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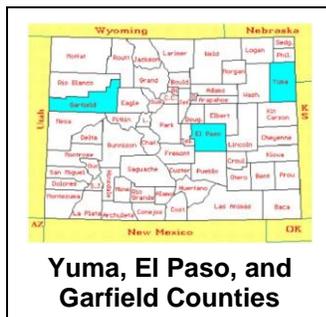
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COLORADO CATTLE MUTILATION DELUSION

J Henry McHenry

The Milieu

During the Fall of 1974, the Colorado media reported extensively on the cattle mutilation epidemics in neighboring Nebraska and Kansas. Minnesota's was sometimes mentioned. They elaborated on the mysterious helicopter searchlights and on the missing body parts like blood, sex organs, lips, eyes, and tongues. They acknowledged that misinterpretation of natural death and scavenging was a possible explanation for cattle mutilations, but gave more play to the paranormal cult and UFO theories.



In November and December, 1974, motivated by the media coverage, ranchers in three Colorado counties began finding their own cattle mutilations: Yuma, El Paso, and Garfield counties.

All the reports were odd. In Yuma County it was reported that a 1,000 pound cow had been bled dry through a vein in its ear. In El Paso County it was reported that searchlight-equipped helicopters had aided and abetted the mutilation of four head of cattle. In Garfield County, the local District Attorney blamed cultists and witches for the mutilation of eight head.

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In the first case, the notion that a cow had been bled dry through a vein in its ear is preposterous on the face of it. In the second case, reports of searchlight-equipped mutilator helicopters weren't much different than reports of searchlight-equipped rustler helicopters – just on a theoretically different mission. In the third case, the District Attorney's opinion about cults and witches wasn't unusual in Colorado or the region at the time. In perspective, only four months earlier, psychologist Robert J. Williams committed suicide in neighboring Kansas after the *Wichita Eagle* hounded him about his religious affiliation with witchcraft.

While not much can be said about the first two, there is an obvious link between witch hunts and the welfare of the community. It therefore pays to consider the basis of the DA's arguments.

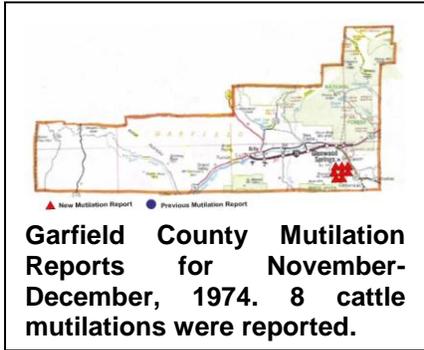
Garfield County: The District Attorney Who Blamed Cults And Witches

The Garfield County sheriff's office verified eight cattle mutilations during late November, early December, 1974, all at virtually the same location. Frank Tucker, the state's District Attorney for Garfield County, told inquiring reporters that he blamed cults and witches for all of them. Probably the majority of Colorado ranchers and sheriffs at the time agreed with him.

In this particular case, however, a local veterinarian later examined the eight carcasses and said he saw nothing unusual about them, that he assumed they died of natural causes, that the damages had been done by scavengers, and that he saw no reason to believe humans were involved. The Garfield Eight more or less dropped out of sight after that. At the height of his powers, however, here's how the DA conjectured that paranormal forces were at work in these so-called cattle mutilations.

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From the Denver Post: Dist. Atty. Frank Tucker said Thursday, "The whole thing doesn't fit into the pattern of our usual livestock problems. Our contacts in locker plants aren't doing us any good because this is not normal run-of-the-garden livestock theft."



Tucker said, "It appears to me to be a ritualistic kind of killing."

He admitted law agencies have no leads but believes that an "odd-type cult of people"

in the Aspen, Colo. area may be involved. [Denver Post, Denver, Colorado, 05 DEC

1974, p90, "Cult Activity Suspected in Killing of 8 Cattle," (Associated Press)] [Denver Post, Denver, Colorado, 17 DEC 1974, p20, "States Deny Cult Killed Cattle," by Joan Zyda, Denver Post Staff writer]

And where you find cults, of course, you're likely to find witches, at least according to what Tucker told a reporter for another Denver newspaper.

From the Rocky Mountain News: Frank Tucker, the district attorney in Garfield County, confirmed Friday that a local minister "has come to me and said that he heard from one of his parishioners that a witch, if you will, is practicing in this area and that this blood together with certain parts of the animal are used in these ceremonies."

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When Tucker was asked if the natural death and scavenging explanations coming out of Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska applied to the Garfield County mutilations, he said there could be no comparison because “no autopsies” were planned for any of the Garfield County animals. And anyway, he said, he knew what he had seen with his own eyes.

“But just by looking at their remains, you can tell that those cows didn’t die by natural causes,” Tucker insisted.

“I don’t know what happened to their (Kansas’ and Nebraska’s) cattle, but ours (Colorado’s) didn’t die of natural causes,” said Tucker.

“I say it could be a religious cult since there were so many similarities in the slayings. I’m told that some of the people who use them (organs and skins of animals) march to a different religious drum.

“I’ve been in the cattle business for a long time. This isn’t the crime of the common variety cattle rustler. It’s of people, I’m sure, who believe they can cast spells on other people. They’re your uncommon garden variety of crazy.”

