

# AnnDruffel

Author - Researcher - Lecturer

About Me Books Appearances Articles Contact Links



**From the MUFON Journal, August 2006, Number 460**

## SCIENTIST, UFOLOGIST JAMES McDONALD'S VOICE SPEAKS AGAIN TO RESEARCHERS!

Papers, reports, audio tapes archived at UA

by Ann Druffel, Vincent Uhlenkott, & Ralph McCarron

From April 1966, through February 1971, the UFO research field was blessed with the presence of a prestigious scientist. Dr. James E. McDonald, an internationally renowned atmospheric physicist and climatologist.

Alone among scientists at that time, Jim McDonald, as he was known to us in the field, had the courage to speak out openly, stating that his own private research into UFO sightings by the

public and military sources had convinced him that the UFO phenomenon was a serious question that was being badly neglected by the scientific community at large.



**McDonald**

For five unforgettable years, the scientifically-oriented lay research field had an invaluable and unforgettable colleague, working side by side with investigators from NICAP (National Investigations Committee On Aerial Phenomena) and other objective groups.

He also worked privately with a few scientists in the field who could not come out openly with their UFO interest for fear of damaging their own careers and reputations.

Perhaps most astonishing of all, McDonald began actively interacting with numerous other scientists in the Establishment, who crowded to hundreds of talks he gave at scientific conferences, symposia, and other scientific meetings at military installations and other governmental venues. He convinced many in the Establishment that UFOs did, indeed, need to be studied seriously, and a few of the most prestigious scientific organizations began taking up the subject earnestly.

Then, in April 1971, our entire research field was shocked and saddened when we learned that Jim McDonald had apparently taken his own life in the desolate desert outside his home city of Tucson. AZ. ([1](#))

The loss of Jim to our field was inestimable, but we never forgot the "McDonald years," as those five years between 1966 and 1971 came to be called.

Slowly, however, the interest of the scientific community which McDonald had inspired faded away without the benefit of his physical presence, his unlimited persistence, and his ability to retrieve previously-unknown empirical evidence of the reality of UFOs from military and governmental sources.

During the McDonald years, of course, Jim never neglected his own professional work; his voluminous contributions to cloud physics and climate modification continued.

He was active on numerous government research commissions, and many of his projects were funded by grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Office of Naval Research (ONR), The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), NASA, and other top agencies.

He had simply added UFO research to his already crowded schedule. McDonald's basic personality could not allow him to let any scientific problem he encountered go unstudied, and everywhere he spoke, or met with UFO colleagues, whether lay or scientific, his humorous, vital presence enlivened the room.

In the early 1990s, through a synchronistic occurrence, this author (Druffel) re-established contact with Betsy McDonald, Jim's widow, who still lived with some of the members of their family in their Tucson home.

It was learned that McDonald's UFO archives were still being carefully guarded in a special room there, which the family lovingly referred to as "the UFO room."

During re-contact with Betsy McDonald, which at first involved a screenplay Druffel had written about McDonald's UFO research, the idea of archiving Jim's UFO files came to the fore.

McDonald's atmospheric physics and climatology projects had been carefully preserved at the University of Arizona at Tucson at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics (IAP), where he had taught and conducted research.

### **UFO files not archived**

Although his "scientific" work had been carefully archived and preserved, his UFO files had not.

After the Condon Report was published in 1969, apparently dismissing all the evidence McDonald and the UFO field had gathered over the years, he had planned to take a sabbatical and write a book which would be a full rebuttal of Condon's illogical "report", as well as a general text outlining the extreme urgency that the UFO phenomenon be accepted as a legitimate subject for interdisciplinary study.

His 17 years of study (including eleven years of private research in and around the Tucson area between 1954 and 1965) had convinced him that the UFO problem was one of the most serious scientific questions of our times.

Shortly before McDonald died, he wrote a letter to Betsy, stating his concern that his voluminous UFO files not be simply burned after his death, but archived in some form so that capable researchers could use them in further studies on the UFO phenomenon.

Of particular concern to him were hundreds of Blue Book radar-visual (R-V) sighting files which he had acquired in 1970 at Maxwell AFB, a few months after Project Blue Book was officially ended.

