

The New Richmond Reader

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Our Literary News from the Heart
of the Karoo



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Johannesburg

Dearest Karoosters,

We have had a pretty harried summer season in the Boekedorp Richmond district. Weeks upon weeks of unrelenting heat and parched earth and desolation, followed by monsoon type rains and which a storm water drainage system clogged by the sands of time and neglect, both Loop Streets the Pienaar were rivers lacking only a couple row boats with couples in long dresses and boater hats and parasols. When it rains in the Karoo it really rains but no one is complaining, especially the farmers. The veld is now lush and green and the sheep fat.

The village has been up and down with weekends full of travellers, post-Christmas and New Years, right up into early February, and then suicide month as the locals in the travel industry bemoan it when there are nights without a single tourist bed occupied. But everyone knows the pattern and sit back and wait. And wait. And drink.

Having been almost been selected the village of the year....runner up to Jan Kempdorp, the village has seen a steady increase in tourist traffic through and staying in town. At the time of

BoekBedonnerd 2025, the newbie in town; Stay at Richmond on Pienaar Street (082-828-1041....No website as yet but on Google maps) was barely open for a small few visitors. Today it is up and running like a well-tuned machine. Inside the high walls you will think you are in a beautiful house on a hill overlooking the Aegean Sea, and after an hour around the plunge pool and a couple lekker G 'n T's later you will hear the waves lapping the shore. Richmond has no shortage of superlative bed stays.



Next in line to come back on stream under the same management and ownership but very new branding will be the former Richmond Small Hotel which stands right next to the Booktown Richmond HQ, so very handy and very central. The fellas will be having a grand opening in the next month or so. Watch this space.

The wee dorp as Darryl Connolly used to refer to us is just starting to come of age. There is certainly enough to warrant a stop over of two nights: we are not short of good coffee shops, restaurants, Art galleries the book shops, although sadly we are loosing our anchor book seller in the likes of long-time resident and really part co-founder of Booktown Richmond, John Donaldson who is moving to Philippolis in the Free State, just past Colesberg. Booktown Richmond will miss him as our major book seller. So, if you want to set up shop in Booktown Richmond

I am sure many of you have seen some of the short AI generated vids of the likes of Jack Nicholson, Arnold Schwarzeneger, Sylvester Stallone, Marlon Brando, Sean Connery and Clint

Eastwood meeting up with themselves 30 or 40 years ago. Whilst it is enough to make the hardest ass smile just to see the old guys meeting themselves when they were young and in their prime and Over the Coocoo's Nest, or on the Wagon Train, it is very frightening how this new fangled art and science can be misused and abused to show you or me holding a smoking gun over a dude with bullet holes in his head. This is frightening. It is almost as frightening as asking AI to write a sonnet or poem on some matter of the heart and soul and then seeing some lines which a William Shakespear might well have written on a bad day.

We are full steam ahead and building up an excellent list of presenters and speakers, a sprinkling of which are listed here following.

Deon Meyer

Tracy Going

Jake Hoddinott – Migrations Beneath a Baobab

Louis Botha - Photography

Chris Marais / Julianne du Toit

Becky Cerling Power. Forbidden Orphanage Outside the Forbidden City

Peter & Beverly Pickford - To the Edges of the Earth - Journeys Into Wild Land.

Roger Lucey - How to Build a House in the Mountains

Manni Coe - Little Ruins

Jonathan Slaght- Tigers Between Empires

I have been desperately trying to get Canadian crime writer Louise Penny to visit BoekBedonnerd via Zoom....but she is far too busy and otherwise importantly engaged to bother with a few dusty souls in the Karoo...where the f**k is that anyway her publicist indicated?