As for reports of vigilantism, District Attorney Tucker emphasized that he stood behind the farmers and ranchers who had armed themselves and “become more vigilant” in the hunt for the cattle mutilators.

“They have a right to protect their property,” said Tucker. “Can you blame them? This is serious business. Probably the only way we’ll

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catch these people is in the act." [Rocky Mountain News, Denver, Colorado, 16 DEC 1974,

p5, "Autopsies in Nebraska, Kansas indicate tales unfounded: Cattle mutilation rumors spread to state," by Jack Olsen, Jr., News Staff]

"These people" who Tucker hoped to catch "in the act" must have spent the winter in Cancun or some other warm clime, because his words were essentially the last heard of cattle mutilations in Colorado for around four months, until April, 1975, when temperatures moderated and snow melted from the land. In that lapse, however, a significant event altered the nature of cattle mutilation investigations in the state.

That event was an egregiously flawed investigation by Donald Flickinger, an agent of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BAT&F). He, at the behest of UFO guru J. Allen Hynek, conducted an official, federally-funded investigation to prove that Satanic cults were responsible for cattle mutilations, and that UFOs were not.

Although Flickinger's investigation ended in a debacle and cover-up, leaked copies of his investigative report, in which he did in fact blame cultists, accelerated the cattle mutilation delusion to warp speed in Colorado. It led the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, local law enforcement agencies, newspaper editors, and reporters in general to view cattle mutilations and cult involvement as a de facto reality, much like that expressed by District Attorney Frank Tucker in Garfield County.

In August, however, four months after the Flickinger Report was surreptitiously distributed, it was revealed that the BAT&F agent's investigation had been based on a hoax run by a prisoner in a federal penitentiary. Those in law enforcement who accepted the natural death and scavenging solution were relieved. Those true believers who did not accept it were

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undaunted, and simply switched the hunt from cultists to humans who may or may not be cultists.

The Colorado chapter of **Beef Jerkey** follows the Flickinger investigation and hoax from its beginning in January 1975, to its implosion eight months later, during August. It was as grand a Keystone Cops caper as will ever be.

For now, however, the caper I want to tell you about concerns a sheriff who at least on the outside seems to have been one of the true believers. He was Harry L. “Tex” Graves, the sheriff of Logan County, Colorado.

Logan County: The Sheriff Who Hunted Cults And UFOs

Logan County sheriff Harry L. “Tex” Graves became a star of the cattle mutilation delusion in Colorado. He was portrayed in many paranormal publications – mostly UFO magazines - as being a belligerent, long-suffering sheriff who waged war against mysterious, helicopter-borne mutilators, all the while complaining about incompetent state and federal efforts to help him catch the mutilators.

Graves seems to have been one of the true believers who simply re-focused to blame unknown human mutilators who may or may not be cultists. However, in the face of overwhelming evidence for natural death and scavenging that developed over the years of his tenure as sheriff , a skeptic might wonder if he ginned up cattle mutilations just to keep his name before the electorate and in the paranormal publications. As a Nebraska sheriff told me during my research trip, you can never really tell what’s really going on inside a man’s head.

Either way, when Sheriff Graves was consistently unable to produce any human mutilators or their helicopters over the years, he began flirting with the idea that the mutilators

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might actually be arriving aboard UFOs. He even began finding what he deemed to be “tripod tracks” at the sites of some mutilated carcasses. Paranormal authors were very interested in his findings.

I learned more about Sheriff Graves and his UFO conversion during a 1980 interview I had in neighboring Morgan County with Sheriff Howard Mann and County Attorney Hayden Johns. From them I learned about the night Sheriff Graves actually did capture a UFO.

Me to Sheriff Mann: From what I've learned, the majority of cattle mutilation reports were made by people who misinterpreted natural death and scavenging. They probably had seen the same thing before, but hadn't really noticed the details until the delusion came along, and they just got swept up in it.

Sheriff Mann: That's exactly right. I've talked to some old-time sheriffs around here who also have their own ranches. They tell me there's nothing new about this mutilation thing, that it's the same old thing they have always seen predators do.

Me: Based on reports I've found in newspapers and other places, it looks like your big month for cattle mutilation reports was in August of 1975, somewhere around thirty. Before that there were basically none, and after that, they dropped off sharply to maybe a

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dozen or so for the rest of the year. And I find no reports from 1976 on.

Sheriff Mann: Well, to tell you the truth, I never did see a mutilation that I thought was a 'mutilation'. The one thing I did notice in 1975, though, was that the farmers and ranchers around here experienced fewer losses from natural death than ever before. All their dead critters were mutilated that year, if you listened to them.

When you look at all the mutilation reports we received in '75, all but two of them were too far gone to really make any determination about the cause of death, or about whether they were cut on or chewed on. We sent two carcasses to Fort Collins to the University, and the reports came back that they died of natural causes and were eaten on afterward.

And all that nonsense about no tracks and missing blood everyone was reporting - I knew then as I know now, that blood settles in a dead animal, and that's all there is to it, no great mystery. That's why there never was any blood on the ground or anywhere in the vicinity of the carcass like there would have been if the animal

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had theoretically been mutilated while it was still alive. If that were the case, I would expect to find at least some trace of blood on the ground or clotted on vegetation or someplace, but there never was.