Dismayed by the possibility that the Air Force would simply destroy all Blue Book files because the Condon Report had brushed off the entire subject as not being of scientific value, McDonald spent two weeks studying the R-V files there.

He was astonished and excited by the wealth of data in them that had not been revealed. It was information like these R-V files, which he realized would never be archived by any of his academic colleagues, that prompted him to write to Betsy:

"My present best suggestion is that [my UFO files] be archived at the UA Library, though maybe they'll view that as presumptuous. Actually, for someone who came along later, that's a mine of UFO material, and library archiving is in many ways the cleanest.

"It's at least not destroyed, even if only boxed away for years.... Its scientific value is, I think, quite large... a collection of reference material on a subject still controversial, worked on by one UA professor, and possibly destined to assume very considerable importance later on— particularly as science-history source material..... I'd sure hate to see all that stuff burnt...." (2)

NICAP personnel and the UFO field in general never recovered from the loss of this remarkable man. After the scientific community quietly dropped their interest in UFOs, which McDonald had inspired, all that was left were his files.

### Limited access

At first, Betsy McDonald permitted a few UFO researchers limited access to them, including Richard Greenwell, who assisted her in arranging the files and books into more convenient form.

Paul McCarthy then accessed some of the files for a doctoral thesis, and shortly afterwards, David Jacobs used some of the files while writing his book, *The UFO Controversy in America*.

During this period an Australian scientist inquired about the Blue Book R-V files which had so enthused McDonald.

Betsy McDonald, herself a highly educated person, obtained proof from this scientist that he possessed the necessary expertise in atmospheric physics, astronomy, and radar systems which McDonald felt was necessary to extract the data effectively.

After he had demonstrated his expertise in these fields, she allowed him to copy the R-V files. At first it seemed he was actually going to attempt to extract the data which McDonald felt could provide a type of "physical evidence" so badly needed in the UFO field.

Suddenly, however, the scientist was offered a large grant, apparently from the Australian government, to pursue an entirely different project, and he dropped his interest in UFOs.

Betsy McDonald became engrossed in her own work pursuits, which took her to various out-of-state cities for years at a time, and could no longer screen the numerous persons who requested access to the files, and NICAP had essentially been destroyed by 1970 by government agents who had infiltrated top administrative positions.

### Access ended

By the mid-1970s, she cut off access to researchers who approached her, because the changes which were occurring in the UFO field disturbed her.

She felt that the field had become chaotic, particularly the attention being paid to "abduction" reports which could not be scientifically verified, and that the strictly objective approach which McDonald had employed was no longer dominant.

So the files lay unused for over 15 years until re-contact in the early 1990s by this author (Druffel), who had known and worked with McDonald in conjunction with NICAP activities, particularly Southern California sightings and photo cases.

Betsy shared McDonald's letter in which he had expressed the deep hope that his UFO files could be archived and made accessible to future researchers.

Dr. A. Richard Kassander, former director of the IAP and McDonald's good friend, made initial contact with the University of Arizona Library in Tucson, and the Special Collections Section agreed to house them. The curator there, Mr. Roger Myers, gave invaluable help and encouragement during this process.

The Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR) generously granted \$2,400 to archive the files. Archiving required acid-free file folders, plastic Mylar sleeves for photos, and special storage boxes for other materials in order to insure their preservation.



***Ann Druffel with Betsy McDonald at her home amid the 29 boxes of McDonald's files, audio tapes, and recording equipment, May, 1996.***

As the work continued, involving five trips from the Druffel home in Pasadena, California, to Tucson, McDonald's contributions to UFO research proved even more immense than anyone had realized. All together, there were about 1,200 files, each on a different UFO-related subject.

Besides the voluminous files in the "UFO room", McDonald's former secretary, Margaret Sanderson-Rae, then a publications editor, found many other UFO-related items at the IAP which were added to the original collection.

Other academic colleagues at IAP, including Dr. Benjamin Herman and Dr. William Sellers, searched out other items in storage which were added to McDonald's UFO files.

In all, the archiving took four years. As the complexity of the files became clearer, additional archival materials had to be obtained, and the Fund for UFO Research graciously increased their grant to \$3,500 to cover various unexpected expenses.

In May, 1996, 29 boxes comprising McDonald's entire UFO files— which filled an entire corner in the McDonald's living room— were moved to the Special Collections Section of the Library.

