

# "Prehistoric" UFOs: A Review

By Thomas E. Bullard, PhD.

**Dr. Bullard holds a doctorate in folklore from Indiana University where he wrote his dissertation on UFOs. His last appearance here was a comparative summary of UFO abduction reports.**

What Charles Fort started when he collected old reports of strange aerial phenomena has continued as a distinctive and vigorous branch of ufology today. Historical research lures investigators with the hope of digging out bygone sightings and even unknown fossil evidence for a whole lost world of past observations and beliefs by which to gain a unique perspective on the present. Takers have been many and diligent. The result is a growing but scattered literature too often overlooked and unappreciated. This review will highlight some of the important contributions to pre-1947 historical research.

## PHANTOM AIRSHIPS

The chief focus and biggest find of historical ufology is the phantom airship wave of 1896-97. Fort turned up a few reports from April 1897 in the New York newspapers, and Donald Keyhoe referred to a lighted airship over the Midwest in his list of old sightings in *The Flying Saucers Are Real* (1950). In his first UFO book, *Flying Saucers* (1953), skeptic Donald H. Menzel extended the wave in time and space with reports from California late in 1896. References to these airships became part of a litany recited by many subsequent authors to prove that UFOS were nothing new and by no means discountable in every case as misidentified airplanes.

By the mid-1960s researchers turned from authority to original sources and began to search old newspapers in earnest for airship reports. The extent and complexity of this wave became plain as articles in *FSR* by Jerome

Clark (Jan. - Feb. 1965, July - Aug. 1966, July - Aug. 1967), Lucius Farish (May - June 1965), Clark and Farish (Sept. - Oct. 1968, Jan. - Feb. 1969), Donald B. Hanlon (Sept. - Oct. 1966) and Hanlon and Jacques Vallee (Jan. - Feb. 1967) detailed sightings and landings from a dozen states. Airship articles spread to *Fate* with an article by Farish (Nov. 1966) and a series of three articles there by Clark and Loren Coleman (May - July 1973). Clark and Farish again collaborated during the mid-1970s in articles for Saga's *UFO Report*. Farish carried on a column about historical UFOs with emphasis on 1897 in *Skylook* throughout 1972.

Geographically specialized articles appeared as early as 1938, in the winter issue of *Prairie Schooner*, when Rudolph Umland published an account of the airship over Nebraska, based on WPA research in newspapers from that state. A second article on Nebraska airships, authored by Roger L. Welsch, appeared in the 1979 volume of *Nebraska History*. Robert G. Neeley, Jr. presented an exhaustively researched record of the airship in Illinois in the *Journal of UFO Research* (1979), George M. Eberhart followed the ship through Ohio (*Pursuit*, Winter 1977), and Hanlon's 1966 article covered activity in Texas. Dale M. Titler added a Canadian and Siberian phase to the wave with reports of a stray balloon from the summer and fall of 1897 (see Clark and Farish, *FSR*, Jan. - Feb. 1969), while Loren Gross expanded on this discovery in his book *Charles Fort, the Fortean Society, and UFOs* (1976), and William Retoff gave further details in "The Great Canadian Starship Invasion" (*Ideal's UFO Magazine*, August 1980).

Extended surveys of the 1896 - 97 wave became the norm in many UFO books published during the 1970s, notably John Keel's *UFOs - Opera-*

*tion Trojan Horse* (1970), David Jacobs' *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975), and Paris Flammond's *UFO Exist!* (1976). As the literature has grown, so has the need for self-correction. The Leroy, Kansas, "calfnapping" case made famous by Vallee in *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* (1965) proved to be a hoax when researched in depth by Clark (*Fate*, Feb. 1977), and H. Michael Simmons exposed the equally familiar Aurora, Texas, crash in his article "Once Upon A Time in the West" (*Magonia*, Aug. 1985).

In several books the airships have moved to center stage. They occupy a large fraction of *Mysteries in the Skies: UFOs in Perspective*, by Gordon I.R. Lore and Harold H. Deneau (1968), and Loren Gross devoted *The UFO Wave of 1896* (1974) to a detailed study of the first phase of the wave. The most extensive investigation of sources ever undertaken was completed recently by Robert Neeley, Jr., who spent three years travelling throughout the country searching some 5,000 newspapers for airship reports. His *The Airship Chronicle*, published by the Fund for UFO Research, summarizes the sightings he uncovered in some 2,500 entries and offers a definitive record of the largest of airship waves.

## THEORIES

Interpretation of the airships as something other than spaceships seen through turn-of-the-century eyes has been the focus of several books and articles. Clark and Coleman adapted their findings to a chapter in *The Unidentified* (1975), a book seeking to link UFO phenomena with the psychological archetypes of C.G. Jung. F. Miller's "Jules Verne and the Great Airship Scare" (*IUR* May - June 1979) favors the sociological argument that whatever the ultimate nature of

## Charles Fort actually proves a Johnny-come-lately in historical perspective.

objects may have been, the descriptions derived from expectations of the day. Louis Winkler holds out for the airship being an actual invention on trial (*MUFON UFO Journal*, Mar. 1982), while Daniel Cohen's book, *The Great Airship Mystery* (1981), takes the opposite view that (all the sightings originate in conventional phenomena.) The longest study is Jean Sider's *L'Airship de 1897* (1987), a careful history based on extensive sources. Unlike Cohen, Sider recognizes the dynamic aspects of the wave and traces its spread throughout the country. He analyzes the descriptions along with the context of experimentation and fiction literature, then eliminates alternative explanations to conclude that a legitimate unknown accounts for some of the reports.

### EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS

England joined the airship business with waves in the spring of 1909 and winter of 1913, both discovered by Fort and explored in depth by recent researchers. In *FSR* (Nov. - Dec. 1970, Jan. - Feb. 1971), Carl Grove published his collection of 1909 reports. Paul Screeton followed one newspaper's coverage (*MUFOB*, Summer 1980). David Clarke, Granville Oldroyd and Nigel Watson have just completed a massive catalogue of 1913 newspaper reports for the Fund for UFO Research. These two waves intertwine so closely with fears of German invasion that they have provided ammunition for an interpretation of airships as a form of social panic (Roger Sandell, Peter Rogerson, *MUFOB*, Autumn 1978; Watson, *Magonia*, Spring 1980). Hints that the Russians also shared in the 1913 wave have appeared in *FSR* (Mar. 1984, Feb. 1987).

Scandinavia has been another busy area for UFOs, with "balloon" reports from 1897, phantom airships in 1909, and phantom airplanes during World War I. Then the action really began: An article by David G. Markham in *Doubt* (Jan. 1942) dealt with "ghost

fliers" over Sweden, and John Keel reported in depth on these 1933 - 37 sightings in *FSR* (May - June, July - Aug. 1970; July - Aug., Sept. - Oct. 1971). The "ghost rockets" appeared in 1946 and again received mention in *Doubt* (#16, 17). A survey by Bjorn Overbye was published in *FSR* (May - June, July - Aug. 1970), and Loren Gross devoted a booklet, *The Mystery of the Ghost Rockets* (1974, 2nd ed. 1982), to these reports. Swedish investigators have obtained access to extensive Swedish government files concerning these sightings and are also collecting newspaper reports and interviewing witnesses, so the "ghost" waves promise to be the best-researched of all historical UFO events. Some results have been published by Anders Liljegren (*FSR*, Dec. 1986; nearly every issue of the *AFU Newsletter* [Box 11027, S-600, 11 Norrkoping, Sweden] also contains an article on this work). In 1987 Erlend Sundqvist published *Spokflygarna - 46*, a book devoted mostly to the ghost rockets. The best summary of Swedish research is "The Ghost Rockets," by Liljegren and Clas Svahn, in *UFOs 1947-1987*.

### OTHER WAVES

A summary and bibliography of other waves can be found in Nigel Watson's booklet, *Phantom Aerial Waves and Flaps* (1987), an essential survey of UFO concentrations over the past century and a half. Historical reports not associated with a wave are scattered and difficult to find. Of course Fort's books are major sources, as are the pages of *Doubt* and Carl Pabst's ongoing "Notes of Charles Fort" column in each issue of *Pursuit*. The sourcebooks compiled by William Corliss from old scientific publications carry on Fort's work in a more systematic way, and often provide full texts of reports. Louis Winkler's *Catalogue of UFO-Like Data Before 1947* (Fund for UFO Research, 1984) contains a valuable list of reports as well. Lore and Deneault's *Mysteries in the Skies* and Loren Gross's *Charles Fort, the For-*

*tean Society and UFOs* cover the period from the 1896 wave to 1947 by revealing many unfamiliar reports. The series by Clark and Farish in *UFO Report* also includes some "strays," especially the article on UFOs from the 1920s.

Perhaps the most thorough survey of all is Michel Bougard's *La Chronique des OVNI* (1977), which culls reports for the period 1800-1947 from many UFO publications and lists summaries in chronological order. A survey of historical New Zealand reports by Harold J. Knapman and a similar survey for Australia by Bill Chalker appeared in *UFO Research Australia Newsletter* (Nov. - Dec. 1983). George M. Eberhart's *Geobibliography of Anomalies* includes a great many historical reports from the U.S. and Canada, while from England, David Clarke and Granville Oldroyd concentrate on a particular kind of phenomenon often reported early in the century in their booklet, *Spooklights: A British Survey* (1985).

The UFO literature contains many other old reports, but the reader must look far and wide for these individual cases, some of them accidental discoveries and some the reminiscences of witnesses speaking out after decades. A few examples include Jerome Clark's discussion of a supposed 1884 airship crash in Nebraska (*IUR* Nov. - Dec. 1986), Dwight Whalen's discovery of a mystery airplane over Ontario in 1911 (*Fate* Dec. 1982), and the reprint of a newsclipping about an 1889 airship over Paris, Texas (*Crux* Summer 1985). Madge Brosius Allyn kept secret her observation of a flying "cucumber" in 1903 for 68 year (*Fate* March 1971), Paul T. Collins recalled the 1942 "Battle of Los Angeles" UFO (*Fate* July 1987), while William D. Leet and Leonard H. Stringfield reported their "foo fighter" sightings from World War II (*MUFON UFO Journal* Jan. - Feb. 1979; *Inside Saucer Post ... 3-0 Blue* [1957]).

### PRE-1800

Treatments of aerial phenomena before 1800 are even more hapha-



## TEXAS ODYSSEY OF 1897

by Donald B. Hanlon

BY now, readers of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW will be aware that a wave of sightings occurred throughout the United States in the years 1896-7. Contributions to this journal by Jerome Clark<sup>1</sup>, a pioneer researcher in this area, and the data contained in Vallée's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* (the LeRoy sighting) have brought this period into focus. The results of my own researches<sup>2</sup> into these early observations are partially indicated in Figure 1. Briefly they have convinced me that a wave of **major proportions** occurred, marked by a rather erratic, coast to coast, eastward progression. An interesting characteristic of this wave is that a great many sightings were made over large urban areas, in some instances hovering objects created panic in the city streets (today, of course, we have anti-aircraft facilities for such nuisances). Preliminary investigations (now over 170 reports) encourage me to predict that when all the data has been uncovered, this wave will rival the French wave of the autumn of 1954.

Although far from being an area where a maximum density of these early sightings have as yet been recorded, Texas has produced some of the most important. The following account of a landing appeared in the *Dallas News* of April 28, 1897. The witness was a lawyer who wished to remain unnamed:

"I had been up to old 'Uncle Billy' Gathings to write his will and was driving homeward thinking of the old man and his useful career, and the reward that doubtless awaited him in the good hereafter, when I was astonished by a brilliant flash from an electric searchlight which passed directly over my buggy. I want to tell you also that I was almost frightened to death by it, for it made the space around me as light as day. My horse was also frightened and came near overturning the buggy. He snorted, reared, and plunged madly, trembling meantime like a leaf. My hair stood straight up and I was almost too excited to pay attention to the horse. Fortunately the light rested on us scarcely a second, but glided over the fields and the country till it was suddenly turned upward toward the heavens. Then following it with my eyes, I beheld about 1,000 ft. above me I judge, a huge, black monster, from which the light emanated. It was in shape something like a cigar, but underneath there appeared to be a body similar to the body of a ship, which was attached to the object and from which the light originated. The searchlight was presently shut off, and a number of incandescent lights flashed around the lower edge of the body of the vessel or whatever it was. When I first saw it, it was going very slowly in a southerly direction. The lights were soon entirely extinguished and it glided about three miles this side of the town of Aquila. The vessel or ship steered for the hill, and as it approached it all the lights were again extinguished and the ship disappeared from my sight. I think it may have stopped on the hill.

"I never had anything to so thoroughly work me up, and I resumed my journey home, considering in my mind the strange adventures of the night. I have read and heard much of the airships, but I never expected to see one. I had never seriously thought of them as possible, but in a few minutes I recalled the many stories I have recently seen in the papers about airships and decided that what I had seen was an airship.

"When I was within a mile of Hillsboro, about an hour later, I saw the same object rise from the locality where it disappeared. It ascended till it looked like a mere dark cloud in the skies, when it started in a north-easterly direction and went at a terrific rate of speed. It must have gone at the rate of 100 miles an hour or more. It was headed as near as I can judge toward Dallas, or near there. Every few seconds it would send out brilliant flashes and sparkles, but it travelled most of the time in darkness. Now, gentlemen, I am not prepared by my profession to believe everything I see and hear, but I saw that object and my horse saw it. It almost made both of us frantic. So there is no denying the fact of its existence. The question is, what is it? Man has conquered the ocean, but we are told that the devil is the prince of the air. Again, the scriptures say the devil shall be turned loose for a season. Who knows but what the scripture is being fulfilled right here before our very eyes. It is possible I admit, for man to get up a flying machine, but still, for all that I have seen, I feel curious as to what it was, and can't help it."

This description, which reads like a bad turn-of-the-century novel, gives some indication of the sociological factors which were at work throughout the wave. The appearance of "unknown aerial vehicles" had a profound effect upon the populace. The ramifications have not as yet been fully distinguished. The Wright Brothers were six years away.

One unfortunate factor which must be taken into consideration in these early reports is that journalists of the time were quite prepared to construct an entirely mythical account for publication. This trait was widespread, and considered as a literary exercise of sorts in those days. Many of these accounts are easily recognisable as blatant fakes. However, since seemingly authentic reports also sound quite fantastic to us today, a good deal of analysis will be required before accepting or rejecting a particular incident. Also there is ample evidence to support the belief that there were a considerable number of hoaxes perpetrated by practical jokers of the day, much in the same manner as adolescents and college students staged hoaxes during recent flaps in the United States.

There were a number of humorous accounts in the 1897 reports. For instance, on April 19, an object passed over Farmersville, Texas causing much local comment. One individual claimed to have detected three men on board the craft who were passing out temperance tracts and singing "Nearer My God to Thee"! (Human voices from the airship were

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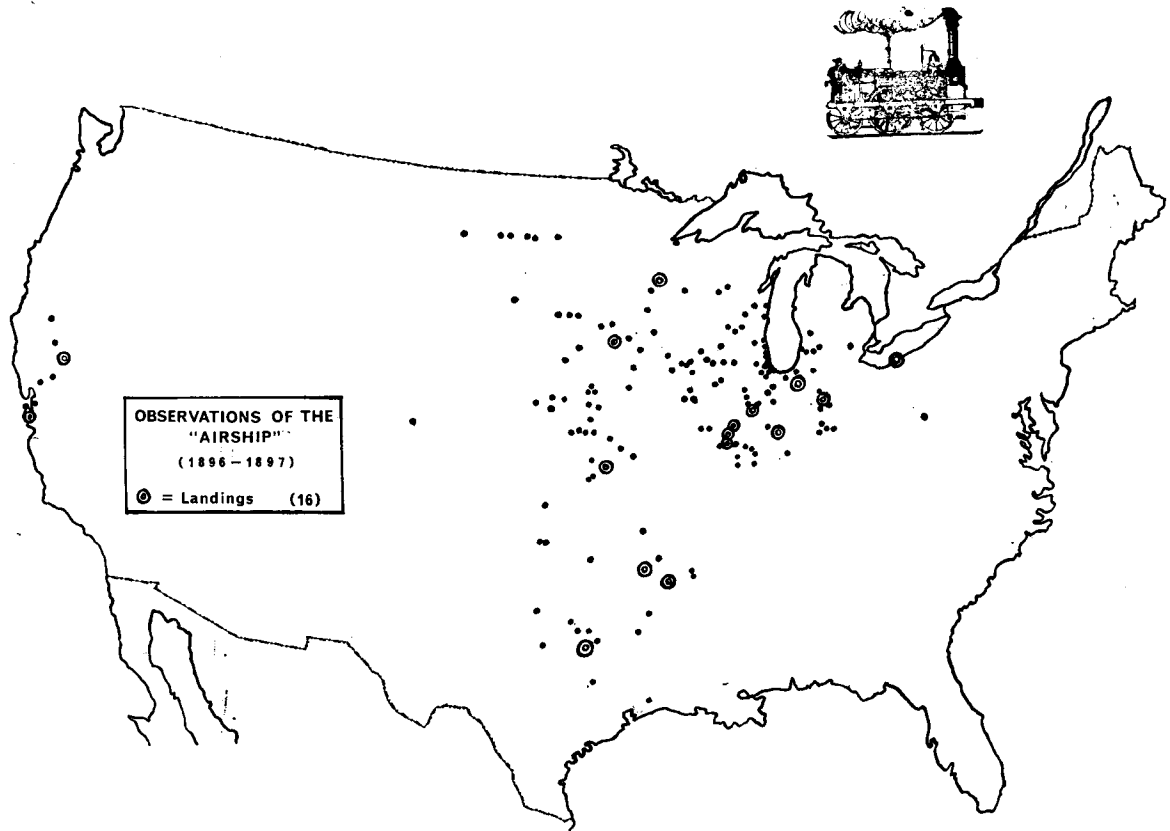


Fig. 1

Based on a sketch by J. Vallée and D. B. Hanlo

supposedly heard at Galesburg, Michigan, on April 3, and also at Vermillion, South Dakota on April 17. Both accounts are mentioned by Clark.) The following appeared in the *Chicago Chronicle* of April 13, 1897, under the headline AIRSHIP SEEN IN IOWA :

"Fontanelle, Iowa—April 12—The airship was seen here at 8.30 tonight, and was viewed by the whole population. It came from the south-east, and was not over 200 feet above the tree tops and moved very slowly, not to exceed ten miles an hour. The machine could be plainly seen, and is described as being sixty feet in length, and the vibration of the wings could be plainly seen. It carried the usual coloured lights, and the working of the machinery could be heard, as also could the strains of music, as from an orchestra. It was hailed, but passed on to the north, seeming to increase its speed, and disappeared. There is no doubt in Fontanelle that it was the real thing, and is testified to by the most prominent citizens among whom are: J. H. Hulbert, S. Shoemaker, J. I. McCampbell, ex-mayor Dr. D. B. Scott, Editor McClure and others. The weather was very cloudy, and it has been raining lightly all evening, so it could not possibly have been a star."

When reviewed collectively these curious incidents begin to lose some of their humour and assume a weird quality.

Taking into consideration the various negative and positive factors inherent in the 1897 reports, we cautiously present the following, taken from the April 19 edition of the *Dallas Morning News* :

"Aurora, Wise County, April 17—About 6 o'clock this morning the early risers of Aurora were astonished at the sudden appearance of the airship which has been sailing throughout the country.

"It was travelling due north and much nearer the earth than before. Evidently some of the machinery was out of order, for it was making a speed of only 10 or 12 miles an hour and gradually settling toward the earth.

"It sailed directly over the public square, and when it reached the north part of town collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water tank, and destroying the judge's flower garden.

"The pilot of the ship is supposed to have been the only one aboard, and while his remains are badly disfigured, enough of the original has been picked up to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world.

"Mr. J. T. Weems, the U.S. Signal Service Officer at this place and an authority on astronomy, gives it as his opinion that he (the pilot) was a native of the Planet Mars.

"Papers found on his person—evidently the records of his travels—are written in some unknown hieroglyphics and cannot be deciphered. (A distinct resemblance here to the "1864 Martian Hoax" discussed by Vallée in the revised Ace edition of *Anatomy* p.174, and more recently the Brooksville "hoax" discussed by Charles Bowen, *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* July/August 1965 p. 6.—D.B.H.)

"This ship was badly wrecked to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a

mixture of aluminium and silver and it must have weighed several tons.

"The town is full of people today who are viewing the wreck and gathering specimens of strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow." (The pilot's epitaph must have been quite special!—D.B.H.)

After reading a report such as this, one has the impulse to either burst into gales of laughter or head for Texas with spade and shovel!

Some substance is given to this report by a similar event which occurred on April 10 at Winamac, Indiana. The airship allegedly hovered directly over the centre of town before moving off, displaying red, blue, and white lights, with a terrific lunge toward the "Pink Mink Marshes." It stopped directly over the marshes and was seen to quiver, after which an explosion tore off the wings. It then began to settle, slowly at first, then "at the speed of a bullet." It struck the softest part of the marshes and sank out of sight with a gurgling noise. It was also reported that two mysterious "tramps" who had been "stealing a ride on the airship" were killed.

We now proceed to another fantastic report, taken from the April 28 edition of the *Houston Daily Post*:

"Merkel, Texas, April 26—Some parties returning from church last night noticed a heavy object dragging along with a rope attached.

"They followed it until, in crossing the railroad, it caught on a rail. On looking up they saw what they supposed was the airship. (This feature seems to be directly related to a report from Sioux City, Iowa on March 29, 1897, in which a farmer, Robert Hibbard, was pulled several rods distance after being hooked by a grapple which was attached to a drag rope dangling from the rear of 'an airship'. The grapple finally ripped through his trousers depositing him in a cow lot.—Just fishing, I suppose.—D.B.H.)

"It was not near enough to get an idea of the dimensions. A light could be seen protruding from several windows; one bright light in front like the headlight of a locomotive.

"After some ten minutes, a man was seen descending the rope; he came near enough to be plainly seen; he wore a *light blue sailor suit and was small in size*. (My italics.—D.B.H.)

"He stopped when he discovered parties at the anchor, and *cut the rope* below him and sailed off in a north-east direction. The anchor is now on exhibition at the blacksmith shop of Elliot and Miller and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people."

This account sounds much too familiar to be taken lightly.

Drake<sup>3</sup> and Wilkins<sup>4</sup> relate rather garbled accounts of "cloud ships" whose "anchors" allegedly caught on some terrestrial snag in either Kent or Ireland (ca. AD 1211 or earlier) according to which account you prefer. The Irish account runs as follows:

"There happened in the borough of Cloera, one Sunday, while the people were at Mass, a marvel. In this town is a church dedicated to St. Kinarus. It befell that an anchor was dropped from the sky, with a rope attached to it, and one of the flukes caught in the arch above the church door. The people rushed out of the church and saw in the sky a ship with men on board, floating before the anchor cable, and they saw a man leap overboard and jump down to the anchor, as if to release it. He looked as if he

were swimming in water. The folk rushed up and tried to seize him; but the bishop forbade the people to hold the man, for it might kill him, he said. The man was freed, and hurried up to the ship, where the crew cut the rope and the ship sailed away out of sight. But the anchor is in the church, and has been ever since, as a testimony."

