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Extraterrestrials in the Stacks: An Archivist's Journey with Alien Abduction, A Stained Blue Dress, and the Betty and Barney Hill Collection

WILLIAM ROSS

The Alleged Abduction

ON SEPTEMBER 19, 1961, BETTY AND BARNEY HILL, A COUPLE from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, reentered the United States following a belated honeymoon in Canada. They crossed northeastern Vermont before entering New Hampshire at Colebrook, where they dined at a small café. Although road weary and seventy miles from home, Barney calculated that they could reach Portsmouth by 3:00 A.M. and endeavored to drive straight through. Leaving the restaurant, Barney pointed their 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air south on US Route 3 heading to Lancaster, New Hampshire. After Lancaster, the road and the travelers turned southeast toward Franconia Notch. It was then that Betty became aware of lights in the sky. Before the night was over, the strange lights and the events that allegedly followed would forever change the course of their lives. In subsequent years, their descriptions of events that night, real or perceived, would cast them as central figures in interest surrounding the alien abduction of humans. And the accounts, research, and ephemera they collected to document those events, now housed at the University of New Hampshire, would both keep their story alive and provide source material for future debate (Fuller 17–20).

The Hills' story, communicated through varied mass media platforms, captured the public imagination and became a touchstone in the lore surrounding alien abduction. The alleged events made them both celebrities and an established part of the lexicon for those pursuing evidence of extraterrestrial life; their supposed abduction generated decades of debate between true believers, skeptics, and scientists, all while challenging traditional norms of cultural significance. By the time the Hills' files and memorabilia came to the University of New Hampshire, popular culture collections had long become an accepted part of archival collecting. Likewise, although the debate over the place of popular culture in the academy has waned, there remain questions and sometimes-sharp debate about the role of alien abduction apologists in academic discourse (Cowlshaw 610). For these reasons, this article serves as a reflection on the challenges for archivists seeking to avoid the roiled waters of these controversies while staying focused on maintaining and providing access to the collections in their custody. Archivists may strive to maintain neutrality even as certain documents and physical objects in their care emerge as such charged symbols of popular cultural significance that they become characters in a succession of disputed narratives involving the repository, nonetheless. Subsequently, the notoriety of the Hills' story has challenged archival norms in terms of audience, authority, and use of the collection.

Beyond the story that emerged from that September night, Betty and Barney Hill already stood out, particularly in racially homogeneous New Hampshire. Eunice "Betty" Barrett, a white New Hampshire native, was born in Kingston in 1919. She was a graduate of the University of New Hampshire and worked as a social worker and child advocate. Barney Hill, born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1923, was the African American son of a shipyard worker. After serving in the US Army, Barney became a postal worker in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, married, and fathered two children. Years later, Barney met Betty while visiting New Hampshire, separated from his wife, and secured a post office transfer to the New Hampshire seacoast. The couple shared liberal causes, religious beliefs, and together they became deeply involved in the New Hampshire civil rights movement. They married not long before their momentous trip to Canada (Friedman and Marden 23) (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Barney Hill delivering mail, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, late 1950s. Betty and Barney Hill Papers, Special Collections and Archives, UNH Library.

Basic facts about their trip are easily verifiable, but it is important to point out that most of the details of their alleged abduction emerged and were recorded while they were under hypnosis. By all accounts, the early part of their trip home from Montreal was uneventful. They cleared customs at a border crossing in northern Vermont before stopping for a bite to eat. It was a clear moonlit night, perfect for driving, but soon after they left the restaurant in Colebrook, New Hampshire, Betty began observing a bright point of light that streaked across the sky. She first thought it a falling star,

but it moved upward in the sky and became bigger and brighter. Betty urged Barney to stop at a picnic area south of Twin Mountain so that he could observe the object while they walked their dachshund, Delsey. Barney took the dog, while Betty used his binoculars to follow the object, later reporting that as she watched, "it changed direction and passed in front of the moon . . . I was puzzled, for this satellite was flashing multi-colored lights that cast several beams like a police cruiser" (Hill 17).

Barney scoffed at Betty's notion that the object might be a flying saucer; however, he quickly changed his mind when the mysterious craft stopped and rapidly descended in their direction. The couple returned to their car and continued to watch the object as it passed behind the mountain peaks that flank Franconia Notch. Barney drove slowly to observe the unidentified phenomena, and as they passed another geologic landmark, Indian Head, the object reportedly descended over their vehicle, obscuring their forward view. Thoroughly shaken, Barney stopped the car in the middle of the highway and got out carrying the binoculars and a handgun. He described the craft as a huge pancake and, using his binoculars, reported seeing eight to eleven beings lining the windows observing his approach. Later, under hypnosis, Barney described one individual he likened to a "military pilot," adding, "I looked at him, and he looked at me." The other figures withdrew, but Barney remained fixated on the leader: "I continued to look at this one man that just stood there, and I kept looking at him and looking at him" (Fuller 140) (Figure 2).