Druffel's husband, Charles K., paying all of his own expenses, accompanied her on this trip and helped with some of the final archiving duties.

In addition to the boxed materials, the collection includes computer listings of McDonald's 400-book UFO library and an itemized catalog of the 1,200 file folders.

### **Handwritten Journals**

The collection also includes McDonald's four handwritten journals, dated 1958 through 1971, which outlined his 17 years in the UFO field. [\(3\)](#)

Two of these had been fully transcribed by Druffel, with Betsy McDonald's invaluable help. These journals, prior to the archiving, were totally unknown to anyone in the field.

The UFO archives are housed in the Personal Collections Section, where they are available to the public in a carefully guarded Reading Room.

They include hundreds of files containing McDonald's research on UFO cases, classic and otherwise, as well as correspondence and other materials connected with his numerous seminars and symposia talks before scientific groups. This section filled 15 storage boxes alone.

The file names are, for the most part, those originally selected by McDonald. The collection continues with the 580 Project Blue Book R-V files photocopied by McDonald at Maxwell AFB.

These are in four boxes, filed chronologically by date, as McDonald originally arranged them. The dates on these R-V files begin with "June 1947, Hamburg, NY" and end with "July 11, 1968, Nielson AFB, Alaska."

There is also a collection of 16 large vinyl binders. Binder #6 might be of special interest, as its contents seem to be a preliminary outline of the book which McDonald had planned to write, rebutting the Condon Report.

The other binders contain Projects Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book sightings and other materials related to AF involvement in UFO research.

Box #21 contained eight thick magazine holders, in which McDonald had placed miscellaneous information, including propulsion theories related to UFOs.

Biographical material includes the Memorial Resolution prepared and signed by several of McDonald's IAP colleagues upon the event of his death. This remains the most fitting biographical sketch to describe McDonald's academic life and scientific contributions. Also included is a biographical article by this author (Ann Druffel) published in International UFO Reporter (IUR), a quarterly publication of the J. Alien Hynek Center for UFO Studies in Chicago, Illinois.

Soon to be published is a 600-page biography of McDonald's involvement in the UFO research field based mainly on materials archived here.[NOTE: This book was finally published in 2003. See Reference [\(4\)](#) in the "References Section" at end of paper.]

A very large cardboard box, #29, contained special materials which were impossible, at the time, to actually "archive," for it contained McDonald's numerous audio tapes and his Sony tape recorder.

These tapes included numerous interviews held with witnesses, many of his talks at scientific conferences and symposia (including Q & A sessions), and private conversations with colleagues and military personnel.

Sixty-one (61) reel-to-reel tapes were in his own Steelmaster File, which McDonald had labeled "No. 1." Most of these were interviews with UFO witnesses.

#### **Photo: McDonald's Handwritten Journals Detailing Years of UFO Research**

A second Steelmaster file drawer, labeled "No. 2", contained dozens more tapes with subjects ranging from radio/ TV appearances, more conference/symposia talks, taped letters, suspected "UFO sounds" and other data relating to specific sightings.