The Kentish account comes from Gervase of Tilbury's *Otis Imperialia*, in which it is related that an anchor from a "cloud ship" became fastened in a mound of stones in a churchyard at Gravesend. Voices from above were heard, and the cable connected to the anchor was seen to move as if an attempt to free the anchor was being made. A man of human proportions, was observed to slide down the cable, after which he cut the cable and ascended (or died from suffocation as one account has it) leaving the anchor behind.

What connection do the "celestial sailor" of ancient Eire and/or Kent, have with the little man in the blue sailor suit of Merkel, Texas? The similarities are strange, in fact, downright suspicious. The dates and locations of the English and Irish stories could, and should, be clarified.

The mention of "anchors" remind one of the Gulliver device, developed by G. V. Levan and N. H. Horwitz. This device was designed as a means to secure and analyse Martian soil samples when an instrument package is landed on that planet's surface. Projectiles which are shot out to a distance of 25 feet, are attached to the device by strings coated with an adhesive material. The projectiles are

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then reeled back, and any material adhering to the string is analysed in the device." One could speculate that the "anchors" of the cloud-and-air ships may have served a similar purpose.

Mr. Frank Masquelette of the *Houston Post* has done an admirable job in researching the 1897 reports from Texas. In following up the Merkel account Mr. Masquelette states:

"Recent enquiries among old-timers in Merkel have turned up no one who could remember anything about the incident, if indeed there was one.

"Several people, though, readily recognised the name of Elliot and Miller. The blacksmith shop occupied a building facing the railroad track. The building is now used by an International Harvester Company dealer as a warehouse.

Mrs. Elaine Brumbeau, editor of the *Merkel Mail* recently ran an item asking if anyone knew anything about the airship incident. There have been no replies."

And for the Aurora incident:

"Gene Carter publisher of the *Wise County Messenger*, learned that there was a Judge Proctor who

used to live in the Aurora area. But that is the only part of the story that anyone recognised.

"Two life-long residents of the Aurora area—Miss Mag Morris and Mrs. Lou Inman (88 and 93 respectively)—scoffed at the story."

If the link with present day UFO sightings is as strong as it would seem, then, by comparison, the Phenomenon itself was in primitive state. This consideration has led those of us researching the period to believe that the "key" to the UFO Phenomenon may well be found among these reports. Oddly enough, it may be that we are closer to "proving something" with the 1896-7 Airship Phenomenon than with the post 1945 UFO Phenomenon!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> FLYING SAUCER REVIEW: January/ February 1965 and July/ August 1966.

<sup>2</sup> *Enigma of the Airship* by Donald B. Hanlon—to be published.

<sup>3</sup> *Spacemen in the Middle Ages* by W. R. Drake—FLYING SAUCER REVIEW May/June 1964.

<sup>4</sup> *Flying Saucers on the Attack* by H. T. Winkins, p. 160-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Sourcebook on the Space Sciences* by Samuel Glasstone, p. 721.

<sup>6</sup> *Claims made of UFO Evidence* by Frank Masquelette—*The Houston Post* June 13, 1966.

#### Advanced Life on the Planet Earth?

Although the Mariner IV space probe which took photographs of the surface of Mars was designed for geological and not biological reconnaissance, it has been suggested that the absence of signs of advanced life in the 22 photographs (whose resolution was a few kilometres) tends to confirm that such life does not exist. S. D. Kilston and his colleagues, at Harvard College and the Goddard Space Flight Centre have tried examining photographs of the Earth for signs of our own civilisation (*Icarus*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 79).

Although several hundred thousand suitable photographs of the Earth have been taken by the Tiros and Nimbus meteorological satellites, only three of the high resolution pictures showed signs which were indicative of an advanced civilisation on Earth: a recently completed inter-state highway could be seen on one; another photograph showed the condensation trail left by a jet aircraft; and a third showed a rectilinear grid pattern, subsequently found to be due to the activities of Canadian lumber men, which was thought by Kilston to be a clear indication of advanced life. A fourth photograph, however, contained what appeared to be the most convincing sign of advanced civilisation—a long straight breakwater on the Moroccan coast which in fact proved to be a natural peninsular.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Our thanks to Peter Haythornthwaite for drawing our attention to this item in the *New Scientist* of April 21, 1966.)

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# THE AIRSHIP . . . FACT AND FICTION

Donald B. Hanlon



IN an important book, *Mysteries of the Skies* by Gordon Lore, Jr., and Harold Deneault, Jr., the authors devote themselves to a review of pre-1947 UFO sightings and in so doing have presented much new and significant material.

Of particular interest are the first two chapters which deal with the 1896-97 airship sightings. The authors are apparently totally unaware of the discussions of these sightings which have been presented in the pages of this REVIEW since 1965. This is indeed unfortunate since much of their material complements and in many cases substantiates that which has been presented here.

In their "Appendix C" the authors have included a chart of bright planet positions for November 1896-June 1897 which I have found most helpful in eliminating a number of "sightings" possibly caused by astronomical bodies. It was found that Venus could have been a major culprit.

Also included is a list of towns and cities<sup>1</sup> from which the authors have found reports. As a result of my researches into the mid-western states I might add the following locations<sup>2</sup>:

**Illinois**  
Arcola  
Arrowsmith  
Cabery  
Downs  
El Paso  
Greenfield  
Hillsboro  
Lake Forrest

Minonk  
Moline  
Mt. Morris  
Nashville  
Paris  
Quincy  
Rock Island  
Springfield  
Vandalia

**Indiana**  
Anderson  
Batesville  
Gas City

Hope  
Muncie  
Wabash  
Winamac

**Iowa**  
Belle Plain  
Cedar Rapids  
Green Island  
Jefferson

Linn Grove  
Northwood  
Reinbeck  
Solon

**Kansas**  
Belleville  
Emporia  
Eureka  
Everest

Haddam  
Kiowa  
Leavenworth  
Marysville  
Washington

**Nebraska**  
Beatrice  
Hastings  
Grand Island

Kearney  
Quovale  
York

**Wisconsin**  
Darlington  
Eau Claire  
Fond du Lac  
Grand Rapids  
Lodi

Manitowoc  
Palmyra  
Rio  
Sheboygan  
West Superior

**Michigan**  
Ann Arbor

Battle Creek

As I have stated previously,<sup>3</sup> there were a number of factors at work at that period which hinder the evaluation of the reports. Aside from misidentification due to astronomical causes, there were:

1. Entirely mythical accounts written by journalists for publication as actual fact (Lore and Deneault quote newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst to this effect).

2. A considerable number of admitted hoaxes, including what could be termed the first fake "UFO" photograph in the history of the subject (*Chicago Chronicle*, April 13, 1897).

3. Spurious claims by several individuals of having "invented the airship" (this particular hindrance has been brought into focus as Lore and Deneault have published two patents for an airship taken from the files of the U.S. Patent Office for 1896-97).

An excellent example of an admitted hoax which, incidentally, Lore and Deneault have apparently taken at face value and treated as an authentic landing, is described in the April 17, 1897, edition of the *Chicago Record*:

"Waterloo, Iowa—April 17—Waterloo made the discovery early this morning that an airship was anchored on the west bank of the Cedar river, just inside the city limits, and the citizens thronged to the spot. The ship was constructed of canvas, heavily painted and tightly stitched to a light framework of wood. The principal parts of the concern were two large cigar-shaped balloons, each 36ft. in length, and about 8ft. in diameter at the swell. These lay side by side and slightly elevated between them was the cabin, and inside of this were the compressors and generators with which the man guarding the machine seemed to be perfectly familiar. No opportunity was given anyone to inspect the machinery, and any attempt to cross the rope fence which he had erected was met by an order to stay out.

"Visitors came hastening from all parts of the city, as the news spread rapidly. It was but a few moments until the telephone and telegraph wires were busy receiving messages from outside towns asking for information on the latest airship. So well did the man guard his treasure, and so clearly did he tell the story of how he, in company with a Mr. Stormont, left San Francisco on March 20, and gave every detail up to the time of landing, that fully half of the 5,000 people who visited the place today doubted the truth of the

matter when it leaked out this afternoon. The affair was built by a practical joker who has spent more than a week constructing it, and when completed and placed on the ground in the night not half a dozen persons beside the inventor knew anything about it. The grounds around it are crowded tonight, and people are coming in from a distance expecting to see the 'airship' continue on its journey. When told that one man had fallen overboard just before landing a searching party was organised by some of the more credulous, and a start was made at dragging the river for his remains, when it was discovered that the entire affair was a joke."

It will be seen that pranksters in 1897 were prepared to go to elaborate lengths to have their fun.

The patents, and the newspaper stories concerning one of them, discovered by the authors are anything but convincing.<sup>1</sup> Such patents in the "Machine Age" were a dime a dozen, and no individual has ever stepped forward with conclusive proof that he had mastered heavier-than-air flight. Among the various individuals in the Midwest who claimed to have invented "the airship" we have an A. C. Clinton who claimed he would give a demonstration of his machine at the trans-Mississippi exposition on April 17; he never showed up. A certain Mr. Carr made a deal with the famous Ringling Brothers' circus to demonstrate the airship designed by one F. Meyer at a ticketed performance. At the time agreed upon neither Mr. Carr nor the airship could be located.

A more interesting story of an inventor's claim was reported or concocted by a correspondent in the April 11, 1897, *Chicago Chronicle*:

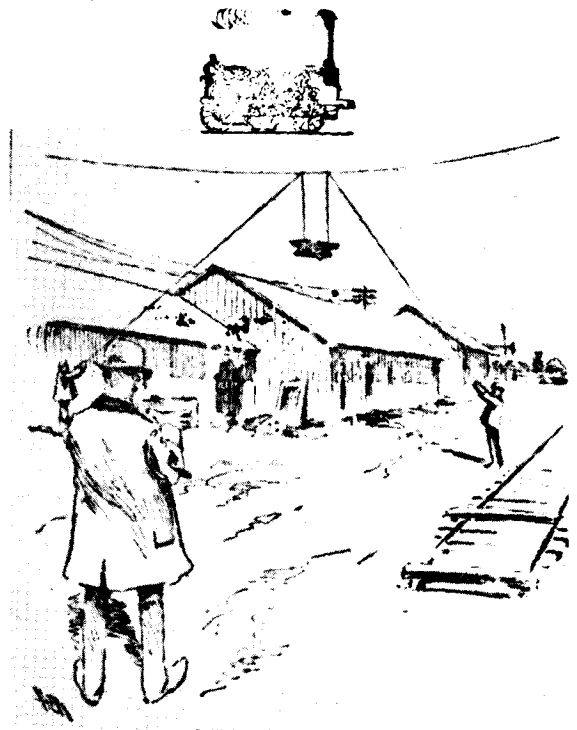
"Taylors Falls, Minnesota, April 10—The famous airship has been found near here. Upon receipt of a bulletin from Minneapolis, your correspondent hastened to the thick woods south of town. He penetrated them with great care. Moving cautiously he came to the edge of a considerable clearing in which he saw lying an immense and curiously shaped object, which looked like a whale at a distance of five feet. At first I feared that it might be some animate thing of terrible proportions. A little observation assured me that it was something of metal and wood. Suddenly a door opened and two men came out of the ship's side. They were reading daily papers and laughing at the surprise and wonder their ship had created. At that moment I rushed out at them. Seeing me they came at me like wild beasts, but I drew a revolver and warned them to stand and deliver their secret. Thereupon one of them introduced himself as J. S. McMasters of Chicago and admitted that he was the inventor of the craft that had excited so much wonder.

"There she is," he said. "There remain some little things to perfect before we make our discovery known. We will never reveal the secret, but we will soon put on lines of airships between all the principal points in the world. Each trip serves to correct some defect.

"All that I can say to you is that the principle on which our invention rests is that of *negative gravity*' (my italics, D.B.H.) 'as opposed to the positive kind with which we are all familiar.'

"While I was asking him some question the wheels on the thing began to revolve, great wingle projections unfolded, and some mysterious force drew the men into the car on the lower side and before my eyes the thing rose and sailed away down the St. Croix.

"The town is full of farmers who saw the mysterious object and came into town to discuss it. The prevailing belief is that it is the devil's own creation. When I told them my story they all said I was crazy and locked me up. I am writing this from the jail, but I am as sane as any man and never write a fake any more than Sioux City and Omaha reporters."



Preparing the 1897 fake!

These are typical of the spurious claims which were rampant at this period. However we do have some evidence that a serious attempt to emulate the behaviour of the real and quite mysterious airship by certain responsible inventors on the West Coast. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, Max L. Harmar, Secretary of the Chicago Aeronautical Association (whose president was aviation pioneer Octave Chanute), claimed to have a good idea of what was behind the mysterious sightings.

He claimed that Chanute was at that time in California as he was one of a number of wealthy men who were financing the building of an airship. The craft was said to have started a cross-country journey with the eventual destination being Washington, D.C. It was to land in Chicago, however, for purposes of registration, and a reception was being planned by Mr. Harmar. Needless to say, Mr. Harmar was disappointed as the craft observed in that area showed no signs of landing for the festivities. Later it was learned that the California airship that Mr. Chanute had been backing crashed after a very unsuccessful attempt at aerial navigation.

After sifting through data such as the above, one is left with a hard core of sightings (now over 200) of a rather unlikely looking aerial craft which created much commotion among the observers. The only detectable effect which the sightings left on the society of 1896-97 is exactly the same as that left by the modern UFO phenomenon—a psychological impact.

It is clear that the origin of the airship is still very much an open issue. It is also clear that the mystery surrounding its appearance at that particular time in history has deepened.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lore and Deneault: *Mysteries from the Skies*, pps. 24-25.  
<sup>2</sup> Refer to map in FSR September/October 1966, p. 9.  
<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.  
<sup>4</sup> Lore and Deneault, pps. 16-17, 38-39.

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# AIRSHIPS OVER TEXAS

A contribution to the study of the 1896-1897 wave

by Donald B. Hanlon and Jacques Vallée



CONSIDERABLE attention has recently been devoted to the 1896-97 American wave<sup>1, 2</sup>. This phase of UFO activity had first been recognised by Fort<sup>3</sup> and has been discussed in books by Keyhoe<sup>4</sup>, Ruppelt<sup>5</sup> as well as in more recent publications<sup>6</sup>. But it is only in the last few months that it began to be really clarified. Although Dr. J. Allen Hynek had called attention to the dramatic Leroy episode<sup>7</sup> as early as 1960, it was not until the publication of the story in 1965 by one of the authors<sup>8</sup> that a full-scale study of the wave was undertaken. This long-needed investigation has produced an unprecedented amount of data. At the same time, most researchers interested in this aspect of the mystery have found themselves in complete agreement regarding the very high significance of the new data so suddenly brought to light.

An important remark that has been presented in the pages of the REVIEW by Clark<sup>1</sup> is that "the 1897 wave indicates the futility of any attempt to divorce flying objects from the general situation in which they operate." It is quite clear that the similarities which had been noted between the behaviour of the 1897 airships and modern observations must now be regarded with caution.

The fact remains, of course, that many features of the 1897 sightings closely parallel UFO behaviour during the major waves of the post-war period. It is striking to read in Clark's article that an object seen on April 10, 1897 "dropped what looked like a parachute with a light attached to it", an observation we have come to regard as typical in the French sightings of 1954 and which is also found time and again in the American files—for instance in the recent Exeter case<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the high proportion of "occupant" cases, and the pattern observed in Type I reports (not to mention such obvious features as the reported size of the objects, or the relationship between light frequency and acceleration), tend actually to support earlier claims that we are dealing precisely with the same type of objects—that the airships are UFOs in the modern sense. What is entirely disturbing is the reported behaviour of the operators and the appearance (which Clark with reason calls "almost ludicrous") of the vehicles themselves.

Accordingly, the purpose of the present article is twofold:

- (i) To further document the analysis of that period by presenting a series of thirty sightings, most of them unpublished.
- (ii) To show how the patterns already observed by Clark<sup>1</sup> and Hanlon<sup>2</sup> are further substantiated as the acquisition of new evidence progresses.

### Observational material

For convenience, we give in table form the dates and sources for the accounts which we describe in detail below in chronological order. All these sightings were made in a twelve day period and within two hundred miles of Fort Worth, Texas (see map).

1. 'That Denton is not behind the other towns and cities in North Texas is shown by the fact that the mysterious airship of which so much has been said and written in the last few days, has been seen here by at least two credible persons, one a gentleman and the other a lady, whose reputation for truthfulness cannot be assailed.' The airship is described as cigar-shaped with a light, moving slowly. Then it accelerated "at a terrific rate." There was a row of windows along the side. One witness observed it through a marine telescope and said "I do not doubt that it was an airship." It was said to be about fifty feet long.
2. Weatherford: "Last night at 9 o'clock the airship that has been mentioned in *The News* from Oklahoma and other points, was seen here. It passed over the city in a south-westerly direction and lights were thrown out from the front, resembling the headlight of an engine. The machine was seen here by many people."
3. "Various and truthful citizens of Corsicana today declared that the airship, which has received not a little mention in the press this week, passed over the city last night. It was described by one, who is emphatic in the statement that he saw it, as being a bright light a long distance from the earth and was moving at rather a fast speed across the firmament."
4. A man from Ennis said that he saw the airship the previous night from Fort Worth.
5. Paris: several persons saw the airship, including J. A. Black, a nightwatchman. He got a good look at it and described it as cigar-shaped, 200 feet long, with sails or wings outstretched on either side. A dog howled until the airship passed from sight.
6. Sherman: "The mysterious aerial navigator that has caused so much newspaper comment recently has been sighted by W. S. Hellier of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad at this place. This is what Mr. Hellier says about it: "I was standing on the pavement on the north side of the public square last night about 10 o'clock when I noticed a dark object begin to pass between the

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TABLE

Case identification						Source	
remarks	No.	Date	Time	Place	Witness	Dallas Morning News	Houston Post
meteor ?	1	About 13		Denton		15 April, 1897	
	2	14 April	2100	Weatherford		16 April	
	3	night 14-15		Corsicana		16 April	
	4	night 14-15		Fort Worth		17 April	
	5	night 15-16		Paris	Black Hellier	17 April	
	6	15 April	2200	Sherman		17 April	18 April
	7	16 April		Farmersville		18 April	
	8	16 April	2130	Granbury	Gresham Smith	19 April	
	9	17 April	0116	Childress			22 April
	10	17 April		Texarkana		18 April	
misquote	11	17 April		Garland		18 April	
	12	17 April		Bonham		18 April	
	13	17 April		Cleburne		18 April	
	14	17 April		Tioga		18 April	
	15	17 April		Mansfield		18 April	
	16	17 April		Ladonia		18 April	
	17	17 April		Forney		18 April	
	18	17 April		Stephenville		19 April	
	19	17 April		Waxahachie		19 April	
	20	17 April		Greenville		19 April	
accident	21	17 April	0600	Aurora	Weems	19 April	
	22	night 17-18		Bryan			20 April
	23	night 18-19	0010	Atlanta	Nelson		22 April
	24	19 April	2130	Longview			22 April
	25	19 April	2330	Belton			22 April
landing	26	19 April		Groesbeck	Johnson		22 April
	27	22 April	2330	Rockland	Barclay		22 April
landing mistake	28	night 22-23	2400	Josserand	Nicholas		26 April
	29	night 25-26		Pine Valley			28 April
	30	night 25-26		Merkel			28 April

earth and the moon. At first I thought it was a cloud, but I noticed at the same time that it was perfectly shaped. The object was going eastward and not apparently at any great rate of speed. It was an elongated oval, perhaps six times its diameter in length. After it passed by the moon I saw no more of it."

7. Farmersville: Several persons saw the airship. Two said they saw men on board. One said he could clearly hear them singing "Nearer My God to Thee". He said they were distributing temperance tracts.

8. Granbury: Newt Gresham at 9.30 p.m. was drilling the Riddle Rifles when the airship approached. He ordered the company to fire on the object. It later disappeared.

9. Childress: 'The much-talked-of airship was seen here last night about 1:16 o'clock. Rev. J. W. Smith was the first to discover the curious aerial monster. He thought at first that it was a star shooting, but after watching it a moment or two, saw that it was not. He then called to his mother-in-law, Mr. Charley Norris, and also called to Mr. Bates and wife, near neighbours, who were up at the time. Charles Norris ran over to his mother's and called out several members of the family, who saw the ship. It soon disappeared, travelling in a westerly direction. Rev. Smith thinks it must have been 2,000 feet high and travelling very fast.'

10. Texarkana: A telegraph operator at Hope, Ark., said he saw the airship. It is not clear whether he saw it from Hope or from Texarkana.

11. Garland: A man said he saw wings on sides and back of cigar-shaped object.

12. Bonham: Several saw ship pass and heard motors.

13. Cleburne: Sighting of the airship. No details given.

14. Tioga: Sighting, no details.

15. Mansfield: Airship was said to be cigar-shaped with wings on either side. Had a front end headlight. Side lights were green with bright red light in rear.

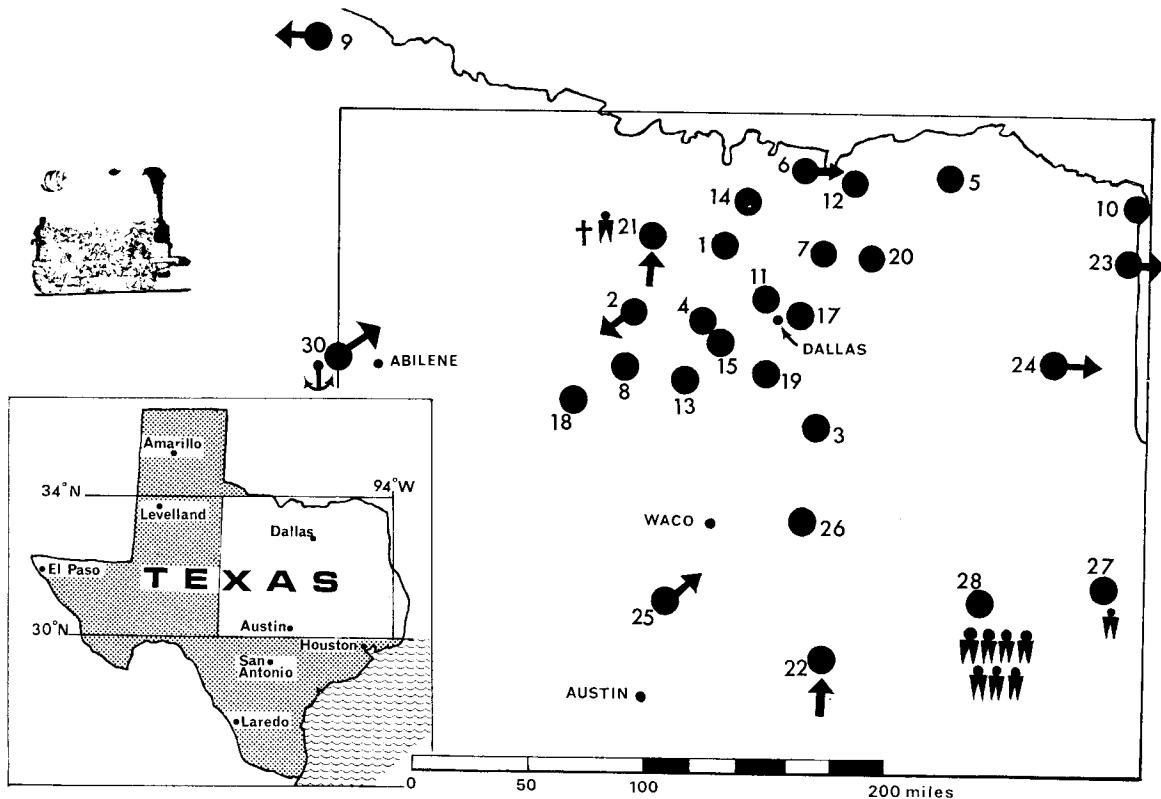
16. Ladonia: A sighting was mentioned, but the News several days later ran a correction which said that the man had been misquoted; that he had not seen the airship.

