William Roger Corliss (August 28, 1926 – July 8, 2011) Wikipedia Oct 22 2020

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss>

   

      

**William Roger Corliss** (August 28, 1926 – July 8, 2011)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-Contemp-1) was an American [physicist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physicist) and writer who was known[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-2) for his interest in collecting data regarding [anomalous phenomena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fort#Fortean_phenomena). [Arthur C. Clarke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_C._Clarke) described him as "[Fort](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fort)'s latter-day - and much more scientific - successor."[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-clarke110-3)



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## Biography

Starting in 1974, Corliss published a number of works in the "Sourcebook Project". Each volume was devoted to a scientific field ([archeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archeology), [astronomy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronomy), [geology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology), et cetera) and featured articles culled almost exclusively from [scientific journals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_journal). Corliss was inspired by [Charles Fort](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fort), who decades earlier also collected reports of unusual phenomena. Many of the articles in Corliss's works were earlier mentioned in Charles Fort's works. Unlike Fort, known for his idiosyncratic writing style, Corliss initially offered little in the way of his own opinions or editorial comments, preferring to let the articles speak for themselves. Corliss quoted all relevant parts of articles (often reprinting entire articles or stories, including illustrations). In some of his later *Sourcebook* efforts, such as the mid-1990s *Biological Anomalies* series, Corliss added his evaluation of both the reliability of the claims, and their ranking as anomalies. Well-documented reports from credible sources are ranked as a "1" while entirely unsubstantiated reports are rated as a "4", with "2" or "3" representing intermediate reports. Similarly, Corliss's uses a rating of "1" for anomalies that cannot be explained by existing scientific theories, while a "4" describes phenomena that are unusual but do not challenge scientific theories.

Corliss wrote many other books and articles, notably including 13 educational books about astronomy, outer space and space travel for [NASA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NASA) and a similar number for the [Atomic Energy Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Atomic_Energy_Commission) and the [National Science Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Science_Foundation).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-newscientist1-4)

## Reception

In his book *Unexplained!*, [Jerome Clark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome_Clark) describes Corliss as "essentially conservative in outlook". He explains, "Corliss [is] more interested in unusual weather, ball lighting, geophysical oddities, extraordinary mirages, and the like — in short, anomalies that, while important in their own right, are far less likely to outrage mainstream scientists than those that delighted Fort, such as UFOs, monstrous creatures, or other sorts of extraordinary events and entities."[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-5)

[Arthur C. Clarke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_C._Clarke) said:

Unlike Fort, Corliss selected his material almost exclusively from scientific journals like *Nature* and *Science*, not newspapers, so it has already been subjected to a filtering process which would have removed most hoaxes and reports from obvious cranks. Nevertheless, there is much that is quite baffling in some of these reports from highly reputable sources.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-clarke110-3)

The meteorologist [Charles A. Doswell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_A._Doswell_III) has praised the research of Corliss, stating his documentation of anomalies was intriguing.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-6) However, the geologist Henry Faul has criticized Corliss. In a review for *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena*, Faul noted:

[Corliss] is particularly prone, to classify things as "unexplained" even when a good explanation is available... Grossly incomplete, naively uncritical, supplied with inaccurate sketches (many of them fictitious, like the illustrations in old novels), and lacking an author index, it is no handbook at all. Instead of giving new access to genuinely mysterious observations, it only buries a few of them in a clutter of confused esoterica.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-7)

In a review for a book that documented astronomical anomalies, the astronomer [Joseph Veverka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Veverka) wrote that Corliss had shown negligence of the scientific literature for more than a decade and made incorrect statements.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-8) However, [Richard Baum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Baum) wrote a mostly positive review, stating that it was an objective work and "his reviews are concise and well-referenced, and if on occasion his examples are questionable we do at least have the benefit of the bibliographies which will be useful to historians."[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-9)

A reviewer in the [*New Scientist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Scientist), noted that the book *Incredible Life* had an agenda to challenge evolutionary theory as Corliss believed that [natural selection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection) fails to explain biological mysteries.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss#cite_note-10)

## Bibliography

Books published include:[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Corliss%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Contemp-1)