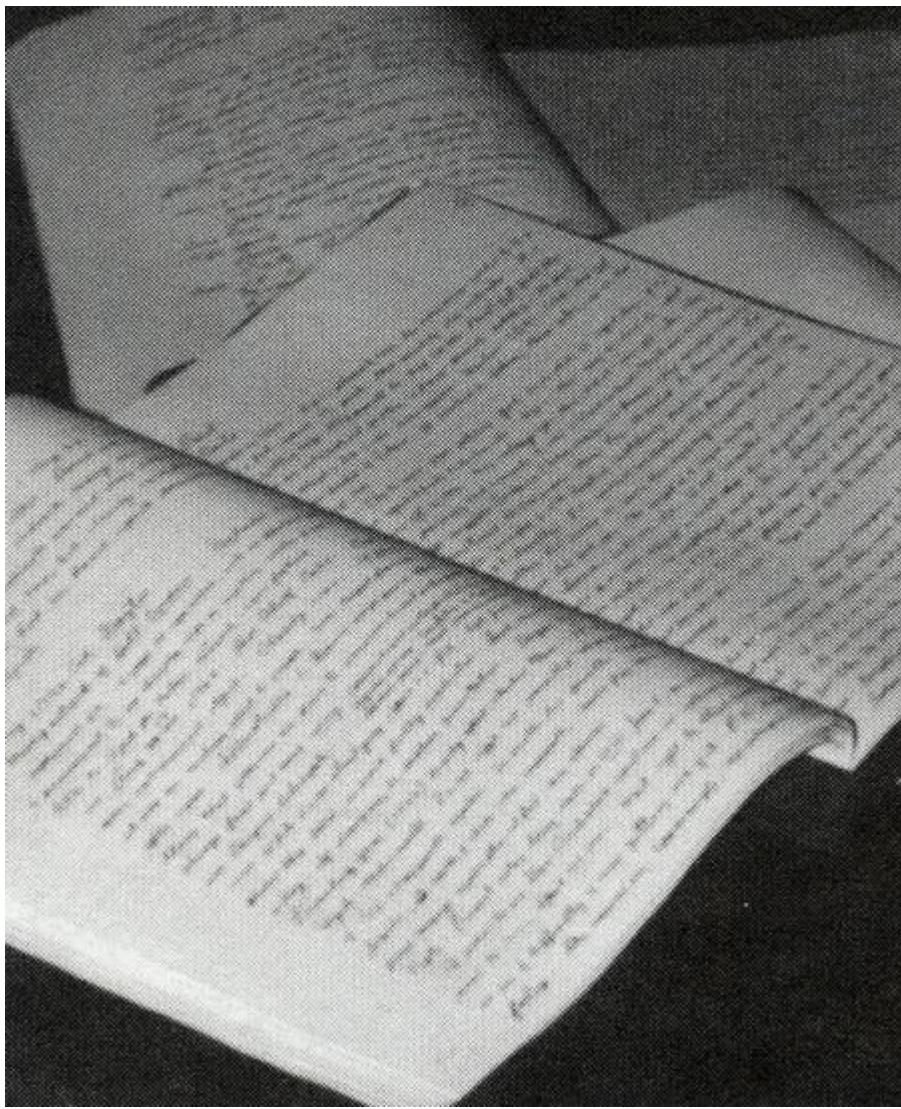
Most were dated and identified; others are identified but undated; others are neither identified nor dated. They included 7-inch, 5-inch, and 3-inch reels.

The entire aggregate of Jim McDonald's UFO files, including the audio tapes, was donated to the Library by Betsy McDonald in May, 1996, and the copyright to the entire collection is now held by the Board of Regents of the University of Arizona.

Some of McDonald's tapes were plainly audible when played on his small, portable recorder at his Tucson home; others were almost inaudible due to static and hum.

At the time of delivery of the archives, however, Curator Roger Myers determined that, since these 25-year old reel-to-reel tapes were very fragile, they would not be available to the public at that point.

McDonald's paper files, however, as described above, were ready to be accessed by the public, and it was not long before researchers, including some prominent in the field, began to flock to the site.



*McDonald's handwritten journals detailing years of UFO research.*

The archives comprise a collection of approximately 1400 labeled files with handwritten and typed case investigations on UFO sightings by military pilots, tower control officials, law enforcement officers, fellow scientists, and other reliable and credible citizens, involving reports from 1945 to 1970, and some of these investigations include photos/soil samples, etc. These UFO cases concern mostly American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand sightings, and some European cases.

The files include McDonald's correspondence from 1958-1971 with various government and military officials and other scientific and professional civilian UFO researchers. Also included are papers and talks (printed and recorded) before various scientific conferences, symposia and other academic groups, 1966-1970.

#### **Blue Book reports**

Case files include photocopies of approximately 580 Project Blue Book (Air Force official investigations) sighting reports, mostly by military and civilian pilots, and airborne and ground radar verification.

McDonald's collection of more than 400 books on UFO and related topics are incorporated into the main University Library, but a catalogue of these books is included in these archived materials to facilitate the researcher in locating desired volumes. Requests for permission to publish materials from this collection should be discussed with the Personal Collections curator. Credit should be given at all times to Dr. James E. McDonald whenever applicable.