17. Forney: Sighting of the airship. No details given.

18, 19, 20. Stories from Stephenville, Waxahachie and Greenville say that people have talked to crewmen of the airship.

21. Aurora: 'About 6 o'clock this morning the early risers of Aurora were astonished at the sudden appearance of the airship which has been sailing throughout the country. It was travelling due north, and much nearer the earth than before. Evidently some of the machinery was out of order, for it was making a speed of only ten or twelve miles an hour, and gradually settling toward the earth. It sailed over the public square and when it reached the north part of town collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water tank and destroying the judge's flower garden. The

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pilot of the ship is supposed to have been the only one aboard, and while his remains are badly disfigured, enough of the original has been picked up to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world. Mr. T. J. Weems, the U.S. Signal Service officer at this place and an authority on astronomy, gives it as his opinion that he was a native of the planet Mars. Papers found on his person—evidently the records of his travels—are written in some unknown hieroglyphics, and cannot be deciphered. This ship was too badly wrecked to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminium and silver, and it must have weighed several tons. The town today is full of people who are viewing the wreckage and gather specimens of strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow. Signed: E. E. Haydon.' (see note 10).

22. Bryan: 'A number of Bryan people claim to have seen the mysterious airship pass over that town Saturday night. It was going north.'

23. Atlanta: 'There was considerable excitement here today, caused by a visitation last night by the mysterious airship. It was first seen by Jim Nelson, a farmer, living one and a half miles west of here. He had walked out into his yard just after midnight, when his attention was attracted by a peculiar noise and looking up he discovered the mysterious aerial traveller. It seemed to be descending straight to the earth with great rapidity and Mr. Nelson's hair stood out with fright, as he mistook it for a meteor and momentarily expected it to strike the earth, explode and blow himself, his family and earthly possessions into eternity. But when within two or three hundred feet of the earth it paused for an instant, coming to a sudden stop, almost like a heavy weight fall-

ing until it reached the end of a rope sustaining it, then it moved off at a rate of speed about equal to that of an ordinary passenger train, in the direction of this city. Having read in the papers of an airship appearing at different places, he decided this must be the mysterious stranger and having telephone connection with this city, he immediately rang up central and reported what he had seen.

'Mr. Boothe, the telephone manager, being in the office, looked out for the airship, which made its appearance on time. While passing over the city it was seen by many of the best citizens. Lee Wicks, night policeman, saw it distinctly and describes it as being about thirty feet long and the body or hull being about the proportions and shape of a skiff, and seemed to be propelled by revolving wheels and fitted with sails to guide its course. Both Mr. Wicks and Mr. Boothe agree in their description of the ship, and both believe the motor power to be electricity.

'Dr. Crossly, Jack Bangus, Dr. Connelly, Chess Mayes, Tom Swint, Dick Hogan, Paul Dunklin, R. T. Cope and Mr. Huffmaster, night operator, all are reported to have seen the ship, and verify the statement and description given by Boothe and Wicks. When first seen by Jim Nelson, there were only faint gleams of red, green and blue, lights showing, but just after starting off horizontally it shot out a glaring gleam of white light, which was directed towards the earth in front of the airship at an angle of about 45 degrees and lighted a circle of about thirty feet diameter as bright or brighter than the noonday sun. This great light and its wonderful power is supposed to have been a searchlight. While passing over this city the speed of the airship was from five to fifteen miles an hour. It slowed up just before reaching the business part of the city and in passing over this portion

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its speed was not above five miles an hour. It was traveling almost due east and the stream of light was shut off just after passing the city limits. The opinions regarding this mysterious ship are about as numerous as the population. Some who did not see it are inclined to brand the story as a fake, but the character of the men who saw it cannot be questioned. It is impossible to give all the opinions, but one that seems worthy of consideration is that the airship is the property of a gang of crackmen, who by the aid of the searchlight and X-rays, under the management of scientific experts, sail over a town and look through the walls of the houses and bank vaults and locate the booty; that they return on a later date and secure it, and then disappear by the aid of their airship. Another solution offered is that it is an exploring party sent out by some other planet. The most plausible theory seems to be that some inventor has succeeded in solving the problem of aerial navigation and with a party of his friends is out on an aerial trip.

24. Longview: 'Last night about 9.30, the *Post* correspondent and family on returning from church saw the so-called airship. A bright light, seemingly about the size of Venus, moved swiftly to the Northwest, disappearing beneath the horizon. In a few minutes it reappeared rising nearly to the zenith and rapidly traversed the heavens in an easterly direction. The light emitted a series of intermittent flashes of a steel colour. No car was seen.'

25. Belton: 'Last night quite a crowd of responsible people of this place assembled for the purpose of watching for that much-talked-of airship and at 11.30 o'clock it was seen coming from the southwest at an immense velocity. It dipped and but for the fact of bearing just a little to the left of the "New Surprise" show tent, directly in front of Peay's hotel, the tent would have suffered great injury, judging from the velocity of the ship. Missing the tent, it passed by the northwest corner of Peay's hotel and rising passed from view. The passengers on board their aerial wonder spoke as they passed, but could not be understood on account of the velocity. Belton people have been sceptical heretofore, but they now believe. The race was so swift that no proper estimate could be formed as to the dimensions; however, about ten persons were distinctly seen.'

26. Groesbeck: 'Mr. B. F. Johnson saw the mysterious airship last night, as did several of his neighbours.'

27. Rockland: 'Mr. John M. Barclay, living near this place, reports that last night about 11 o'clock, after having retired, he heard his dog barking furiously, together with a whining noise. He went to the door to ascertain the trouble and saw something, he says, that made his eyes bulge out and but for the fact that he had been reading of an airship that was supposed to have been in or over Texas, he would have taken to the woods. It was a peculiar shaped body, with an oblong shape, with wings and side attachments of various sizes and shapes. There were brilliant lights, which appeared much brighter than electric lights. When he first saw it, it seemed perfectly stationary about five yards from the ground. It circled a few times and gradually descended to the ground in a pasture adjacent to his house. He took his Winchester and went down to investigate. As soon as the ship, or whatever it might be, alighted, the lights went out. The night was bright enough for a man to be distinguished several yards, and when within about thirty yards of the ship he was met by an ordinary mortal, who requested him to lay his gun aside as no harm was intended. Whereupon the following conversation ensued: Mr. Barclay enquired: 'Who are you and what do you want?'—'Never mind about my name, call it Smith. I want some lubricating oil and a couple

of cold chisels if you can get them, and some bluestone. I suppose the saw mill hard by has the two former articles and the telegraph operator has the bluestone. Here is a ten-dollar bill; take it and get us these articles and keep the change for your trouble.'

Mr. Barclay said: "What have you got down there? Let me go and see it." He who wanted to be called Smith said: "No, we cannot permit you to approach any nearer, but do as we request you and your kindness will be appreciated, and we will call you some future day and reciprocate your kindness by taking you on a trip."

Mr. Barclay went and procured the oil and cold chisels, but could not get the bluestone. They had no change and Mr. Barclay tendered him the ten-dollar bill, but same was refused. The man shook hands with him and thanked him cordially and asked that he not follow him to the vessel. As he left Mr. Barclay called him and asked him where he was from and where he was going. He replied "from anywhere, but we will be in Greece day after tomorrow." He got on board, when there was again the whirling noise, and the thing was gone, as Mr. Barclay expresses it, like a shot out of a gun. Mr. Barclay is perfectly reliable.

28. Jossierand: 'Considerable excitement prevails at this writing in this usually quiet village of Jossierand, caused by a visit of the noted airship, which has been at so many points of late. Mr. Frank Nichols, a prominent farmer living about two miles east of here, and a man of unquestioned veracity, was awakened night before last near the hour of twelve by a whirling noise similar to that made by machinery. Upon looking out he was startled upon beholding brilliant lights streaming from a ponderous vessel of strange proportions, which rested upon the ground in his cornfield.'

'Having read the despatches published in the *Post* of the noted aerial navigators, the truth at once flashed over him that he was one of the fortunate ones and with all the bravery of Priam at the siege of Troy Mr. Nichols started out to investigate. Before reaching the strange midnight visitor he was accosted by two men with buckets who asked permission to draw water from his well. Thinking he might be entertaining heavenly visitors instead of earthly mortals, permission was readily granted. Mr. Nichols was kindly invited to accompany them to the ship. He conversed freely with the crew, composed of six or eight individuals about the ship. The machinery was so complicated that in his short interview he could gain no knowledge of its workings. However, one of the crew told him the problem of aerial navigation had been solved. The ship or car is built of a newly-discovered material that has the property of self-sustenance in the air, and the motive power is highly condensed electricity. He was informed that five of these ships were built at a small town in Iowa. Soon the invention will be given to the public. An immense stock company is now being formed and within the next year the machines will be in general use. Mr. Nichols lives at Jossierand, Trinity County, Texas, and will convince any incredulous one by showing the place where the ship rested.'

29. Pine Valley: 'The airship—the genuine, real live thing—was seen last night by several parties whose word is far beyond question and of whom some of the most responsible persons in the community. They were at church when it was seen from the inside through a window; considerable excitement prevailed. It appeared to be a long distance off, at an angle of about 45 degrees from where the crowd was standing, moving very slowly; was of cigar shape, as has so often been described; had two large wings on each

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side; one set was just in front and slightly overlapped the rear set, but appeared to be a great deal larger. The colour of the object seemed to be of a yellowish brown, a bit different than other accounts. The propeller was at the bow and, as well as the crowd could distinguish it, was made of long paddles, even as long as the ship itself. The much-heard-of searchlight was on the stern of the ship and appeared to cover the entire stern. It seemed to be a very large light and it would go out and relight at regular intervals. This was explained by some to be a disinclination of its navigators to being perceived, that it merely turned on the light occasionally to discover their whereabouts. The light was a deep golden colour and some of the observing party declared they could see plainly enough to have picked up a fly on the floor had there been no other light in the house. At this juncture, the ship had almost gone out of sight from the window and the crowd decided to look at it, but when they got outside it was nowhere to be seen. Upon returning and making more careful observation they found it to be a lightning-bug or fire-fly crawling slowly across the window-pane.

30. Merkel: 'Some parties returning from church last night noticed a heavy object dragging along with a large rope attached. They followed it until crossing the railroad it caught on a rail. On looking up they saw what they supposed was the airship. It was not near enough to get an idea of the dimensions. A light could be seen protruding from several wings. One bright light in front like the headlight of a locomotive. After some 10 minutes a man was seen descending the rope: he came near enough to be plainly seen; he wore a light blue sailor suit, was small in size. He stopped when he discovered parties at the anchor and cut the rope below him and sailed off in a north-east direction. The anchor is now on exhibition at the blacksmith shop of Elliott & Miller and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people.'

### Discussion

On the basis of several detailed descriptions of the airships seen at close range, descriptions that use such terms as 'wings', 'wheels', 'carriage', etc., Clark makes the strong assumption that the phenomenon is "a kind of heavier than air construction built for limited flights through the immediate atmosphere. It was most decidedly **not** any sort of spacecraft." This statement is somewhat ambiguous. If it is meant that in the appearance of the objects to the observers, they could only be interpreted as airships, the point is certainly well taken; if it is meant, however, that the intrinsic features of the craft made them drastically different from the class of UFO phenomena observed today, then we disagree with the statement. In addition to the similarities noted in our introduction, there are, in our view, three characteristics of the airships that duplicate the performances observed today: (i) The very general description of the objects as 'cigar-shaped', (ii) the dramatic way of arrival ('descending straight to the earth with great rapidity' in case No. 23) and departure ('like a shot out of a gun' in case

No. 27) and (iii) the reported noise 'whinning' or 'whirling' in case No. 27, witness 'awakened by a whirring noise similar to that made by machinery' in case No. 28).

Not only were these performances beyond the technology of 1897, but it would still be impossible to duplicate them: the airships have the characteristics of a ten-passenger vertical take-off and landing aircraft creating little noise and no ground disturbance, and not propelled by rockets, capable of both extremely high horizontal speeds and remarkable hovering or stationary flight! They violate the laws of inertia and aerodynamics precisely in the same manner as our 'modern' UFOs (see note 11). Yet their outside appearance seems well-designed to convey the impression that they are nothing but advanced dirigibles, just within the grasp of an American farmer of 1897. As for the conversations with the crews, they are also disturbing to the highest point, if they are reliably reported. It should be remembered, however, that not all occupants were described as humans. Hamilton himself, in Leroy, spoke of 'six of the strangest beings I ever saw'. They were jabbering together, but we could not understand a word they said. Later he refers again to 'the cursed thing with its big lights and hideous people.' On the contrary, in most of the Texas encounters, there was communication of the most uncomplicated and mundane nature between the witness and the operators—this duality is indeed present in modern time: it constitutes one of the major mysteries of the French wave of 1954 (cf. also Carrouges book *Les Apparitions de Martiens* and the South American cases).

A great deal of research and discussion will undoubtedly be necessary before this duality can be understood. To appraise objectively the 1897 sightings, one must replace them within the entire history of the rumours of aerial visions—and, perhaps, the strange astronomical observations—that flourished during the second half of the last century and may have culminated in the Siberian catastrophe of 1908 and the New Zealand wave of the following year. What is remarkable in the American wave itself is the revelation of a much higher proportion of landings than was originally suspected, and the discovery of a pattern of contact so remarkable that it may open an entirely new avenue of approach to the UFO mystery.

### References:

- 1 Clark, J.: *The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship FLYING SAUCER REVIEW XII, 4.*
- 2 Hanlon, D. B.: *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW XII, 5.*
- 3 Fort, C.: *New Lands in Books of Charles Fort*, Holt ed. page 468.
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A → "SEXUFOR"



IGNACIO DARNAUDE  
Manuel Sturot, 3, Bloque 3.  
SEVILLA - SPAIN

*Lucius Farish is recognized by leaders in flying saucer research as one of the best of the historical ufologists. His reputation is worldwide as he has provided valuable clues to the UFO enigma. Mr. Farish lives in Arkansas*

BRAD STEIGER AND JOAN WHITENDOUR: "THE ALLENDE LETTERS"  
(UNIVERSAL PUBLISHING, NEW YORK, 1968)

# The Great 1897 Air Flap

By Lucius Farish

Item: An electrician from San Jose, California claimed to have taken a 4,400-mile round trip from San Francisco to Honolulu in a mysterious aircraft.

Item: Michigan residents reported the landing of a strange craft which opened to disclose a being 9-1/2 feet tall.

Item: A prominent judge in Texarkana, Arkansas told of going aboard a landed ship and being shown around by its "Oriental-looking" occupants.

The above-listed news stories might well have come from today's papers, considering the scale of UFO activity during the past few years. In actuality, they were taken from newspaper files for the period between November, 1896 and May, 1897. They are contact reports from that mysterious yet revealing period—the time of the "Great Airship Flap."

To citizens of the late 1890's, the term "flying saucer" undoubtedly would have conjured up visions of an irate wife pelting her husband with kitchen crockery! That much-maligned term was not to come into use until over fifty

years later. Neither would the identification term UFO have been meaningful to them. But, if one mentioned the word "airship", there could be little doubt that a swift reaction, pro or con, would be forthcoming.

So far as is known, the sightings began in California in November, 1896. Persons in Sacramento, Oroville, San Francisco, Red Bluff and other communities, reported seeing the "mystic flying light", as the San Francisco *Call* termed it. To fully recount all the 1896-97 sightings would take a very large book. Therefore, this article will be devoted entirely to some of the more outstanding contact reports from this period.

From the beginning, the terrestrial airship concept was uppermost in the public mind. This idea was constantly reinforced by press references to alleged inventors of the airship. As seen from our present-day perspective, the terrestrial airship theory (that the airship was the product of an inventor who had solved the problem of aerial navigation) falls flat. From a purely mechanical and aerodynamic point

of view, it was highly unlikely that any inventor of the period could have constructed a workable craft which could have performed like these airships were purported to do.

Consider the words of British aviation authority and historian, Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, as quoted in the outstanding British UFO magazine, *Flying Saucer Review*:

"Speaking as an aeronautical historian who specializes in the periods before 1910, I can say with certainty that the only air-borne vehicles carrying passengers, which could possibly have been seen anywhere in North America in 1897 were free-flying spherical balloons, and it is highly unlikely for these to be mistaken for anything else. No form of dirigible or heavier-than-air flying machine was flying—or *could* fly then.

That the terrestrial airship theory was almost universally accepted is evident in the first contact account we will examine. The December 2, 1896 edition of the Los Angeles *Times* reported the story under the heading, "A FLIGHT OF IMAGINATION—ANOTHER MAN WHO HAS SEEN THE AIRSHIP:"



*A Milwaukee teen-ager saw this saucer in April of 1967. According to the witness, the object swooped down from his right, then leveled off in flight while emanating a golden glow. After several seconds the UFO soared away*

electricity. It is a wonderful machine and can be stopped and made to stand still in the air anywhere and comes down light as a feather.' "

"Horen lives at the New Exchange Hotel and went to San Francisco Thursday. Some seem to give credence to his story. All admire his abilities as an accomplished story-teller and say he has a marvelous imagination. He sticks to his story and bears the name of a hard-working man."

In our investigations thus far, only two instances have been found wherein the airship crews were of abnormal appearance. The following is one of those cases and is easily the most intriguing of the lot.

The Lansing, Michigan *State Republican*, carried the following story in 1897. Datedlined Williams-

"SAN JOSE, Dec. 1.—The champion airship story of the season is told by John A. Horen, an electrician in the employ of Electrical Improvement Company of this place. Horen says he has a patent on an electrical platinum speaking appliance and that by appointment he went to San Francisco Thursday to see the inventory of the airship who wished to see the appliance. Said Horen: 'We went on horseback to a point on Sandy Beach, where the airship was, got aboard and rose very high. The height was registered by a meter on the ship. The inventor does not count the distance traveled by miles but by degrees. After leaving Sandy Beach Thursday afternoon we traveled westward. Before day next morning we saw lights. The inventor said they were the lamps of Honolulu. We turned east and Saturday evening about dark landed near where we started. The airship rose by means of two propellers. The movement was noiseless and swift. The inventor is 45 years old, but I cannot now tell any news, but the motive power is not steam or



*A high-pitched whine drew a Kentwood, Louisiana resident's attention to this classically-shaped UFO. As he aimed his camera to the sky, the saucer turned slowly and remained overhead as if watching the curious earthling*

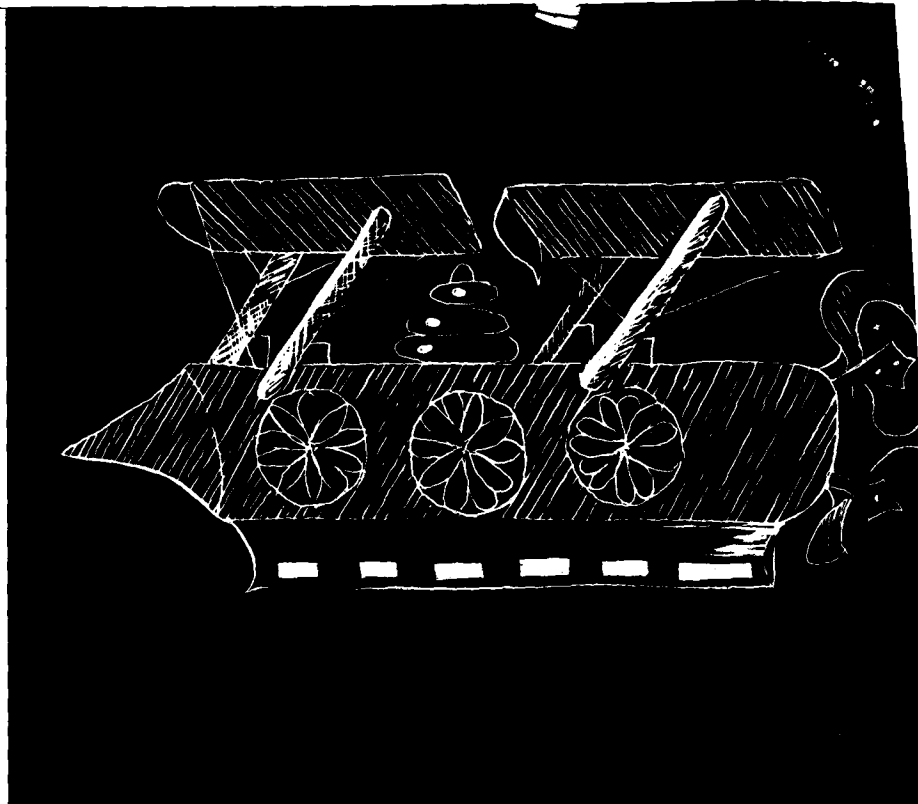
ton, Michigan, April 17, the account says:

"This morning at a point a mile and a half south and west of this village, a balloon or flying machine alighted. The airship was seen about an hour before it alighted, by a dozen farmers or more, who had been watching it. On its attempt to alight, they gathered around, but a good many of them did not remain long after the landing of the ship. A strange man, if man he might be called, was in charge of the ship. While he seemed to have plenty of clothes, he seemed to have no use for them, as he was almost naked, and seemed to be suffering from the heat. He is almost 9-1/2 feet tall and his talk, while musical, is not talk at all, but seems to be a repetition of bellowing. One of the farmers, who was somewhat braver, attempted to go near him and got a kick that will last him for some time, having got his hip broken.

Great excitement prevails here, and lots of people are flocking here from Okemos and Locke to view the strange being at a distance, as no one dares to go near. He seems to be trying to talk to the people. The people here are credulous and those who have not seen refuse to believe, although six of the best people are here and affirm that it is the truth. From their excited manners, we are led to believe that no hoax exists. At 8:10 last evening the airship passed south and a little west of the village. Hundreds of people watched its flight."

No exact date is given for the next story, but it was reported in the April 22nd issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* of Little Rock. The contact had presumably taken place only a short time before. The principal of the story was a Captain Jim Hooton, "The well-known Iron Mountain railroad conductor." Though skeptical of earlier airship reports, the *Gazette* sent one of its reporters to interview Captain Hooton and termed his account "The most authentic story printed."

