **Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs.** From 1976-1979 the Treasures of Tutankhamun exhibit toured the United States, attracting more than eight million visitors and inventing the phenomenon of the blockbuster museum show. In a highly publicized return visit, a larger selection of items from the famed pharaoh's fabulous tomb goes on a 27-month U.S. tour, introducing a whole new generation to the golden treasures of Egypt's Valley of the Kings. Tickets are timed and dated and must be reserved in advance. Call 1-877-888-8587.

**The Wagner Free Institute of Science** offers an assortment of science lectures presented at the introductory college level by professors from various universities around Philadelphia. These courses are free and vary from a single night to an eight week course. They do appreciate donations or memberships. See their website at <http://www.wagnerfreeinstitute.org/>.

See Page 7 for event on **May 31, 2007.**

**University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology** presents **Amarna, Ancient Egypt's Place in the Sun**, a new exhibition that offers a rare look at the meteoric rise and fall of this unique royal city during one of Egypt's most intriguing times. The exhibition, the centerpiece of the Museum's event-filled "Year of Egypt", runs through October 2007. Admission is free with museum admission: \$8 adults, \$5 seniors and students. Free Sunday afternoons until Memorial Day. For information: [www.museum.upenn.edu](http://www.museum.upenn.edu).

**Ongoing: Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (FSGP) and the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia (HAGP)** co-sponsor a monthly book discussion club. The book club meets on the third Saturday of each month at 7:00 PM at Willow Grove Barnes & Noble, 102 Park Avenue, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania 19090. If you have any questions, please contact the book club moderator, Ian Thomas. Email: [ian.thomas101@gmail.com](mailto:ian.thomas101@gmail.com) Phone: (610) 368-5915 Cell: (610) 565-4530.

The PhACT Calendar is open to members, and non-members too, 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 [phact-publicity@aol.com](mailto:phact-publicity@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.

**Note about Phactum** - There will be no June edition of Phactum. Look for the July/August edition sometime during the summer.

Also, you are invited to submit letters and articles to be printed in Phactum. Almost any topic is fair game but we do try walk softly around matters partisan politics and religion.

## Various Ruminations

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

### Anti-vaccination Bill rejected

Dr. Stephen Barrett reports in Consumer Health Digest, March 27, 2007, that an anti-vaccination bill was defeated in the Arkansas legislature. This would have been a perfect question to have asked Dr. Offit had the March PhACT meeting not been canceled because of strike and snow. The issue is huge and for most laymen it is immensely difficult to separate legitimate and irrational fears.

*Arkansas rejects antivaccination bill. The Arkansas Senate Committee on Public Health, Welfare and Labor has rejected SB911, which would have lowered the amount of mercury in the vaccines for children under 8 and for pregnant women by August 1, 2008. <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/ftproot/Bills/2007/public/SB911.pdf> It was introduced by a Senator who apparently believes that the tiny amount of thimerosal (a preservative that contains mercury) in flu vaccine might trigger autism or other neurologic disorders. Several health care professionals testified at a hearing that there is no proven health hazard and said the bill would discourage some people from receiving vaccinations that can be life-saving. [Lyon J. Committee rejects bill to reduce mercury in vaccinations. Arkansas News Bureau, March 27, 2007] <http://www.arkansasnews.com/archive/2007/03/27/News/341460.html>.*

Consumer Health Digest is a free weekly e-mail based publication. To subscribe go to: <http://www.quackwatch.org>. Donations to support Quackwatch are not required but are appreciated.

### The Elixir of Life

Could it be that the Elixir of Life is rum and coke? In Washington State Mr. Alden Coach, who has rum and coke with a wedge of lime, otherwise known as

a Cuba Libre, every day between 3 and 4 in the afternoon, recently passed his drivers test and got a new driver's license at the age of 101. He has owned many automobiles in the past, his first being one of Henry Ford's Model T. The new license will expire in 2012. Hang in there, Alden, and Happy Motoring!



### Global Warming - 1

A proposal to build the country's first offshore wind farm in the waters off Cape Cod won state environmental approval on Friday, March 30, 2007, bringing the project a major step closer to being built.

