

The Atheist

August 1998

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization

P.O. Box 3798
Austin, Texas
78764
512-371-2911

www.atheist-community.org

16 August 1998
Volume 2 No. 3

Contents:

Freethought Cenotaph Update
IRC Chat; A Community For Atheists And Freethinkers
Newsletter
News
Book Review - Jesus Christ Jr.
Announcements
ACA to Host Atheist Alliance Convention
Your ACA board of directors
A Quote to put on your refrigerator
ACA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Freethought Cenotaph Update

The monolith was set in the Comfort Park on July 27th. After months of searching and miles of traveling to numerous rock quarries and creek beds throughout central Texas, what was thought to be the near-perfect natural stone was finally selected. It turned out to be somewhat larger than planned because of the difficulty in measuring it due to the rugged terrain, other stones stacked around it, the oppressive heat cooking our brains, and the ever concern of avoiding the numerous rattlesnakes frequenting the site. It took two gigantic earthmovers several hours to move this stone up the half-mile road from the bottom of the 130' deep pit back up to the rim from which it had fallen. It had to be removed before rains came since there is no drainage in a quarry pit. We spent a week (in blazing temperatures) with a jackhammer, saws, drills, chisels, and rock hammers cutting down one irregular spot. The stone occupies a prominent place in the Comfort Park, and those that have seen it think its impressive size is befitting of the contributions of the early Freethinkers it commemorates. Go see for yourself!

The bronzed American Bald Eagle for the top of the monolith is ready. It will be installed as soon as agreement can be reached on its placement. The inscription for the Official Texas Historical Marker is still under discussion. Keep your fingers crossed that we will make the Oct. 4th dedication. We have the Comfort Park reserved for the dedication ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 4th, from 1 to 6 p.m. The cost is \$800, including a refundable \$500 if we leave the park clean.

Tax-deductible donations should be sent to the Comfort Heritage Foundation; Attn: Eugene Konde, Treasurer; PO Box 433; Comfort, TX 78013. Checks should be made out to the "Comfort Heritage Foundation" and noted on the bottom, "Freethought Cenotaph."

Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation is planning to attend. As some of you know, he is quite entertaining, so Catherine Fahringer is asking that anyone interested in an evening meal in Comfort (with Dan performing), contact her ASAP at (210) 824-5061.

On Sunday, August 16th, at the Family Korner Restaurant in Boerne, we will discuss final details of the Cenotaph and dedication ceremony. The only way this historic event will be successful is if each of us will not only attend and participate, but volunteer to get involved early on in one of the following areas:

Promotion: Contact Julie Fisher (210) 354-3311 or Email: zoe@@a-omega.net,
Parade: Contact Al Scharf (210) 534-7612 or Kellen von Houser (512) 916-9832 or Email: atheist@atheist-community.org,
Video/Photo: Contact Darren Scharf (210) 695-8778
PA System: Contact Kip Scharf (210) 534-2252
Research: (In German) Contact Irene Scharf (210) 695-8008 or Ed Wilding (210) 655-6066
Display Tables: Contact Jan King (210) 690-1052
Program: Contact Ed Scharf (210) 695-2533 or Email: edscharf@hotmail.com -Ed Scharf

Comfort Trip

The Cenotaph will commemorate the existence of some 1500-2000 religion-free German immigrants who settled in the Hill Country around Comfort in the middle of the last century. A parade is to begin at the Treue der Union Monument, burial site of about 40 young men, mostly Freethinkers, who were killed trying to escape the Confederacy during the Civil War. The dedication itself will begin at about 3:00PM.

ACA will be renting a bus to go to Comfort Texas and carry our banner in the parade. Ms. Fahringer says the cost for both the dinner and Dan Barkers concert will be somewhere around \$25 per person. For more details, see the Announcements. The Cenotaph dedication and related activities will provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to celebrate our atheism AND our atheist heritage. Come join us in what will be a day to remember!

IRC Chat; A Community For Atheists And Freethinkers

IRC internet chat protocol was designed around 1989 by a group of guys in Finland. Like everything else about the Internet the prototype became the reality; from testing to standard in one fell swoop. Chat can be carried on in a channel or individually, in addition file transfers of text, code, or pictures can be accomplished. A more recent development is the transmission of voices in walkie-talkie style, whiteboards, and video.