Said the Captain: "Of course I



*Captain Hooton's own sketch of the rocket-shaped airship he saw in April of 1897*

saw the airship. There is no doubt in the world about it and you will be safe in banking on what I tell you. It came about in this way:

"I had gone down to Texarkana to bring back a special, and knowing that I would have some eight to ten hours to spare at Texarkana, I went to Homan (Arkansas) to do a little hunting. It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon when I reached that place. The sport was good, and before I knew it, it was after 6 o'clock when I started to make my way back toward the railroad station.

"As I was tramping through the brush my attention was attracted by a familiar sound, a sound for all the world like the working of an air pump on a locomotive. I went at once in the direction of the sound, and there in an open space of some five or six acres, I saw the object making the noise. To say that I was astonished would but feebly express my feelings. I decided at once that this was the famous airship seen by so many people about the country.

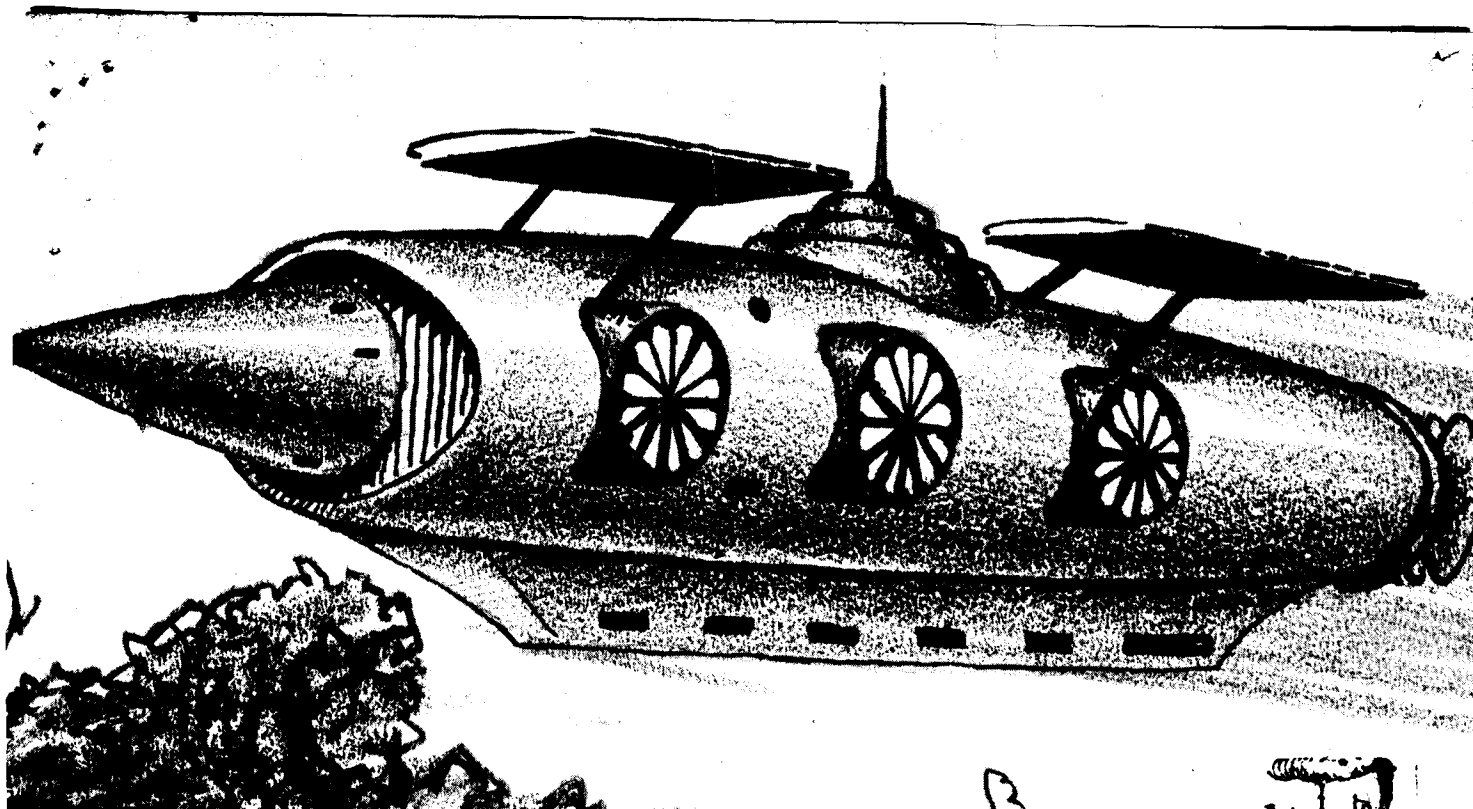
"There was a medium-sized man aboard and I noticed that he was wearing smoked glasses. He was tinkering around what seemed

to be the back-end of the ship, and as I approached I was too dumbfounded to speak. He looked at me in surprise, and said: 'Good day, sir; good day.' I asked: 'Is this the air ship?' and he replied: 'Yes sir,' whereupon three or four other men came out of what was apparently the keel of the ship.

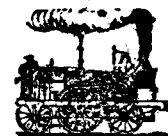
"A close examination showed that the keel was divided into two parts terminating in front like the sharp edge of a knife; in fact, the entire front end of the ship terminated in a knife-like edge, while the sides of the ship bulged gradually toward the middle, and then receded. There were three large wheels upon each side made of some bending metal and arranged so that they became concave as they moved forward.

" 'I beg your pardon, sir,' I said, 'the noise sounds a good deal like a Westinghouse air brake.' "Perhaps it does, my friend; we are using condensed air and aeroplanes, but you will know more later on." " 'All ready, sir,' someone called out, when the party all disappeared below. I observed that just in front of each wheel a two-inch tube began to spurt air on the wheels and they commenced revolving. The ship gradually arose





Artist Hal Crawford's interpretation of Captain Hooton's airship taken from his description in a local paper



with a hissing sound. The aeroplanes suddenly sprang forward, turning their sharp ends skyward, then the rudders at the end of the ship began to veer to one side, and the wheels revolved so fast that one could scarcely see the blades. In less time than it takes to tell you, the ship had gone out of sight.

"This drawing I have made you is the best I can do under the circumstances. I consider I was fortunate in seeing the ship. You may add that she pumped while standing still like the air pump of an engine. One particular feature I remember is that what I would call the cowcatcher was sharp as the blade of a knife and almost as pointed as a needle. There was no bell or bell rope about the ship that I could discover, like I should think every well-regulated air locomotive should have."

Judge Lawrence A. Byrne of Texarkana, Arkansas, told a *Daily Texarkanian* reporter of his encounter with an airship and its occupants on April 23rd of that year. The reporter, while acknowledging that the Judge was "known here for his truthfulness," nevertheless found his story a bit beyond belief. Admitting that the

account was "a well studied one" and "ingeniously wrought," the reporter quoted the Judge as follows:

"I was down on McKinney bayou Friday looking after the surveying of a tract of land, and in passing through a thicket to an open space, saw a strange looking object anchored to the ground. On approaching I found it to be the 'airship' I have read so much about of late. It was manned by three men who spoke a foreign language, but judging from their looks, one would take them to be Japs. They saw my astonishment and beckoned me to follow them, and on complying, was shown through the ship."

Following this, the Judge explained "about the machinery being made of aluminum and the gas to raise and lower the monster was pumped into an aluminum tank when the ship was to be raised and let out when to be lowered." This is the only other account in our files which describes beings of other than normal appearance. Even here, the difference is not nearly so pronounced as in the Williamston, Michigan story of a 9-1/2-foot-tall being.

In considering the contact stories we have described, it should be borne in mind that research into the 1896-97 flap has only just begun. Thus far, only four states—Texas, Kansas, Michigan and Arkansas—have been even semi-researched. Credit should be given to those researchers who have contributed to our meager knowledge of this period. In Kansas, Harry Fleenor of Topeka has given much time to this study and is largely responsible for this writer's all-consuming interest. Jerome Clark of Canby, Minnesota, has written a number of airship articles for both popular and specialized publications and in so doing, has brought the subject to the public's attention. Jacques Vallee and Donald Hanlon have also publicized the airship flap in their articles for *Flying Saucer Review*.

Researcher Gary Larreategui of Lansing, Michigan has delved into old newspaper files and given us some very important data, such as the Williamston "giant" report. It is our fervent hope that other interested persons will dig into their local newspaper files and provide other equally important information concerning the period in question.

# THE E.T. CONCEPT IN HISTORY

Lucius Farish

THIS contribution is occasioned by one of Gordon Creighton's remarks in a recent issue of *Flying Saucer Review*.<sup>1</sup> In discussing the history of those whom he terms the "Gentry," Creighton wondered if anyone prior to the early 1950s had claimed contact with "extraterrestrials."

Further, Mr. Creighton remarked, "What does seem certain, at any rate, is that, during the American Visitation of 1897 for example, not one of the entities allegedly met told any American that he was from another planet, and not a single American is reported in the press of that time as having thought there was anything 'interplanetary' about the whole affair."

Let us take these subjects one by one and see how well they stand the test of examination:

(1) Did anyone claim to have met inhabitants of other planets prior to 1952 or thereabouts? Yes, most definitely!

In the revised paperback edition of Vallée's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*,<sup>2</sup> reference is made to the Jesuit scholar, Athanasius Kircher, who "could not find his words" to convey to his readers the admiration he felt for the inhabitants of Venus. He describes them as young men of a wonderful beauty, whose clothes were as transparent as crystal . . ."

Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) wrote on a wide variety of scientific subjects, but most of his writings have never been translated from the original Latin. However, in Gustav Davidson's *A Dictionary of Angels*,<sup>3</sup> a bit more information is given concerning Kircher's "visits to various planets."

According to Davidson, Kircher was accompanied on his celestial flights by "the genius Cosmiel." On

Saturn, he found the "sinister" genii inhabiting that planet. The "guardian angels of all the virtues" were found living on the "Elysian shores of the planet Jupiter."

If some Latin scholar among the FSR readers should wish to translate more of Kircher's writings into English—a worthy project, it would seem—the interplanetary accounts will probably be found in two works—*Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652) and *Voyage Ecstatique* (Rome, 1656).

Vallée also mentions one David Fabricius, a 17th Century writer who claimed to have met the "inhabitants of the Moon." Investigation of Fabricius' writings might well disclose more pertinent details.

Some time in the late 1800s, a book entitled *The Man From Mars* was published. The author, Thomas Blot, claimed to have met an inhabitant of the Red Planet in the mountains of California. The Martian had not arrived by spaceship, but through a process which seems to have been a mixture of astral projection and teleportation (if such a thing can be conceived!). Long discourses by the Martian, largely of a philosophical/sociological nature, are contained in the book. The only copy this writer has seen had the copyright date missing, so it is not possible to say precisely when the incident allegedly occurred. However, it was at the time of an extremely close approach of the planet Mars.

One modern contactee, Albert Coe of Beverly, New Jersey, claims to have been in contact with people now living on Mars and Venus who are descendants of a race which once lived on "Norca," a planet of the star Tau Ceti. Coe says his original contact occurred in 1920 and they have continued over the past 52 years.<sup>4</sup>

## REJUVENATION FOLLOWS CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH UFO—Continued from page 13

as soon as we got there she suddenly awoke and fled in terror, scratching my arms as she escaped from me.

### The Dead Catfish

The Bromatology analysis has not yet been received. The water of the small stream where the dead fish were found is normally drinkable. Two or three metres wide and about 50 or 60 cms. deep, its water is always crystal-clear and its flow is regular, indeed at times very fast. No more dead fish have been found since the first batch.

I must repeat that on the occasion of my second visit to the witness, and also all the other persons engaged in investigating this case, again emphasised their wish to remain anonymous and, despite our pleadings, they also insisted that even the name of the town be withheld. They consider that this is the only way in which they

can be sure of avoiding a mass invasion by reporters and curiosity-seeking intruders.

Buenos Aires, February 27, 1973.

\* \* \* \* \*

### NOTE BY EDITOR OF FSR

The name of the town, the name of the witness, and the name of the Secretary to the local Government Office who participated in the interrogation of Sr. V.M., are on record with us, and in accordance with Señor Romaniuk's express request we shall not reveal them until advised that we may do so.

[As indicated in our note on p. 10, some of these details have been published in Germany, so the restriction is now lifted.—C.B.]

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These are only a few examples of "pre-flying saucer" contactees.

(2) Did any of the "airship contactees" of 1896-97 claim to have met extraterrestrials? No—not exactly. Some of the people who met airship crews seem to have wondered if the "aeronauts" were terrestrials or otherwise, but no one openly voiced an opinion on the matter. There are only "hints," such as that of the Texas contactee who said he would not have been more astonished had he entertained inhabitants of the Moon. Or the Missouri man who met a nude man and woman from an airship and wondered if "Adam and Eve had come to Earth again." Or even Alexander Hamilton, the Kansas rancher who unwillingly provided a steak dinner for a group of airship occupants and wondered if they were "devils or angels."

(3) Did the newspapers of the airship era quote anyone as believing the strange aircraft were of E.T. origin? Again, the answer is a definite Yes.

The first reference to a possible E.T. source for the airships came in November 1896, during the wave of sightings on the U.S. West Coast.

In the November 24, 1896, edition of the Sacramento, California, *Bee*, the following letter appeared, headed "A Visitor From Mars?":

"To the Editor of the *Bee*—Sir: There is nothing improbable about our recent airship visitor. The only doubt that can arise is as to the origin of this particular aerial messenger.

"In my investigation of this subject, it would seem that this visitor is from our neighbouring planet Mars. We know, from the evidence of scientists and astronomers that Mars is many millions of years older than this earth. It is but reasonable to agree and conclude that the inhabitants of our nearest planetary neighbor, are more advanced in the sciences, and have more knowledge of the use of the great electric power than the denizens of the earth. Many thousands of years' experience have given them the perfection of inventions which would appear marvelous to our mundane people.

"The Lord Commissioner of Mars has evidently sent one of his electric aircraft on an exploring expedition to the younger but larger worlds.

"The airships are constructed of the lightest and strongest fabrics and the machinery is of the most perfect electrical work.

"Aluminium and glass, hardened by the same chemical process that forms our diamonds, contribute the chief material of their most perfect airships.

"When in use, these vessels, at a distance, have the appearance of a ball of fire, being operated wholly by the electric current generated on such vessel.

"The speed of our Martian ships is very great, and can be regulated to the rapidity of a thousand miles a second.

"In fact, with the Martian inventions, space is almost annihilated. These aerial craft can so adopt their courses that when they desire to rest they can anchor within certain degrees of latitude and wait

for the revolutions of the earth, for instance, bring any particular locality desired, much nearer them, without the necessity of any aerial navigation.

"In Mars, all the great electric power is converted by the waves of the ocean, thus making electricity a common utility for everything necessary for their arts, sciences, manufactures, commerce, and transportation.

"It is supposed that the Lord Commissioner of Mars, in sending out his airship is seeking to establish telegraphic or telephone communication between the planets.

"It is probable, that in a short time this embassy will make a call upon the President. Perhaps they are delaying until Major McKinley assumes the administration of affairs, on the theory that there may be more advanced ideas in this event.—W.A., Sacramento, November 24, 1896."

Consider the now-familiar elements in W.A.'s story: The "hardened" aluminium and glass used in airship construction were paralleled by Adamski's comments about metals which were processed to the point of translucence. Where W.A. described the airships as having the appearance of a "ball of fire" when seen at a distance, modern contactees and theorists speak of "heavy forcefields." The speed of the "Martian" airships—"a thousand miles a second"—and their ability to "orbit" over a precise area are details which seem not to belong to the world of 1896. Unless, of course, W.A. had obtained his information "at first hand"—as seems likely.

Who else thought of Martians in 1896-97? Several people, apparently. Following the rustling of Alexander Hamilton's heifer by "hideous people" in an airship, the Colony, Kansas, *Free Press* commented: "The *Free Press* having turned the 'NOCTURNAL AERIAL VISITOR' completely over in its mind, is now of the opinion that the airship is not of *this world*, but is probably operated by a party of scientists from the planet Mars, who are out, either on a lark, or a tour of inspection of the solar system in the cause of science."

The Van Buren, Arkansas, *Daily Argus* of May 12, 1897, featured the opinions of a local resident concerning the aerial visitations: "Everybody has a theory concerning the airship story. The most acceptable theory is that it is of mundane origin, and that the secret concerning it will soon be known. Capt. Bostick stands alone in his theory, he asserting that it is an invention of some inhabitant of Mars who is down on a prospecting tour and is studying our system of government."

The St. Louis, Missouri, *Post-Dispatch*, in an editorial entitled "What Light Do We See?," speculated that the airships might be "visitors from Mars, fearful, at the last, of invading the planet they have been seeking. It is certainly time for Camille Flammarion to spread out an illuminated problem in Euclid which the Martians could recognise as a message of peace and good will as well as a hospitable invitation to alight."

In Michigan, the Benton Harbor *Daily Palladium* of April 13, 1897, commented on the airship reports:

(Continued on page 26)



Feature Article

## THE GREAT AIRSHIP SCARE

By DENNIS STAMEY (Illustrated by Charles Roller, Jr.)

In the quiet evening of November 18, 1896, hundreds of residents in Sacramento, Calif., gazed skyward at a metallic, cylindrical craft drifting through the heavens. The object cast down brilliant beams of light upon the city, and then slowly headed out on its predestined course to San Francisco.

The following evening, the bay communities of Oakland and San Francisco were plunged into panic when another flying vessel made a low level descent above the streets. Horses bolted, buggies overturned and pedestrians ran in terror. The strange airship maintained a straight-line flight out toward the coastline, and then disappeared.

"My entire family saw the machine when it came across the bay from Oakland," commented then Mayor Suro of San Francisco.

Frightened, bewildered, the newspapers and the people of Northern California were desperately trying to make some sense out of the mystery. Descriptions generally agreed that the flying monster was about 150 feet in length, equipped with powerful searchlights and four rotor-like arms. It seemed to be, at best, rather cumbersome and exhibited no spectacular outburst of speed. Yet the craft could easily outperform anything man could put up into the air, at that date.

A streetcar driver, Shelby Yost, and his eleven passengers told newsmen at Oakland that an illuminated object had passed over the downtown section on the evening of November 22. It sped silently across the horizon and then cast an intense, blinding glow over the entire community.

"I didn't want to admit I'd gone crazy," said Yost, "but for a minute, I thought my senses had deserted me."

The December 2, 1896, edition of the *Los Angeles Times* broke the strange story of electrician John A. Horen from San Jose, Calif., probably the first man ever to step inside one of these marvelous airships. It made headlines across the nation, and here

is some brief text from his account:

"We left California in the morning and headed westward. The ship travelled by means of two propellers...movement was noiseless and swift. The motive power was not steam or electricity. It was a wonderful machine and can be stopped and made to stand still anywhere in the air..."

Horen said the pilot was 45 years of age and completely human. The airship reportedly took him on a quick excursion to Honolulu which he described as brilliantly lighted with lamps.

The article in the *Times* concluded, "He sticks to his story and bears the name of a hard-working man."

About the same time, William Bull Meek of Comptonville, Calif., and his four companions encountered a normal looking fellow whose airship had just landed in a desolate valley. Meek, who was interviewed by reporters from *The Sacramento Bee*, said that the "man stepped from the ship and said he had come from the Montezuma Mountains...wherever they are."

By December the airships left the scene as mysteriously as they arrived. The sightings had been concentrated in a small area; but by March the following year, the aerial performers returned to becloud the skies throughout the country. It seemed as if a well-planned invasion was beginning.

Watchers in Omaha on the night of March 29 reported some sort of controlled aerial vehicle roaming the evening sky. The object, conceivably the same one, was again seen the next night over Denver, where witnesses described it as brightly illuminated, cruising at high altitude and moving northwest.

On April 1, *The New York Sun* gave sporadic running accounts of a strange craft reported around Kansas City, Mo., which paused from time to time to send down beams of light. Various communities in Texas also reported sightings, including Dallas,

Fort Worth, Marshall and Beaumont.

*The New York Herald* of April 11 reported that on the nights of April 9 and 10, Chicago was flooded with stories of eerie lights that were seen from 8 p.m. until 2 o'clock in the morning. "Thousands of persons declared the lights seen in the northwest were those of an airship..." said the *Herald*. Some declared that they could distinguish two cigar-shaped objects and great wings.

Adolph Winkle and John Hylle swore a craft landed in a field two miles north of Springfield, Ill., on April 15. Aboard the machine were two men and a woman. The farmhands excitedly blurted out their story: "They said the ship came from Quincy, flying 90 miles in thirty minutes. They plan on making a report to the government when Cuba is declared free."

Several people in Benton, Texas, watched a cigar-shaped vessel on the night of April 16 as it crossed between them and the moon.

A story from the *Daily Post* at Childress, Texas, reported the observation of a fast-moving aerial body about two thousand feet high and on a westerly course, on April 17.

That same date yielded a number of tantalizing incidents including the alleged crash of a spaceship near the tiny village of Aurora, Texas. A correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News*, S.E. Haydon, visited the crash-site and reported that the remains of the ship and its eerie looking pilot were being collected. The spaceman was also going to be buried, he said, with full ceremony in tribute to a brave voyager.

But just as bizarre is the chilling incident telegraphed from Williamston, Mich., and picked up in an edition of *The Lansing State Republican*:

"Williamston, Mich., April 17—This morning at a mile south and a half mile west of this village, a balloon or flying machine landed in a field. A dozen farmers watched the airship for

## LA INVASION DE OVNIS NO COMENZO EN 1947

# EL MISTERIO DE LAS NAVES VOLADORAS

Por JOHN A. KEEL

La fase moderna del fenómeno OVNI se inicia en 1840, al surgir sobre los cielos de Europa y América una oleada de misteriosas naves, dirigibles y aeroplanos. ¿Cuál es el significado de estos avistamientos del pasado? ¿Por qué los OVNIS no fueron vistos como platillos sino como antiguos vehículos?