I was perusing some of the material in one of my files which I have from the wonderful days when Booktown had as permanent resident and the undoubted King of the Castle of village eccentrics and intellectuals, Darryl Connolly, who some of you may remember sitting on the large stoep of the Karoozing Gallery opposite the Kerk. Permanent cigarette hanging from his lip and a cup of strong coffee on the table next to the two books he was reading at the same time as well as the trinket he was cleaning with a bit of steel wool and a little metal scraper. Before he died, and left many of us the poorer for the absence of his friendship, a friendship which was a bit like a roller coaster ride in a state of semi-inebriation, he amassed quite an amount of, mainly incomplete works of research on a wide variety of subjects and ideas. He had written a thriller, the manuscript for which has gone missing and is sitting on a shelf in someone's house, browning with age, waiting to be discovered then hopefully touched up and published. I read it many years ago and it was as good as it gets when it comes to action and intrigue. "Take Good Care of My Baby" was the title. From a gang rape after a Buddy Holly concert to a she-male stalking the President of the United States, Hillary Clinton, it was or is a masterful piece of imaginative writing. Stay Tuned....

The following little ditty from the dusty old Dell laptop of Darryl Conolly is just one of the articles I have come across amongst the dozens of computer files which I managed to scavenge.

1947.2

On 14 June 1947, William 'Mac' Brazel and his son, while working on the Foster ranch, some 110 km north of Roswell in New Mexico, came across a "large area of bright wreckage made up of rubber strips, tinfoil, a rather tough paper and sticks". They gathered up a few pieces of the debris, and returned home. During the course of the next week or two, Brazel visited the town of Corona, where he showed a few people in the local bar and hardware store fragments of the debris. But as no one seemed particularly interested in his discovery, he left it at that.

A week later, on 21 June, seaman Harold Dahl, his son and dog, were on a boat scavenging for driftwood near Maury Island in the district of Tacoma, Washington when an unidentified object flying directly overhead shed a form of hot slag, instantly killing his dog and injuring his son.

The following morning, a tall, muscular man in a black suit arrived at Dahl's home and invited him to breakfast at a nearby diner. The man drove a new 1947 Buick, and Dahl assuming him to be representative of the military or government, accepted the invitation.

While the two men ate, the man spoke of Dahl's unidentified flying object sighting, though Dahl had not related his account publicly. The man also gave Dahl a veiled warning which Dahl took as a threat that his family might be harmed should he mention the sighting to anyone.

In spite of the threat, Dahl weeks later reported the incident to his immediate superior, Fred Crisman, who had long claimed to have had experiences with unusual phenomena (and who, incidentally, would later be linked to the John F Kennedy assassination). Crisman gathered more of the slag, then called in the press.

On 24 June, three days after the Maury Island incident and in crystal-clear conditions, 32-year-old entrepreneur Kenneth Arnold was flying his CallAir A-2 from Chehalis to Yakima, Washington on a business trip. After learning of a \$5 000 reward for the discovery of a US Marine Corps C-46 transport plane that had crashed near Mt Rainer, Arnold decided to make a short detour.

A few minutes before 3:00pm at about 9 200 feet in altitude and near Mineral, Washington, he abandoned his search and headed eastward towards Yakima. It was then that Arnold saw a bright flashing light, similar to the reflection of sunlight from a mirror. Sensing that he may be

dangerously close to another aircraft, Arnold scanned the skies around him, but all he could see was a DC-4 to his left and to the back of him, about 25km away.

Not 30 seconds later, he saw a series of bright flashes in the distance to his left, or north of Mt Rainier, which was then between 30 and 40 kilometres away. At first, he thought these might be reflections on his airplane's windows, but after rocking his plane from side to side, removing his eyeglasses, and rolling down his side window, he ruled this possibility out.

The objects Arnold saw flew in a long chain, and for a moment he thought they might be a flock of geese, but quickly realized that this couldn't possibly be the case: apart from the bright glint they emitted, the speed and altitude at which they flew were simply too fast and too high.

Grouped together in a diagonally stepped-down echelon formation stretched out over a distance that he later calculated to be eight kilometres, and moving on a more or less level and horizontal plane, the objects weaved from side to side "like the tail of a Chinese kite", darting through the valleys and around the smaller mountain peaks. They would occasionally flip or bank on their edges in unison as they turned or manoeuvred causing blindingly bright flashes of light. It then struck him that he may well be witnessing test flights of a new US military jet, so he searched intently for signs of a tail but couldn't find any.