The project, known as Cape Wind, would involve 130 wind turbines in a 25-square-mile area in Nantucket Sound, and would provide as much as 79 percent of the electricity for the cape, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

In this age of Global Warming Fear, such a project should be welcomed, but that is apparently not the case among some highly placed individuals, in particular Senator Edward Kennedy, a landowner on Cape Cod. He claims that if built, he'd be able to see the turbines, which are six miles off shore, from his back porch and claims that they would essentially create an eyesore. Basically, he's vetoed the program on the basis that he doesn't want the turbines in his backyard.

Senator Kennedy has declared numerous times in his platform that he is a huge proponent of achieving energy independence and protecting the environment. In fact, this cause is one of seven major issues on his political agenda, as stated on the home page of the

Senator's website, <http://kennedy.senate.gov/>, which contains this statement *“Our dependence on foreign oil not only creates a national security risk, but also harms the environment by contributing to global climate change. We can reduce our dependence on international sources of oil, and promote a cleaner environment by investing in energy-efficient technologies and domestic clean-energy alternatives. Giving consumers an opportunity to make environmentally-informed decisions about the fuel and power they use expands our ability to improve both our economy and our planet. By encouraging technological innovation, investing here at home, and providing consumers with broader and more responsible choices, we can promote real energy security for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and protect the environment from further degradation.”*

That is a pretty nice statement. Too bad that in the Senator's mind it does not apply in Nantucket Sound.

### Global Warming - 2

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Senator John Kerry met at a public forum and had a serious and well reasoned discussion, not a phony nonsensical political “debate”, on the topic of Global Warming and what can be done about it. This event gives some reason for optimism in that neither were strident and both seemed earnest in seeking solutions. It is readily apparent that growing numbers of people are becoming aware of environmental problems and it seems to me that partisans on any side of the question will condemn themselves to shrinking constituencies. Kerry and Gingrich participated in a classy forum and one can only hope that such a condition is highly contagious.

### Global Warming - 3???

Is it possible that Global Warming and the increase in Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere between the mid 20th century and the early 21st century has caused anti-social misfirings of brain synapses leading to the decline in civility, sentimentality, and romance that we are seeing on a massive scale at this time in world history.

Consider these Pre-Global Warming music videos that now can be found on the internet.

(Warning: intensely Romantic.)

Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald -

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=QHARVVEUWO>

Giuseppe de Stefano -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0y3nxbMiTk>

Mario Lanza and Katheryn Grayson -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajNQNB0qcr0>

Then consider these contemporary music videos which are all the rage today. (Note: not recommended listening for people under 98 years of age - use discretion and low volume)

Ludacris— (warning: vulgar)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZiJPxaQRHA>

Snoop Dogg - (warning: extreme vulgarity)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbpJCUDORqM>

As Global Warming progresses and atmospheric Carbon Dioxide further corrodes brain cells, culture will further deteriorate. I shall relocate to Tierra del Fuego with a Victrola, no radio.

### Rain on the Evolution Parade

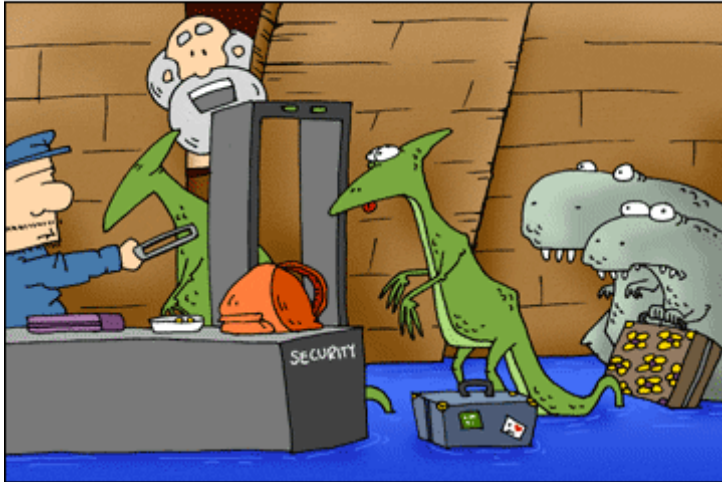
When I left the Pike Restaurant on April 21 I had the ebullient feeling that perhaps science and reason was making significant headway, that evidence would win the day over superstition and metaphysics. Why should I not have had a buoyant feeling, after all Ted Daeschler had just finished a most interesting presentation about a scientific discovery that adds a piece in the puzzle of human evolution? My happy frame of mind lasted about 4 hours.