And as for the lack of tracks, you'll find that we have plenty of hard soil in this area, making it kind of difficult to leave tracks. In the grassy areas, they soon recover after being stepped on, especially by light-footed animals.

Me: I also noticed you weren't quoted very frequently in newspaper articles about cattle mutilations.

Sheriff Mann: That's right. I figured the best way to handle the cattle mutilation reports was to give them no publicity. I knew that the more publicity they got, the more reports I would get. A good example of that is what happened down in Logan County.

Me: With Sheriff "Tex" Graves.

Sheriff Mann: Right. He talked with anyone and everyone about them, and that's why he had dozens and dozens of reports every year.

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Me: I've asked other sheriffs this, and I would like to get your opinion, too. Do you think insurance and tax fraud had anything to do with any of the cattle mutilation reports in your county?

Sheriff Mann: Well, it's hard to say because, like I said, all but a couple of the carcasses I looked at were too far gone to really tell whether they had been cut on, or chewed on. And the two that were tested, came back, like I said, natural death and scavengers.

But I can tell you this - in some cases where our ranchers filed claims, the insurance companies actually wanted to pay them, if you can believe that! It happened with one of our big ranchers here. I wrote a report that said I thought the work had been done by predators - which he was none too happy about, so he called his insurance company. Then I got a call from his insurance company. They asked me to just write out my reports based on what I physically saw, like missing ears and the like when I had calls involving their big clients. They were willing to pay them, no questions asked!

And there's other kinds of cattle mutilation fraud, too.

Me: Such as?

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Sheriff Mann: Well, we recently had a caretaker who let the cattle he was watching run out of water, and four of them died of thirst. So he used a tractor to pull them away from the dry water tank where they died, and then later, when the animals were "re-found," the predators and scavengers had been at them, and he called in a mutilation report.

When my deputies and I investigated, our ranching experience - and the drag marks - pretty much told us what had really happened, so after we put two and two together and confronted the caretaker, he told us the truth and begged us not to tell his boss. We left it up to him what to do.

Me: That's like a story a veterinarian in Nebraska told me, about farmers dragging dead cattle under trees so they could claim they were struck by lightning.

Sheriff Mann: Oh, yeah, they're a tricky bunch, all right. Another good example - it's not unusual for some of them to water down the silage they're selling to the big feedlots. While they're loading silage onto a wagon, they'll spray it with water to increase the

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weight, because that's how the feed lots buy it, by weight. I actually watched a farmer one time use a two-inch hose to blast water into his load. By the time these guys drive to a feedlot, all the excess has drained off, but the weight remains increased. So the feedlot operator is buying some very expensive water!

Me: Switching subjects now, what did you think about all those helicopter reports that were associated with the cattle mutilations?

Sheriff Mann: Oh, man, during 1975, we had more helicopter reports than you could count. Based on the phone calls we received, we could track every helicopter across the county. As one would pass over a particular farm or ranch to another, each one would phone in a helicopter report. People were mostly reporting public service helicopters that ran gas lines and power lines, and also some Air Force helicopters.

I can tell you, though, that people around here at the time were actually terrified of the mutilators and the helicopters. And I give most of the credit for that to Sheriff Graves in Logan County. He was always being quoted in the papers and on radio stations for ranchers

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and farmers to watch out for helicopters and call them in when they see one. We got a lot of the business he generated. Graves used to have two or three deputies out all night chasing helicopters - we could hear them on the radio frequency. He ran them ragged. Toward the end, he started thinking they were UFOs since they couldn't catch any of them.

[Laughter]

It got so bad around here, that people were threatening to shoot at any helicopter they saw over their land - and no doubt a few shots probably were fired. At the height of it all, we were concerned about the Flight for Life helicopters that sometimes fly into remote areas of the county to pick up critical patients. We set up a deal with them that when they were flying into Morgan County, they would call first, and we would have the radio stations broadcast their itinerary so they wouldn't get shot at.

Me: So, you never really had any evidence of mutilator helicopters?

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Sheriff Mann: No. None. On all the mutilation calls I was on personally, I never did see any indication that helicopters had landed at any of them. I never saw any indication that they were involved with the death of any cow.

As Sheriff Mann and I chatted, we were joined by Morgan County Attorney Hayden Johns. As he listened to what we were talking about, he said he had a related story to share. It involved himself, Logan County sheriff “Tex” Graves, and *Brush Banner* editor Dane Edwards, the gadabout editor who sensationalized cattle mutilations in the weekly newspaper he published in eastern Morgan County. Like Sheriff Graves, Edwards was a star player in the Colorado phase of the cattle mutilation delusion.

County Attorney Johns: This goes back to when Dane Edwards was a big wheel at the *Brush Banner*, just before he disappeared. I’m not sure how it started, but he got a phone call from two farmers in Logan County, telling him they had captured a UFO, and they were fighting over who should have custody of it. Apparently they thought Edwards could help since he was such a crusader.

Well, the first thing Edwards did was to notify Sheriff Graves, who actually was starting to think that maybe UFOs were involved in the cattle mutilations. After that, Edwards drove to Sterling, about

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forty miles up the interstate to meet Graves. Then the two of them got a judge of the local court out of bed to sign a search warrant - and the judge in turn notified me. The judge said Dane gave him a deposition that convinced him signing the warrant was for the public good, whatever that meant.