Barney described them as humanoids who wore black uniforms and black hats, although the supposed leader was distinct from the others. As a long structure came down from the craft, Barney ran back to the car, yelling to Betty that the occupants of the craft intended to capture them. He told Betty to continue watching the object as he put the car into gear and drove away at high speed. Betty rolled down the car window just as a series of rhythmic series of beeping and buzzing sounds came over them. At that point, the Hills recalled losing consciousness; they came to, with Barney still driving, some thirty-five miles beyond their last known stop at Indian Head (Fuller 32).

They arrived at their home in Portsmouth at dawn, hours later than Barney had figured. Tired and confused from their night on the road, they went to bed for a few hours. When they awakened, they

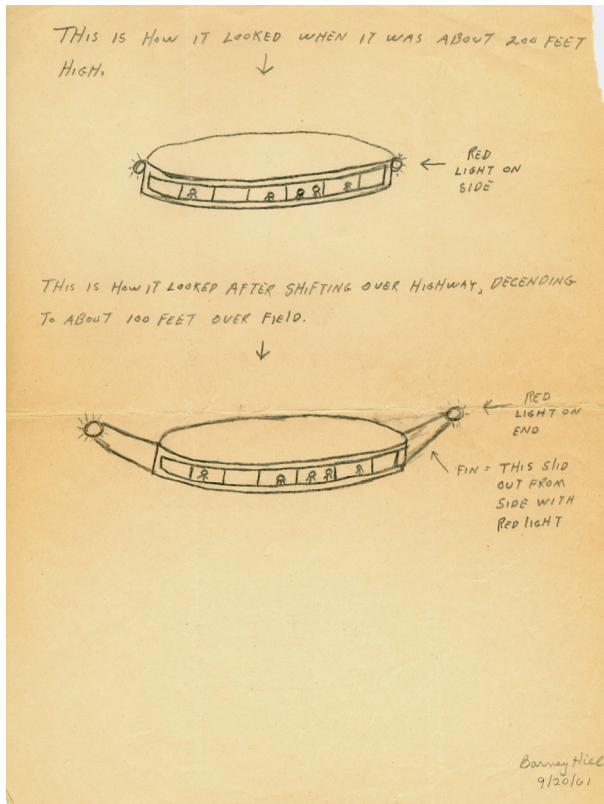


FIGURE 2. Barney Hill's drawings of the UFO with occupants, 20 Sept. 1961. Betty and Barney Hill Papers, Special Collections and Archives, UNH Library.

discovered a pink powdery substance and discoloration on Betty's blue dress; worn only twice, Betty found its zipper broken and its lining torn at the hem. The straps to Barney's binoculars were broken and their watches had stopped. They also found silver dollar-sized circles on the trunk of their car that they later discovered would respond to magnetism (Fuller 35). In the days that followed, Betty tentatively reported the incident to the US Air Force at nearby Pease Air Force Base and to a member of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), a civilian organization that operated from the 1950s into the 1980s. The former discounted Betty's

account, while researchers from NICAP considered their story plausible (Friedman and Marden 37).

Ten days after their return, Betty experienced a series of vivid dreams over five consecutive nights in which she recounted some details of their abduction. The dreams made her anxious, and at the suggestion of a friend, Betty typed out the details, which included their capture and experience on the craft, her examination, and their return to their vehicle.¹ Barney did not experience such dreams. Although he was sympathetic to her experience, Betty did not mention them further. Shortly thereafter, NICAP members C. D. Jackson and Robert E. Hohmann interviewed the Hills again. It was during that encounter that the investigators raised the concept of “missing time” to explain the lost hours. In addition, they suggested hypnosis as a means to retrieve lost memories. Barney was apprehensive; however, he thought it might assuage the anxiety stemming from Betty’s dreams (Friedman and Marden 49–56).

In the months following, the Hills returned to the White Mountains in an unsuccessful effort to piece together what had happened, but apart from previous interviews, they kept their story to themselves. The Hills broke their silence in March 1963, when they disclosed details of their abduction during a meeting at their church, the First Universalist Church of Portsmouth. The following September, Air Force Captain Ben H. Swett gave a talk about hypnosis at the church. Following his presentation, the Hills discussed the promise of hypnosis with him, and he advised them to work through a mental health care provider. As a result, Barney spoke with his psychiatrist, who referred them to Dr. Benjamin Simon of Boston. In November 1963, prior to meeting with Simon, the Hills shared their story with the Two State UFO Study Group in Quincy Center, Massachusetts (Fuller 69; Friedman and Marden 68).