#### **The audio tape project**

The memory of the audio tapes, which could not be made available to researchers because of their fragile condition, continued to haunt certain members of the UFO field. This included Vincent Uhlenkott, a prominent veteran ufologist in the Los Angeles area, longtime field investigator and former Director of MUFON-So. California. Uhlenkott and Druffel applied for another grant from FUFOR in order to have Jim McDonald's invaluable audio tapes converted to modem technology, which could then be accessed at the Library by interested parties.

FUFOR was again most generous, and another grant was approved in the early 2000's. Uhlenkott took on the task of finding the most suitable, technically-proficient professional to accomplish the daunting task. At first it was thought best to transfer the 1966 reel-to-reel tapes onto audiocassette. After discussing the project with several experts, however, it was decided that newer and better technology was becoming available, and it was eventually decided to use CDs.

This first step took several months. Druffel journeyed to Tucson together with husband Charles K. to bring all of McDonald's tapes back to Los Angeles.

This was a daunting task in itself, since it involved persuading the airline personnel to fit them into the interior of the plane itself so that they could be carefully watched during the flight. Once the tapes and equipment arrived safely in the Los Angeles area, it took several weeks to find a skilled person to transfer the tapes onto CDs.

An accomplished technician, Badie Youseff was known to Uhlenkott, and he felt he had the spare time necessary to complete the task. We all realized that the FUFOR grant could give only a minimal payment for such difficult work, but Youseff was a generous individual, as is necessary for almost everyone who works in the UFO field.

When he began the transfer, however, he realized that some of the tapes were almost unintelligible, due to hum, static, and other electrical interference. Youseff spent considerable time searching for modern means to clean them up. He eventually found software that would do a fairly good job, but the editing proved very time-consuming.

Youssef managed to convert some of McDonald's 3-inch reels, and although some of the resultant CDs were acceptable, the quality of many others was not. He persisted, however, began to get better results, and accomplished the transfer of 25 tapes in acceptable form.

### A problem arises

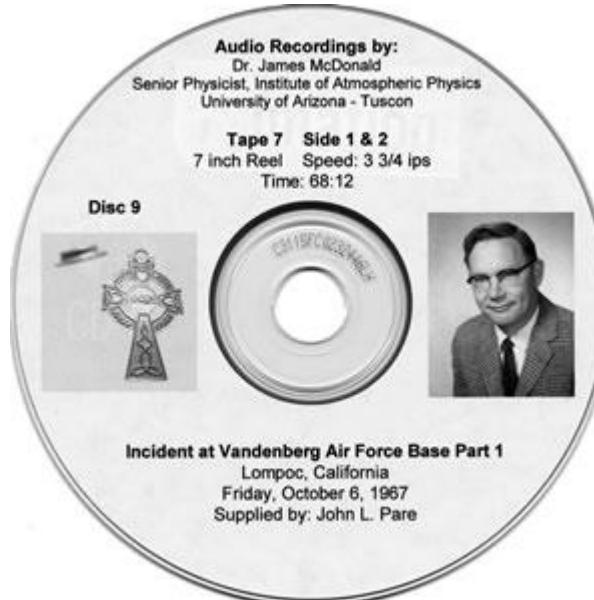
Then an unexpected occurrence in California interrupted the process: the California Department of Water and Power (DWP) experienced what became known as "the energy crunch." Since Youseff was a high-level employee at the DWP, the power company gave him additional responsibilities needed to handle the then-unprecedented crisis. No longer did he have any spare time at all!

Generously, Youseff returned a great portion of the FUFOR money that had been forwarded to him after he found that his DWP professional responsibilities made it impossible for him to continue the transfer.

Uhlenkott discovered that Ralph McCarron, a professional audio/visual expert who is on the Board of Directors of MUFON-LA and extremely active in the UFO field, thought he would have the time for the job. He accepted the task of converting McDonald's reel-to-reel tapes to digital format, using state-of-the-art technology available in his self-owned company, Wolf Video. This firm does video editing, video production, CD/DVD authoring, and Internet web design. As it turned out, however, we had grossly underestimated the size of the task, including additional tape recorder problems which arose in McDonald's 1960s equipment.

Altogether, the work comprised:

- Eighty-three 1 7/8 ips (inches per second), 3-inch reel to reel tapes, 166 hours of record time.
- Ten 3 ¾ ips, 5-inch reel to reel tapes, 20 hours of record time.
- Twenty 3 ¾ ips, 7-inch reel to reel tapes, 80 hours of record time.