After they got the search warrant, Graves and Edwards went back to the sheriff's office to get organized. I got there in time to tag along.

Those two drove out to the farm in the sheriff's car, and I joined a deputy in another car. It was a dark, cold night when we got there, and the house was all closed up. So Graves went to the door and knocked. When no one came, he and Edwards started beating on the door, identifying themselves and why they had come. But still no one came to the door.

So we got back in our cars and drove off in different directions. Then we sneaked back with the lights off. Graves was on the road, and we were on a hill behind the house on a farm lane. We all

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saw a kerosene lantern moving inside the house, so we knew then that they were home.

So we drove back to the front of the house, and Graves got on a bullhorn and told the farmer why we were there, and finally cajoled him to open the door a crack. The deputy I was riding with went inside, and after half an hour or so, came back out and said they were ready to talk.

The old man told us that they did have the UFO, and that if the sheriff's office were to take it, Graves would first have to sign a contract that he would return it when he was through examining it. His wife went ahead, then, and typed up a contract on a rickety old typewriter, one finger at a time, and Graves signed it.

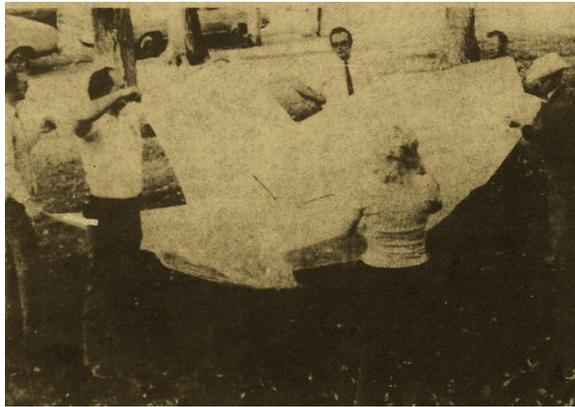
Then they brought out the UFO for Graves to take custody of it. It appeared to me to be made out of pieces of wood and what looked like some plastic material. When we got it back to the sheriff's office, one of the deputies said she thought it looked like the plastic thing could be blown up, and wondered what it would look like if it were. So they patched it and started blowing it up with a hand pump.

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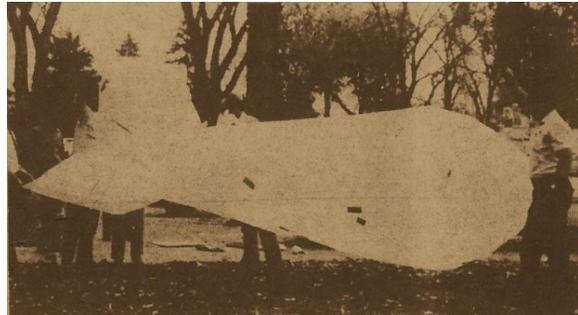
As it began taking shape, everyone could see that they had a weather balloon!

After that incident, Graves had no sense of humor about UFO jokes because of the ridicule he faced.

[More laughter]



WHATSIT? – Logan County Sheriff's Office personnel unravel a strange plastic item found in a field Wednesday night in northeastern Colorado. The device, which officers at first thought might have something to do with mutilations in the area, turned out to be something entirely different. – J-A Photo by Bill Jackson



A BLIMP? – Once Logan County Sheriff's Office personnel did some repair work with some tape, the device found in a field Wednesday night in northeastern Colorado turned out to be what appeared to be this hand-made blimp. LCSO officers believe it to be the work of some youngsters, who obviously got a kick out of flying the thing, possibly at night and possibly illuminated – which if it was the case, would have been very strange floating around. JA Photo by Bill Jackson [Sterling Journal-Advocate, Sterling, Colorado, 31 OCT 1975, p1, p3]

Sheriff Mann: I should add that getting that deposition was one of the last things Dane Edwards did, since he disappeared a few days later, and wasn't around to take any heat for his part of the action. We found his car abandoned at the Little Bandit truckstop motel later - which was a relief to the bank that held the loan on it.

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County Attorney Johns: Yeah, it was pretty obvious that Edwards was obsessed with the publicity he was getting for his mutilation stories. He and Graves made a good pair. Both of them were irrationally obsessed with the mutilations.

Sheriff Mann: You know that big beef packing plant at Sterling, well, one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture vets who worked there inspecting meat used to go out on calls with Graves and he'd look at a mutilated critter and say, yup, that's another mutilation, without posting them or anything.

County Attorney Johns: Graves used to refer to him as his resident expert.

Sheriff Mann: Graves got into a little hot water with his Board of Supervisors, too, over all the photos he was taking. Now for myself, I had to take photographs of the alleged crime scene, and I must have spent five hundred dollars on worthless photos of dead cows - they cost right around a dollar a shot at that time. Well, Graves held the record, because he would shoot maybe thirty or forty shots per mutilation, and I'm sure he had at least two thousand photos when the

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Board got on him about spending all that money. [Interview with Morgan County

Sheriff Howard J. Mann and Morgan County Attorney Hayden Johns, Morgan County Sheriff's Office, Fort Morgan, Colorado, September 29, 1980]

Meanwhile, even as Sheriff Graves was burning up taxpayer dollars photographing dead cows in Logan County, fear was growing in the west Denver subdivision of Evergreen that the cattle mutilators might be moving into their area and mutilating their pets. Five years later, during my 1980 research trip, I learned that they were correct.