Thinking back in the day I recalled a remark that the Evolution vs Creation controversy was mainly an American phenomena, that most of the industrialized world was far more in tune with science, eschewing superstition and mythology. Then while reading the April 21, 2007 edition of The Economist I stumbled upon an article claiming that Creationism is going global and there are some odd alliances at work.

**H. L. Mencken on Metaphysics** -It is never possible for a metaphysician to state his ideas in plain English. Those ideas, with few exceptions, are inherently nonsensical, and he is forced to formulate them in a vague and unintelligible jargon. Of late some of the stars of the faculty have taken to putting them into mathematical formulae. They thus become completely incomprehensible to the layman, and gain the additional merit of being incomprehensible also to most other metaphysicians.

In Kenya, paleontologist Richard Leakey is having difficulty because of plans to display the bones of Turkana Boy, the most complete skeleton of an early human. Bishop Boniface Adoyo, an evangelical leader has denounced the exhibit stating "I did not evolve from Turkana Boy or anything like it". The battle rages.

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(See Genesis 6-8)

11-16-2004

**SORRY GUYS, BUT YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE ARRIVED EARLY ENOUGH TO ALLOW FOR SECURITY DELAYS**

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The "Atlas of Creation" is a 770 page lavishly illustrated work, laced with quotations from the Koran, being massively distributed in Turkish and French schools. Its author claims proof that Darwinism is false, and even worse, that Darwinism is linked to communism, fascism, and terrorism.

In the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI has backtracked from Pope John Paul II's notions of evolution. And in Russia the Russian Orthodox Church has backed a family who sued because the schools were teaching only evolution as the Origin of Life.

Perhaps oddest of all is that representatives from the Discovery Institute, the Seattle based Intelligent Design think tank is regrouping after their smashing defeat in Dover, PA, and heading to Istanbul to denounce Darwin with Turkish Muslim scholars. It is rumored that part of their quest is to secure Turkish government support for yet another expedition to Mount Ararat to find Noah's Ark.

All of this once again illustrates that powerfully held conclusions about the Origins of Man need not be shaped by scientifically derived facts when Myth and Legend are so much more soul soothing.

### Pet Monkey Bites IRS Agent

A pet monkey that weighs ten to twelve pounds, in Rankin County, MS, attacked an IRS Agent in early April. The Macatue monkey, which is at least seven years old and came from Japan is now locked in a secure cage in Rankin County.

Sheriff Ronnie Pennington confirmed the attack and said the owner of the monkey was given a citation for having a wild animal in captivity. The monkey is being tested for disease and will eventually be turned over to the Animal Rescue League. Its canine teeth have been removed, according to the Sheriff. Pennington will who not release the name of the owner of the monkey or the IRS agent.

The agent was treated for scratches and bites on her face and arms.

It is not known at this time if the monkey knew the victim was an IRS agent.

### Psychics Part 1— Nina Wang leaves billions to fortune teller

Nina Wang, the richest woman in Asia, died and left her estate, valued at 4.2 billion dollars, to her fortune teller Mr. Chan.

Sources close to Mrs. Wang (such as she is) have declared that her fortune teller Mr. Chan has publicly declared that the Dow Jones Industrial Average might possibly hit 13000 by the end of business 04-20-07. It is speculated that Mr. Chan will use whatever portion of his \$4.2 billion inheritance from Nina Wang that is required, to purchase shares to accomplish the feat within the waning moments of market operations should that measure be needed.

Analysts expect that Mr. Chan will be purchasing at least 300 shares each in all of the companies which declined in value today. When asked how he came up with that strategy for affirming his prediction Mr. Chan responded, "It's not that I particularly believe any of what I say, it's just that someone believed me enough to give me lots and lots of money and that's a good thing." Reporters noted that Mr. Chan was unable to successfully wipe the grin from his face.



## Psychics Part 2 - Psychics shut down in Philadelphia

The Philadelphia Daily News reported on April 27th that an old Pennsylvania law was enacted recently to shut down 16 store front fortune telling establishments. The obscure state law bans fortune telling "for gain or lucre". The city's Department of Licenses and Inspections is closing storefront psychics, astrologers, phrenologists and tarot-card readers who charge money for their services.