The Hills met with Simon on December 14, 1963. Although skeptical of their story, Simon gauged the anxiety stemming from their supposed experience, particularly from Barney, who appeared to have repressed his feelings and recollections. During the first half of 1964, Simon hypnotized the Hills multiple times, but in separate sessions so that their stories would remain distinct. After each session, he reinstated amnesia. While under hypnosis, each displayed fearful memories of their alleged encounters and both described their examinations on board the alien craft and eventual release. Betty’s

accounts differed somewhat from the dreams she experienced in the wake of their alleged abduction. Betty and Barney shared significant details of the events of that night and displayed considerable emotional distress when recounting their experiences. Simon suggested that Betty, after hypnosis, freely draw the star map shown to her by her captors without thinking about it.²

In the end, Simon believed that Barney's recollections were fueled by Betty's dreams from 1961 and concluded that their abduction was improbable. Betty disagreed, believing that the sessions validated her dreams following the incident. Barney vacillated, eventually enmeshing his known experience with what had come out under hypnosis; he came to accept the recalled events, but never to the extent that Betty did. In the end, even though Simon and the Hills came to different conclusions regarding their case, the hypnosis sessions seemed to free Betty and Barney from longstanding anxiety, purportedly stemming from the events of September 1961 (Fuller 319). Many subsequent reviews of the facts of case and the results of the hypnosis sessions would be far more critical.³

The relative calm ended in August 1965 when a friend told them that a Boston reporter, John H. Luttrell, was interviewing friends and acquaintances about their story. Worried that the news might affect their jobs, the Hills' pleaded with him not to run the story and refused to be interviewed by him. On October 25, 1965, the *Boston Traveler* newspaper published a front page article titled "UFO Chiller—Did THEY Seize Couple?" His five-installment story exploded worldwide, and the Hills took issue with both the invasion of their privacy and inaccuracies in his reporting. They eventually responded by signing a book deal with writer John G. Fuller so that they could fashion their own narrative (Friedman and Marden 185).

While the publication of that book, *The Interrupted Journey* (1966), gave the Hills control of their own story, it thrust them more into the limelight, and they responded to their notoriety in different ways. They participated in speaking engagements and media appearances, but Barney was never comfortable with celebrity, preferring to focus on his work as a letter carrier and his growing political activism, especially as it related to civil rights. In addition, his health began to deteriorate, which led him to quit smoking and watch his diet. Despite these efforts, Barney suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in February 1969 and died shortly thereafter at the age of forty-six (Friedman

and Marden 228). While Betty more comfortably embraced the attention, Barney's death devastated her; however, by the early 1970s, she renewed her research, initially focusing on the star map she had drawn from muscle memory. For the next twenty years, Betty continued her investigation and kept detailed accounts of her encounters with extraterrestrials. She corresponded with others, collected related materials, and shared her story with an eager and engaged audience (269).

In 1991, forty years after the incident that made her famous, Betty abruptly retired from her advocacy regarding extraterrestrial encounters, having become disenchanted with the community of UFO believers that she helped foster. Betty told her niece, Kathleen Marden, that "there were too many kooks . . . who knew too little about the UFO field. They accept fantasy as if it were reality and distort information to fit their own purposes" (Friedman and Marden 281). She began working with her niece and a friend to produce a memoir detailing her life experiences and thirty years of research in the field. Both Benjamin Simon and John Fuller had died, which freed Betty to tell her own story in her self-published *A Common Sense Approach to UFOs* (1995). In the years that followed, according to Marden, Betty's health was in serious decline. On October 17, 2004, after a long and painful fight, Betty died from lung cancer (284).

The Hill Collection Comes to UNH

While Betty's writings, research, and presentations helped define her life and work, she also wanted to ensure that her papers, photographs, artwork, and other ephemera were maintained to support future inquiry. Departmental files note that in the late 1980s, through an intermediary, Betty contacted the Special Collections Department in the UNH Library about her collection. A representative from the department went to her house in Portsmouth, surveyed the materials she maintained there, and discussed the possibility of a donation, but in the end, Betty proved unwilling to make a commitment. Years later, in 2002, Betty renewed contact through a long-time friend, Valerie Cunningham; as a result, Cunningham, the special collections librarian, and a member of the English faculty met with Betty at her home. This time Betty was better prepared to decide and made clear

her plans to bequeath her collection to the library upon her death (Hill Papers. Administrative Files).