Rapidly, the objects approached Rainier, sweeping past the mountain peak in full view of Arnold. Against the white blanket of snow covering the mountain, they appeared mostly dark in profile, yet occasionally gave off bright flashes of light as they flipped and banked erratically. On such occasions they appeared to be so narrow as to be almost flat and practically invisible to the human eye. One of the objects was crescent shaped, while the other eight were more circular.

At one point they flew behind a lower peak and briefly disappeared from view. Knowing his position and the position of this lower peak, Arnold placed their distance as they flew past Rainier at about 35km.

As the objects passed Mt Rainer, Arnold turned his plane southward on a roughly parallel course. It was at this point that he opened his side window again and began observing the objects unobstructed by any glass that might have produced reflections. The objects did not disappear and continued in a southerly direction at unbelievable speed, always ahead of his position. Using the clock on his instrument panel, he timed their rate of passage as they moved from Mt Rainer to Mt Adams in one minute and forty-two seconds before fading from view.

Arnold landed in Yakima at about 4.00pm, and excitedly related his extraordinary tale to his friend, the airport manager, Al Baxter. Before long, the entire airport staff was abuzz with speculation.

Arnold then flew on to an air show in Pendleton, Oregon, and it was here that he studied his maps, determined the distance between Mt Rainier and Mt Adams as being about 80km, and calculated the astonishing flying speed of the objects to be over 2 700km per hour. This was about three times faster than any manned aircraft had achieved by June 1947. Not knowing the exact distance where the objects disappeared from view, Arnold conservatively and arbitrarily rounded this down to 1 900km an hour, still faster than any known aircraft, as the sound barrier had yet to be broken. It was this supersonic speed and the saucer-like shape of the mysterious objects that ultimately captured the world's imagination.

Arnold described his experience to a number of pilot friends, and in his account to Army Air Force (AAF) intelligence wrote that none had scoffed at his account of events. Rather had they suggested that he could possibly have seen guided missiles or some entirely new aircraft, though Arnold felt this explanation to be inadequate. He also wrote that some former army pilots had told him that they had been briefed before going into combat “that they might see objects of similar shape and design as I described and assured me that I wasn’t dreaming or going crazy.”

Arnold wasn’t interviewed by the press until the following day when he visited the offices of the *East Oregonian* in Pendleton. Any scepticism the reporters may have harboured quickly evaporated. Arnold had the makings of a reliable witness. He was a respected businessman and an experienced pilot, and in his interview appeared not to have exaggerated nor embellished upon the contents of his report to the AAF. He also gave the impression of being a careful and insightful observer. These details impressed the reporters and lent credibility to his claims. His sighting therefore received worldwide press coverage and by 27 June, newspapers had already begun using the terms ‘flying saucer’ and ‘flying disc’ to describe the objects.

Arnold’s experience was partly corroborated by a prospector on Mt Adams, who wrote AAF intelligence that he saw six of the objects on 24 June at about the same time as Arnold, which he viewed through a small telescope. He said they were “round” and tapered “sharply to a point in the head and in an oval shape.” He also noted that the objects seemed to disturb his compass. An evaluation of the witness by AAF intelligence found him to be credible.

Then on 4 July, a Portland, Oregon newspaper reported receiving a letter from an LG Bernier of Richland, Washington (about 200km east of Mt Adams and 225km southeast of Mt Rainier). Bernier wrote that he saw three strange objects over Richland flying “almost edgewise” toward Mt

Rainier about half an hour before Arnold claimed to have seen them. Bernier thought the three were part of a larger formation. He indicated they were travelling at high speed: "I have seen a P-38 appear seemingly on one horizon and then gone to the opposite horizon in no time at all, but these disks certainly were travelling faster than any P-38. No doubt Mr Arnold saw them just a few minutes or seconds later, according to their speed." The maximum speed of a P-38 was about 655km an hour.

Although there were several other reported sightings in the Seattle district, none could be corroborated, and the pilot of the DC-4 Arnold had seen some distance north of him, reported seeing nothing unusual.