This was great news and the obvious joke has been making the rounds: "that they didn't see it coming". But all is not well. A lawyer argued on behalf of the shuttered psychics that it was unfair to shut them down. The City Solicitor's Office said that it had advised L&I to back off because the state law banning fortune-tellers seemed better suited to fraud prosecution than to regulation.

The upshot is that L&I officials agreed and the psychics are back in business, and it leaves the skeptic wondering if store front fortune tellers are not engaged in fraud, then what is?

It is nice to know that Philadelphia has city officials adept at making and applying law.

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## Snippets

### Collected By Becky Strickland

■ Charles Darwin was not afraid to publish his theory of evolution, according to his diaries and correspondence. It has long been thought that Darwin held back for fear of the reaction to his ideas, but in fact he was simply too busy writing other books. From Notes and Records of the Royal Society, reported in New Scientist, March 31, 2007

■ Lab tests carried out by two New Zealand schoolgirls on the blackcurrant drink Ribena have led to a fine of \$156,000 for the drink's manufacturer, GlaxoSmithKline. Contrary to advertisements, Anna Devathanan and Jenny Suo of Auckland found that some versions of Ribena contained hardly any detectable vitamin C. Reported in New Scientist, March 31, 2007.

■ "If your baby has a fever, you go to the doctor. If the doctor says you need to intervene, you don't say, 'I read a science fiction novel that says it's not a problem.'" Al Gore, testifying to the US Congress on the need for a bold agenda to tackle climate change (San Jose Mercury News, March 22, 2007.)

## About the Mutter Museum

19 South 22nd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

Phone: 215-563-3737

The Mütter Museum was founded to educate future doctors about anatomy and human medical anomalies. Today, it serves as a valuable resource for educating and enlightening the public about our medical past and telling important stories about what it means to be human. The Mütter Museum embodies The College of Physicians of Philadelphia's mission to advance the cause of health, and uphold the ideals and heritage of medicine.

In 1858, Thomas Dent Mütter, retired Professor of Surgery at Jefferson Medical College, presented his



personal collection of unique anatomic and pathological materials to The College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

The collection now boasts over 20,000 unforgettable objects. These include fluid-preserved anatomical and pathological specimens; skeletal and dried specimens, medical instruments and apparatus; anatomical and pathological models in plaster, wax, papier-mâché, and plastic; memorabilia of famous scientists and physicians; medical illustrations, photographs, prints, and portraits. In addition, they offer changing exhibits on a variety of medical and historical topics.

One-of-a-kind treasures include:

- The plaster cast of the torso of world-famous Siamese Twins, Chang & Eng, and their conjoined livers
- Joseph Hyrtl's collection of skulls
- Preserved body of the "Soap Lady"
- Collection of 2,000 objects extracted from people's throats
- Cancerous growth removed from President Grover Cleveland
- Tallest skeleton on display in North America

The Mutter Museum is just a part of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia which offers a variety of programs open to the general public. See their website at: <http://www.collphyphil.org/index.asp>

## A Learning How To Learn Conference Call

Sponsored by a Mastermind Group

Thursday, May 24, 2007,

8:30 PM Eastern Daylight Savings Time

Phone: (319) 256-0100 - Access Code: 147081#

Why is learning how to learn important?

We live in state of information overload.

Currently there are 37 million active websites. If you scanned 10 websites a day, it would take you 10,000 years to look at the current number of sites, There are about 175,000 new books published in the United States each year and this number does not include EBooks. Even these numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. Just to mention a few other sources of information, consider professional papers, magazines, journals, audios, DVDs and lectures.

Yes, learning how to learn efficiently and effectively has become a necessity.

*How will the call work? A one hour interactive dialogue will be held by members of the Mastermind Group. Others joining will be asked to only listen since there will be too many to participate. A ½ hr question-answer session will follow. All attending the call can participate.*

**The call can only accommodate 25 people. Please confirm your attendance with:** Harvey Mathason at [HMmathason@aol.com](mailto:HMmathason@aol.com) Phone: (215) 752-5117 (Also, contact Harvey if you have any questions or change your plans and will not be attending)

All participants are requested to submit something either describing a personal experience in learning or an article relating to "learning how to learn" to Harvey Mathason by May 10, 2007. Information submitted will be shared with everyone.