Net Atheists are a growing segment of the atheist population, not all are otherwise isolated from like thinking people as you might expect. For example, there is Clark Adams, moderator of alt.atheism.moderated and Public Relations Director for the Internet Infidels; though he works for a web-based organization, he does not fit this description. Nonetheless Clark (AKA GodFree as channel operator of Dal.net's #atheism) will marry a fair lady he first met in #atheism later this year. A recent marriage celebrated in this hard-hitting debate channel was that of Agnostic_Pope (He) and Godless_Heathen (She). Humanist wedding details can be viewed in Godless_Heathen's website located at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/2028/Wedding.html>. Don't forget to see her "children's" pages. Parties for channel regulars and "ops" are also organized from time to time in meeting places all over the map.

Other, sometimes desperate, needs are filled by the community found on IRC. TheNick, a frequent visitor of #atheism on Dal.net finds a peer group of real value to him and to whom he can report, with satisfaction, that he is still winning his battle against alcoholism. He could not be himself at AA meetings and his inevitable dissatisfactions with AA as a peer group seemed to have become a weak link in the chain of his resolve to never drink again. TheNick does contract programming work and making friends is hard when moving often, but #atheism is almost always online and became community for him. TheNick is not shy and would share his story with interested people. A U.S. Airman who was a channel regular in #atheism and had realized his atheism while in the Air Force was brought to take a pacifistic stance as a result of his atheism. He had a major problem obtaining Conscientious Objector status as an atheist. Heathen, an op, had read of a similar case from the Vietnam era in Freethought Today, the publication of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. In this case the Supreme Court ruled that an atheist had as much right to CO status as a religious person; given the address and phone number the Airman left the channel temporarily. Shortly after that GodFree (remember Clark Adams?) came into the channel and Heathen messaged him concerning the situation. GodFree happened to know the man in question who is an active state-church separation defender he had met at freethought conventions. The way was paved and the Airman received a CO's discharge. SirPhin AKA TheHermit, founder of Dal.net's #godless channel tells the story of a young Asian man who, failing in school and in his relationship with his girlfriend, had resolved to commit suicide. SirPhin is a computer and Internet professional and was able through his international Internet connections to discern the actual location and real life identity of the youngster and notify authorities and support people in his city. I personally was online one night when I noticed the strange ranting of a fellow who happened to be in a hotel room above the beginnings of the latest round of Northern Irish violence. This area is shaped like an amphitheater and his hotel was about 1 kilometer from center. The bitter tirade against the Orangemen and the Irish in general soon proved to be the stressed reaction of an expatriate Irishman visiting on business and I was able to feel his horror and inescapable connection to his religious countrymen as they burned below. This last story is an example of how breaking news travels over the Internet. I was aware of the significance of Drumcree and the fact that serious new disturbances were occurring almost 24 hours before it was reported in Austin media. This man was in #godless, #religious_debate, and #atheism at the same time. I think that that night we were community for an atheist far from home. One young woman finds help with her relationships on line, in fact she often shows up with her "Nick" modified to reflect the current status of her long running relationship. A man everyone has advised her to dump. She also offers support in kind to other women and girls on IRC.

Yes, there are youngsters in the atheist channels, and lots of them; here is the group most likely to be isolated due to circumstances beyond their control. These are very bright young people and you will be hard pressed to tell who they are in a debate. Not all are debaters or all atheists for that matter. The more serious youngsters will be found in Dal.net's #atheism and UF.net's #atheism. Less serious to bordering on silly youngsters are often in #evilatheistconspiracy and #godless. Some wiccans and other sorts of religious types are tolerated in these last channels. For the maximum in tastefulness and tolerance #religious_debate seems to stand out.

Channels I have found for atheists are:

On Dalnet: #atheism, #godless, #evilatheistconspiracy, #religious_debate On efnet: #atheism (this channel has become younger I hear; migration to Dalnet) Ircnet: #atheism (5 years old, having a gathering in Finland soon, mostly European) BeyondIRC: #The_Atheist_Temple (never found anyone in this channel, hmmm)

--John M. Dolph

Additional advice and help for IRC clients from TheHermit:

There are clients available for Windows 95 and Windows NT, Macintosh and Unix. Follow the instructions below to get a client and get started.