The primary corroborative sighting, however, occurred on 4 July, ten days after Arnold's experience when a United Airlines crew flying over Idaho en route to Seattle reported spotting between five and nine disc-like objects that paced their plane for 10 to 15 minutes before suddenly disappearing. The next day in Seattle, Arnold met with the pilot, Captain EJ Smith, and his copilot and compared sighting details. The main difference in shape was that the United crew described the objects as being asymmetrical on top. This was one of the few sightings that Arnold felt was plausible, most of the others, he thought, were figments of the public's imagination. The United Airlines incident garnered even greater media interest than Arnold's original sighting, and opened the floodgates of media coverage in the days to follow.

Curiosity and talk in the local papers of 'flying discs' had by now got the better of 'Mac' Brazel, the farmer from the district of Roswell, and on 3 July, he, his wife, son and daughter, revisited the wreckage site and gathered up a further samples. On their way back home, they came upon a second crash site, where they discovered what appeared to be the bodies of at least two aliens.

Then on Saturday 5 July, a report on the United Airlines sighting appeared in the paper. So on Monday morning he drove to Roswell and paid Sheriff Wilcox a visit.

Wilcox immediately called Roswell Army Air Field. After inspecting the pieces recovered by Brazel, and already of the opinion that they were from a crashed weather balloon, Major Jesse Marcel and a "man in plainclothes" accompanied Brazel back to the ranch where more pieces were collected.

"[We] spent a couple of hours Monday afternoon [7 July] looking for any more parts of the weather device", said Marcel. "We found a few more patches of tinfoil and rubber." They then attempted to reassemble the object, but Brazel said they could not. Marcel took the debris to Roswell Army Air Field the next morning.

Early on Tuesday 8 July, the Roswell Army Air Field issued a press release which was instantly picked up by the various news agencies:

"The many rumors regarding the flying disc became a reality yesterday when the intelligence office of the 509th Bomb group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc through the cooperation of one of the local ranchers and the sheriff's office of Chaves County. The flying object landed on a ranch near Roswell sometime last week. Not having phone facilities, the rancher stored the disc until such time as he was able to contact the sheriff's office, who in turn notified Maj Jesse A Marcel of the 509th Bomb Group Intelligence Office. Action was immediately taken and the disc was picked up at the rancher's home. It was inspected at the Roswell Army Air Field and subsequently loaned by Major Marcel to higher headquarters."

Colonel William H Blanchard, commanding officer of the 509th, contacted General Roger M Ramey of the Eighth Air Force in Fort Worth, Texas, and Ramey ordered the object be flown to Fort Worth Army Air Field. At the base, Warrant Officer Irving Newton confirmed Ramey's preliminary opinion, identifying the object as being a weather balloon and its "kite", a nickname for a radar reflector used to track the balloons from the ground. Another news release was issued, this time from the Fort Worth base, describing the object as being a "weather balloon".

In Fort Worth, several news photographs were taken that day of debris said to be from the object. The debris was consistent with the general description of a weather balloon with a kite. Ramey, Colonel Thomas J Dubose and Marcel all posed with the debris. Brazel, in interviews that day with the *Roswell Daily Record* and Associated Press, dismissed the military's "weather balloon" assertion. Citing several other weather balloons he had recovered previously on the ranch, he said: "I am sure what I found was not any weather observation balloon." The incident was quickly forgotten.

Now friends, Kenneth Arnold and Captain Smith of United Airlines met with Army Air Force intelligence officers on 12 July where they filed sighting reports. They then teamed up again at the end of July to investigate the strange Maury Island occurrence involving Harold Dahl, his son and dog. Arnold and Smith, realizing the incident was beyond his capacity to investigate, called in the AAF, who dispatched two investigators. Despite the investigators being largely unimpressed with Crisman and his evidence, they agreed to take some of the slag with them for analysis, but the plane carrying them and the slag samples crashed shortly after taking off from Tacoma, killing both men. Only sixty years later, in April 2007, would the crash site be found and some material recovered.

A similar sighting of eight objects had in the meantime occurred over Tulsa, Oklahoma on 12 July.

In this instance, a photo was taken and published in the *Tulsa Daily World* the following day.

Interestingly, the photographer, Enlo Gilmore, said that in blowups of the photo, the objects resembled baseball catcher's mitts or flying wings. He had been a gunnery officer in the navy during the war, and using information from another witness, also a veteran, he performed a triangulation and arrived at an estimated speed of 2 650km per hour, or essentially the same estimate as Arnold's. One of the objects, he said, seemed to have a hole in the middle.