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* *Radioisotopic Power Generation* (with [D. G. Harvey](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=D._G._Harvey&action=edit&redlink=1); 1964)
* *Space Probes and Planetary Exploration* (1965)
* *Scientific Satellites* (1967)
* *Mysteries of the Universe* (1967)
* *Teleoperator Controls* (with [E. G. Johnsen](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=E._G._Johnsen&action=edit&redlink=1); 1968)
* *Mysteries Beneath the Sea* (1970)
* *Human Factors Applications in Teleoperator Design and Operation* (with Johnsen; 1971)
* *History of NASA Sounding Rockets* (1971)
* *Man and Atom* (with [Glenn T. Seaborg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_T._Seaborg); 1971)
* *History of the Goddard Networks* (1972)
* *The Interplanetary Pioneers* (1972)
* *Strange Phenomena: A Sourcebook of Unusual Natural Phenomena* (1974)
* *Strange Artifacts: A Sourcebook on Ancient Man* (1974)
* *The Unexplained* (1976)
* *Strange Life* (1976)
* *Strange Minds* (1976)
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* *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena* (1977)
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* *Ancient Man: A Handbook of Puzzling Artifacts* (1978)
* *Mysterious Universe: A Handbook of Astronomical Anomalies* (1979)
* *Unknown Earth: A Handbook of Geological Enigmas* (1980)
* *Wind Tunnels of NASA* (1981)
* *Incredible Life: A Handbook of Biological Mysteries* (1981)
* *The Unfathomed Mind: A Handbook of Unusual Mental Phenomena* (1982)
* *Lightning, Auroras, Nocturnal Lights, and Related Luminous Phenomena* (1982)
* *Tornados, Dark Days, Anomalous Precipitation, and Related Weather Phenomena* (1983)
* *Earthquakes, Tides, Unidentified Sounds, and Related Phenomena* (1983)
* *Rare Halos, Mirages, Anomalous Rainbows, and Related Electromagnetic Phenomena* (1984)
* *The Moon and the Planets* (1985)
* *The Sun and Solar System Debris* (1986)
* *Stars, Galaxies, Cosmos* (1987)
* *Carolina Bays, Mima Mounds, Submarine Canyons* (1988)
* *Anomalies in Geology: Physical, Chemical, Biological* (1989)
* *Neglected Geological Anomalies* (1990)
* *Inner Earth: A Search for Anomalies* (1991)
* *Biological Anomalies: Humans I* (1992)
* *Biological Anomalies: Humans II* (1993)
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* *Science Frontiers: Some Anomalies and Curiosities of Nature* (1994)
* *Biological Anomalies: Mammals I* (1995)
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* *Biological Anomalies: Birds* (1998)
* *Ancient Infrastructure: Remarkable Roads, Mines, Walls, Mounds, Stone Circles: A Catalog of Archeological Anomalies* (1999)
* *Ancient Structures: Remarkable Pyramids, Forts, Towers, Stone Chambers, Cities, Complexes: A Catalog of Archeological Anomalies* (2001)
* *Remarkable Luminous Phenomena in Nature: A Catalog of Geophysical Anomalies* (2001)
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* 1.  Cherfas, Jeremy. (November 12, 1981). *Incredible Life: A Handbook of Mysteries*. *New Scientist*. p. 448.

## External links

* [The Sourcebook Project homepage](http://www.science-frontiers.com/sourcebk.htm)
* [Unofficial Sourcebook discussion group](https://groups.yahoo.com/group/sourcebookdiscussion/)
* [A Search for Anomalies](https://web.archive.org/web/20040821232431/http%3A/www.scientificexploration.org/jse/abstracts/v16n3a6.php), by William R. Corliss, [*Journal of Scientific Exploration*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journal_of_Scientific_Exploration), Volume 16: Number 3: Article 6 (2002)
* [Works by or about William R. Corliss](https://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n80-57226) in libraries ([WorldCat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WorldCat%22%20%5Co%20%22WorldCat) catalog)
* [William Roger Corliss Obituary](http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/baltimoresun/obituary.aspx?n=william-roger-corliss&pid=152523465), [*Baltimore Sun*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltimore_Sun), July 13, 2011

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* [NDL](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Diet_Library): [00436657](https://id.ndl.go.jp/auth/ndlna/00436657)
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* [NSK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_and_University_Library_in_Zagreb): [000121054](http://katalog.nsk.hr/F/?func=direct&doc_number=000121054&local_base=nsk10)
* [NTA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Library_of_the_Netherlands): [070203652](http://data.bibliotheken.nl/id/thes/p070203652)
* [SUDOC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SUDOC_%28identifier%29): [032457073](https://www.idref.fr/032457073)
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<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/baltimoresun/obituary.aspx?n=william-roger-corliss&pid=152523465>

**CORLISS** , **William Roger** On July 8, 2011, WILLIAM ROGER CORLISS, age 84. Mr. Corliss was a Navy veteran having served during World War II. As a physicist, he was Director of Advanced Programs in the Nuclear Division at Martins in the 1960's. Later, he became a prolific writer, authoring 57 books on atomic energy, space propulsion, scientific satellites, teleoperators, wind tunnels, and scientific anomalies in all fields of science. He was a loving husband to his wife Virginia for 61 years, and is survived by his wife; his four children, Cathleen, Stephen, Jim, and Laura McCudden; seven grandchildren, and one great-grandson. He will always be remembered for his devotion to his wife and for his sense of humor.
The family will be holding private services. Contributions in his memory may be sent to his alma mater at The Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Gifts Processing Center, P.O. Box 3164, Boston, MA, 02241-3164.