Jefferson County: When Pets Are Bite-Size



When I visited the Evergreen area of Jefferson County during my first research trip in 1975, I was looking for a scenic location near Denver to park my van overnight, a place where my dog could get out and stretch her legs. I was disappointed to find a sprawling area of mountainous pine forest with spectacular homes embedded among the trees and along cold mountain streams. There was no place for an old van to park inconspicuously.

According to newspapers at the time, residents of the Evergreen area were concerned about the loss of 20 or so dogs, some snatched from yards, some mutilated. Neighborhood meetings had been held to discuss the problem. The consensus was that cattle mutilators were probably to blame.

From the Rocky Mountain News: At least some residents think the thefts may be the work of a Satanic cult similar to one being blamed for disfiguring dead cattle in parts of rural Colorado.

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One resident found a disfigured small animal on his porch the day his dog disappeared, and there are unconfirmed reports of dogs being found skinned and dressed, and of strange stick-and-stone formations in the woods around the town.

According to John Currie, who had a Maltese terrier stolen from his back yard, the day his dog disappeared a disfigured chipmunk was left on his porch.

"The chipmunk had its head split right down the middle," Currie said. "Its legs were cut off and left there in a pattern, and it was disemboweled." Another day he found a squirrel in similar condition in his yard.

He has offered a \$2,000 reward for the dog alive and \$500 for it dead "just so I know what happened to it."

Currie says his dog, Suki, would never leave his sight and disappeared without a trace while he was on the telephone for several minutes.

Mrs. Jo Oliver says her miniature schnauzer disappeared from her backyard while she was on the other side of her home for several

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minutes. She found an extension cord near her chain link fence which she believes was used to lift the dog over the fence.

Almost all residents rule out the possibility the dogs ran away or were killed by other animals.

Residents say most dogs taken don't appear to fit in a pattern, except that most are small. [*Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, Colorado, 02 AUG 1975, p8,

"Weird thefts of animals suspected in Evergreen"]

Bite-size, you might say.

Five years later, during my 1980 research trip, I visited with Dr. Albert E. McChesney, then director of Colorado State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Fort Collins. I mentioned the 1975 Evergreen situation to him. He said he had something to show me that would clear away the mystery. He pulled out a series of 35 millimeter slides from a desk drawer and asked me to hold them to the light and view them.

Dr. McChesney: These are slides of two cats that a lady brought in that she thought might have been mutilated. They were each almost identically deformed. She found them on her front porch.

In this first slide you see a twisted pile of flesh with a black cat's head on it. That's all that was left of the cat, just its head and the bones and meat in the claws below the level of the pads. Beyond that, there was not a piece of meat or a bone left of the cats.

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The cats as they were found.



Nothing left but the head and toes.

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Turned right side out.



Consumed through the rectum.

As I worked on them, the mystery deepened. The skin was not torn open, even though all of the cat inside was missing. The only irregularity was that the anus was stretched to perhaps the size of a half dollar or a little larger. I couldn't figure it out until I mentioned it Dr. Boddicker, our wildlife man. He said that was the typical eating method of a raccoon. They start at the rectum and use their fingers to stretch and pull the hide and eat the cat right out of the bag, you might say.

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It had been a hard winter, and the raccoons apparently cornered the cats and killed and ate them right there on their own porch. Now if newspaper reporters had gotten hold of these photos, they surely would have said that it was the work of a devil cult. I prize these photographs because they illustrate to me that no matter how weird something appears, there is always a logical explanation for it.

[Interview with Dr. A. E. McChesney, DVM, Director, Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, College of Veterinary Medicine, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, October 2, 1980]

Moving now from bite-size pets to the helicopter searchlights everyone was reporting and chasing at the time, there was also a “logical explanation” for them. That, of course, was atmospheric manipulation of light beams from stars and planets as they passed through it on the way to the observers’ eyes. A good example of this misinterpretation occurred in Crowley County, in southeastern Colorado, during mid-September, 1975, when the planets Venus and Jupiter were misinterpreted as helicopter searchlights.

Crowley County: Venus Threatens, Jupiter Chased, Shots Fired!



During mid-September, 1975, a handful of ranchers in Crowley and Pueblo counties made desperate Citizen Band radio calls for help at 5:00 a.m., claiming they were being chased by a helicopter with a bright searchlight. At the same time, 150 miles directly north, in Yuma County, two drivers reported they had been chased into town

by a helicopter with a very bright search light trained on them. One of them reported hearing no

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noise, and estimated that the “aircraft” was “pacing her automobile at a distance of about three-quarters of a mile.”



Pueblo County, Colorado, showing Venus rising in the east at around 4:30 a.m. Starry Night™ image.

The cause of their mutual alarm was Venus rising in the east at around 4:30 a.m., and then passing through the ten-degree zone of maximum atmospheric effect for the next hour or so.

A few days following those incidents, and perhaps with them on his mind, a Crowley County teenage driver was confronted by Jupiter rising brightly in the east just after dusk. He made a desperate CB radio call for help, alleging he had been spotlighted and chased by a helicopter, and then run off the road into a ditch. Two police officers from the town of Fowler, in neighboring Otero County, responded to the teenager’s desperate call with the speed of summer lightning.