In November 2006, Marden, serving as the executor for the Hill estate, legally transferred the Betty and Barney Hill Collection to Special Collections, just as Betty had agreed to years before. At the time, the repository maintained meager popular culture holdings, notably the files of a New Hampshire science fiction poet and some original art and initial issues of the *Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles* comic book series, which had been produced locally. While the Special Collections Department's collecting policy did not specifically include or exclude such collections, the Hills were noteworthy and local civil rights activists, and Betty Hill wanted her collection at her alma mater (Hill Papers. Administrative Files). Moreover, the acceptance of the Hills' papers and memorabilia provided Special Collections with the opportunity to broaden its collecting, with an eye toward both underrepresented populations and nontraditional research areas.

The decision reflected that by century's end archival repositories had become considerably more accepting of popular culture collections, as documented in Betsy J. Blosser and Gretchen Lagana's "Popular Culture in the Rare Book and Special Collections Department." Their survey highlights both the desire to democratize collecting and growing comfort with nonprint formats when print documentation did not exist (125). Likewise, Ann Larabee, while celebrating five decades of advocacy on behalf of popular culture studies, lauds those who stood for "a broadening of the humanities to better reflect cultural diversity and taste" (573). In the wake of political and intellectual upheaval, advocates increasingly defied cultural gatekeepers to study diverse cultural forms from every possible level.

The acquisition of the Hill collection did emphasize the role that archivists have in furthering the study of popular culture. Under review, the collection appeared ordinary, consisting primarily of paper files, but it also featured nonprint materials and three-dimensional items, such as artwork and even clothing. These materials brought with them both research value and symbolic weight in a sphere of inquiry uncommon in most academic archives. George Lipsitz highlights the importance of the historian and archivist in preserving such documentation, of ensuring that such evidence finds its way into the archives. For Lipsitz, "To control the archives is to control

representation. Presence in the archive translates into presence in histories" (14). Moreover, the acceptance of a collection containing iconography so entwined with popular interest in alien abduction would surely reflect on the repository itself.

The actual transfer of the collection took place two years after Betty Hill's death. Marden, serving as trustee of the Eunice B. Hill Revocable Trust, had authority over the estate and the bequest to the UNH Library. However, during that time period, Marden had invited author and lecturer Stanton T. Friedman to work on a retelling of the Hills' story, this time combining narrative drawn from the hypnosis transcripts used by John Fuller for *The Interrupted Journey*, evidence from Betty's collection, and their own research. The legal transfer eventually took place in late November; Marden and the library's representative signed the gift agreement on November 28, 2006. Marden attached a signed addendum to the standard gift agreement that included a couple of unusual requirements. The first makes a standard provision that if the library should choose not to maintain the collection, "its representatives will make every effort to contact the Hills' surviving family members" and return it to them. In the absence of an heir to the estate, the collection was to be transferred to a named university in Boston, again not an unusual provision; failing that, the collection would go to either the Center for UFO Studies or the Mutual UFO Network, both outside a neutral, academic realm. In addition, the agreement required that Betty's stained blue dress, the one she wore the night of the alleged abduction, be "made available to reputable scientific laboratories for chemical and forensic analysis." Sections of the stained portions of the dress had already been removed at various times for study, and the agreement required that "additional swaths . . . be donated based upon the qualifications of the individual." Clearly such a requirement was out of normal bounds for a gift transfer, as the primary objective of the curator is to preserve items intact. The provision reflects the primacy of the dress—and to a lesser extent, other artifacts—among more traditional documentation and continued public interest in these bears this out. And finally, Marden made clear that she, as trustee, "made every effort to protect the identity of individuals who have communicated sensitive information to Betty Hill." As a result, the collection includes some previously redacted correspondence (Hill Papers, Administrative Files) (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. Betty Hill, wearing the blue dress, on their return from Montreal, prior to the alleged abduction, 19 Sept. 1961. Betty and Barney Hill Papers, Special Collections and Archives, UNH Library.

Previous discussions with and descriptions from Betty and her niece made it clear to library staff that this was not a typical collection. Some items, like Betty's stained blue dress, held iconic status within the community of alien abduction believers. The sections removed for scientific analysis only contributed to the symbolic role the dress has played in efforts to confirm and transmit the Hills' narrative. Other noteworthy items in the collection included Betty's star map and the couple's drawings of the spacecraft and their abductors. Like the dress, the star map was iconic and had become the source of longstanding study and debate (Figure 4). In addition, the Hill

collection included paintings by New Hampshire artist David Baker, who painted these at Dr. Simon's home from details provided by Barney while he was under hypnosis (Hill 95). The collection did not contain any of the star map models that Marjorie Fish created from Betty's hypnosis-driven drawings nor did it include any of Betty's typed notes from the series of nightmares she experienced after the alleged abduction. However, the collection did include the alien bust sculpted by Fish, based on composite features of the Hills' captors as represented in Baker's paintings. Fashioned from window screen covered in painted fiberglass, Betty named the sculpted amalgam "Zeta," after Zeta Reticuli, which Fish determined from her star map to be the captors' star system of origin (Hill 27). But as Betty shared her experiences of "Zeta" at local schools, the students would dub the figure "Junior," a moniker that stuck over time (Hill 95).