Suggested book "The Learning Revolution" at: [ww.thelearningweb.net](http://ww.thelearningweb.net)

**At the Wagner Free Institute of Science**  
Montgomery Avenue and 17th Street, Philadelphia

Thursday, May 31, 2007— 5:00 - 7:00 PM  
Lecture at 5:30 PM

## A Summer Stroll: Philadelphia's Broad Street

Philadelphia's Broad Street is the longest straight city street in the world. With the building of Philadelphia City Hall in the 1870s, it rapidly developed into one of the city's premier thoroughfares.

Join us Thursday, May 31, as forensic architect Robert M. Skaler takes us on a "stroll" down this historic street and, with slides, shows us how dramatically Broad Street has changed in 100 years. From the cultural burgeonings of Philadelphia south of City Hall, to the elegant brownstones, synagogues, educational institutions, and ballparks built along North Broad Street, Mr. Skaler will cover fascinating ground, explaining how South Broad exploded in culture while North Broad never quite became "fashionable".

"Broad Street is like a coring tool running through the tree of Philadelphia history. Starting at city hall and moving either north or south, one can see the



changes that occurred in the city's development and social history. Both South and North Broad Streets are examples of the successes and failures of urban design in the last 100 years." - from *Philadelphia's Broad Street: South and North* by Robert Morris Skaler.

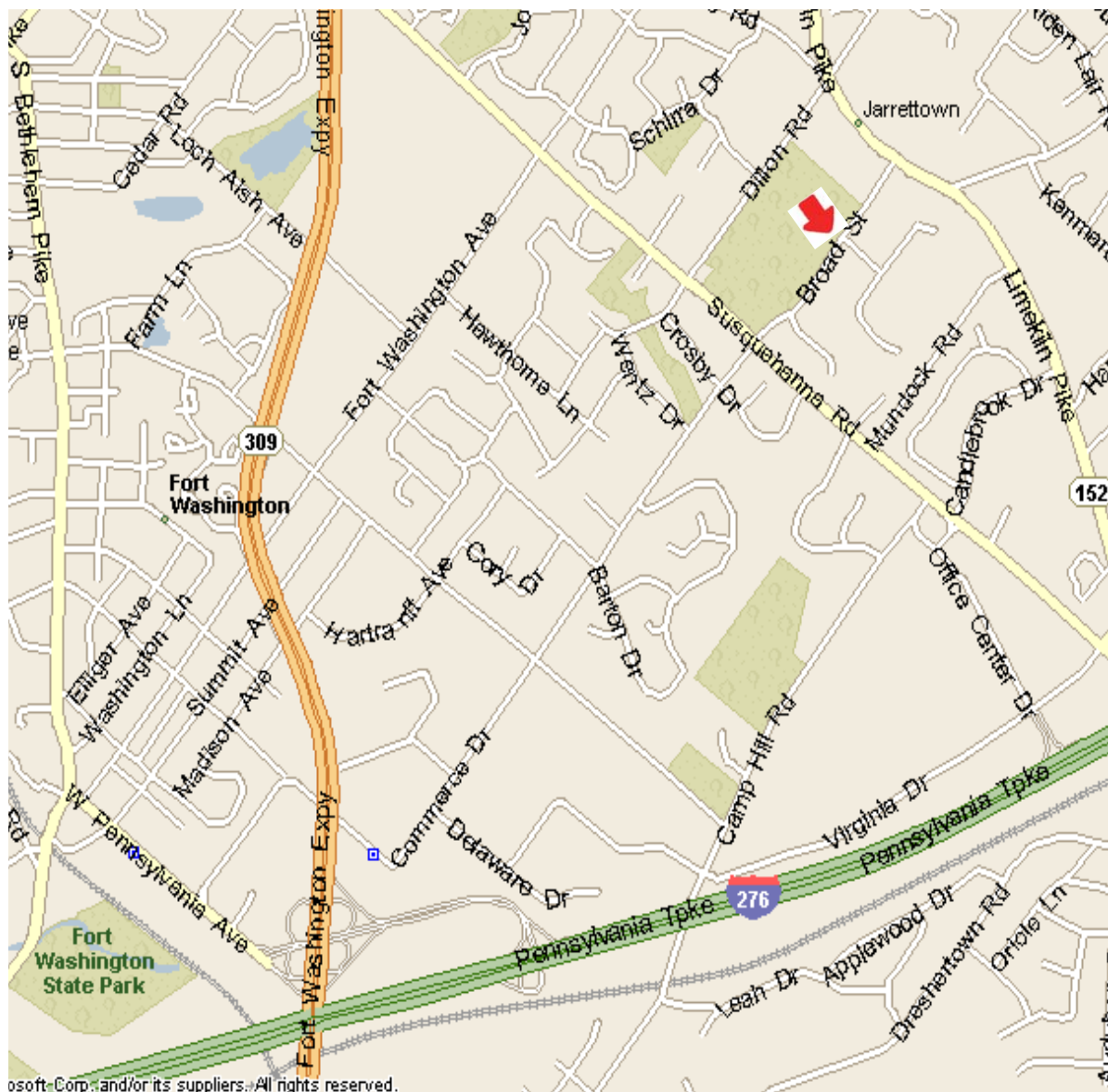
Robert Morris Skaler, a forensic architect and architectural historian, has been collecting historic images of Broad Street for forty years. A past president of the Philadelphia chapter of the Victorian Society and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture, Skaler is also the author of *West Philadelphia: University City to 52nd Street*.