The main reason for choosing DAL.net is simply that they are not beset by as many "teenage warriors" causing difficulty as some of the other networks. If you are nervous about getting IRC set-up, you could go to www.dal.net, choose "CHAT", enter a username like "Airs1579" (choose a different number to make sure no one else has the same name) and room "#Airships". If I'm on-line (TheHermit), I will be in that channel. I will help you to download and set-up a client - or point you in the direction of somebody else who will. If I am not there, you could try for help by joining #DALnetHelp. You could also contact me on ICQ at 11769712. I also recommend you connect to www.dal.net and look at the help and FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) notices on their site.

PC Clients (Win95 or NT): Recommended = ViRC97 1.00 Freeware/no cost

Download it from <http://virc.melnibone.org>, or mail me for extended instructions. If you install the client without getting help, choose the "New user" installation. Temporarily use nicks like "Airs1579" (choose a name/different number to make sure no one else is using the same name until you understand the system). Select the Server drop down box and "Add new server" Server Spider.ca.us.dal.net Port 6667 Net DALnet. You can use dummy email/real name entries. When the installation is complete, click start, then the little connect icon in the top left corner of the Server Notices Window. Once you have connected, type "/join #airships" and if I am not there type "/join #virc" and ask for help (Don't type the quotes). There is a lot of help and tutorials available at http://home.earthlink.net/~tm_crazy/

For the technically aware, Visual IRC '97 is a totally new 32-bit IRC client with white board, real-time voice and video chat, an object-oriented scripting language, supporting VBScript and JavaScript, and much more for Windows 95 and NT 4.0. It includes a interface radically different from existing clients,

and is integrated with the Windows 95/NT 4 shell.

Mac clients: Recommended = Ircl 3.0b10

Download it at <http://ircl.netmug.org> Set your browser to automatically decode it (default setting) and download the .bin version. When you first start ircl, there'll be a window called Connections. Click on the first line in that window (connection #1) to hi-light it, and click the Edit button at the bottom of the window. That opens the dialog where you put in username, nickname, etc. In that dialog is a button to select the server. Hit that, choose from the huge list of servers on most major networks. Pick "Spider.dal.net" Enter a username (Nick) like "Airs1579" (choose a name/different number to make sure no one else is using the same name until you understand the system). When you've got the nick/user/server config done, dispatch that dialog, and in the connections window, hit the Connect button at the bottom. When you have connected, type "/join #airships" and if I am not there type "/join #macintosh" and ask for help (Don't type the quotes).

Other Systems:

For unix the preferred client is BitchX. You should be able to get it at <ftp://ftp.bitchx.org> or <ftp://ftp.bitchx.com> - if you need more help than that, you should not be running unix!

Wagener The@Hermit.net.

--Carl

Newsletter News

I realize that many of you are probably surprised to get this newsletter so soon after the last issue. I have finally worked out most of the bugs and I plan on getting The Atheist out once a month from now on. In order to get important news out as fast as possible, The Atheist will be distributed at the Bagelry on the first Sunday following an ACA board meeting.

If you have e-mail, and would be willing to help us save a lot of money, you may now receive The Atheist by computer. We will still be running off hard copies, but the money saved will allow us to distribute more copies to more people. Please contact us at atheist@atheist-community.org if you would like to receive The Atheist by e-mail.

I am always open to suggestions, comments and constructive criticism concerning The Atheist. I would also like to include more stories, poems, essays, book reviews and news from our atheist community.

-John Koonz, editor

Book Review

When I was asked to review Jesus Christ Jr., I had no idea what I would find to say. I generally ignore fiction preferring to read books that are 'true'. I'm not even sure what makes a story good anymore. I did, however, continue to think about the characters for some time after I finished reading the book.

The story involves a young mans apprenticeship to an eccentric psychologist. After a few bizzare experiences, the main character, Andrew, becomes convinced that his mentors master plan for saving the human race has a real chance of working. The plan, which is to be packaged as a religious experience, involves training people to get their three brains in 'synch.' I do not have enough knowledge of psychiatry to evaluate the technical aspects of this book. There were a few technical mistakes concerning the process of evolution, however. Several explanations for the development of brains smacked of Lamarckism, that outdated idea that aquired traits can be inherited. But there I go, reviewing the book as if it were non-fiction. The biological mistakes should not deter the reader as they are inconsequential to the theme.