Crowley County, Colorado, September 15, 1975, showing Jupiter rising in the east at around 7:30 p.m. [Starry Night™ image]

From the Fowler

Tribune: Two members of the Fowler Police Auxiliary Monday night rushed to a point about one-half mile

east and four miles north of Olney Springs where a young man had

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reported he was being chased by a helicopter. Equipped with a CB radio in his pickup, he had called for help when the object forced him off the dirt road north of Olney.

Mrs. Leonard Smith of Fowler heard his call and notified her husband, who was on police duty at that time. He and Jess Lopez, another Auxiliary policeman, found the young man "frantic and practically under his pickup which was off the road." Smith fired a .30-.30 and heard the bullet ricochet off the helicopter.

Members of the Otero, Pueblo and Crowley county sheriff departments, as well as guards from the Pueblo Army Depot and State Patrolmen joined the chase which went from Olney west to the east end of runways at Pueblo airport. Then the helicopter disappeared to the north.

In describing the object, Smith said it was about 30 feet long, probably an olive drab color, and the little noise it made sounded like the whistling of air coming from a tire. It was about 250 yards away, and 40 to 50 feet in the air when he fired the gun.

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Other residents of the north county have also reported being chased by one or more helicopters in recent weeks. [The Fowler Tribune, Fowler, Colorado, 26 SEP 1975, p1, "Fowler Officer Takes Shot at Helicopter"] [Alamosa Valley Courier, Alamosa, Colorado, 24 SEP 1975, p1, "Costilla County: Cattle Mutilation Case Reported Near San Luis," by Miles Porter IV, Courier Staff Writer] [Summit County Journal, Breckenridge, Colorado, 10 OCT 1975, "Fires Shot at Helicopter"] [Record Stockman, Denver, Colorado, 16 OCT 1975, p1, "'Secret Witness' Joins Search for Mutilators," by Pat Kalahar]

During my 1980 research trip, I went to Fowler, Colorado, and tracked down Jess Lopez, who was working at a gas station. When I phoned him to ask for an interview about the helicopter chase, he agreed to meet me at a local restaurant. He told me Leonard Smith was out of town and not available.

When Jess arrived at the restaurant, I could tell he had recently showered. His hair was still damp and his clothes were fresh and sharply pressed. We introduced ourselves and I ordered a round of coffee. We started talking.

Me: On the night of September 22, 1975, you and Officer Leonard Smith responded to a CB call from a teenager who said he had crashed in a ditch after being chased by a helicopter. How did you get involved?

Jess: Well, Leonard and I were on duty and patrolling in the town's marked police car. We heard the kid call for help on the car's CB radio. We'd installed the radio a few months earlier because the kids in town were using CBs to fool us.

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Me: How so?

Jess: Well, we'd be sitting at one end of town, and we could hear lots of squealing tires at the other end. When we would get there to check it out, we would hear all the squealing back where we came from. When we'd get back there, we could hear it again at the other end of town. Each time we got to where the squealing tires were, the kids would all be on their best behavior, smiling and waving at us. They used their CB radios to coordinate so they could keep us running back and forth. That worked for a while, until we got the CB radio installed in the police car. Then we could hear what they were up to, and beat them at their own game.

Me: Was the teenager who called in the helicopter chase one of those teenagers?

Jess: I don't know for sure, but probably. He was five or six miles northeast of town, near Olney Springs. On the radio, he said he was being chased by a helicopter, and his voice was so terrified there was no question in my mind it was for real.

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We'd had a meeting a few days earlier of the Fowler Police Auxiliary, where we had discussed the cattle mutilations that had been reported in the area, and how helicopters were supposed to be involved. So when we heard that kid call for help, Leonard and I just naturally assumed it was one of the mutilator helicopters.

We had a quick talk about what to do. Since there was another policeman on duty, we decided to leave the town in his charge and go help the kid. Leonard said we should leave the police car in town and go get his own personal car because it was faster. He also wanted to get his .30-.30 rifle in case we spotted the helicopter and got close enough for a shot.

I told him that since we were on duty, maybe we shouldn't leave town. Leonard said that it was alright, that we would just take off our police jackets and put them in the back seat, and tell anyone, if they asked, that we were off duty. So that's what we did.

Me: So you got Leonard's car and his rifle?

EXCERPT

Jess: Yes. And it was the scariest ride of my life. He drove ninety and ninety-five miles an hour all the way. The tires squealed on every corner, the whole thing. But he seemed to be a very good driver.

After we got off the paved road and onto the dirt road that the kid was on, Leonard didn't slow down one bit. We were coming toward the kid from the east, still at ninety-five miles an hour. That's when I hollered at Leonard that I knew there was a sharp curve coming up, and he'd better slow down. So he hits the brakes, and we skidded and slewed around the curve. We stayed on the road, somehow. Then we barreled onto a bridge over an irrigation canal and went airborne. Wham! We slammed down hard on the other side. [*He slaps the table for emphasis*] But that didn't slow Leonard down one bit. He just jammed on the gas again.