Anticipating scrutiny about the handling of such value-laden popular culture items, Special Collections staff took special care in how they applied the repository's policies and procedures governing the processing and description of collections. Given the real possibility that those outside of the academy might become suspicious that files would be embargoed, purposefully lost, or otherwise removed, librarians conferred over decisions regarding processing, description, and

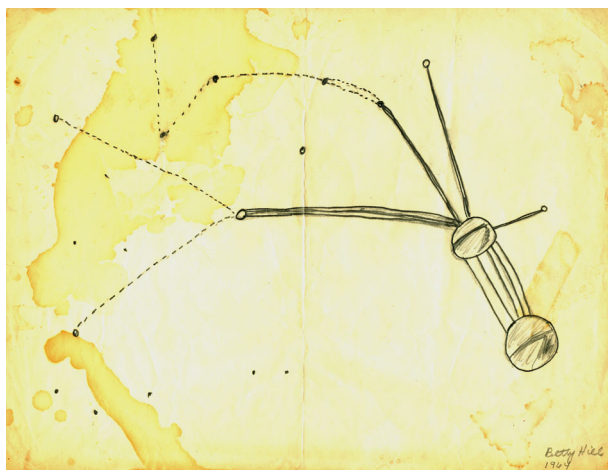


FIGURE 4. Betty Hill's star map drawing, spring 1964. Betty and Barney Hill Papers, Special Collections and Archives, UNH Library.

access, consistently erring on the side of transparency. This caution is borne out by Karen Buckley in her reflection on how archives and archivists are portrayed in popular culture. She represents an uneasy balance of possibly incompetent or untrustworthy cultural custodians, as some stereotypes suggest, simultaneously being charged with guarding society's irreplaceable symbols and treasures (95). Staff likewise recognized that even the location of the Special Collections unit, below grade in the library, might contribute to popular cultural stereotyping about materials of cultural significance being squirreled away in an inaccessible basement.

The Betty and Barney Hill Papers, as the collection is officially titled, are comprised primarily of Betty's correspondence, writings, research files, and nonprint media, such as photographs, films, and magnetic media (including audio and video files). Staff initially surveyed the unprocessed collection, both to discern the extent to which it was organized and to identify any preservation concerns. They decided to maintain the basic file structure, which followed Betty's filing system. The primary preservation concerns included materials housed in acidic filing folders and the condition of audio and videotapes. Student workers replaced old file folders with archival folders and placed the collection in a mix of document boxes and oversized boxes to accommodate both files and large format publications, artworks, and oversized ephemera. A collection description, including biographical information, research information, and folder level description is available online (Hill Papers, Administrative Files and Guide to the Hill Papers).

The collection contains considerable correspondence, largely addressed to Betty, from dozens of individuals and representatives of various institutions and media outlets. Significant correspondents include John Fuller, Marjorie Fish, and UFO investigator Robert Hohmann. As suggested by the codicil to the gift agreement, this series includes four folders of redacted correspondence. Another series contains Betty's spiral notebooks, containing descriptions of her UFO encounters; these, along with typed transcriptions of them, which she called her journals, date from 1977 to her "retirement" in 1991. Betty also maintained subject files on her case, as well as articles and clippings about other alien abduction cases. Other parts of the collection contain drafts of her writings, contracts for media appearances and speaking engagements, as well as extensive photographs, film,

and audio/videotape. And finally, there is a small series of materials relating to Barney's long-time membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and service on the New Hampshire Civil Rights Commission (Guide to the Hill Papers).

The Hills in Popular Culture

Clearly, the celebrity of the Betty and Barney Hill story factored in the decision to accept the collection. While the documentation of their local civil rights activism could provide one rationale for accessioning their materials, particularly considering Special Collections' collection development guidelines, the documentation surrounding their alleged abduction constitutes the bulk of the collection. By the time that Marden approached Special Collections to carry out her aunt's wishes, more than forty years had passed since the incident gained worldwide attention. In the meantime, their story had become enmeshed in popular culture, with their descriptions significantly informing the representation of extraterrestrial lifeforms in popular culture. The case has served as source material for articles, movies, and television programming, and even after Betty's death in 2004, the Hills and the account of their experience had become akin to a creation myth among believers, skeptics, and scholars who referenced the story.