***One of the modern discs produced by  
Ralph McCarron from the fragile tapes.***

The difficulties encountered during the "cleanup" of the reel-to-reel tapes can be regarded as either devastating or humorous, depending on the attitude of the reader.

It is vital, however, to understand particular problems encountered early on in the audio-transfer, since these difficulties add to the extreme value, and appreciation of, the final results to the UFO community and to individual researchers who will use them in future UFO research.

After some time, Uhlenkott's tape player/recorder also started having playback problems. He changed the belt, and for a while the unit worked well, but soon it developed similar difficulties which McDonald's recorder had displayed.

Rob Swiatek, who handled the grant funds for FUFOR, agreed that another recorder could be purchased on eBay, and that the Fund would reimburse its cost. For each tape, McCarron used Druffel's original notes associated with the tape collection to make sure the names, spellings, and dates associated with each recording were correct.

And on most of his tapes, McDonald himself would state the date, the time, the location, the event, and in the case of personal sighting interviews he spelled out the name of each witness.

At times, Swiatek of FUFOR and Richard Hall (also at the time with FUFOR) would help out with names and dates. On some of the tapes, however, no pre-information had been recorded, but unless it was a famous UFO case, or known to Druffel, Uhlenkott, Hall, or Swiatek, nothing could be found about it, even on the Internet!

As a result, some spellings of persons' names may be incorrect in the finished product, but in those instances a question mark is added next to the name or date.

On recordings with even less information, the file will read, for example, "Dr. James McDonald Interviews Unknown Man" or "Dr. James McDonald Interviews Frank (Last Name Unknown)."

McCarron discovered an easy way to name the files so that they could be organized easily, so that each file (CD) corresponds with the original reel-to-reel tape. That way, looking back at the original WAV files, one could determine from which reel and which side the recording came.

In order to complete the job within the FUFOR funding grant, it was necessary for McCarron to work at his regular self-owned business, and squeeze in the transferring tasks whenever there was spare time. Once finished, the project ended up being archived on 110 CD-R's for playback on various types of equipment available at the U. of A. Library.

In addition, the original uncompressed (WAV) files were backed up on 18 data DVD-R's. Then, to complete the work to true state-of-the-art technology, these 18 data DVD-R's were processed into Windows Media Audio (WMA) files and MP3 files. The WMA or MP3 files could be used (should the Board of Regents later decide) for streaming off a web server for Internet playback. Also WMA and MP3 files can be played on most new media players like the iPod or any other current DVD/CD players.

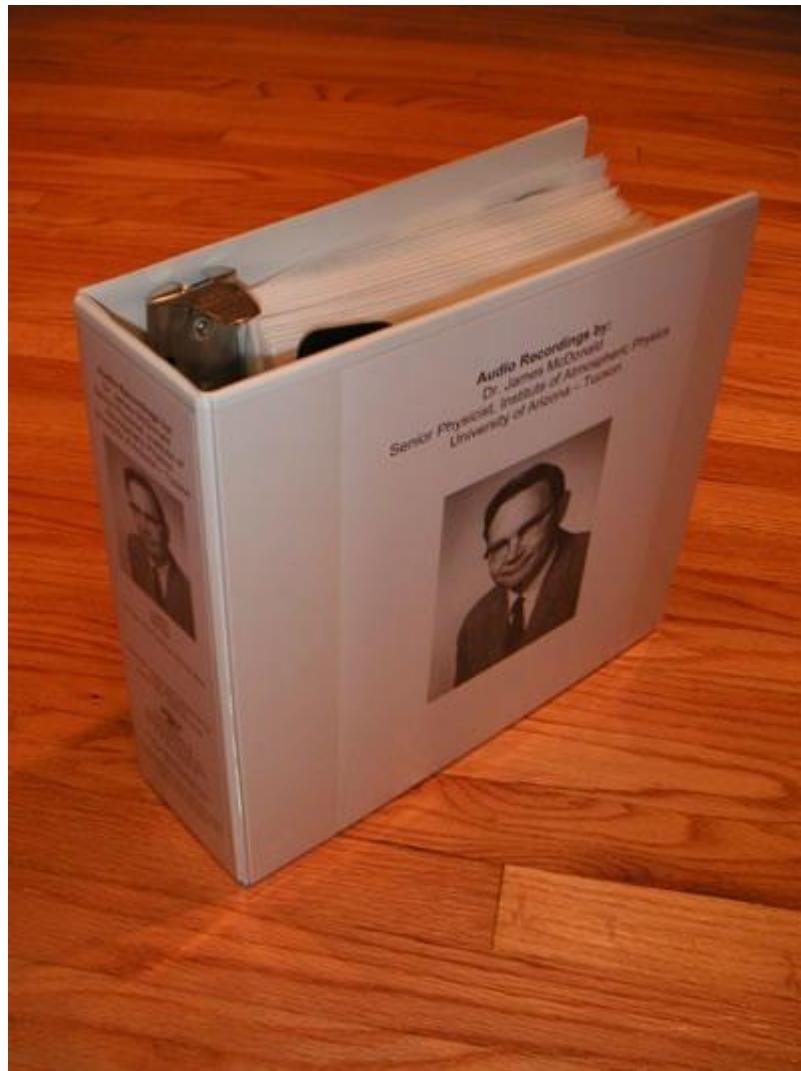
The beauty of the WMA and MP3 files is that roughly 81 gigabytes of McDonald's complete audiotape archives have been compressed to fit on one (1) DVD, being less than 4.5 gigabytes!