*Es esta la primera colaboración exclusiva que nos envía el prestigiado escritor norteamericano John A. Keel, quien ha elaborado una de las teorías más singulares y coherentes sobre el fenómeno OVNI. De esta forma, CONTACTOS EXTRATERRESTRES cumple con el compromiso adquirido con sus lectores de superarse continuamente. Con colaboradores como Keel la revista tiene una garantía de seriedad e información de primera línea que los lectores seguramente sabrán valorar.*

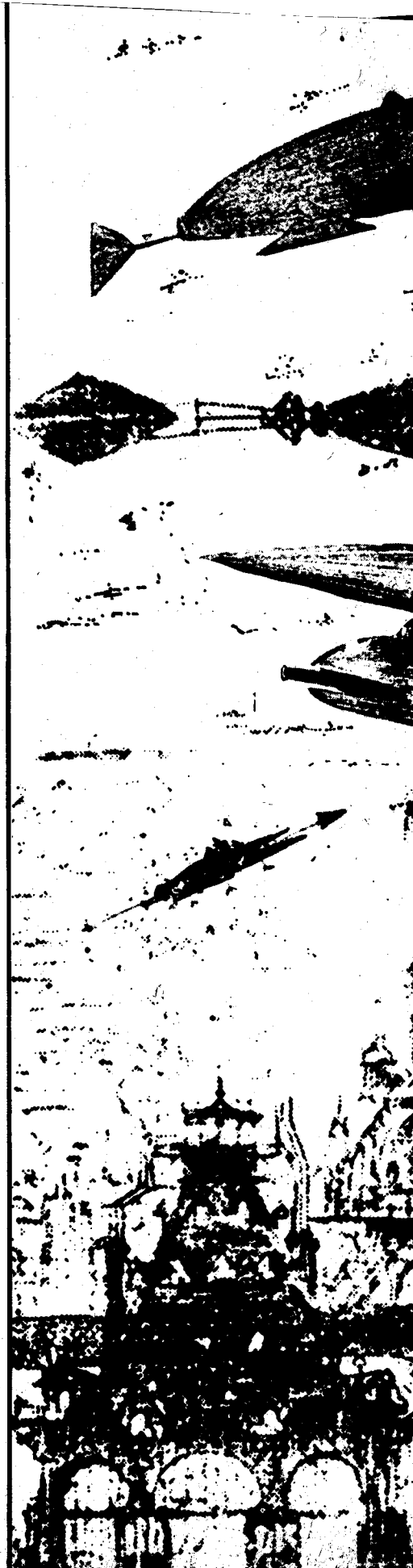
Llegaron cautelosamente en 1840. No fueron observados por nadie excepto por los marineros de algunos barcos, quienes reportaron en las anotaciones de los diarios navales, relámpagos repentinos que surcaron el cielo nocturno y los océanos. Pero a partir de su arribo, comenzaron a suceder cosas extrañas. Las embarcaciones desaparecieron para siempre. Unos veleros fueron encontrados a la deriva, en el Atlántico, completamente intactos, aunque su tripulación había desaparecido misteriosamente.

Los objetos se concentraron en las más recónditas y escasamente pobladas regiones de nuestro planeta, más allá de los círculos del Ártico y del Antártico. Los marineros les vieron sumergirse en el mar o, en muchos casos, emerger

de él y lanzarse precipitadamente a los cielos.

Entonces, a principios de 1877, los astrónomos se dieron cuenta de su existencia. Vieron pasar, viajando en línea recta/formaciones sobre las superficies del Sol y de la Luna. Desafiando a las leyes tradicionales de movimiento, aparecieron cometas y meteoros. Los astrónomos se quedaron estupefactos, no daban crédito a lo que veían en sus telescopios.

El finado astrofísico Morris K. Jessup llamó a los años 1877-1888, "La increíble década", por todas las cosas que se avistaron en el espacio, como también por los extraños sucesos que acaecieron aquí en la Tierra. En 1879, cayeron sobre Inglaterra inmensos pedazos de hielo, y al mismo tiempo, llovió sobre Chicago algo como



fragmentos de un horno de fundición. En las Indias del Oeste llovieron toneladas de lodo. En Argentina llovió carbón. Una tortuga de 60 pies de largo y 40 de ancho fue encontrada en Nueva Zelanda. En 1880, una gran nube de moscas negras, ennegreciendo los cielos en Francia y Nueva Escocia, tardó veinte minutos en pasar. Gigantescas ruedas de luz, vistas por el barco "Buitre", giraban bajo las aguas de los mares de Asia. En Francia, el techo de pizarra de una casa saltó súbitamente y cayó a gran distancia, a pesar de que no había el más leve indicio de viento. En Ontario, Canadá, un grupo de hombres dijo haber visto cómo las piedras del campo se elevaban hacia los cielos.

Durante esta década, muchos astrónomos famosos se vieron envueltos en terribles controversias sobre lo que se había observado en los cielos nocturnos, antiguamente plácidos. Se llevaron a cabo acalorados debates acerca de una escuadrilla de extraños objetos que pasó volando a cientos de millas de la Tierra.

## LOS PLATIVOLOS HABIAN LLEGADO, ELLOS LOS VIERON

De dónde vinieron y cómo llegaron es una pregunta que aún no se puede contestar. No obstante, existen testimonios de hechos inusitados aparecidos en el cielo desde los orígenes del Universo, aunque en realidad la fase moderna comenzó en 1840. Quizá exista algún fenómeno que haya rodeado por siempre a nuestro planeta. Puede ser que ellos, al igual que nosotros, residan aquí, construyendo sus hogares en las desoladas extensiones del norte o en la vastedad inexplorada del fondo de los océanos. Puede ser que hayan venido de otro mundo, de un planeta distante, o bien de otra dimensión del espacio.

En todo caso, en 1880, comenzaron a edificar sus fuerzas en este globo y sus movimientos causaron cambios sobrenaturales en nuestra atmósfera produciendo extrañas tormentas y fenómenos atmosféricos, fijando así la primera etapa de lo que había de suceder.

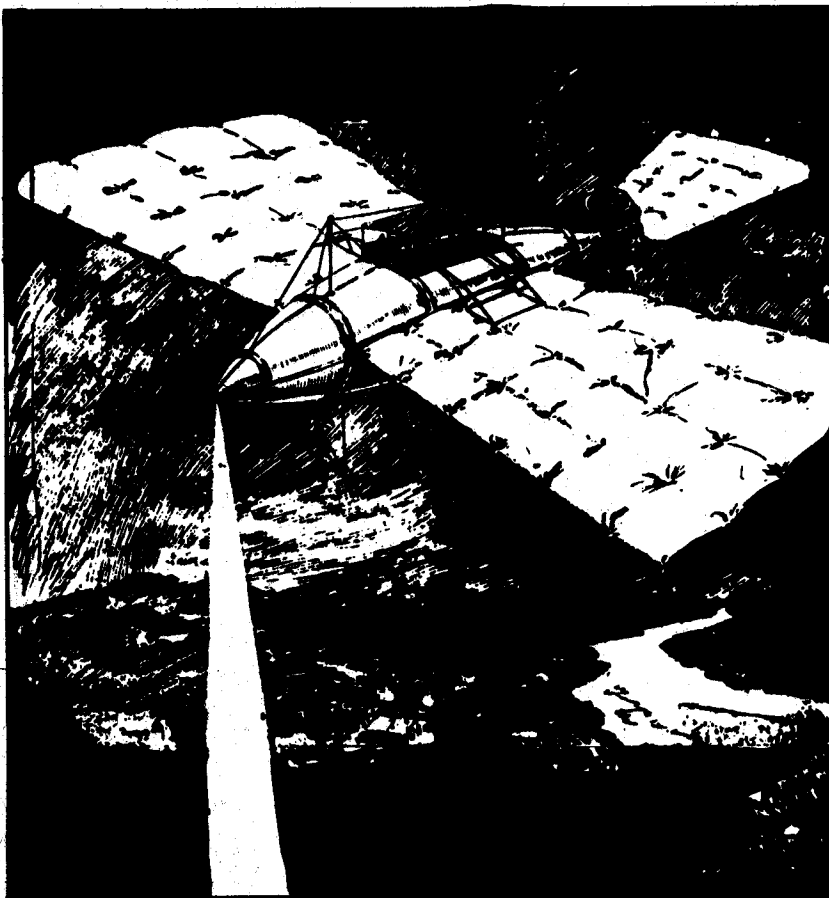
En noviembre de 1896, en California, tuvo lugar la oleada más grande de OVNIS. Durante las siguientes semanas del mismo mes los monstruosos objetos aparecieron de repente sobre San Francisco y otras ciudades de la costa Oeste.

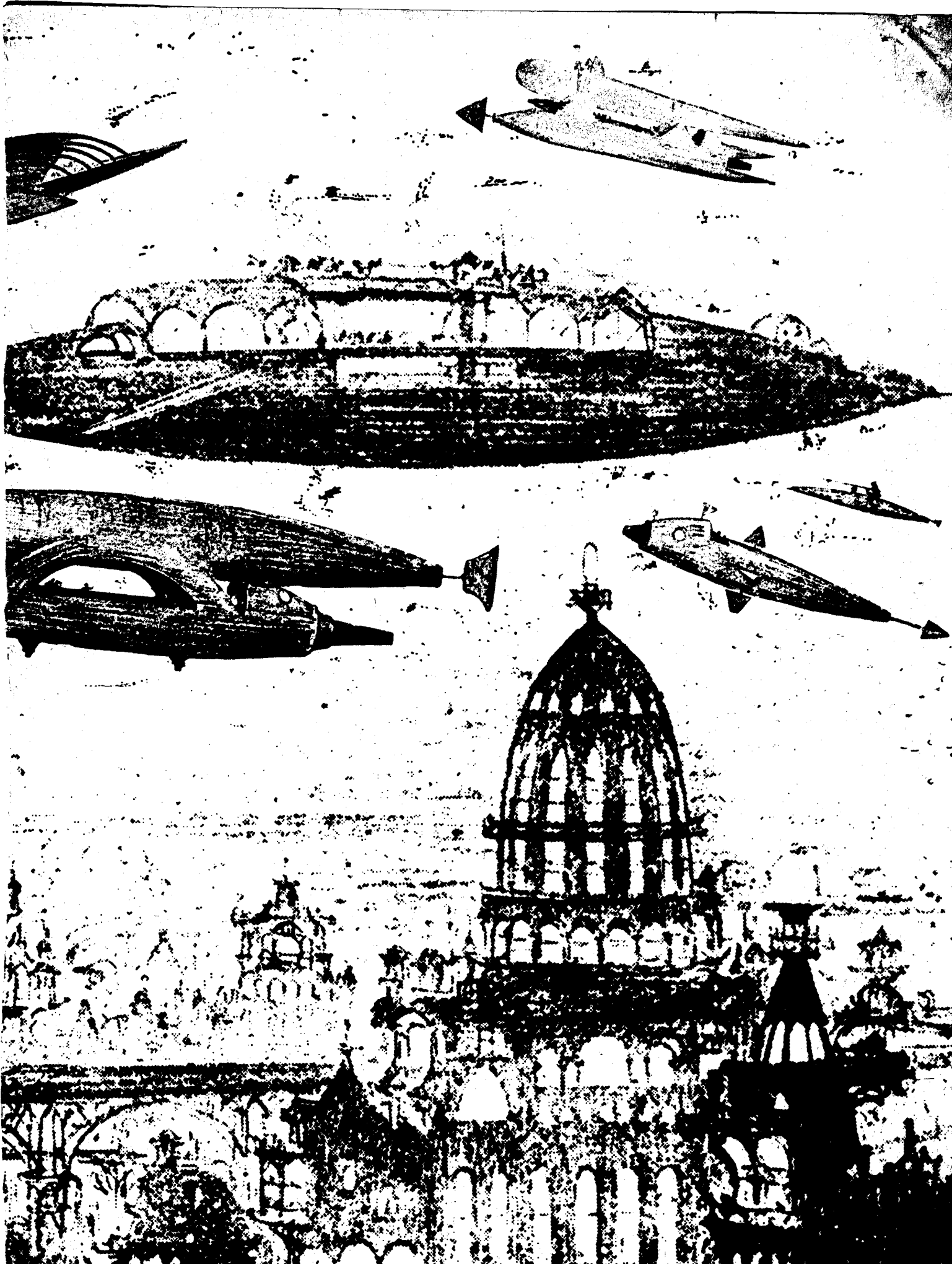
Formadas como cigarras en vuelo, las naves escudriñaban la Tierra con sus brillantes reflectores. Los ciudadanos de California se aterraron. En Europa, algunos inventores como Santos-Dumont trataron de construir dirigibles controlados, pero en Estados Unidos estas máquinas no existían (el primer dirigible americano voló sobre Coney Island, Nueva York, en 1902).

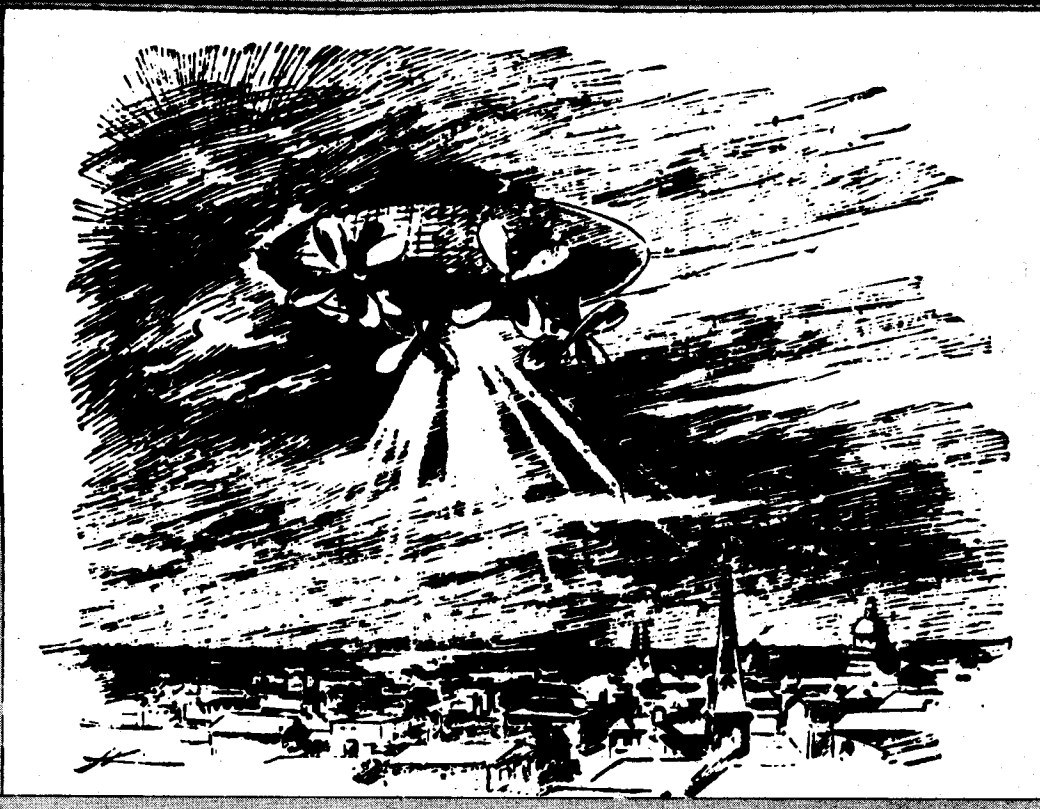
Tres meses después, en marzo de 1897, las misteriosas naves aparecieron volando de nuevo desde la frontera con Canadá hasta la costa del golfo.

Los platillos fueron observados por millares de personas y, esa misma noche, se tuvieron señales de ellos en distintas ciudades de los Estados Unidos. . . lo que indi-

*En 1896, los periódicos de California publicaron cientos de noticias sobre la "Gran Nave" que surcaba los cielos de todo el estado. Los avistamientos, al parecer del mismo objeto, fueron interpretados de diversas maneras. En la ilustración de la izquierda, perteneciente al "Morning Journal", se ve como un aeroplano primitivo. Abajo, en una ilustración del periódico "The San Francisco Call", se interpreta como una especie de dirigible con hélices y una potente luz abajo.*







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ca que varias naves volaban al mismo tiempo.

Hubo reportes de docenas de aterrizajes y testigos dignos de confianza aseguraron haber sostenido conversacion con los tripulantes de las naves. En todos los casos, con excepcion de uno, se describio a los tripulantes con aparicion de seres humanos comunes y corrientes. Vestían, hablaban y se comportaban como nosotros.

Sin embargo, contaron historias contradictorias acerca de su lugar de origen. Algunos dijeron que su nave había sido construida, en secreto, en el estado de Nebraska. Otros nombraron distintos estados. Unicamente un testigo, un juez de Arkansas, aseguro que eran distintos a nosotros. Dijo que los pilotos eran japoneses.

A fines de abril, las naves desaparecieron en la misma forma misteriosa como habían llegado. Más tarde, en 1897, se les reportó en Canadá, Escandinavia y Siberia. (Investigadores americanos como Lucius Farish, Charles Flood, Jerome Clark y el doctor Jacques Vallee, y desde luego yo mismo,

habíamos empleado años buscando en viejos periódicos los miles de reportes que se publicaron acerca de esto.)

#### BAJO DISTINTAS FORMAS, APARECEN EN EUROPA Y AUSTRALIA

La siguiente oleada importante de esas misteriosas naves acaeció en el año de 1909. Las apariciones comenzaron a suceder en Gran Bretaña. En el periodo 1896-97 se les describió como dirigibles con faros buscadores de alta potencia. Fueron vistos, primero, por las embarcaciones del Mar del Norte, mientras volaban del sur hacia el círculo ártico. Después pasaron sobre Inglaterra desde Suffolk, Northfolk, Essex, en la costa Este, hacia Gales, en la costa Oeste.

Las apariciones principiaron el mes de mayo. El primer artefacto avistado voló tan bajo que pudo verse claramente, y en esa ocasión se reportó un aterrizaje. Este tuvo lugar en la región montañosa de Gales. El testigo aseguró que los dos pilotos que tripulaban la na-

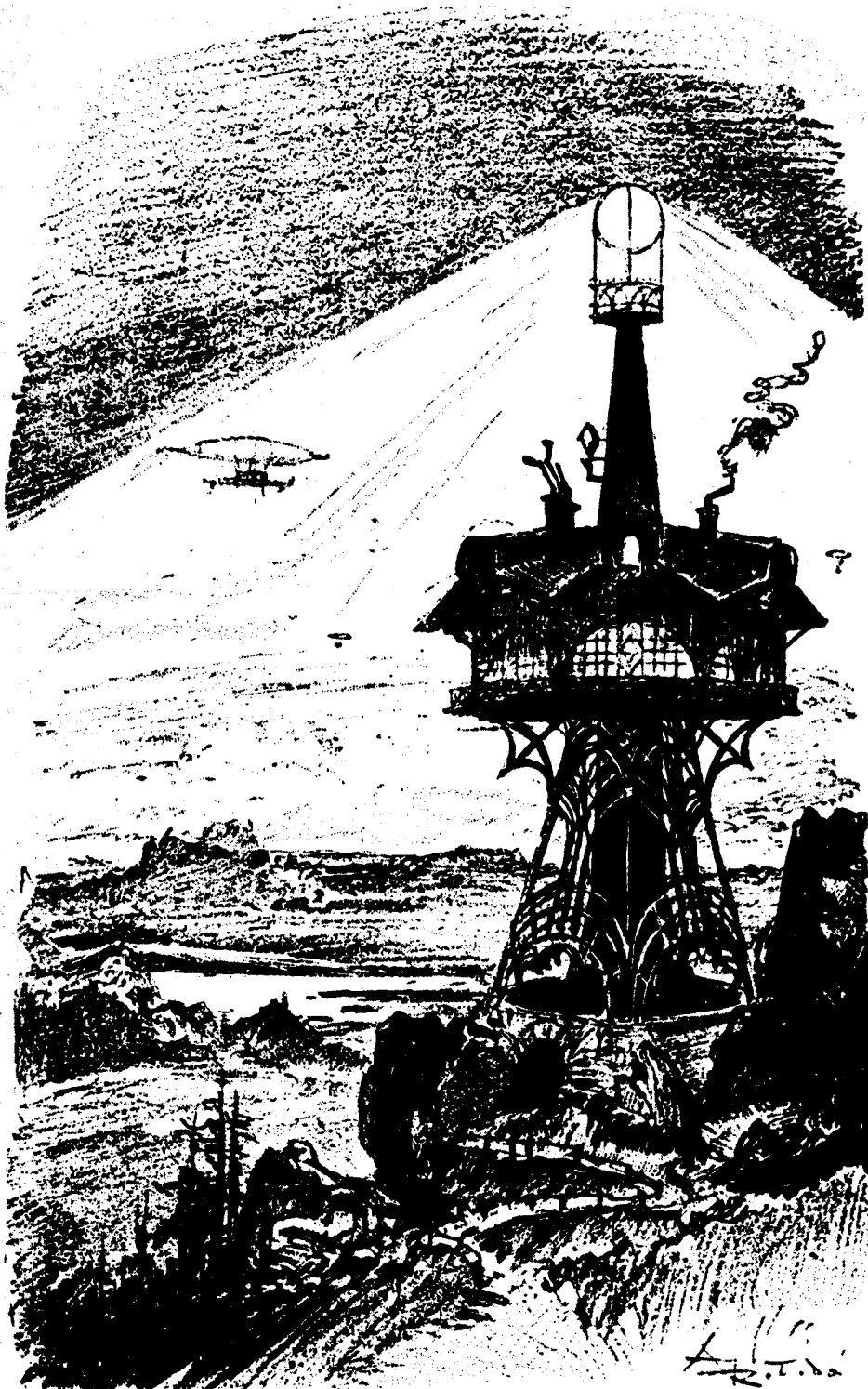
Otra ilustración de "The San Francisco Call" donde se ve al mismo objeto sobrevolando un área de la población de Sacramento.

ve usaban abrigos y capas de piel, vestimenta lógica, si es que venían del norte. Cuando advirtieron que los observaban, se avalanzaron sobre su máquina y emprendieron el vuelo.

A principios de junio, los platillos aparecieron sobre Dublín y Belfast, en Irlanda, dirigiéndose aparentemente hacia el norte. Un mes después, a fines de julio de 1909, los habitantes de la Isla del Sur, en Nueva Zelandia, al sureste de Australia y cerca del círculo del Atlántico, vieron dirigibles que, como usualmente sucedía, reflejaban a su paso la luz de sus poderosos reflectores sobre la tierra. Durante dos semanas realizaron vuelos nocturnos, dirigiéndose gradualmente hacia el norte. Sólo un aterrizaje fue reportado y el testigo dijo que los tripulantes de la nave eran japoneses (Japón no tenía en ese entonces naves en operación).

Los avistamientos continuaron. En Australia, a 100 millas de Nue-





*Los extraños invasores del siglo pasado establecieron sus bases en lugares inaccesibles y desde ahí enviaron a las ciudades artefactos volantes muy parecidos a los que se diseñaban en aquella época.*

va Zelandia, fueron vistos brevemente cuando se dirigían de nuevo al círculo Antártico.

Durante el mes de septiembre, hubo apariciones esporádicas de misteriosos dirigibles en el norte

de Europa, particularmente en Suiza.

En el amanecer del 20 de noviembre de 1909, fueron vistas sobre Boston, Massachussets, luces de gran intensidad. Pronto todos los estados de Nueva Inglaterra, de Connecticut a Maine, observaron a los extraños objetos voladores.

Parecían venir por el sur y desaparecer por el norte. Muchos tes-

tigos pensaron que se trataba de máquinas con alas en forma de cigarro. La prensa especuló que

no eran más que aviones recién inventados, los cuales habían sido contruidos clandestinamente por un inventor local, en Worcester, Massachussets. Pero el inventor jamás dio su creación a la publicidad.

La siguiente escala en la ruta fantasma de la nave fue Africa del Sur, en 1914. Los granjeros del lugar dijeron haber visto dirigibles, los cuales proyectaban en la selva africana las potentes luces de sus reflectores.

#### PATRONES DE LAS OLEADAS

Varios patrones significantes se destacaron en estas tempranas oleadas. Los objetos voladores siguieron un itinerario que se repetiría muchas veces en las oleadas de los años 1950 y 1960. Las oleadas tendían a principiar alrededor del verano y el solsticio de invierno (junio 22 es el día más largo del año y diciembre 22 el más corto).