*Philadelphia City Hall*  
Photo: Jack Boucher (1963).  
From the Historic American  
Buildings Survey.



The **PhACT Annual Picnic** will be on **Sunday, June 24, 2007** from 1:00 to 5:00 PM at Mondauk Commons Park in Upper Dublin off Broad Street in Upper Dublin. There is plenty of parking. The red arrow on the map points roughly to the location of the pavilion we will be using. If your body and soul gets lost call Eric on his cell phone: 215 667-1151. Bring food and beverages if you wish. The local ant colony will appreciate the handout. There are fireplaces there for  grilling, and the pavilion will provide sun shelter and hopefully not rain shelter. If you are a musician, bring your guitar or bongo drum. Some folks are likely to throw a ball around. 





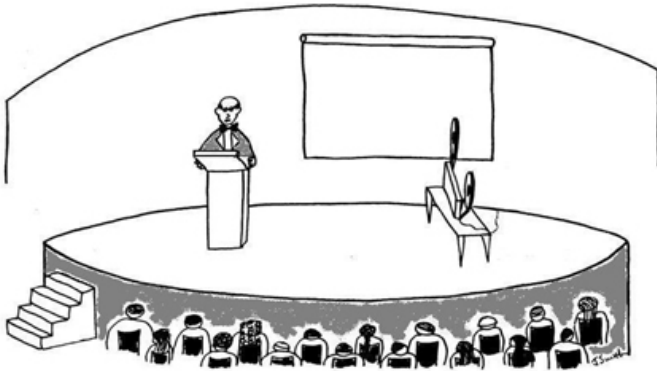
## February Meeting Report

### Dr. Tom Delworth discusses Global Warming and Projections of Future Climate Change

By Becky Strickland

Tom Delworth, leader of the Climate Dynamics and Prediction Group at the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Princeton, spoke at our February meeting about global warming, ironically at the end of a very cold spell that cost us all extra dollars in heating bills.

Tom discussed the evidence and how it was



*"Thus, when the film is run backwards, we see that it contains a hidden message: the glaciers are actually getting larger."*

gathered that leads him to conclude that climate is changing, the earth is warming and we are causing at least some of that change.

Surprisingly, at least to me, was the information that water (in the form of vapor) is the dominant greenhouse gas and that heat & pollution from cities does not significantly affect world climate.

Tom was very forthcoming about what he doesn't know - for example the role of clouds in reflecting back incoming solar radiation vs. reflecting radiated heat back down to earth, and the effect of volcanic activity on climate. He admitted some bumps in the data were not fully explained and stated modeling of climate is limited by the speed of the most powerful computers on earth. As they get even faster, we will get better predictions.

Tom fielded several questions about the motivations of global warming deniers and conceded that the Bush administrations has made some attempts to silence the work of scientists. However, he did not speculate as to the intentions of others or indulge in doomsday scenarios but urged us all to "stick to the science" He is an excellent speaker who seamlessly integrated the flood of questions in a way that introduced each of his points.

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## Strange Places

by Eric Krieg

I interrupt my succession of small articles about strange places I've explored in our area to bring you a recent strange experience-coincident I recently had.