It might be useful to review how the Hills, who were reluctant to share their story, gained international notoriety. As described previously, in the wake of their drive from Montreal, they quietly strove to piece together what had happened, sharing the details of that night with investigators, mental health professionals, and a small group of friends. That all came to an end on October 25, 1965, when the *Boston Traveler* newspaper published the article about the Hills' alleged abduction. The reporter published the story against their wishes, leading with the sensational, front page story line: "A night of terror, of confrontation and abduction by occupants of a space ship from another planet had been related by a New Hampshire couple under clinical hypnosis" (Luttrell 1). What had been shared reluctantly within a small circle was shared internationally when United Press International picked up the story. The account drew the

attention of New England writer John H. Fuller, who secured the cooperation of the Hills and their hypnotist Dr. Benjamin Simon. Fuller's account, based largely on transcripts of Simon's hypnosis tapes, was excerpted in two issues of *Look Magazine* in October 1966 (Fuller "Aboard"). A teaser for the first installment, published in the October 4th issue, shared the cover with actress Elizabeth Taylor. That same year, Dial Press published Fuller's full retelling in book form under the title *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours "Aboard a Flying Saucer."* Through Fuller, the Hills regained control of their own narrative. The book remains in print, and believers consider it the first account of alien abduction based on actual witnesses and credible documentation (Fuller).

In this effort to control their own narrative, the Hills and their story gained greater attention. As part of publicity for the book, the couple made themselves available for several radio and television interviews throughout the country. In December of 1966, Barney Hill appeared on the CBS prime time game show *To Tell the Truth*, where celebrity panelists queried Hill and two imposters to determine the real alien abductee. The host's introduction of the segment clearly drew from Fuller's book.⁴ Years later, television writer and director S. Lee Pogostin would draw on Fuller's book to write *The UFO Incident*, a made-for-television movie. It starred Estelle Parsons and James Earl Jones as the couple and aired on October 20, 1975 (*The UFO Incident*). The Hills' story also provided source material for both the *X-Files* episode "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" and the alien-themed NBC series *Dark Skies*, both of which were broadcast in 1996. Such exposure heightened interest in their story and all of its supporting evidence ("Jose Chung"; *Dark Skies*).

Perhaps the most serious discussion of the case came from astrophysicist Carl Sagan in his landmark 1980 series *Cosmos*. Toward the end of the series, in an episode entitled "Encyclopaedia Galactica," Sagan discusses the search for extraterrestrial life in the universe while sharing his skepticism about UFOs. The episode opens with a dramatization of the Hills' abduction. Sagan goes on to question the validity of Betty's famous "star map" and describe the lack of underlying scientific evidence to support their story. Clearly, Sagan used the segment to prove that science did not support the story of the Hills' abduction nor the underlying evidence ("Encyclopaedia Galactica"). In a review of Betty's correspondence with Fuller about the episode,

Barbara Mervine described their irritation at being dismissed on national television. Their letters, housed in the collection, show that they threatened to sue Sagan's producers for copyright infringement; however, no lawsuits resulted (Mervine).

As a direct result of such publicity, whether sought after or not, the Hills' alleged abduction and the collection that bears their name remain central to both scholarship and public interest in alien abduction and also directly and indirectly contributes to prevailing interpretations of the meaning of alien abduction in popular culture. Stephanie Kelley-Romano views their narrative as foundational to the development of a "Myth of Communion" shared by the scores of individuals who claim to have been abducted. These living myths emerged from the Roswell incident of 1947, but when combined with the abduction narratives of Betty and Barney Hill, those who followed "produced a set of narratives that continue to increase in complexity in both form and function" (384). To Kelley-Romano, the growth in the acceptance of this belief system reflects both sexual and racial anxieties while illustrating the firmness and rapidity with which these stories have ingrained themselves into society (394). Others have pointed to the Hills' case as a precursor to ongoing themes in the literature. Patricia Felisa Barbeito recognizes the Hills' account as "a blueprint for the veritable avalanche of narratives that has been published since" (201). Moreover, their experience harkens back to colonial American captivity narratives describing Europeans, often women, being taken by Indigenous people. These publications became early American bestsellers; alien abduction accounts, beginning with *The Interrupted Journey*, are equally sensational and reflect similar sexual and racial anxieties. In fact, the site of the Hills' supposed capture at Indian Head in the White Mountains even mirrors the visceral conflict between civilization and wilderness rife in these earlier captivity narratives (203). In sum, the Hills are the progenitors of narratives that rehearse the cultural meanings of alien abduction, especially those regarding racial anxiety, both as it relates to their interracial marriage and to the heightened racial tensions present during the American Civil Rights Era.⁵