La mayoría de los avistamientos sucedían al anochecer, alrededor de las 8 y las 10 P.M. Finalmente, y para sorpresa de todos, gran número de los arribos tuvieron lugar los días miércoles.

Los primeros investigadores de OVNIS se dieron cuenta de que los objetos seguían rutas que empezaban en el Artico o Antártico, dato que podría ser un indicio de la existencia de bases ocultas localizadas en heladas e inhabitadas regiones del planeta.

Los extraños invasores se infiltraron en nuestro planeta durante el siglo pasado. Para permanecer alejados de nosotros, establecieron sus bases en lugares inaccesibles y, con el fin de hacerse menos notorios, emplearon artefactos semejantes a los diseñados por nuestros inventores.

En los años treinta aparecieron al norte de Noruega y Suecia gran cantidad de biplanos. Los escandinavos les llamaron "fantasmas voladores" y el ejército no fue capaz de identificarlos o hacerlos descender, a pesar de sus denodados esfuerzos.

*Continúa en la pag. 47*

Llegaron cautelosamente en 1840. No fueron observados por nadie excepto por los marineros de algunos barcos, quienes reportaron en las anotaciones de los diarios navales, relámpagos repentinos que surcaron el cielo nocturno y los océanos. Pero a partir de su arribo, comenzaron a suceder cosas extrañas. Las embarcaciones desaparecieron para siempre. Unos veleros fueron encontrados a la deriva, en el Atlántico, completamente intactos, aunque su tripulación había desaparecido misteriosamente.

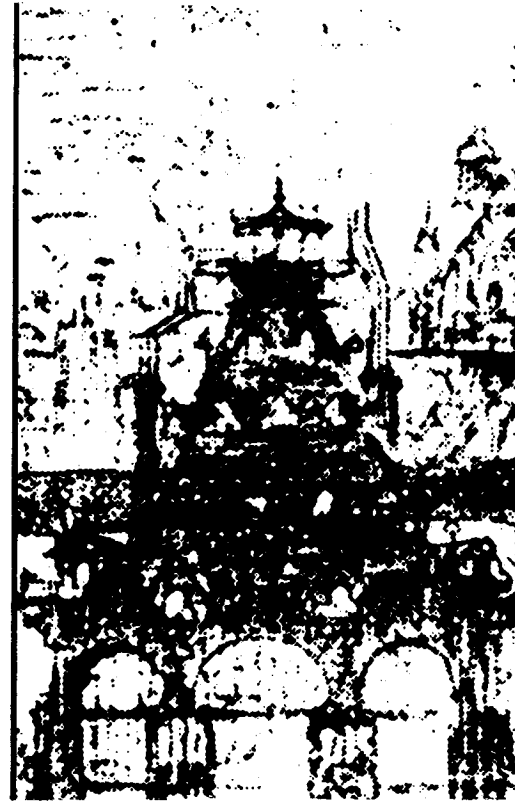
Los objetos se concentraron en las más recónditas y escasamente pobladas regiones de nuestro planeta, más allá de los círculos del Ártico y del Antártico. Los marineros les vieron sumergirse en el mar o, en muchos casos, emerger

de él y lanzarse precipitadamente a los cielos.

Entonces, a principios de 1877, los astrónomos se dieron cuenta de su existencia. Vieron pasar, viajando en línea recta, formaciones sobre las superficies del Sol y de la Luna. Desafiando a las leyes tradicionales de movimiento, aparecieron cometas y meteoros. Los astrónomos se quedaron estupefactos, no daban crédito a lo que veían en sus telescopios.

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J.A. KEEL: "EL MISTERIO DE LAS NAVES VOLADORAS"



"CONTACTOS", 1981

# THE 19th CENTURY AIRSHIP MYSTERY

By DON BERLINER

INFO JOURNAL, No 29, MAY-JUNE 1978

It happened eighty years ago, and still people can't agree on what they were. There were scores of sightings, many hundreds of witnesses, and some highly ornate descriptions. There was a minimum of things with which to confuse them, as neither the airplane nor the orbiting satellite had yet been invented. Why, then, should the "Great Airship Mystery of 1896-1897" remain such a mystery?

Leaving aside the deep psychological aspects for others to ponder as they wish, we'll try to stick closely to the mechanics of the matter. The question we intend to face is this: "Could the wondrous craft reported throughout the United States in late 1896 and early 1897 have been man-made airships?" Excluding hoaxes, this should pretty well zero in on the likelihood of their having been genuine UFOs.

First of all, what did people claim to have seen? As almost all the sightings in the November 1896 wave were at night, few of the reports contain much convincing detail about the actual craft involved. By and large, they told of lights--one or two very bright ones, like locomotive headlights, and often many smaller ones. Behind the lights were seen, dimly, round or oblong objects--often egg-shaped or cylindrical--with, upon occasion, some rather odd features such as wings or riverboat-like paddle wheels. But, as anyone who has looked at the lights of a night-flying airplane can attest, discerning the shape of a flying machine from its lights is all but impossible.

During the second wave, in April 1897, the descriptions approximated those of the earlier flurry of activity, since they were also generally at night. Basically, people reported oblong objects with a wide variety of lights and sometimes some quite peculiar gadgets sticking out of the bottom, sides, or top.

Does any of this make sense?

In order to answer that, one first has to take a careful look at the state of the art of dirigible development in the late 19th Century, and also at the subsequent trends in powered, lighter-than-air craft. In addition, attention must also be paid to the existing knowledge of, and later progress in, engines and motors, electrical batteries, and similar equipment implied by the appearance or behavior of the "airships."

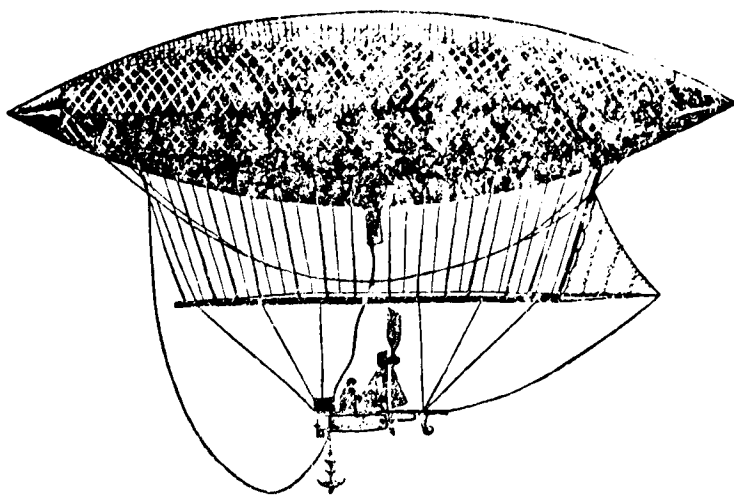
## KNOWN AIRSHIP HISTORY

While considerable work had been going on in Europe leading to the perfection of the dirigible, the United States was far behind in such experimenting, in 1896 and 1897. The first true dirigible (a powered, steerable, lighter-than-air machine) was built and flown by Henri Giffard at Paris in 1852. With a 3 hp steam engine (weighing 350 lbs.), Giffard flew his 144-foot long airship 17 miles at about 5 mph. An improved version was wrecked prior to its first flight.

The first dirigible to be powered by an electric motor was the brainchild of the Tissandier brothers, also in France, and made two slow flights in 1883. A year later, French Army engineers Renard and Krebs flew their 170-foot electric-powered "La France" in winds up to 10 mph.

Little more was done until 1886, when a German, Karl Wolfert, built the first gasoline-fueled, piston-engine dirigible, which a young man flew for two miles on just 2 hp! In 1896, an improved Wolfert dirigible, the "Deutschland," flew briefly. And in 1897, his third craft, using a 6 hp Daimler engine, crashed fatally during its first flight.

Also in 1897, David Schwartz, an Austrian, built a quite sophisticated (at least for those days) all-aluminum

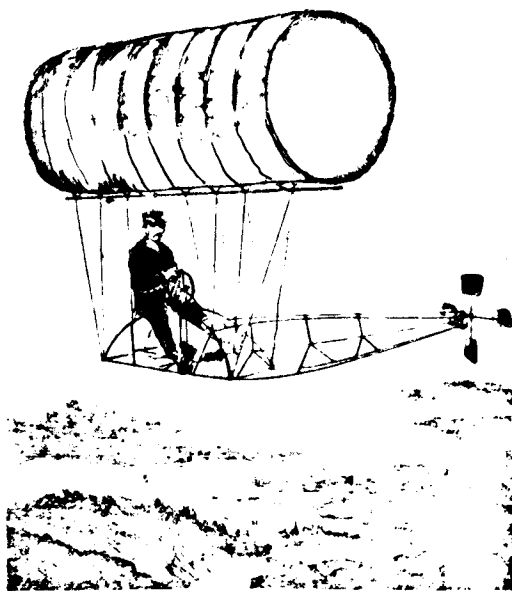


The Giffard Airship, 1852

dirigible. But due to poor piloting, this interesting machine was destroyed seconds after its maiden lift-off.

Not until the brilliant little Brazilian, Alberto Santos-Dumont arrived on the scene in 1898, did the dirigible show any signs of becoming even remotely useful. He flew the first of his many small airships at Paris, in September, and then used it for repeated short pleasure flights. Two more Santos Dumont dirigibles were flown in 1899, with one of them reaching a speed of 15 mph in November of that year.

In 1900, progress was greatly accelerated by the entrance of Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin into the picture. His



U.S. "Pedal-Power"- 1878  
Bicycle-driven Airship of  
Prof. C.F. Ritchell, Conn.

first airship--named for himself, of course--was a gigantic 420 feet long, and had attained a speed of 17 mph by late 1900. That same year, the first confirmed flight of a dirigible in the United States was achieved by A. Leo Stevens in his "Pegasus."

Therefore, on the basis of what has been discovered by a succession of talented historical researchers, there were NO powered, controllable airships known to have been in the United States during the "airship" sightings of 1896 and 1897. And there were none having performance rating higher than "pathetic" anywhere in the world at that time. At least, there were none that are now known to aviation historians, though there is always a slim possibility that someone invented an airship or two, flew it all over the place with unprecedented performance and reliability, and then destroyed all traces of the marvelous machines.

Yet, is it really possible that there could have been "unknown airships" sailing through American skies in 1896-97, which then vanished completely? There were certainly enough patents granted by the U.S. Government for truly peculiar dirigibles that could have looked like the ones people claimed to have seen. It wouldn't have been totally impossible for a small group of inventors and craftsmen to have built and flown airships without their having become public knowledge until they decided it was time.

#### WERE THE U.S. "AIRSHIPS" REAL?

But could such airships have performed the way so many people said the airships of 1896-97 performed? The more closely one looks at the technology of the era, the less likely this seems. There are just too many ways in which the observed "airships" don't fit any American or foreign craft that could have been built in the 19th Century.

1. With few exceptions, the 1896-97 "airships" flew (at night). Yet, there was absolutely no air navigation system anywhere in the United States, because there were no known aircraft that needed one. And flying any kind of aircraft--be they airplanes or airships or helicopters--

(Continued on next page)

## AIRSHIPS, Cont.

(at night) without some navigational aids) ←  
is akin to attempted suicide.

In 1896, they were seen over the length of California--at least 500 miles in spread. Unless they flew along the Pacific coast in brilliant moonlight, their pilots would have had no possible way to determine their location, nor to figure out how to get where they wanted to go next. Since many of the sighting locations were many miles inland (Fresno, Sacramento, Modesto, Bakersfield, etc.), and bad weather was not uncommon, the moonlight-navigation technique is out of the question.

There were, to make matters even more difficult for the "airships" navigators, absolutely no radio stations upon which to home, nor were cities lighted sufficiently to permit navigation with more than a very slim chance of success. Indeed, even today, the lights of one city of 50,000 population look pretty much like those of most other cities of the same size.

2. If the "airships" of 1896-97 had actually been secret experimental projects, what happened to them, and why? After all, if an experiment succeeds (and certainly the performance of the 1896-97 "airships" was many years ahead of any known airships in the U.S. or even Europe), it hardly seems logical that they would have been discarded like failures.

No one knows for certain how fast the "airships" actually travelled, but many estimates at the time were in the range of 50-100 mph and higher. Yet, there is no record of any dirigible flying faster than 10 mph until a couple of years after the dual wave of sightings, and then the best speeds still were under 20 mph.

The times and locations of sightings should give some clue to the performance of the "airships," since it is very difficult to imagine simultaneous tests of two or more experimental craft in different locations, especially in view of the primitive state of communications in those bygone days. But on November 23, 1896, "airships" were reported from Chico, California, at 7 PM, and from Santa Rosa at 7:30 PM. Since those towns were (and still are) more than 100 miles apart, a speed as high as 200 mph is suggested.

Even allowing for great errors in the reported times, at least 100 mph is indicated, not counting the effects of the undoubtedly unfavorable winds for a flight in a southwesterly direction.

The following night it (or they) was seen from cities 700 miles apart, over a span of less than five hours, again pointing to a speed of more than 100 mph if one craft was involved. As an indication of what several decades of subsequent progress then produced, the U.S. Navy's dirigible "Akron" of 1931 had a top speed of about 75 mph, and the well-known Goodyear advertising blimps cruise at 35 mph and can reach 40 mph under ideal conditions.

But these later airships were powered by efficient engines developing hundreds of horsepower...and making noises appropriate to such power. The horsepower available back in the 1890's was pathetically small by comparison; in fact, the lack of a dependable, light-weight engine of 10-25 hp was the biggest single reason no airplane flew before 1903. As for noise, few of the people who reported seeing "airships" described any engine-like sounds coming from them. Sometimes they were said to have given off humming or whirring sounds, but never the crude rattling and banging so typical of the early gasoline engines.

## ELECTRIC POWER

Of course, there is the possibility that the 1896-97 "airships" were powered by electric motors, since some of the earliest of dirigibles had been so powered. But the electric motors of the day were so heavy and so weak that they would have been totally unable to drive airships at more than a few miles per hour. As an example, the electric power for the Renard-Krebs airship of 1884 produced a whopping 9 hp, while weighing a mere 1,100 lbs. !

Had someone--such as a secretive inventor of airships--been able to develop electric motors and batteries of great power and little weight, their value for other uses would have made him an overnight multi-millionaire. That this was next to impossible is borne out by the history of portable electric power, for it has just recently been used for the very first time to propel a small man-

Chicago Tribune, April 10, 1897:

EGG SHAPED WHEN SEEN IN WISCONSIN

Mysterious Aerial Visitor Appears to Two States Within a Period of half an hour

Wausau, Wis. April 9 - The airship made its appearance in Wausau last night about 10 o'clock and was viewed by at least 100 citizens. It came from the southeast, passing over the city going northwest. Lights could be seen attached to the ship. A dim outline of it could be seen, which appeared to be shaped like an egg.

Nebraska City, Neb. April 9 - At 9:30 o'clock last night several persons observed the lights of the supposed airship approaching from the southeast, and after passing over the city it disappeared, going due northwest when last seen.

LOOKED OBLONG AT MT. CARROLL, ILL; AIRSHIP AT THAT POINT WAS MOVING WEST AT A TERRIFIC RATE OF SPEED

Mount Carroll, Ill. April 9 - Hundreds of persons on the streets tonight--persons whose honesty and truthfulness are beyond doubt viewed the airship about 8:40 o'clock. It came from the northeast and when opposite this city changed speed. It was in sight at least 10 minutes. It appeared oblong in shape and carried a great red light. In length it did not appear to be over eight or ten feet, and two or three feet high. So many persons saw it there is no dispute (sic) the fact that something unusual appeared.

carrying airplane on a short flight. Moreover, many millions of dollars are being poured into research aimed at effective electric power for non-polluting automobiles. But as yet there has been little progress.

3. The reported provision of some of the "airships" with fixed or flapping wings, or even paddle wheels, may be of more psychological than technical significance. All of these devices can be found on patent drawings issued during the 1890's to inventors of fanciful airships, but their use on successful lighter-than-air craft is another matter entirely. Fixed wings (as on airplanes) could be used on dirigibles, but at the low speeds to which such craft were limited before 1900, they would have provided far too little lifting force to have been worth the trouble.

Flapping wings (as on birds) have aroused the imaginations of aeronautical dreamers since Leonardo da Vinci, some 500 years ago. The ornithopter, or flapping-wing airplane, remains very much a dream, though a limited amount of work is currently being done on it in hopes of eventually lifting a man off the ground for a short distance. But applying flapping wings to a dirigible would add so much weight and so much complexity, and would provide so little lifting force, that the result would probably be to keep an otherwise flyable airship thrash-

ing around on the ground.

As for paddle-wheel propulsion, it makes no more sense for an airship than it would for a bicycle, and has aroused even less serious interest among aeronautical designers than have flapping wings. Paddle wheels work reasonably well in a dense medium like water, but would be hopelessly inefficient in the air. And, like flapping wings, they would create so many problems and provide so little benefit, that the chances of an airship flying with them would be greatly reduced.

4. The bright lights seen on many of the "airships" (or, perhaps, the single "airship" seen all around the country?) are of little apparent value. They were generally compared with locomotive headlamps in brightness, and in most cases shone straight out the front of the "airship." But for what purpose? Even the super-powerful landing lights on giant modern airliners are not used to see straight ahead, but rather to light the runway immediately prior to landing. Thus, "airship" lights could hardly have been for navigation, nor could they have been for recognition by other "airships" (as landing lights now are often used in the vicinity of a busy airport), for there are no reports of more than one "airship" being seen at a time.

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## AIRSHIPS, Cont.

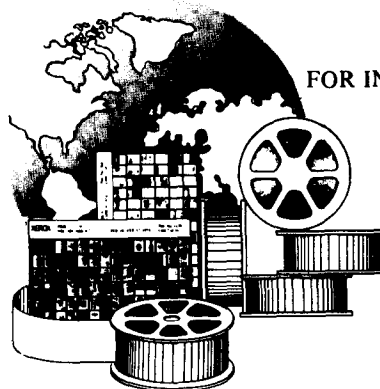
Even if there had been some logical purpose for the lights, how were they powered? Batteries in the 1890's were terribly heavy for their power, and the lifting ability of a relatively small (100 feet long or so) gas bag was barely enough to raise one man from the ground, let alone hundreds of pounds of batteries to power lights having no obvious function. Even more difficult to explain are the occasional instances of great search-lights that came from an "airship" and swept over cities such as Sistersville, W. Va., in the dead of night. These would have required far more power, thus more weight, yet had no understandable purpose.

5. Most witnesses reported the "airships" moving with fairly regular, steady motions, but some described them as moving erratically or even darting around. Sorry, but airships just don't do things like that! In fact, the Goodyear Blimps are the only flying machines in the United States which are not required to carry seat belts for the passengers. As a blimp pilot once told your surprised writer, "Don't worry, this thing never does anything abruptly!" Compared with an airplane, an airship is a great clumsy hulk, which floats rather than flies.

6. The geographical spread of sightings, especially in 1897, means that either there were several "airships" in action at once (and very well coordinated), or there was just one which had phenomenal performance. On November 12, 1896, for example, reports came in from Illinois, Kansas, and Iowa. On November 18, there were sightings reported from Texas, California, Colorado, West Virginia, and Nebraska (the latter two at exactly the same time, though more than 800 miles apart).

There were numerous claims by inventors and their agents that the mysterious "airships" were their secret experimental projects, and they would soon be revealed in all their elaborate detail. This, of course, never happened, and it is hard to imagine that such airships ever existed and then disappeared without leaving a trace. There is not a single example in recorded history of sophisticated technology being demonstrated and then completely lost.

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England

Some of the "airship" reports are undoubtedly fabrications, for they contain features that, in retrospect, make absolutely no sense. Reports, for instance, of the sounds of singing and music coming from an "airship". Or reports that the crew of one "airship" talked at length with witnesses and described plans to attack Havana harbor with bombs (the Spanish-American War was obviously in the offing, and may have precipitated this one).

So we are left with the only feasible explanation for the "airship" sightings of 1896-97: They must have been UFOs. They were generally shaped like UFOs, they had lights like UFOs, they made sound like UFOs, they flew around doing peculiar things like UFOs, and they never really bothered anyone, also very much like UFOs.

But, lest you get the idea that a mystery has been truly laid to rest, just stop and think for a moment. If the "airships" of 1896-97 were UFOs, they remain as much of a mystery as ever, for a UFO is nothing more than a flying object that has yet to be identified. And that's what the "airships" have been for eighty years.

## "MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIPS": A COMMENT

By Don Berliner  
(Aviation/Science Writer)

Dr. Winkler's discussion of "The Not-So-Mysterious Airships of 1896-97" raises as many questions as it answers. While the thoroughness of his research is commendable, his conclusions seem to this writer to be rather hard to support in light of the history of airship-related technology.

That there *could have been* powered lighter-than-air craft of unknown manufacture in the late 19th century can hardly be denied. But there could also be vicious cocker spaniels living in oxygen-filled caves on the far side of the Moon! However, in the absence of evidence, such assumptions are highly risky. And evidence of the actual existence of 19th century engine-driven airships in the U.S. simply cannot be found. Nowhere in all the vast collections of aeronautical historical material is there a single specific detail about such a device: Not a photograph, not a measurement, not an artifact, and not anything else that would suggest that even one of these things flew except in the imaginations of inventors and journalists.

And if such a machine had flown, why did it never become public knowledge? The performance described by hundreds of witnesses strongly suggests highly successful airships: fast, maneuverable, long-ranging. Yet none was ever seen except at a distance. Where were they built? Where were they based? Where did they end up? And, assuming such airships existed, why were they never capitalized upon? Why were none seen at pre-announced public displays, or in showrooms?

The first engine-driven airships known to have flown in the U.S. were those of Stevens and Boyce, who flew at Manhattan Beach, N.Y., in 1900. Prior to that, and dating back to 1863, the only powered airships in the U.S. were driven by pedals, like a bicycle, and hence capable only of quite feeble speed and very limited

range and duration of flight. Let's face it: pedalling a clumsy great gas-bag against even a gentle breeze is very hard work.

And that really points to the major argument against the "mysterious airships" having been secret U.S. craft: The state of the aeronautical arts in 1896-97 was such that airships having anything like the speed, range, and navigational capabilities of the reported craft would have required enormous advances in technology. Had such advances been made, their non-airship applications would have been so great that to have kept them secret and then let their secrets die would have cost their developers many millions of dollars in sales and royalties, and world-wide fame.

The great barrier to the development of aviation in those days was the absence of efficient engines. Gasoline engines put out a few horsepower and weighed hundreds of pounds; electric and steam powerplants were even worse. It wasn't until the Wright Brothers built a 12 hp engine that weighed around 200 lbs. (crude, by today's standards) that aviation stood a chance.

Had an efficient airship engine been available before the turn of the century, it would have found immediate application in airplanes, but that never happened. Prior to 1897, only Karl Wolfert, in Germany, had flown an airship with a gasoline engine, and his biggest that flew was less than 6 hp. The performance of known 19th century airships was pathetic, at best, with none capable of as much as 10 mph.