Two or three photos of a similar, solitary object were taken by William Rhodes over Phoenix, Arizona on 7 July, and appeared in a local Phoenix newspaper. The object was rounded in front with a crescent back. These photos also seem to show something resembling a hole in the middle, though Rhodes thought this to be a canopy. Rhodes' negatives and prints were later confiscated by the FBI and military, and appeared in subsequent air force intelligence reports.

Arnold was shown Rhodes' photos when he met with two AAF intelligence officers, and commented, "It was a disk almost identical to the one peculiar flying saucer that had been worrying me since my original observation - the one that looked different from the rest and that I had never mentioned to anyone." Arnold therefore believed Rhodes' photos to be genuine.

In the weeks that followed Arnold's story, reports of over 850 similar sightings appeared in 140 different newspapers in the US and Canada alone. Although most of these stories were poorly documented or fragmentary, about 250 of the more credible reports, such as those backed by photos or submitted by pilots, scientists and multiple eyewitnesses, made a persuasive case for a genuine mystery.

Adding intrigue to Arnold's story, the US military denied having any planes at all in the area of Mount Rainier at the time of his sighting. On 6 July, certain newspapers began speculating that the objects being sighted were possibly either the 'flying wing' or the 'flying flapjack', both disc-shaped experimental aircraft under development by the US military at the time. The military, however, also ruled out this possibility.

The first official investigation of Arnold's claims was conducted by Captain William Davidson and Lieutenant Frank Brown of Hamilton Field in California when they interviewed Arnold on 12 July, and received from him a written report. Regarding the reliability of Arnold's sighting, they concluded:

"It is the present opinion of the interviewer that Mr Arnold actually saw what he stated he saw. It is difficult to believe that a man of [his] character and apparent integrity would state that he saw objects and write up a report to the extent that he did if he did not see them."

Despite this, the Army Air Force's formal public conclusion was that Arnold had seen a mirage.

On 9 July, AAF intelligence with help from the FBI, secretly began an investigation of the most plausible unidentified flying object sightings, especially those from pilots and military personnel. Included in this investigation were Arnold's sighting, that of the United Airline's crew and the Roswell incident. Three weeks later they came to the conclusion that the saucer reports were neither imaginary nor adequately explained by natural phenomena; some unexplained objects were indeed flying around in the skies above America! This laid the groundwork for another investigation in September 1947 led by General Nathan Twining, commanding officer of the Air Materiel Command, which likewise concluded the saucers were real and urged a formal

investigation by multiple government agencies. This in turn resulted in the formation at the end of 1947 of Project Sign, the first publicly acknowledged USAF UFO investigation. Project Sign eventually evolved into Project Grudge, and ultimately the better known Project Blue Book.

Numerous books have been written on the Roswell UFO and the following general outline from *UFO Crash at Roswell* (1991) by Kevin D Randle and Donald R Schmitt is common to most of these accounts:

“A UFO crashed northwest of Roswell, New Mexico, in the summer of 1947. The military acted quickly and efficiently to recover the debris after its existence was reported by a ranch hand. The debris - unlike anything these highly trained men had ever seen - was flown without delay to at least three government installations. A cover story was concocted to explain away the debris and the flurry of activity. It was explained that a weather balloon, one with a new radiosonde (??) target device, had been found and temporarily confused the personnel of the 509th Bomb Group. Government officials took reporters’ notes from their desks and warned a radio reporter not to play a recorded interview with the ranch hand. The men who took part in the recovery were told never to talk about the incident. And with a whimper, not a bang, the Roswell event faded quickly from public view and press scrutiny.”

Charged with “coordinating the nation’s intelligence activities and correlating, evaluating and disseminating intelligence which affects national security”, the Central Intelligence Agency was created on 18 September 1947 with the signing of the National Security Act by President Harry S Truman.