The impact of the Hills' story has also tangibly influenced how aliens are portrayed in popular culture. The descriptions of their alleged captors, preserved by the artistic representations they commissioned, became central to what skeptic Joe Nickell has termed

“extraterrestrial iconography.” Whether true or not, their descriptions influenced a wide range of visual media over the decades that followed. Nickell’s wry, visual chronology of how aliens have been portrayed over time acknowledges the Hills’ singular influence (18–19). Nonetheless, despite such playful treatment of the topic, serious debate remains about the place and meaning for academic inquiry into alien abduction. Bridget Roussell Cowlshaw has pointed to attempts by some scholars to bring a serious discussion of alien abduction to scholarly discourse. She contends that “these academics have manufactured a rhetorical space in which to speak from professional expertise, while at the same time enacting rhetorical conventions . . . that limit the validity of ‘expertise’” (593). Her pointed criticism and identification of the unscientific and biased intellectual frameworks leaves plenty of room to examine the *meaning* of what alien abduction represents, particularly as it relates to the American experience (610). And it is here where the Hills and their collection of files and artifacts provide an interpretive battleground for future debate, writing, and reflection on the subject.

Current Interest in the Collection

From the beginning of discussions with Betty Hill over the placement of her papers, those negotiating the gift knew that hers could never be considered a “normal” collection. For over a decade, the division has hosted scores of researchers, curious visitors, and schoolchildren, while fielding online queries and research requests from around the world. Visitors range from historians and scholars with experience using archival collections to curious observers anticipating a large, permanent display about the Hills and their collection. In addition, there has been a healthy mix of true believers and skeptics, and it is not uncommon for visitors to know considerably more about the details of the Hills’ abduction than those staffing the reference desk. Special Collections has also experienced a healthy amount of what staff have identified as “alien abduction tourism,” aided and abetted by the fact that the collection has its own page in *Atlas Obscura*, which consists of both an online and print guide “to the world’s hidden wonders.” To make it a little less “hidden,” the division maintains an exhibit case dedicated to the Hills, with items from the

collection featured on a rotating basis. When the exhibit is not up, staff know the collection's "greatest hits" and pull them on demand. This interest parallels the popularity of a New Hampshire state historical marker, erected in Lincoln near Indian Head in 2011, to mark the spot of the Hills' alien encounter; it is reputed to be the most visited historical marker in the state.

While scholars focus on the interpretation of narratives such as the Hills' using the archives to construct historical representations, many of those outside the academy are more likely to embrace the Hills' narrative as truth, encouraged by the tangible and visual source material they left behind. The contents of the collection, from Betty's blue dress to her notebooks containing decades of accounts of her contacts with aliens, serve as totems to believers and targets for skeptics. For example, Marden made extensive use of the evidence in the Hill collection when writing her book with Stanton Friedman. While focused on the narrative drawn from the hypnosis tapes, they also used investigative reports, Betty's writings, Fish's analysis of the star map, and the results of testing done on Betty's blue dress. Marden and Friedman published the results of their investigation in 2007, a few months after the collection came to the UNH Library. It built on earlier narratives while attempting to refute the work of skeptics, and, since its publication, skeptics have zestfully countered, often by sifting through the evidence in the collection. Thus, truth often exists most firmly in the eye of the beholder.

2011 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Hills' fateful trip through the White Mountains, an occasion that reinvigorated interest in their case. Along with the erection of the aforementioned historical marker near Indian Head in Lincoln, New Hampshire, the Travel Channel approached the library about filming a segment on the case for a new series, *Mysteries in the Museum*. The production took place over two days, shutting down the reading room and public areas within Special Collections. While the production attempted to retell the events of the alleged abduction, much of the focus was on Betty's blue dress. The production confirmed its status as both museum object and document, its centrality echoing both the cultural and sexual anxieties transmitted through frontier captivity narratives. While the episode drew renewed attention to the collection, the production disrupted library services and demanded a large amount of the staff's

time. As a result of the experience, the division adopted policies and a fee structure to govern any large-scale filming in the future.

Other recent television productions have focused on either the Hill case or materials from the collection that bears their names. During the summer of 2017, producers for the TBS situation comedy *People of Earth* approached the library for large-scale images of Betty and Barney Hill. The images proved central to a scene involving an interracial couple becoming acquainted with the Hills' story while visiting an exhibition on alien abduction. The episode aired on September 11, 2017, and the experience working with the production highlighted the potential for commercial licensing for materials, particularly images, from the collection. More recently, *Project Blue Book*, a History Channel dramatic series about UFO investigations during the 1950s and 1960s, aired an episode, "Abduction," based on the Hill case. In addition, the show's website features an accompanying video entitled "Project Blue Book: Declassified—The True Story of The Hill Abduction." The use of images, video, and sound recordings in the video illustrates the extent to which materials from the collection have been copied, shared, and used online as source material for websites, blogs, and videos. At the same time, popular podcasts retell decades-old events and, in the process, introduce the Hills' story to a whole new generation.⁶