Even if suitable engines could have been built in total secrecy, could secret airships have flown where they were reported? Most sightings were at night, and they covered such widespread areas that either there were a large number of airships, or a few that ranged the entire country. Such flying demands some means of

navigation, especially at night: the crew must know where they are and they must be able to figure out how to get where they are headed. In 1896 and 1897, there was obviously no air navigation system in the U.S. There were no radio beacons upon which to home. There were no major roads to follow. There were no networks of well-lit cities whose unique patterns of lights would permit identification from the air.

Had there been air-to-ground radio in those days, someone on the ground might have been able to keep an airship pilot informed about his location. But useful radios were far in the future. (The first use from an airplane was in 1910.) Had our secret inventors come up with miraculous improvements in radio, they would have had to have been nuts to hold back the news.

And even if there had been such amazing radios, they would have required power for operation. The batteries of the day were huge and weak, and thus would have proven a great drain on the already over-taxed lifting ability of any pre-historic airship. This would have been true to an even greater extent for powerful search-lights said to have emanated from some of the airships. Hundreds of pounds of batteries would have been needed to run them, and their purpose is difficult to imagine.

What of the reported designs of the airships? Many were said to have had wings, oars, and even paddlewheels. Any of these appendages would have cost an airship far more than it produced, hence the total absence of anything of this sort on known airships. Wings built to the technology of the day would have provided so little lifting at the low speeds any possible engine could have produced, and they would have created so much

(continued on next page)



# THE NOT-SO-MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIPS OF 1896-97

By Louis Winkler, PhD  
(MUFON Consultant in Astronomy)

The mysterious airships of 1896-1897 have long fallen into the category of the unexplained or unidentified. But in the last decade or two, a new investigative tool has emerged in academe which sheds an entirely different light on the mysterious airship flap. The tool is a variety of microforms and readers that are used in connection with a nation-wide, interlibrary loan system which provides service copies of microforms. With this instrument it was possible for this writer to make a generous sampling of daily newspapers from the major cities of the U.S. from late 1896 to the spring of 1897, and draw new conclusions.

The sampling provides detailed evidence of a number of real balloon craft which were steerable or powered (airships). The areas most involved show an initial progress of activity from the west coast to the east coast, over a 5-month period. Reports of the flap start in the San Francisco area, then move to Omaha, Chicago, Nashville, and finally return to the central portion in Texas. News was quickly disseminated with the telegraph and appeared in countless newspapers. By the time the phenomena reached the Midwest, thousands of people were having sightings. And many of the reports would include landing accounts or interaction with the pilot, inventor, or passengers. The nation was a twitter with the idea that American inventors were close to discovering the "secret" of powered navigation. These balloon aircraft would just be the first of other major developments soon to follow in the field of transportation by air.

Sightings of one or more airships in the U.S. originated in the central coastal area of California during the late fall of 1896. The San Francisco

*Chronicle* published a series of articles in late November regarding an airship seen in the Sacramento area with the initial weak suggestion that it was a hoax. Some reports were to the effect that it was cigar-shaped with a framework underneath for two men to sit on bicycle-like structures. Other reports were that it was oval with outstretched wings and propellers, and in one instance the operators could be heard singing. By November 22 the *Chronicle* and the *Oakland Tribune* reported that "thousands" of people saw an airship in the Sacramento area.

With this ripple, a lawyer, George D. Collins, came to the forefront and explained that his client, E. H. "Aluminum" Benjamin, was the inventor and had been working on the ship for 7 years. Collins also described some of the flights of the ship, and indicated that many parts of it were manufactured in the eastern U.S. The ship apparently was dubbed the "U.S. Collins" and supposedly belonged to the Aerial Navigation and Irrigation Co.

The sensation was so great the San Francisco *Call* carried an engraving of an elongated airship with wings, causing the San Francisco *Examiner* on December 5, 1896 to publish a stiff rejection of the whole affair:

Fake journalism has a good deal to answer for, but we do not recall a more discernable exploit in that line than the persistent attempt to make the public believe that the air in this vicinity is populated with airships. It has been manifest for weeks that the whole airship story is pure myth.

If this amount of airship coverage bothered the publisher, Mr. Hurst, then what happened in the following months must have made him furious, because by mid-April of 1897 there was a deluge of accounts of airships throughout the country.

Additions to and variations of the accounts of the first sightings in

California appeared in eastern newspapers during April. The New York *Herald* of the 12th reported that the first cigar-shaped flying machine was seen on November 16th in the Sacramento area, and Collins revealed that this airship was 150 feet long, had two wings, and was controllable. C. A. Smith, president of the Atlantic and Pacific Aerial Navigation Co., indicated the airship would fly to the east coast soon. Another story of the first California sighting appeared in the April 18th issue of the *Pittsburgh Press.* The report here was that the first sighting was in Maryville, some 75 miles northeast of San Francisco. To what extent these California sightings are related is not clear.

## Concentration Areas

Reports of airships died down during the winter months, but according to the *Pittsburgh Press* an airship spent several weeks crossing the Rockies, and passed over Kansas and Iowa. Newspaper accounts were renewed when the *Chicago Tribune* reported on April 7, 1897 that hundreds saw an airship the night before in the Omaha area. The *St. Louis Post Dispatch* of April 10th, however, reported that Omaha heard of the airship 6 months earlier, suggesting news originated in October of 1896. The New York *Herald* of April 12th said that the first sighting in the Omaha area was made on March 29th. Sightings in mid-April were so numerous that the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* of April 14th and 16th indicated that hundreds had seen it in Nebraska and Oklahoma, and even thousands around St. Louis.

By mid-April the airship flap had the Midwest stirred into a frenzy and reports were coming from all directions, but the most developed data came from sightings in the Chicago area. The *Chicago Tribune* of April

The author invites comment, c/o Dept. of Astronomy, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16801.

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## Airships, Continued

10th reported that hundreds sighted an airship in the Chicago area, many seeing wings. On the same day, the New York *Herald* gave insight into the nature of the elongated Chicago object. Max L. Harmar, secretary of the Chicago Aeronautical Association, said he was expecting the airship since he received word several weeks prior that a party of three had already left San Francisco.

Harmer described the vessel as powered and steerable, and it was just stopping off at Chicago in its flight to Washington D.C. Harmar also explained that Octave Chanute, president of the Chicago Aeronautical Association, had full information on the ship. Chanute was reported as being one of the wealthy sponsors of this airship venture. According to the New York *Times* of June 3, Chanute was running a secret airship farm not far from Chicago, and the New York *Herald* of April 13 reported the patent papers for the airship were already on file in Washington, D.C.

The Chicago *Tribune* was able to provide most of the information regarding the inventor of the Chicago airship. On April 12th they reported that the inventor's name was A. C. Clinton who lived in Omaha. The April 26th issue, however, suggested that A. C. Clinton was an alias and the probable inventor was a violin maker Clinton A. Case, an anagram of the alias. According to Secretary Wakefield of the Omaha Exposition, Case requested 87,000 sq. ft. of landing space at the exposition. Then, the next day the Chicago *Tribune* reported that Case lived in Chicago and he was already building model airships since 1892 in Rock Rapids, Iowa. Perhaps Omaha was mistakenly reported as the home of the inventor because another inventor, Alva J. Grover, a civil engineer who resided in Omaha, is reported as having shown plans for a steerable, powered, inflated machine. But to make things even more confused the New York *Herald* of April 13th reported that Oscar B. Booth, another airship inventor from Chicago, said the Chicago airship was Charles Clinton's who lived in Dodd

City, Kansas.

In the technical vein, the most compelling evidence for the existence of an airship seen in the Chicago area was the two photographs taken by Walter McCann which was reported in several of the major newspapers across the nation. Three other witnesses — G. A. Overstocker, W. Hoodles, and E. L. Osborne — saw the airship as well as McCann who took the photographs. These photographic plates were subject to "an acid test" and pronounced genuine. The witnesses themselves could even see through a telescope a man steering the cigar-shaped airship. Unfortunately these photographs do not seem to have survived. However, among the more prominent sources which declared the photos a fake were the Chicago *Tribune* of April 12 and Donald B. Hanlon in 1970. The *Tribune* explains that it was a fake because of "too much scope of lens." (?)

Another area from which detailed reports issued was Nashville, Tennessee. On April 25th the St. Louis *Post Dispatch* provided a remarkably detailed description of an airship shaped like a shad without its head and tail that landed in the Chattanooga area for repairs! In addition to wings and propellers there was a 9-foot passenger car beneath the balloon which carried two men. One of the pilots, Prof. Charles Davidson, reportedly left Sacramento a month earlier.

Interestingly enough, the May 7th issue of the Chicago *Tribune* gives a description of another airship, also in a very convincing style. Prof. Arthur W. Barnard of Nashville demonstrated take-off and control of a balloon before hundreds at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition grounds. His balloon was elongated with propellers and had a bicycle underneath for the pilot to use, primarily for take-off. The New York *Times* of May 7th specified the airship length as 40 feet and width as 20 feet. Since we presently live in the age where humans have been landed on the moon repeatedly, it is difficult for us to imagine the sensation created in the horse and buggy days by the ap-

pearance of a controlled balloon. The *Tribune* report indicated that in the case of Barnard's demonstration "people refused to believe their eyes."

The New York *Herald* of April 14th expressed exasperation with the airship situation and said it "seems impossible to get anything reliable now about the airships." They then proceeded to describe a steam driven airship named "Pegasus" which had solved the problem of aerial navigation and had spent the last month flying about. This airship was supposedly assembled 10 miles from Lafayette, Tennessee with parts from Chicago, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis.

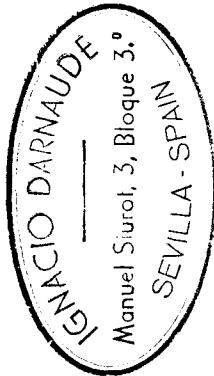
Numerous other accounts of inventors at work were briefly given in newspapers that spring. According to the Dallas *Morning News* of April 6th another pioneer, G. M. Padgitt of Springfield, Missouri, had been making balloon ascensions in the several weeks past. And among the inventors with a reputation who were secretly working at the time was Samuel P. Langley of the Smithsonian Institute. As early as May 14, 1896 the New York *Tribune* reported that Alexander G. Bell described Langley's invention as a steam driven aerodrome which looked like a large bird. On April 13th the St. Louis *Post Dispatch* indicated that Prof. Henry S. Pritchett of Washington University claimed that Langley's invention was able to carry a man several hundred feet.

## Dubious Accounts

By no means were all the newspaper accounts along the lines of pioneering efforts by inventors of airships, secretly or openly. A few of the stories seemed distinctly different in character because of features difficult or impossible to believe. The New York *Herald* of April 12th reported that John A. Herson, electrician from San Jose, by December 1 had already been on a trip with the inventor of an airship. Over a 2-day period they were supposed to have made a trip to Honolulu and back. This was a trip of over 4,000 miles which had to be made at an average speed of 80 mph.

(continued on next page)

Historical Section



# The 1897 Flap

## EXPLAINED

This revealing article has been reprinted from BUFORA JOURNAL by kind permission of Dr. Geoffrey Doel and by courtesy of the BRITISH UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION.

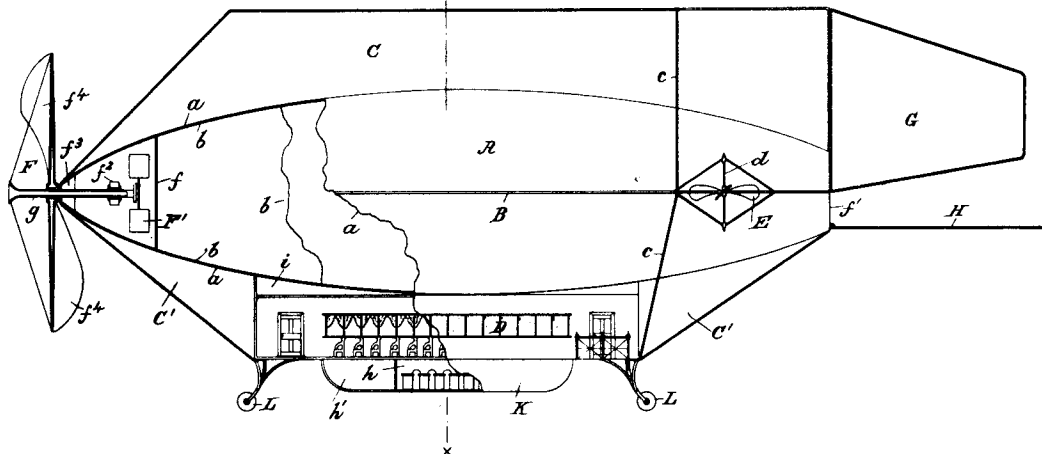
The diagram below is reproduced by courtesy of:

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40 East 49th Street,  
New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A.

The sketch by Captain Hooton is from "The Allende Letters" and reproduced by courtesy of:

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Pennington's Airship design, patented 31st December 1895. Note the battery compartment below the passenger lounge.



### DID PENNINGTON BUILD THE 1897 U.S.A. AIRSHIP ?

Speculation as to the origin of the 'Airship' reported over the central States of the U.S.A. in 1897 has resulted in many theories and at least one of these attributes the sightings to the activities of a peculiar antique sort of U.F.O. I understand that the reason that the craft looked very much like the current airship design already flying in Europe is that the U.F.O. denizens wished to present their ship to the natives in a manner that would be acceptable and understandable. However the airship in question did not seem to be at all anxious to present itself, operating as it did almost exclusively by night and skulking during daylight hours in out of the way places.

Witnesses of the airship were often men of excellent reputation for veracity and often crowds of onlookers were able to compare experiences.

The descriptions tallied to a remarkable degree. It seems clear also that some of the sightings of night flying objects were of quite a different category and to present day ufologists may be recognised as being the result of 'normal' U.F.O. activity.

From the reports still in existence it is possible to build up a very good idea of the type of dirigible involved and there is no doubt that in many respects it was similar to airships already built and flying in Europe particularly in France. In 1884 Renard and Krebs devised and built an electrically propelled airship called 'La France' which made a circular flight of five miles at its first appearance.

It would indeed have been strange if there had been no parallel activities in the U.S.A. at that time. Resources of material and money were there in abundance and among the fertile brains of a rapidly growing scientifically orientated community was there no person of sufficient genius engineering ability and wealth to take up the aerial challenge ?

I believe there was and I believe that his name was Edward J. Pennington.

Pennington was born in Franklin, Indiana in 1858 and as a boy showed remarkable engineering aptitude and as he developed into manhood he displayed remarkable initiative, charm and persuasiveness. With these attributes it was not long before he was running his own factory and at the age of twenty-three had patented a reciprocating head for planing machines the first of a continuous stream of patents which flowed from his active brain until his death in 1911.

He was ruthless too and could exhibit considerable showmanship in order to further his own ideas. A characteristic of Pennington which in this context is significant was the secrecy he achieved to protect his projects and his habit of quietly dropping one idea in favour of another with little regard to the financial outcome.

By 1885 Pennington had acquired sufficient capital to set up the Standard Machine Works in Defiance Ohio and two years later he created two further firms: to make pulleys and wood-working machinery. A flood of Pennington Patents were registered at this time at Fort Wayne.

There were rumours of a company capitalised at one million dollars in Oswego, Kansas and another at Cincinnati with factories to produce 'Freight Elevators'. (Could this phrase possibly have been a euphemism for load-carrying Airships ?)

After a brief appearance at Edinburg, Illinois, where he collected some 50,000 dollars from the inhabitants for yet another 'pulley works' he came to rest at Mount Carmel, Illinois in 1890.

Now things begin to develop . . . . . this new Company was actually entitled 'The Mount Carmel Aerial Navigation Company' and fresh patents included a four cylinder radial engine . . . . "for the propulsion of an aerial vessel". He also let it be known, that he was "readying a vessel to fly from Mount Carmel to New York".

In 1891 he exhibited a captive airship some thirty feet long and six feet in diameter. It flew in a circle propelled by an airscrew turned electrically. The current was conveyed by wires in the tethering cable.

In 1893 he turned his attention to motor driven vehicles and again a spate of patents flooded from the Pennington brain. Soon he was making motor-cycles in Cleveland, Ohio and here he invented the first balloon tyre.

Such giddy progress was bound to meet with reverses and due to his dogmatic attitude and ruthless decisions he began to make enemies: yet his uncanny instinct for avoiding trouble kept him from falling foul of the law.

During 1894 he joined Thomas Kane who made kerosene engines widely used in dairies for milk separation. This event is most important in this thesis which will be evident later. Here, in Racine on the shores of lake Michigan they financed a really large concern for the development of petrol engines.

1.883

As I frequently took photos of the sun, when its disc showed spots and faculae, I decided to take pictures also of this rare and interesting phenomenon of the passage of the bodies across the sun. For this purpose I replaced in the same equatorial, the objective (lens) of 16 cms. by another of equal strength, with a chemical focus (suitable for photographic work) and the eye-piece with a photographic chamber. After several attempts at adjusting the equipment, I succeeded in taking several pictures, from which I sent to "L'ASTRONOMIE" the most interesting one. While I took these photographs an assistant counted the bodies with the equatorial finder (telescope). The picture has been taken using a wet plate at 1/100 of a second. This speed did not leave me time for titrating and conveniently preparing the baths, also the negative might be a little stained by the developer. The focus is not quite on the sun but rather on the body which was of more interest on this occasion.

Although at first glance at the projection, all bodies appear to be round or spherical, one can observe on several photos that the objects are not spherical but mostly of an irregular shape.

I have said that in the projection of the field of the telescope these bodies appeared luminous and stood out like brilliant trails; but when crossing the solar disc, they looked opaque. When studying the photo and the negative closely, one notes a body surrounded by a nebulosity and dark trails, which appeared brilliant after leaving the face of the sun.

This makes me believe that the bright trails when crossing the face, absorbed the actinic light of the sun or reduced its photographic properties. In the afternoon, clouds made all observation impossible. However I took steps and established an observation plan, in case the phenomenon repeated itself the following day.

On August 13th, the first two hours of the day offered a clouded sky until 8 o'clock in the morning. Then the clouds started to disperse a little and I was able to watch. Immediately the same phenomenon reappeared, and during the 45 minutes allowed us by the sky, we counted 116 bodies traversing the solar disc.

Immediately after the observations of the 12th, I sent telegrams to the Observatories of Mexico and Puebla, asking them to watch the phenomenon, but it was invisible from these Observatories. In order to verify by indirect means the approximate distance of these groups of objects, I carefully adjusted the finder of the telescope, the equatorial and a 10 cms. diameter Foucault silver mirror telescope, aiming them at the sun and the bodies. I had during the night the opportunity of directing this set-up at the planets and the Moon, which had been in the first quarter for the past two days, without changing the focus, and only the Moon was nearly at the focus.

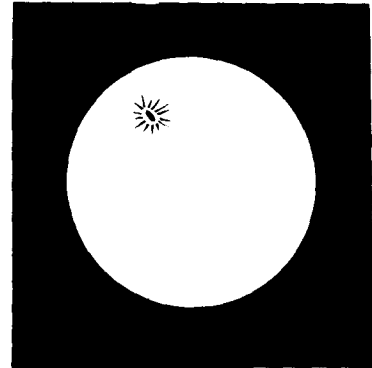
☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

From: Galway College Library, Ireland.

Translation Credit: L.Beer, W.Lasich, D.Sarkar.

Research Credit: William Lasich.

Sketch of the Photograph, showing object moving towards the lower right of the Sun.



In view of the phenomenon being invisible at Mexico and Puebla and elsewhere, makes me believe that these bodies were comparatively close to the Earth, and at a lesser distance than the Moon, and that their considerable parallax was the reason that at Mexico and Puebla they were projected outside the solar disc.

Signed: Jose A. y Bonilla,  
Director of the Zacatecas Observatory,  
Mexico.

L'ASTRONOMIE Editor's Note: The observation of Monsieur Bonilla is extremely interesting and not easy to explain. The dates of August 12th and 13th make us think of flying stars at that period, however, it would be unique for nothing to have been observed at either Mexico or at Puebla. Were these birds? We have studied with great attention the photograph, of which Fig.119 represents a reproduction; the black object is of oval shape, preceded and followed by thin trains, its length is of 0.9 mm, its width 0.6-7 mm, the solar diameter 66 mm (the star is not in focus but the object is.) Outside the Sun, the trains appeared to be brilliant. We tend to believe that it is a question of birds, insects or higher forms of dust, in any case the bodies belong to our atmosphere.

SPACELINK Editor's Note: In 1883 photography was a complicated business, and photographic plates were not used indiscriminately. The actual reproduction in L'ASTRONOMIE shows the Sun with an oblong dot approaching its centre. An official at the British (Natural History) Museum turned over a tome by Wallace and provided the following details: lapwings had been recorded flying at 8,500 feet, cranes at 15000 feet and a flock of geese is recorded as flying over the Himalayas as high as 29,000 feet. (Some wags at the office have asked whether the geese were wearing oxygen masks or going by Boeing. However, the estimated altitudes may well result from optical illusions.) As the Zacatecas Observatory would only be at about 8,200 feet, high-flying birds are a possibility although one would expect the Director of an observatory to recognise them if such were the case. The speed of the objects crossing the Sun indicates that they were close to earth, also the focusing of the telescope. The big "but" is: would high-flying birds, insects or dust, etc., produce trains or trails in the atmosphere, or is this indeed THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPH OF A UFO?

They patented among other things an 'electric igniter' for petrol driven engines which was really the first sparking plug, in 1895. In this year Pennington visited England and took some of his vehicles with him.

Exercising his well-known assurance and charm he persuaded Henry J. Lawson a successful manufacturer of bicycles to purchase patents to the tune of half a million dollars. He was still here in 1896 and entered the Brighton Run. After an altercation with Mons. Leon Bollée his claim to have won the event was not disputed. After this he commuted frequently between England and America so that he could very well have participated in the aerial demonstrations in the U.S.A. late in 1896 and during 1897.

In December 1895 he had deposed with the American Patents Office the design for full sized Airship. Many of the features of this design are so close to those described by witnesses of the aerial ship seen in 1896 and 1897 that on this evidence alone one would suspect that Pennington could have been responsible.

Basing the scale of the design on the size of the passenger seats the overall length of the ship would be about 140 ft. The keel beneath which provided accommodation for the crew and passengers also housed large batteries and extended for 70 ft. with an equal amount of overhang of the envelope at each end. At the front end of the envelope a large airscrew about 50 ft. from tip to tip provided traction. At the rear an ample rudder and a horizontal fin allowed control of direction.

At the sides two horizontally disposed propellers furnished lateral 'trimming'. Along the top of the ship a high dorsal fin would help to prevent sideways drift and yawing at slow speeds. Altogether a very impressive aeronautical design for that period of time.

It is probable that the finished airship based on this plan would deviate in minor details. Perhaps laterally placed aircrews were found to give a better lift and control if suitably shaped.

Wings or large ailerons above the envelope would also help to provide lift if suitably angled. In 1895 during his motorcycle phase Pennington was heard to remark: "Suppose I have a cycle, screw driven, making a mile a minute . . . just suppose that . . . then suppose that I put aeroplanes on that machine . . . and they are under good control, what then?"

The sighting of the Airship on the ground in 1897 by Capt. Hooton at 6 p.m. on about 20th April is usually regarded as a true account of his experience which he recounted in the Little Rock, Arkansas, Gazette. He was, he said, out hunting near Homan when he heard the sound of 'pumping' like the noise of a Westinghouse locomotive brake.