July 7, 2020

I still have a baker's dozen of Mr. WRC's (I always addressed him as "Mr. WRC") books on my library shelves, and I still pick them up to read or refer to. He was a real pioneer in the field of scientific anomalies, and a very pleasant gentleman as well. A good man still missed by many.

Jon Harrison

Acquaintance

July 7, 2019

Corliss was a fine scholar and a great guy. I have many of his books in my library. In fact, just yesterday we took a look at his book on weather anomalies, as we were expecting a hailstorm. I was always pleased to see new work from him, and it's very sad to realize that no new books will be published. Rest in peace, WRC.

Jon Harrison

Acquaintance

February 7, 2012

I was sorry to hear of his passing. I have so many of his books, and I was a subscriber to his newsletter. I will miss him, but his work remain as a testimony to his great love of knowledge.

Ron Giuntini

January 18, 2012

Mr. Corliss was a singular proponent for the broadening of scientific understanding, and a profound early influence on my own comprehension of the natural world. His loss is keenly felt, but his impact on the field of phenomena studies in indelible. Thank you, Mr. Corliss.

Howard Kistler

October 26, 2011

A great loss to the world of science. He's one of the most prominent in trying to keep the whole business honest. His work will inspire generations to come. I hope others take up where he left off. God Bless You, William Corliss.

Jameske



September 6, 2011

I just found out about the death of Mr. Corliss... Very sad...
But he still lives in his books...

Andrei Ol'khovatov

August 24, 2011

I was shocked when I heard about Bill´s death. He was a great guy and a very good friend. He was kind enough to send me many of his books and newsletters that enrichened my knowledge about our inner and outer universes. The worldwide community of curious and clever thinkers have missed a beloved companion, but will never let his name fall in oblivion.

Philippe Piet van Putten
Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, BRAZIL)

Philippe Piet van Putten

August 22, 2011

Mr. Corliss's work was one of the bright spots in this world, a place where mystery, wonder & true inquisitiveness still lived. He inspired & supported my personal journey through science & history for 30 years, even though we had never met. With his departure, we've lost something irreplaceable from the intellectual life of our culture. My thoughts are with his family.

Wylie Cox

August 15, 2011

An amazing man. His books inspired much of my own research and understanding of the universe. His books should grace every library and school in the world. He will be much missed and the world is a poorer place without him. My condolences to the family.
D.Waddell MMCM(SS) ret.

August 12, 2011

A great and open mind that ranged over many fields of science. I read his source material on ball lightning and related anomalies and used it in research on this topic.

Peter Coleman



August 11, 2011

I discovered the work of William Corliss years ago in a library and it awoke in me a deep awe for the mystery of the universe. His work is required reading for anyone who values science. Though I never met him, I will miss him.

George Donovan

August 11, 2011

I have been reading Mr. Corliss's work for 30+ years, and have most of his books on my living room shelf (except for the one I keep on my kitchen table). I pray that his reverence for knowledge lives on in all of his readers.

Jacob Reeves

August 8, 2011

I own many of Corliss' anomaly books. We exchanged a few lines from time to time as well. He was a great figure in the anomalies field, and a fine human being. I will miss him..

Jon Harrison

August 1, 2011

My condolences for your great loss. A unique and able mind has left the world, and the world is lessened by it.

John Bogle

July 31, 2011

My condolences I have most of Mr. Corliss's books and I enjoy them, specially his archeology ones. He will be missed!

Michael Holly



July 24, 2011

Our deepest sympathy to Ginny, Laura and family. It has been a great pleasure to get to know Bill thru the years and to share many family events.
The McCudden Family

July 23, 2011

Please accept my condolences on the passing of Mr. Corliss. It was by chance that I picked up his book Unusual Natural Phenomena tonight to get some background material on ball lightning. I have had his book in my library for several years and have always respected his work in the field. When I went to check on his latest project on the internet, I learned to my dismay that he had died. Mr. Corliss gave anyone who is curious about the world a lasting gift -- M. Gryczan

Matthew Gryczan

July 19, 2011

So sorry for your loss. I think of Mr. Corliss every time I go into the woods,he taught me so much about nature.

hope Livezey

July 19, 2011

Mr. Corliss was the greatest anomalist since Charles Fort, bar none. He will be sorely missed by my father and I, as we have devoured his books together for years.

James Barnes

July 13, 2011

An extremely fine man, perspicuous, learned, and a true gentleman. His work in reporting and bibliography of anomalous events is unparalleled. He was encyclopedic, meticulous, and scrupulously honest. Nothing like his sourcebook project otherwise exists. We all owe him a great debt. May he rest in peace. Ron Westrum

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