That's when the kid turned his headlights on - said he'd turned them off to hide from the helicopter. He was in the ditch just up from the bridge. I guess he was scared we were gonna run him over. Probably would have. When Leonard saw his lights come on, he slammed on the brakes again, and we started sliding all over the place.

EXCERPT

We ended up stopping just ahead of the pick-up, facing the wrong way up the road.

Me: Scared?

Jess: Scared? Oh, Jesus, I thought I was gonna die!

Me: What about the kid?

Jess: I don't know - he probably thought he was gonna die, too.

Me: What happened next?

Jess: Well, the first thing we noticed when we got out of the car was the light. It was a real bright light, like a street light. It was hovering just above the ground about two hundred yards away.

The kid told us that he'd been heading down the dirt road when the helicopter swooped low over his pick-up from north to south. Then it swooped low over him from west to east. In all, he said it made three passes over him before he stopped the pickup, turned off the lights, and got out and hid. He said he figured they could have the pickup if they wanted it.

Me: The pilot made three low passes in the dark...?

EXCERPT

Jess: That's what the kid said. It really pissed Leonard off, so he fired a shot toward the light. Right away he hollered that he could feel from the recoil that he'd hit the helicopter. He even said he heard the bullet ricochet off it.

Me: Did you hear it?

Jess: Well, Leonard asked me that, too, and I told him that yes, I did, but actually I didn't, really. I remember being scared to death about what could happen to us from shooting at a helicopter. That's a federal offense. And what if he hit someone. Even worse.

Me: How could he hear a ricochet when the helicopter was so close, like maybe two football fields away? It seems like the engine and rotor noise would have drowned it out.

Jess: I don't recall hearing any noise from the helicopter at all. Not the engine or the rotor. It was very quiet.

Me: Then what happened.

Jess: Well, about the time he shot, the helicopter began to slowly lift off. So Leonard shouted that we should try to head it off. We jumped back into his car and started down the irrigation canal

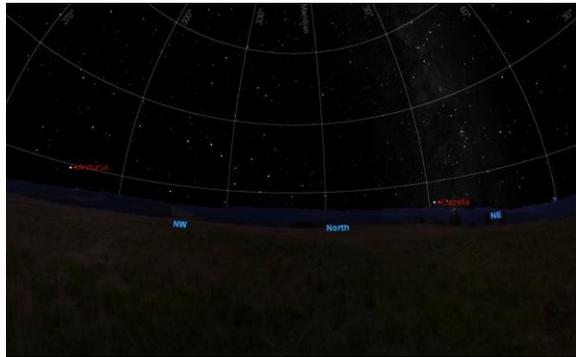
EXCERPT

bank toward it with the headlights off so the pilot wouldn't see us coming. Leonard was driving like a mad man, eighty and ninety miles an hour down the bank with no headlights. I was too scared to even think about watching the helicopter. I was praying and praying and praying.

Me: What did the helicopter look like?

Jess: Dunno. I never did see it. Just the light.

Me: Were you able to head it off.



The bright stars Arcturus setting in the west-northwest and Capella rising in the north-northeast at the time are possibly the lights that Leonard, Jess, and sheriff's deputies chased toward Pueblo. By this time, Jupiter had risen far enough above the eastern horizon to apparently look like nothing more than a bright star. [Starry Night™ image]

Jess: No. When we turned onto Route 96 from the canal bank, the helicopter was already to the west, and moving away from us. Leonard tried his best to catch up, still going ninety, ninety-five miles an hour again, and hollering at me to keep it in sight. But you

know I was too scared to watch it. I was too busy watching the road and the speedometer.

EXCERPT

So then, after a couple of miles, two other helicopters rose out of a nearby field and joined the one we were chasing. The three of them flew in a kind of formation, and when they were over Pueblo, they turned north and we lost them.

Me: So you chased the lights all the way to Pueblo?

Jess: Not all the way, maybe twenty, thirty miles or so, to where 96 and 50 meet. Then we went back to where the kid was. When we got there, there were all kinds of sheriff cars and commotion there.

I asked Leonard what we would do, what we would say, if someone told us the helicopter had been hit. He said because the helicopter had been scaring the locals, that was all the justification we needed. I did hear a news report the following afternoon over a Spanish language radio station in Pueblo that a helicopter had returned to Fort Carson the previous evening with a bullet hole in it. That was the only thing I ever heard about it. But it really scared me. I kept waiting for the FBI or someone to come around, but they never did. When you called me today at the gas station, I thought maybe you

EXCERPT

were with the federal police, that maybe the government was finally getting around to doing something about it. So I went home and cleaned up first, in case I was going to jail.

[We laughed.]

Me: Not to worry. I've talked with all kinds of helicopter pilots, civilian and military, and they all told me that no military or civilian helicopter they know of has ever returned to any base or airport with a bullet hole in it. Anyway, according to them, .30-.30 slugs would just bounce off a military helicopter's armor. They probably wouldn't even know they'd been hit.

Jess: That's a relief to know.

Me: Has anything that exciting happened around here since then?

Jess: No. That was enough excitement for my lifetime. And my last helicopter chase. [Interview with Jess Lopez on December 1, 1980, at a café in Fowler,

Colorado]

We leave 1975 behind now, and fast forward to 1980, the final year of my study. As that year began, the Colorado cattle mutilation delusion had receded to background levels, with only a handful of reports being filed each year. And then an event occurred which

EXCERPT

restored it to its old vigor: A Denver television station broadcast a locally-produced and widely-acclaimed cattle mutilation “documentary.”

