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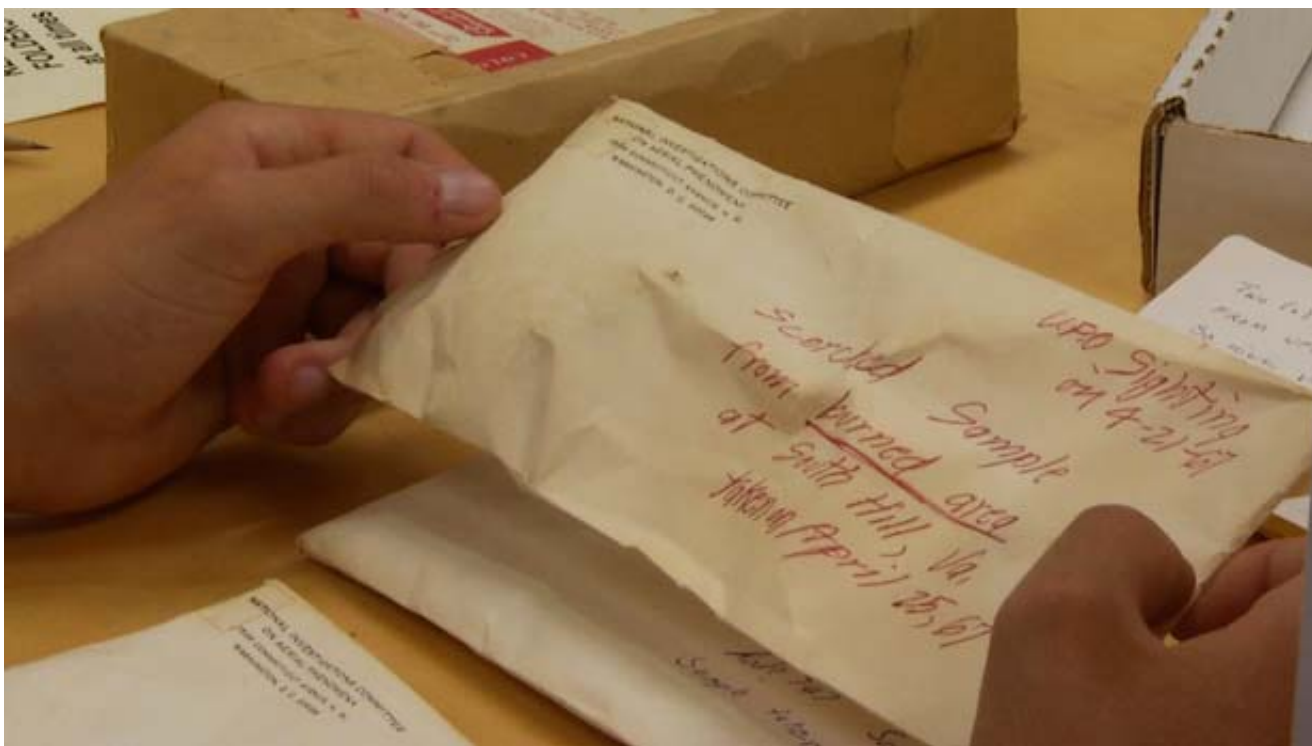
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UA Professor Created Own 'X-Files'

Story by Kevin Reagan

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This letter full of dirt was one of the many peculiar items James E. McDonald examined for any UFO validity.

If Hollywood producers are ever looking for good script material, then they might want to check out the James E. McDonald archives at the University of Arizona's Special Collections.

There, they will find 58 boxes filled with dozens of interviews, photographs, letters and newspaper clippings related to one man's journey to uncover the truth behind unidentified flying objects.

The man responsible for this collection was James E. McDonald, a professor in atmospheric sciences at the UA during the 1950s and 1960s.

After claiming he sighted a UFO in the mid-1950s, McDonald shifted his focus from teaching to research. His outspokenness into the validity of the subject earned him as many admirers as it did enemies.

"He was averse to saying he believed in UFOs," said Kent Gillin, a former UA history student, who spent an entire semester studying McDonald's collection. "What he called it was, he has hypotheses that UFOs exist."

Gillin researched McDonald for his senior thesis. And, it was during this research that Gillin discovered the severe skepticism other scientists had for McDonald's research, even resulting in an incident in which McDonald was laughed off the stage during a congressional address.

"James E. McDonald was a doer turned dreamer," said Gillin. "(He) didn't deserve to lose an ounce of credibility."

But, there were some phantoms McDonald could not escape. Despite his commitment to UFO research, and a number of other causes including the Peace and Freedom Association, McDonald committed suicide in 1971.

In 1997, the surviving members of his family donated all of McDonald's research material to one of the few

places he always called home: the UA. Today, scholars of the university and abroad come to rummage through the boxes, possibly to try understanding a man with an unworldly belief in science and the unknown.

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