On Monday, April 16, my boss and I were on a business trip to meet with our counterpart design engineers in a company that our company had acquired located on the Virginia Technology campus. It didn't take long for our journey south on I-81 to be interrupted by calls from both our wives to the effect of "do you realize what is going on at the campus you are planning to visit today?" "Don't go there, it is horrible with students dying en masse".

We were upset, and called the company we were meeting with - they were still open, but the rest of the campus was shut down. The hotel we had reservations at on the other side of campus was now completely booked with the media circus, but would still honor our reservations.

After thinking about it, we assured our wives that the area we were going too, would change from the most dangerous in the nation, to the safest as it was flooded with police. Getting down there, we noticed state police cars everywhere - perhaps only outnumbered with media trucks. A pair of parking lots was filled with media trucks bedecked with satellite dishes all pointed to the satellites in geo-synchronous orbits.

Even though engineers are probably the least emotional profession in the world, those we worked with had deep connections with the campus and were very shaken by the horrendous events. We joined them for a mile walk across campus to the convocation attended by tens of thousands. On the way we went, we saw a series of military helicopters setting down in a near by commandeered air field and later a speeding procession of more than a dozen black SUV (some ar-

mored) going past a phalanx of stopped police cars, many paired with secret service men. The mood at the stadium was solemn.

As I pondered the students who were probably ill equipped to make sense of such a disaster, I felt special remorse for this; a technology school holding good kids who are the kind likely to pit their skills against the technical problems of mankind - not the people who deserve a massacre.

I thought about my own volunteer work with PhACT - taking a stand against the endemic relentless wave of irrationality in the world. What had slashed a wound through the lives of the families of the victims was the most extreme example of irrationality on the planet - a person completely whacked out and beyond hope. I

though how the well-behaved compassionate kids around me were the kind who would reach out to someone who would be a loner. I was proud of my daughter in college who had invited a Korean girl with few friends to stay with us for Thanksgiving vacation. (she later told me

how her whole campus was freaked out by the thought of fellow students senselessly slaughtered). I figured that even more, kids in this campus must have tried similar efforts - but the insanity of the assailant must have made him immune not just to reason but to any well-meant efforts to pierce his isolation. While unable to hold my attention on President Bush's words during the convocation, I thought how our own message of critical thinking is simply lost on many people. We try to offer reason - but some people are just too stupid, too nuts, or cling too strongly to irrationality.

Hey, we can't save everyone. But at least in life as individuals, or teachers or members of what ever groups we join to make a difference, we must still try to reach out and help whoever will let us.

*Eric Krieg is President of PhACT and an ardent skeptic.*

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## Simply Science

By Tom Napier

It was a special pleasure to hear Ted Daeschler talk at April's PhACT luncheon about the discovery and significance of the Tiktaalik fossil. It's been many years since I was directly involved in scientific research and in my case it demanded cooperation between, and contributions from, several governments. Ted works for Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences, a worthy but local institution. His fieldwork requires that a handful of people spend a few weeks a year in a remote camp on Ellesmere Island. Starting this work took \$50,000 in donated seed money, a sum that might cover the power bill of a particle accelerator for a day or two.

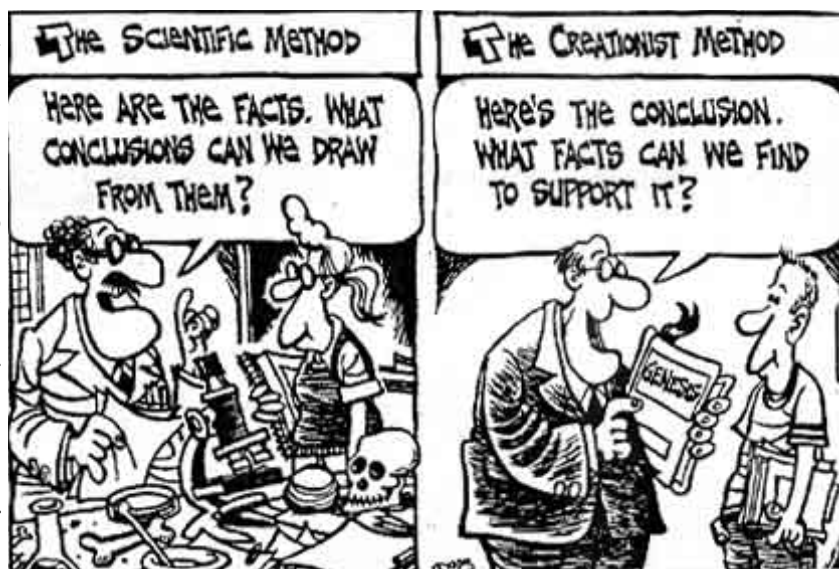
Despite this, Ted made a discovery that has clarified the ancestry of all four-legged animals and has attracted world-wide attention. It's a marvelous demonstration that not all science is typified by tiny increments to knowledge made by teams of hundreds running a multi-billion dollar machine.