All the wonderful insights made by scientists into how the human brain operates are lost on most people. I have often wondered what it would take to make atheism, and good mental health, attractive. In Thrashers book, a plan is devised to make good mental health a sort of religion. The frightening truth in Jesus Christ Jr. is that people generally do accept new ideas only when they are packaged in religious terms. I suspect that in the real world such a plan would fail due to the fact that religion, by its very nature, perverts and destroys all things of value. Still, the author has raised some interesting questions, and I hope that others will join him in exploring the possibilities of atheism through fiction. I would encourage people to read this book and to consider how a positive atheist culture could be packaged for 'mass' appeal. -John Koonz

Jesus Christ Jr. was written by Andrew Justin Thrasher (thrasher@iamerica.net) and published by Morris Publishing.

Announcements

* August 16th 8:00 TV Committee Meeting at the ACTV studio. Plan on arriving earlier to help set up for The Atheist Experience which goes on the air live at 9:00.

* August 30 T-shirt designs will be considered at our Hot Jumbo Bagelry meeting. Sue Osborne has a design in mind already. If you have any ideas, bring them to this meeting. We want to have something to wear to Comfort!

* September 6th 11:00 Lecture Series Mosch Virshup will speak on "The Bible's Ethics and Other Atrocities" (or "If You Think There Must Be Some Good in It, Get Over It!") Furr's Cafeteria, Northcross Mall, 11:00.

* October 4th Comfort Texas Bus Trip Cost will be \$15-\$20 per person. ACA will take part in a parade to help celebrate the dedication of the Freethought Cenotaph. While nothing is set in stone, the plan is for the bus to load in front of Hot Jumbo Bagels at 11:00AM and leave Comfort at about 7:00PM, allowing time for the concert and dinner. This event will take the place of our regularly scheduled guest speaker for the month of October. Contact Don Rhoades or Kellen Von Houser at atheist@atheist-community.org if you are interested in going.

* October 17 10:00 - 2:00 Blood Drive at the Central Texas Regional Blood Center at 4300 North Lamar. Local atheists will be able to draw from the

ACA account for up to a year. At this point we only have 4 pints, so don't do anything dangerous. Please consider donating, especially if you have a rare blood type .

* ACA Advertisement Ray Blevins, our treasurer, is taking donations for an ad to be placed in the Austin American-Statesman. The cost for this ad will be about \$300. If you can help us reach this goal, send your check to ACA P.O. box 3798 Austin, TX 78764.

* Products Godless dollars will be available soon. Cost will be about \$1.50. See Sue Osborne for more information on this and other exciting atheist products.

* Randalls Donations Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.

* Weekly Meetings Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail atheist@atheist-community.org

ACA to Host Atheist Alliance Convention

The Atheist Community of Austin is delighted to announce that we will be hosting the 1999 Atheist Alliance Convention over Easter weekend next April. Also, the convention committee has obtained a commitment from Dan Barker to speak and sing Freethought songs at the gathering. Other details will be forthcoming.

--Don Rhoades

Your ACA board of directors: Co-chairs: Don Rhoades Kellen Von Houser Treasurer: Ray Blevins Secretary: Ray Blevins Board members: Keith Berka Sue Osborne Rodney Florence Arlo Pignotti Earle Beach John Koonz Arval Bohn Ralph Shirley Joe Zamecki

A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"When I became convinced that the Universe is natural--that all ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a serf, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world-- not even in infinite space. I was free. . .

"And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain. . . And I vowed to grasp the torch that they held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still." Robert G. Ingersoll

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.

Last name: _____
First name: _____
Companion's name (if family or couple membership)
Last name: _____
First name: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____
Telephone : (____) _____
e-mail address: _____

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

Purpose The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals. This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability. The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

- I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month until next March, is enclosed.
- I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA.
- I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.
- I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

Copyright © Atheist Community of Austin 1997-1998. All rights reserved.