By the middle of 1947, NACA and the Bell Aircraft Company were ready for an attempt at flying an aircraft at Mach 1, but such were the hazards in those early days of rocket-powered flight, that Bell test pilot, 'Slick' Goodlin demanded \$150 000 to break the sound barrier. So the authorities at Muroc Army Air Field (now Edwards Air Force Base) in Rosamond, California, turned to 24-year-old war veteran Captain Charles 'Chuck' Yeager to take up the challenge.

On the evening of 12 October 1947, two days before the scheduled date for the flight, Yeager broke two ribs while out riding a horse. Afraid of being removed from the mission, he visited a veterinarian in a nearby town for treatment and told only his wife, and fellow project pilot Jack Ridley about his condition, a consequence being that on the day of the flight, Yeager was in such pain that he was unable to seal the Bell X-1's hatch by himself. So Ridley rigged up a device to allow Yeager to seal the hatch of the airplane.

Yeager's endeavour, the first ever in level flight, recorded Mach 1.06 (1 120km an hour) at an altitude of 43 000 feet. Point was that Yeager's incredible feat was only declassified in June 1948, so apart from a handful of people, nobody was aware of it at the time of the 1947 sightings.

While all of this was going on in the skies above America, an altogether different aircraft was being prepared for liftoff in Culver City, California.

In 1942, the US War Department was faced with the urgent need to transport personnel and war material to Britain, as Allied shipping in the Atlantic Ocean was suffering heavy losses to German U-boats. So tenders were called for three flying cargo ships to be constructed that could cross the Atlantic with a large payload. A two-year deadline was stipulated in order for the craft to be available for the war effort.

Seven designs were submitted and the contract finally awarded to Henry J Kaiser, who had directed the Liberty ships programme, and aircraft designer Howard Hughes. Together they would create a monstrous craft, eclipsing any large transporter yet built or even envisioned. Originally called the HK-1 to reflect the Hughes and Kaiser collaboration, it would, when completed, be capable of carrying 750 fully-equipped troops or one M4 Sherman tank.

To conserve metal, the HK-1 would be built almost entirely of wood. Critics, who believed an aircraft of such proportions would simply not be able to fly, quickly latched onto this, tagging it the Flying Lumberyard. But when they learnt that the elevators and rudder were to be covered in fabric, they found an even better name for it: the Spruce Goose.

While Kaiser had originated the flying cargo ship concept, he did not have an aeronautical background and deferred to Hughes and his designers. Development dragged on, with a frustrated Kaiser blaming delays on restrictions on the acquisition of strategic materials such as aluminium, and Hughes' insistence on perfection. Kaiser subsequently withdrew from the project.

Hughes continued the programme on his own, renaming the craft the H-4 Hercules and signing a new government contract that now limited production to one example. Work, however, proceeded at much the same pace, the result being that the H-4 was not completed until well after the war was over. There were many reasons for this, not least of which was Hughes' mental breakdown during development.

In 1947, Howard Hughes was called to testify before the Senate War Investigating Committee over the usage of government funds for the aircraft, as Congress was eliminating war-era spending to

free up federal funds for domestic projects. Even though he encountered scepticism and even hostility from the committee, Hughes remained unruffled. In a transcript of a Senate hearing, Hughes said:

“The Hercules was a monumental undertaking. It is the largest aircraft ever built. It is over five stories tall with a wingspan longer than a football field. That’s more than a city block. Now, I put the sweat of my life into this thing. I have my reputation all rolled up in it and I have stated several times that if it’s a failure I’ll probably leave this country and never come back. And I mean it.”

During a break in the Senate hearings, Hughes returned to California to run taxi tests on the H-4, and on 2 November 1947, five years after the contract had been awarded and almost ten months to the day after the death of Orville Wright who, with his brother Wilber had invented the aeroplane in 1904 (?), Hughes was ready to prove his critics wrong. Or was he? With Hughes at the controls, a co-pilot, two flight engineers and nine members of the press corps on board, the Hercules rose from the waters off Long Beach, remained airborne 20 metres above water for about 1.5km, and dipped back onto the water.

The Spruce Goose never flew again, and Hughes never left the country.

Darryl Conolly Date Line Richmond

Darryl and Angie are as busy as the proverbial rats up a pipe filling in the programme which is already very busy. So hold onto your seat belts folks.

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