McCarron was the only one receiving money from our limited FUFOR grant after Youseff's departure from the team, since Druffel and Uhlenkott gave their time during those years from 2002 to 2006, and paid over \$100 in postage accrued during those years.

The total FUFOR grant had amounted to \$3,495, and by the time McCarron completed the project, his total remuneration was less than \$3,000, also standard procedure for technical professionals who are currently active in the UFO research field. (5) However, the happiness McCarron feels at having been given the opportunity to have cataloged McDonald's amazing five years' work (in audio form) have more than made up for any inconvenience. The same honor is felt by Uhlenkott and Druffel.

The main thing here to consider, however, is really not how long it took the project to be completed, but, instead, the absolutely beautiful and professional way in which it was accomplished.

By using state-of-the-art technology, most of the hum/static and other interference on McDonald's priceless audio tapes was entirely eliminated. When Druffel and Uhlenkott first heard the results in McCarron's studio, it was as if McDonald, himself, was speaking in the room!



*The completed archives of McDonald's tape recordings are packaged in attractive folders.*

Now that same excitement can be experienced by anyone who accesses the tapes in the Special Collections Section in Tucson. It is hoped that eventually the Board of Regents might decide that McDonald's priceless tape collection will someday be made available from the University of Arizona Library over the Internet to the UFO field and to the interested public at large.

The Complete Audio Tape Archive and Interviews can be found on Ann Druffel's website at: <http://www.anndruffel.com/links.htm> or at Ralph McCarron's Wolf Video website at: <http://www.wolfvideo.net/ufo/mcdonaldcompletetapearchive.htm>

## REFERENCES

[Back to Top](#)

(1) See biography described in Reference 4, below, FIRESTORM! DR. JAMES E. McDONALD's FIGHT FOR UFO SCIENCE, by Ann Druffel, for differing hypotheses re. the circumstances of McDonald's death.

[Back to Top](#)

(2) Private letter to Betsy McDonald, written 22 March 1971.

[Back to Top](#)

(3) It is hoped that someday soon the transcribed versions of McDonald's four handwritten journals can be made available to interested readers in UFO research.

[Back to Top](#)

(4) FIRESTORM! DR. JAMES E. McDONALD's FIGHT FOR UFO SCIENCE, by Ann Druffel, Columbus, NC, Granite Publications, Wild Flower Press, was finally published in July 2003, 609 pages. Available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), from the publisher Granite Publications; autographed copies on Druffel's website, [www.anndruffel.com](http://www.anndruffel.com); and on other Internet sites.

[Back to Top](#)

(5) It is estimated that the entire job of converting McDonald's 113 tape reels into the (finalized) 110 CDs would have cost at least \$30,000 if it were done on a regular commercial/time basis, without any editing or sound cleanup at all. The project, as completed, must be considered essentially priceless.

© 2005-2013, AnnDruffel.com. All rights reserved.