

## **A Brief History of the Society for Scientific Exploration**

In 1981, a number of scientists and other scholars in the United States came to the conclusion that there was a need for a new initiative in scientific research. They could identify a number of phenomena or apparent phenomena that, for various reasons, were not being studied by the scientific community, but were potentially interesting and even important. Indeed, it was clear that some phenomena, if they are indeed real, will challenge some of our established scientific beliefs.

We could appreciate the difficulties of accommodating such studies in the present-day highly compartmentalized structure of science. Universities are, by their very name, dedicated to a comprehensive world view of knowledge. Yet, in fact, universities are like corporations in having divisions (called Schools), and further divisions (called Departments) within Schools. Departmental structure closely reflects the partition of learning among scholarly societies, most journals serving only one branch of learning. Add to these considerations the fact that funding opportunities come mainly from Federal agencies that are similarly structured, and we can see the difficulty of carrying out research that does not fall neatly into presently recognized compartments.

However, the fact that knowledge is presently structured in a certain way, and the fact that certain topics may seem curious or even bizarre, does not mean that these topics should be ignored. It is of course possible for any scientist or scholar to spend some small part of his or her time in whatever kind of research he or she may choose. However, the scientific process does not comprise the uncorrelated work of a few individuals or even many individuals. It has been argued persuasively that the process of science is the process of building a rational consensus based on objective data and analysis. Scholarly publications are essential for the process of building such a consensus. For these reasons, it was clear to the Committee that real progress in the study of anomalies requires the publication of a new journal designed specifically for that purpose.

A journal, however, needs a philosophical and a logistical base. On occasion, a scholar may single-handedly create a new journal by assuming the role and responsibilities of editor. Sometimes a committee will be established for that purpose, but committees tend to grow by adding like-minded new members. To be effective, a journal should be open to all points of view on a given subject, and those responsible for the journal should make every effort to encourage all viewpoints.

For the above reasons, it was clear that the first requirement was to form a new society, and it would then be the responsibility of the society to make plans for the publication of a journal. For this reason, the following scholars

established themselves as the Founding Committee of a new society—the *Society for Scientific Exploration, formed for the Study of Anomalous Phenomena*: Professor George O. Abell, Department of Astronomy, University of California, Los Angeles; Professor Bart J. Bok, Steward Observatory, University of Arizona; Professor Robert F. Creegan, Department of Philosophy, State University of New York, Albany; Professor Persi Diaconis, Department of Statistics, Stanford University; Professor Thomas Gold, Center for Radiophysics & Space Research, Cornell University; Professor Robert Jahn, School of Engineering & Applied Science, Princeton University; Professor Roger N. Shepard, Department of Psychology, Stanford University; Professor George L. Siscoe, Department of Atmospheric Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles; Professor Ian Stevenson, Department of Psychiatry, University of Virginia Medical Center; Professor Peter A. Sturrock, Institute for Plasma Research, Stanford University; Professor William B. Thompson, Department of Physics, University of California, San Diego; Professor James Trefil, Department of Physics, University of Virginia; and Professor Marcello Truzzi, Department of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University.

The Founding Committee was too small to constitute an adequate base for a new society. For this reason, the committee invited many of their colleagues to join in their enterprise, and eventually drew up a list of one hundred Founding Members. These Founding Members were distinguished scholars, all of whom had faculty appointments in the United States or Canada.

The Founding Committee nominated the first set of officers of the new Society. Thereafter officers have been elected by the full members of the Society. The first meeting of Council was held at the Joseph Henry Building of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington on January 5, 1982, and the first annual meeting was held at the University of Maryland on June 3 to 5, 1982. Subsequent meetings have been held at the University of Virginia, at Princeton University, again at the University of Virginia, in San Francisco, and most recently in Austin. The Seventh Annual Meeting is scheduled for June 2 to 4, 1988, at Cornell University.

The Society has published and continues to publish a semi-annual newsletter, the *Explorer*. However, one of the prime objectives of SSE has been the publication of this journal, the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.

We hope that you, dear reader, will enjoy and be stimulated by the contents of this journal, and we invite you to join with us in this exciting venture of intellectual exploration.

For further information about SSE, please contact the Secretary, Professor Laurence W. Fredrick, Department of Astronomy, P. O. Box 3818, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.

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