The Future

The UNH Library's Special Collections and Archives Division maintains the papers of many culturally significant Americans, including US Senators, Pulitzer Prize-winning poets, and scores of other notable collections related to New Hampshire history and culture. However, the Hill collection clearly stands out as a unique resource that draws multilayered interest.⁷ The distinction highlights the difference between traditional norms of cultural significance and one that has taken meaning from both its centrality and the sustenance it provides to the ongoing debate over alien abduction. Since 2006, Special Collections has entertained researchers, true believers, and committed skeptics, who on occasion use the Hill collection in the reading room at the same time. It reflects the professional ethos that repositories provide equal access to researchers regardless of their viewpoint,

reflecting a tension that is not just tolerated but encouraged. More broadly, web statistics show that the collection guide for the Hill collection garners far more online traffic than any other of the division's holdings. From July 2019 through June 2020, it received over 17 percent of all online visits, five times more than the next most popular page, thus far outpacing the repository's nearly 1,300 other guides (Drupal Web Analytics).⁸

This high level of interest underscores the need to maintain the collection with all due transparency, both for now and into the future. While this has been a goal since the beginning, going forward it is imperative for the original contents of the collection to remain largely intact, just as Betty left them. Any future materials would be accessioned separately and duly described as additional material. Thus, the Hill Collection should exist as the authoritative source for materials documenting their alleged abduction and Betty's work during the three decades following. To that end, standard reading room and reference policies are in place to ensure that researchers have unmediated access to its contents so that they might draw their own conclusions from their contact with the materials.

Plans are underway to make contents of the collection available digitally as part of the library's digital collections, as well as through partnerships such as the Digital Public Library of America. In addition to furthering access, such efforts will provide researchers with digital surrogates, both to broaden access and save wear and tear on fragile originals. This will happen even though documents, images, and other materials from the collection have been duplicated, with surrogates populating a myriad of sites across the internet. The response to this unauthorized distribution should be the establishment of a definitive source with open access to materials for research and learning. At the same time, the university is looking at the potential for commercial licensing for images and documents, with proceeds dedicated to providing long-term access to the collection.

Clearly, this collection is central to popular culture's debate over alien abduction, and interest seems to be growing rather than waning. Decisions regarding the maintenance of the collection reflect this, for instance in the conservation work done to stabilize "Junior," the alien bust derived from Barney's description while under hypnosis. This work was done in recognition of its importance to the commonplace representation of aliens in popular culture. With

conservation work done, his growing cracks stabilized, “Junior” is now prepared to serve as a model for extraterrestrials for the moment and into the future (Figure 5). The same goes for Betty’s research and writing, the star map, her blue dress, and other representation of the captors in their alleged abduction. As a result, the Betty and Barney Hill Papers should serve as a source of research, inquiry, and popular interest for generations to come.



FIGURE 5. Betty and Zeta, aka “Junior,” 1990s. Betty and Barney Hill Papers, Special Collections and Archives, UNH Library.

Notes

1. These typescripts are not a part of the collection that came to the UNH Library in 2006; however, John Fuller, in *The Interrupted Journey*, recounted that Betty had them with her two years later when she arrived for her first hypnosis session.
2. A detailed account of the Hills' hypnosis sessions, as well as transcriptions of the sessions themselves, comprise the majority of Fuller's book.
3. Perhaps the most famous rejection of the Hills' story was a segment by astrophysicist Carl Sagan during his *Cosmos* series, discussed later. Among others, Sagan included an analysis of the Hills' hypnosis transcripts in Anne Skomorowsky's "Alien Abduction or 'Accidental Awareness'" and a takedown of Betty's star map in Terence Dickinson's "The Zeta Reticuli (or Ridiculi) Incident."
4. Other guests on the show include actresses Bette Davis and Kaye Ballard.
5. Several recent authors have echoed these themes, particularly in regards to race. Good examples include Drysdale and Tromly.
6. Among recent podcasts featuring the Hills' story are: "LAST PODCAST ON THE LEFT," "Lore," and "And That's Why We Drink."
7. Among the notable collections maintained by the UNH Library's Special Collections are the papers of Amy Beach, the pioneering American woman composer; the papers and images of German-American photographer Lotte Jacobi; and the papers of former US poets laureate, Donald Hall and Charles Simic. For others, go to: <https://www.library.unh.edu/find/special>
8. The Hill Papers drew 7,205 views. The next highest, the papers of American composer Amy Cheney Beach had, 1,361 views.

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