Denver: ‘A Strange Harvest’ Begets A Strange Harvest

For the first five months of 1980, only one cattle mutilation had been reported in Colorado. The delusion had been sinking further and further into the background since its heyday in 1975. Then, during May of 1980, all of the changed; Denver television station KMGH broadcast a made-for-TV documentary about cattle mutilations in Colorado. It was like throwing gasoline on a smoldering fire.

The 90-minute documentary was called ‘A Strange Harvest’, and was written and produced by Linda Moulton Howe, a staffer at the television station. When the documentary was first aired on May 25, 1980, it was said to have drawn the largest audience for a locally produced program in the history of Denver television. It was so much in demand, in fact, that it was re-broadcast four months later, on September 6, 1980.

After each airing of ‘A Strange Harvest’, new cattle mutilation reports flooded sheriff’s offices around Colorado. Two months after the second airing, during November, 1980, I interviewed Weld County Sheriff Harold Andrews. I asked him if he thought the broadcasts had any effect on cattle mutilation reports in Weld County.

Me: According to my records, your department had around 25 cattle mutilation reports in 1975, and then it dropped off to almost zero.

EXCERPT

Sheriff Andrews: From 1976 up until the last month or two, we really haven't had any cattle mutilation reports. And now we've had about five, since the show aired.

Me: I've noticed that some other counties have also had sudden increases in the number of reports since 'A Strange Harvest' aired.

Sheriff Andrews: Well, I think most, if not all, of our mutilation reports, including those inspired by the TV program, are from natural causes. I have personally gone out on all of these calls because I think it's important to have one person see everything about them. That way, if a pattern develops, that person is likely to see it.

Me: But so far, nothing?

Sheriff Andrews: No. But if the county could afford it, I'd like to use a helicopter to go around to all the area counties that have had cattle mutilations and look at them as well. Maybe I could pick up something that could help me break the case.

Me: You don't think they're all by natural deaths and scavenging?

EXCERPT

Sheriff Andrews: There are those exceptions, you know, that make you wonder.

Me: Speaking of helicopters, I've read that in 1975, you had a lot of reports.

Sheriff Andrews: Oh, yeah, at the height of it all, we were getting two to three helicopter calls a night. Ranchers and farmers were skittish about lights in the sky, no question about it.

One thing I always looked for around carcasses in those days, to see if a helicopter was involved, was turned over cow chips, from the downdraft they make. Never did see any. But what I did notice is that you can hardly fly a helicopter over cattle without them running or stampeding if you're coming in low. So I don't think helicopters had anything to do with any mutilations, at least not while the critters were still alive.

But I will say that if there really were mutilators, helicopters would have made a lot of sense for them. Almost all the mutilation reports I've ever gone on are way back off a main road, half a mile or more. The land around here is flat and rolling, and there just aren't

EXCERPT

that many roads. Usually there are little, two-track dirt roads back into these areas that ranchers use to check their cattle. They eventually just peter out into the grassland. One of these lanes might serve four or five sections of land. They're usually unmarked, and you won't find them on any road map.

The way the ranchers check their cattle is to drive back into these areas every so often and check on the salt and water. And when they do, they also make a little circuit of the pasture, and that's when they see the dead, mutilated cattle, from the pick-up. And that's why they're almost always dead a few days and rotten.

I hated investigating them. When you finish looking over a carcass, you almost have to go home and change clothes because the smell is horrible, and it gets right into the fabric - sort of like campfire clothes smelling like smoke after a couple of days.

Lots of the carcasses were already full of maggots. It's disgusting, but when there is a full bloom of maggots on a cow carcass, it looks like the undulating waves of the ocean, the way they move. If

EXCERPT

you stand and stare at them long enough, it can almost make you seasick.

Me: Did you ever certify that a cow had been mutilated, either back in 1975 or now?

Sheriff Andrews: Well, there was a learning curve back in '75, and I don't think I ever came right out and said they were mutilated or natural, because I ... we just didn't know for sure. It was such a new thing.

But now, with experience, I can tell when a predator or scavenger has been at work right off the bat, and I tell the ranchers right up front. 'Course they don't want to believe it - and I feel kind of bad having to tell them they're wrong, because they believe so much that they have a mutilation.

Like a case I just had, the farmer followed me right up to my car door, sayin' things like, "Well, what do you think...I've got one, don't I?" and that sort of thing. I had to keep telling him that it looked like predators to me. [Interview with Weld County Sheriff Harold L. Andrews, Weld

EXCERPT

The rest of the 'Strange Harvest' story, which gets stranger and stranger, continues in the Colorado chapter.

As in the Nebraska chapter, these vignettes from the Colorado chapter of **Beef Jerkey** are a fair representation of the many other interviews I had around the state, and how they all tend to complement each other.

Likewise, the same is true in the next chapter, where the odyssey takes us to Iowa. As in Nebraska and Colorado, I was able to interview the main characters in that state's phase of the cattle mutilation delusion, including the state's chief law enforcement officer, who nearly created a constitutional crisis over cattle mutilations.