Dr. Daeschler's story reminded me of Edison's

epigram about invention being 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration or about chance favoring the prepared mind. He admits to being a narrow specialist, one of a handful of paleontologists who study the last 20 million years of the Devonian period. Aware of a gap in the fossil record between fishes and land animals, he had to locate one of the few places on Earth where strata exist having the right age and which had had the appropriate topographical conditions. Go there, dig a bit, and, if you are incredibly lucky, there is just the fossil you seek. One must overcome the practical difficulties of living and working in a remote and inhospitable wilderness but the science is simple and inevitable.

Not to belittle Dr. Daeschler and his achievement, there's a feeling that anyone could do it. Nature's secrets are not hidden. To learn them it's just a question of knowing where to look. The evidence for evolution is right where it ought to be.

Apart from showing us some cartoons based on



I support the aims of PhACT and would like to join/rejoin for the next year. The annual membership is \$15 and \$10 for students. I have enclosed a check payable to **PhACT**.

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his discovery, Ted didn't mention its impact on the mock-controversy of Creationism. I'd like to take Creationists to Ellesmere Island and let them dig up the evidence for themselves. Of course they'd still fall back the old line, the Devil made fossils to lead us astray. Thankfully there are people like Ted Daeschler who concern themselves with what really happened in our remote past.

*Tom Napier is a physicist, a skeptic, and a long time member of PhACT.*

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## How I Came to Appreciate Old Fossils

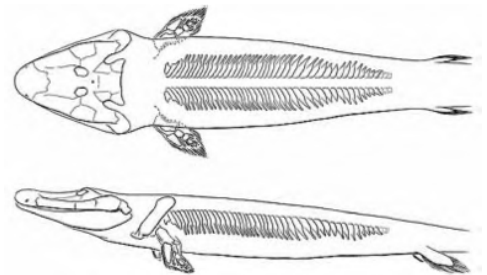
By Becky Strickland

In April we had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Dr. Ted Daeschler, a paleontologist and specialist in the late Devonian period, from the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. Ted and his team discovered the Tiktaalik fossil, a transition species between sea and land animals, an astoundingly important addition in the field of Evolutionary Biology.

To find fossils, a paleontologist must locate an area where the strata and topographical conditions are optimal. Highway departments are often a big help when they cut through rock for new roads but Ted had no such help in the Arctic. He began by describing the logistics of planning a fossil-hunting trip. Fundraising,

obtaining permits, making lists (of equipment, food, clothing, tools, supplies, etc.) shopping, packing, and getting to this remote, inhospitable place precede the fun part - digging for fossils. Then there's the task of bringing back the fossils the team discovers. The Ellesmere Island trips occurred in the Arctic summer when the sun barely sets and the temperatures are usually in the 30's.

He described the events that lead to the discovery & identification of Tiktaalik rosea (named by the indigenous Inuit), showing a series of photographs that gave a "you are there" perspective. He described



playing 'Devil's Advocate' and ensuring that this fossil was in fact a significant transition species linking sea and land animals, emphasizing Tiktaalik is a missing link, not the missing link.

His respect for the Inuit prompted him to set up the Tiktaalik website in the Inuit language as well as English. His incredible enthusiasm for paleontology is contagious - I left wanting to go hunt for fossils! After all, he did say he could teach any of us to recognize one.

*Becky Strickland is a long time member of PhACT and a frequent contributor to this newsletter.*

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# PHACT

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## ***The Earth is Flat***

"We are more gullible and superstitious today than we were in the Middle Ages, and an example of modern credulity is the widespread belief that the Earth is round. The average man can advance not a single reason for thinking that the Earth is round. He merely swallows this theory because there is something about it that appeals to the twentieth century mentality."

- George Bernard Shaw  
in *Everybody's Political What's  
What* (1944)