Going in the direction of the sound he was amazed to behold "the famous airship" in an open space. A man wearing dark glasses was doing something at the rear of the ship. As he approached four other men appeared.

During the ensuing conversation there was no doubt in his mind that the crew were American. When the ship was ready, three large 'wheels' started to rotate on either side of the airship and with a hissing sound she took off. The 'aeroplanes' on top of the envelope sprang forwards and the ship rapidly gained height and speed.

(For a more detailed account of this sighting please refer to the JULY/AUG. 1966 issue of 'The Flying Saucer Review').

The 'pumping noise' is of great significance. This noise is noted in at least three of the sightings. Twice it was referred to as being similar to that made by a milk separator. This is almost conclusive, it was Thomas Kane whom Pennington joined in 1894 who made the motors for these separators.

All witnesses agree that there were lights aboard in abundance with one very bright searchlight which was seen to dim as the airship accelerated.

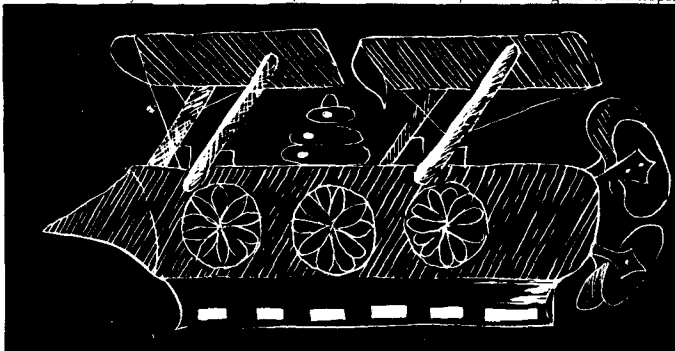
One witness encountering the aeronaut grounded claims to have asked why he turned the light on and off so much. He replied, no doubt truthfully that it consumed a great deal of motive power. We are led to the conclusion that Pennington's ship was propelled by a petrol-electric, or diesel-electric system. A bank of large batteries would be charged by a motor driven dynamo and would then operate electric motors geared to the airscrew(s). This system was widely used for the propulsion of road vehicles in the early years of this century.

After a trip of some miles it might be necessary to land to recharge batteries. Such a propulsion system would be well within Pennington's capabilities at this time.

The crew referred to by some witnesses included a woman, and it was customary for Pennington to take his wife on most of his exploits. (He married three times but I cannot find record of any children). Also a bearded man.

I have a photograph of Pennington with one of his vehicles and here he is accompanied by a man with a beard. Pennington himself was tall and of good physique. He usually sported a rather long dark moustache.

The next evidence required towards proving that the ship was not only terrestrial but Pennington's is to plot the course of the airship from recorded sightings during the 'voyages' of 1897 and to show that its speed was within the capabilities of such an early craft and that it operated in the vicinity of Pennington workshops.



#### FOR AND AGAINST

Consider the words of British aviation authority and historian, Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, as quoted in the outstanding British UFO magazine, *Flying Saucer Review*:

"Speaking as an aeronautical historian who specializes in the periods before 1910, I can say with certainty that the only airborne vehicles carrying passengers, which could possibly have been seen anywhere in North America in 1897 were free-flying spherical balloons, and it is highly unlikely for these to be mistaken for anything else. No form of dirigible (i.e. a gasbag propelled by an airscrew) or heavier-than-air flying machine was flying, or indeed could fly, at this time in America."

Mr. Gibbs-Smith, M.A., F.M.A., is an Honorary Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

Ref: F.S.R. Volume 12 No.4.

SPACELINK does not exclude the possibility that there may have been a few genuine cases of UFO activity in 1897.

The hypothesis put forward to explain the airship in terms of a flying saucer, is that the Occupants wanted to present themselves in contemporary terms so that witnesses would not think the machine too out of place in 1897. This tongue-in-cheek hypothesis is let us face it, rather hard to swallow.

The policy of SPACELINK is to look for the obvious rather than the devious and we consider the obvious explanation fits the facts.

The editor was glad to be able to supply Dr. Doel with some of the material.

Captain Hooton's own sketch of the Airship he saw on 20 April 1897.

Note the large lighted passenger lounge at the base of the craft; also the ropes for adjusting the large ailerons.

Here I suggest the reader obtains a good large scale map of the central States of America. Those included in the Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1911 are most useful being nearly contemporary.

Two series of sightings occurred in 1897.

**Expedition One.** Starting from Pennington's base at Oswego, Kansas, to Belleville, Kansas, to arrive March 25th, thence to Sioux City some 200 miles northwards travelling at night. Making around 40 mph and in fair weather the six or so hours of darkness would allow easy arrival by 28th March. Here the ship landed and charged batteries?

Turning southwards an easy night run of 100 miles allowed late worshippers leaving church at Omaha, Nebraska to view the aerial visitor. Continuing via Lincoln and Beatrice on the southerly run arrival at Everest, Kansas on April 1st., another 100 miles apart. In fact Kansas City was reached quite early at 8.15.

Back to base at Oswego without serious mishap on about the 3rd. April.?

After this there are three possibilities. a) Pennington flew to Racine on lake Michigan by April 9th keeping to out-of-the-way landing sites b) The ship was partly dismantled and carried by rail in Pennington's closed rail cars to Racine. c) That Thomas Kane had another similar airship at Racine. I would suggest (b) as being the most probable in the circumstances. Pennington had the resources and the experience in moving large objects by rail from place to place, vide his captive airship which was shown at exhibitions at Chicago and elsewhere.

**Expedition Two.** The Airship would have taken the air on the evening of April 9th. 1897 and leaving Racine some 60 miles from Chicago was seen first north of the city and then to south-east at 9.30 p.m. passing over the lake.

Turning westwards the ship would have reached vicinity of Eldon in Iowa some 200 miles after five hours at around forty m.p.h. Spending the day of 10th on ground at some secluded spot the batteries would again be charged and ready for the take-off on evening of April 10th. Then passing over Eldon westwards to Ottumwa (10 miles) at 7.25 and 7.40 p.m. respectively the ship is seen near Albia 25 miles further on at about 8.10 p.m. This chain of sightings allows some estimation of the airship's speed, — 35 miles in 45 minutes which is better than 45 m.p. Wind speed must be taken into account but from the sighting reports the weather during this period seems to have been remarkably calm.

Steering now towards the north-west apparently en route for Racine the ship would have passed near Mount Carroll but the date given for the airship over this city is April 9th. One must conclude that if this date is correct that the craft passed near this city on the westward leg of its journey before turning south-east towards Eldon. This is perfectly possible on the time schedule estimated.

However, and here one must speculate on Pennington's movements, it is not certain how the airship arrived at its next point at Yates Center, Kansas on April 19th. It could well have travelled at night over the next week or so southwards which would be well within its 40 m.p.h. capabilities. Or, it may have returned to Racine and have been once more despatched by rail.

At Yates Center there was the unfortunate incident of a young heifer becoming entangled in the mooring rope on take-off. Then south-east and a fairly long haul 400 miles to near Texarkana, but at 40 m.p.h. only ten hours of darkness were necessary. Here the ship was obliged to land on April 21st. to recharge batteries. In the evening when all was ready for take-off the airship was spotted by one Capt. J. Hooton whose detailed report is well known.

Airborne again and travelling in a leisurely manner Hot Springs, Arkansas was reached on May 6th. Once more the ship landed and was encountered by the Law Officers, Constable Sumpter and Deputy Sherriff Mc.Lemore. Both these gentlemen have sworn affidavits to their evidence in which they tell of a bearded mechanic and of a young woman. There was also a young man who was engaged in filling a water bag. They were informed that the ship was en route for Nashville, Tennessee. This may well have been so, but I feel that it was not long before it was once again safely at Oswego, Kansas with Pennington highly satisfied with his aerial exploits. There is little evidence of its re-appearance.

From the foregoing evidence it must be conceded that the itinerary followed by the 1897 airship was not particularly miraculous even for a craft of that period, only it took place in America where hitherto no such aerial exploits had been seen. No wonder then, that the onlookers became scared and confused, suspecting a work of the Devil. The only Devil responsible was in my opinion one eccentric, brilliant inventor named Edward Joel Pennington.

Of course there are so many questions left unanswered. For instance why did Pennington decide to drop the whole project just when fame and fortune might seem to have been within his grasp? I would suggest that he was clever enough to realise that his airship, though a very remarkable invention had very severe limitations which could not readily be overcome.

There would be little prospect of increasing the battery capacity without making the ship larger and unwieldy. It was obviously very much a fine weather craft and he had been extraordinarily lucky to have had such a long spell of fine, calm weather for his trials.

Also he would have realised that until the internal combustion engine could be improved considerably in size and reliability the whole airship project had better be shelved. The new and more financially rewarding field of the motor car must have seemed to Pennington to offer much better prospects of immediate financial rewards. He must also have known that there were aeronautical designers in Europe who had forged ahead in the airship field with whom he could hardly compete.

In the Motor Museum at Beaulieu, Hampshire there is a very rare vehicle. It is an 1896 Pennington motor-tricycle. It is worth looking at closely. The twin-cylinder, water cooled engine functions by fuel injection and the ignition system is remarkably ingenious, operating an early form of spark plug on each cylinder. The wheels have wire spokes and are furnished with wide tyres of modern cross section. It is a really remarkable piece of advanced engineering for its time and marks its designer Pennington as a brilliant engineer of foresight and genius.



DR. OLAVO T. FONTES

It is with a sense of deep sorrow that we must inform the members of APRO and affiliated organizations of the death of Dr Olavo T. Fontes. APRO's Brazilian representative on May 9, 1968 of cancer. Since 1957 when the Doctor requested membership in APRO he had represented the great South American republic of Brazil in UFO Research. His accomplishments have been many. Had it not been for his efforts many recent volumes dealing with UFOs would be slim indeed, for most of the books which enjoyed public consumption in the last two years drew heavily upon his material.

Dr. Fontes was only 43, he left a wife and three children.

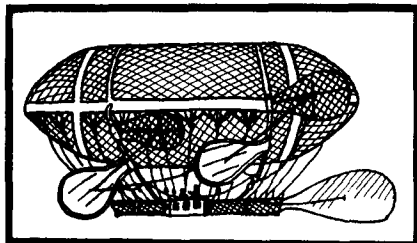
This short tribute is part of a detailed article published in THE A.P.R.O. BULLETIN, May 1968, published by APRO, 3910 E. Kleindale Road, Tucson, Arizona 85716, U. S. A.



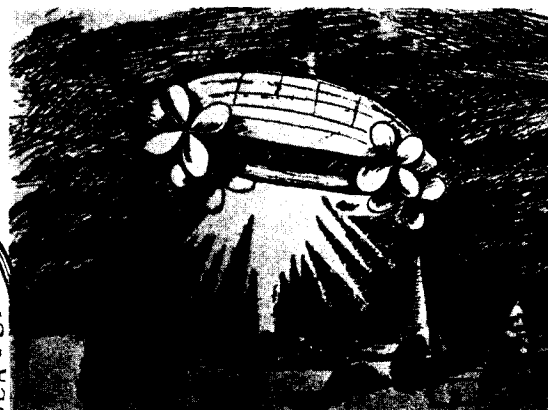
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Geoffrey G. Doel.  
September 1968.

LAST NOVEMBER A CASE OF DANGEROUS DRIVING WAS DISMISSED AGAINST JOHN DOW, 19, IN AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. HE TOLD THE COURT THAT HE AND HIS COMPANION DIVED OUT OF A MOVING CAR IN NAPIER AFTER "A FLYING SAUCER WHIZZED CLOSE ABOVE US." THE CAR THEN SPED DRIVERLESS FOR 200 YARDS AND CRASHED INTO A SHOP.



Count Lennox's air-ship, "The Eagle" of 1835. This machine was on view in London but passed into obscurity.



How long has this been going on? The woodcut above appeared in an 1897 newspaper to illustrate the strange "airship" which was seen in many of the southwestern and midwestern states during the Gay Nineties "saucer flap."

## THE 1897 CONTROVERSY

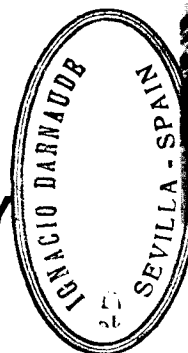
THE PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 1897 UFO

by Kenneth Lloyd Larson

During my research I have determined that the 1896-1897 wave must have been the result of an intelligent pattern established by an unidentified flying object. This analysis is based on sensible reasoning and research, with a study of the original newspaper reports. One of the first reports came from the area of San Francisco and Oakland, California. According to the Oakland Tribune, commuters boarding a ferry in San Francisco on the evening of 24 November 1896 said they saw an 'egg-shaped' object moving quickly through the sky. This ferry left San Francisco at 6.15 p.m. and arrived in the Alameda-Oakland area around 6.50 p.m. The witnesses said that the object followed the ferry and hovered over the dock in Alameda. Then it disappeared to the north-east at high speed. Oddly enough, a San Francisco witness said that he could not see any wings or propellers on the craft.

At about 7.00 p.m. on this same evening, a telegram arrived from Red Bluff, with the statement that many residents saw an egg-shaped object pass over that city at high speed. The distance from Red Bluff to San Francisco equals about 162 miles. It is possible that the object traced the course of the Sacramento River between Oakland and the northern city. Witnesses seemed to have described the same object over both cities, with a time interval of about 10 minutes. Simple reasoning seems to make clear that the UFO would have had a velocity of around 1,000 miles per hour. However, the first American plane flight by the Wright brothers was not made until 17 December 1903.

Secondly, the residents of Sistersville, West Virginia, were awakened around 5.00 a.m., 19 April 1897. The witnesses said that a tube-like object, with red and green lights along the sides, hovered over the small town, playing a brilliant searchlight on the ground. One resident was so startled that he pulled the whistle on the main factory, awakening everybody. The reader should note that newspapers said the object hovered over the town around 5.00 a.m. This is very significant, and the date of 19 April is noteworthy. Another object reportedly appeared over Yates Center, Kansas, where it was seen by several witnesses, on the same day



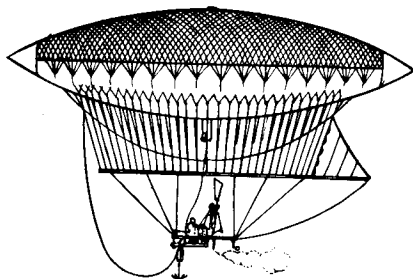
of 19 April 1897. The distance between Sistersville, West Virginia, and Yates Center, Kansas, equals about 800 miles.

A British researcher has claimed that the craft over Yates Center was a man-made dirigible, with a maximum speed of around 40 miles per hour. As the reader can see, the dirigible would have taken about 20 hours to cover the 800 miles between Sistersville and Yates Center. In order to be over Sistersville at 5.00 a.m. on 19 April, a dirigible would have had to have left Yates Center around 9.00 a.m. on 18 April. In the same way, if the object had left Sistersville at 5.00 a.m. on 19 April, it would not have arrived over Yates Center until 20 April, because of the speed of 40 miles per hour. The logical conclusion seems to be that the object had a much higher velocity, so as to be over the two cities on the same day of 19 April. Thus, the vehicle would have been a UFO and not a dirigible.

The weakness of the dirigible theory is that the newspaper reports of that period in America abound with various claims from inventors, all claiming that they had sent up the unidentified aerial object. I should know, I read the original newspaper reports from San Francisco and Oakland, published in thick volumes from the newspaper rooms of libraries. Consequently, these two simple examples show that the UFO researcher has to study the reports and witnesses and then think out the logical conclusions. I can only conclude that the 1896-1897 UFOs must have had a high velocity, much higher than anything manufactured around that period in America. This velocity could have been as high as 1,000 miles per hour. Indeed, it could compare to the estimate made by pilot Kenneth Arnold over Mount Rainier, Washington, 24 June 1947. Arnold checked the sweep-second hand of his plane's clock and arrived at a velocity of around 1,700 miles per hour. He couldn't believe this figure and lowered it to about 1,300 miles per hour. Another example: On 23 April 1897, farmer Daniel Gray said that a UFO had passed over his farm near Flint, Michigan. A dry and preserved newspaper fluttered to the ground, and he discovered that it was from Toronto, Canada, with the date of 5 October 1896. Oddly enough, the length of time between these two dates

comes to exactly 200 days!

This article, by Kenneth Lloyd Larson, Director of VICTORY RESEARCH, of 5630 Sawtelle Boulevard, Culver City, California 90230, U.S.A., relates to an article by Dr Geoffrey Doel which appeared in the October 1968 issue of SPACELINK - THE 1897 FLAP EXPLAINED. Kenneth Lloyd Larson's article, and the following correspondence, should be read in conjunction with Dr Doel's original article.



This balloon flew above Paris on 24 September, 1852. Invented by Henri Giffard, powered by a steam engine driving a 3-bladed propeller at 110 rpm, it achieved a speed of 6 mph.

SPACELINK has also received a letter on the 1897 flap from Bernard O'Connor of 132 East 16 Street, Northampton, Pa. 18067, U.S.A. The following are extracts.

'Dr Doel's article was an excellent job of research and reporting that cleared up an age-old mystery. However it may have inadvertently solved another age-old mystery. First of all I would like to quote Dr Doel's article. "However, and here one must speculate on Pennington's movements, it is not certain how the airship arrived at its next point at Yates Center, Kansas on April 19th. It could well have travelled at night over the next week or so southwards which would be well within its 40 mph capabilities. Or, it may have returned to Racine and have been once more despatched by rail. At Yates Center there was the unfortunate incident of a young heifer becoming entangled in the mooring rope on take-off."

Mr O'Connor then quotes from pages 12/13 of the late Frank Edwards' book FLYING SAUCERS - SERIOUS BUSINESS, the famous case of farmer Alexander Hamilton of Le Roy, Kansas who saw one of his cows being abducted by the occupants of an 'airship'.

Mr O'Connor continues, 'In this passage Hamilton states that his cow was "appropriated" by an airship on Monday 19 April 1897. It then disappeared in the north-west, yet the remains of the heifer were found about four miles west of Le Roy! Why? That question is easy to answer once you review the facts.

1. Pennington was travelling south-west from Mt. Carroll to Yates Center. To arrive there he had to bypass Le Roy.
2. It took him a week to reach Yates Center: 10 April 1897 - 19 April 1897.
3. Le Roy is 15 miles north-east of Yates Center.
4. It's 400 miles to Texarkana. In my opinion one can develop quite an appetite on such a journey.

After Pennington made off with Hamilton's heifer, he butchered it, then dropped the carcass from his ship. While he was attending to the animal, his ship was completing an arc which enabled him to set course for Yates.'

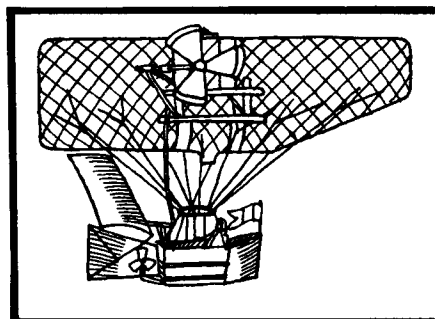
Dr Doel comments as follows:

In his very interesting article entitled 'The performance characteristics of the 1897 UFO', Mr Larson refers to an egg-shaped object which appeared at several points around the San Francisco area in November 1896. Apparently no wings or propeller were seen on the craft, and timing gave it a speed up to 1,000 m.p.h. From the description of this 'craft', which in no way resembled the famous airship, I am sure that any experienced UFOlogist would recognise a type of UFO which has been reported on several occasions in recent years from many parts of the world, Valensole in southern France (1965) and Socorro in New Mexico (1964) to give two instances. Also the dates do not tally with the 1897 airship sightings.

The sighting Mr Larson reports from Sistersville on the other hand evidently referred to Pennington's airship, and helps to fill in the question of its whereabouts after 10 April 1897. As the ship was seen at Sistersville at about 5.00 a.m. on 19 April 1897, there is absolutely no reason why it should not have arrived at Le Roy near Yates Center by 10.30 p.m. of the same day as recorded by farmer Hamilton whose heifer was abducted. Allowing 5.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. on 19 April, there would be 17 hours available flying time at 47 m.p.h. to cover the 800 miles. With a slight following wind, this fits in perfectly with the estimated performance of the Pennington airship. I am very grateful for the information from Mr Larson which has helped to fill in the airship's itinerary.

Mr Bernard O'Connor also helps to trace the airship's movements while at Le Roy, and refers to the discovery of the remains of the heifer (head, skin and legs) which were found a few miles away the next day by a Mr Link Thomas who thought someone had butchered a stolen beast. Of course someone had - Pennington's crew in fact - so that one must now regard the heifer as abducted, not caught up by accident.

Recently I have come across a claim by Pennington that he did build and fly an airship. This is the first admission I have read of which helps to consolidate the theory from his own lips, although one must admit that Pennington was given to making extravagant assertions.



"L'Esperance", an immense dirigible constructed by Delamarne, flew on several occasions during 1865-6.

More reports:

Researchers continue to find reports of the 1897 airship in newspapers of the period. The following is a report from THE DAILY KENNEBEC JOURNAL, Augusta, Maine, of 12 April 1897.



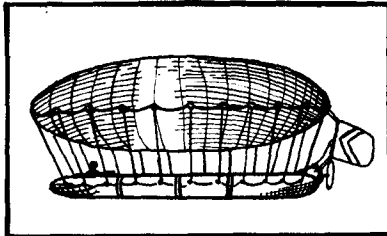
'Sioux City, La., April 11. Many claim to have seen the airship. Up to date, however, it has invariably been on the wing on such occasions. R.H. Butler, of this county, claims he caught it "roosting".

'His account is as follows: "Every Saturday I drive into Sioux City. On my return last week, I reached the driveway near my house about 12.15 a.m. and turned in to get to my barn. I had gone about half the way when I saw light just over the off horse's ear. I strained my eyes, and when I got a good look, I nearly fell off the seat. I was looking at a ship. At the top was what I took for a big, cigar-shaped balloon. It was about 35 feet long, 10 or 12 feet thick and lay on its side. Underneath it was a car something like those on the Ferris Wheel at the World's Fair. It had a row of windows along the side and the light shone through them. As I approached, the folks in the boat heard me and they started into the air. It sounded like a bunch of quail going up. In four or five minutes the ship went out of sight, traveling toward the south. I think it rose at an angle of 40 or 45 degrees."

'The general opinion among his neighbors is that Butler had been drinking before he left town.'

Source: SKYLOOK, Box 129, Stover, Mo. 65078, U.S.A.

Santos-Dumont fitted a petrol engine to an airship in 1898 and flew the craft round the Eiffel Tower.



Printed in the 14 September 1897 issue of THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR, an article reported that C.W. Spencer, superintendent of the eastern division of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and his assistant, Thomas Hay, were 'admiring the clear, starlit heavens' from the observation car, near Gravel River, Ont., when they saw 'A something in the sky'.

They gave details of a large white light, and above it a red and a white light. When the air-borne object turned, the red light became blue and a row of four lights was seen terminated by a circle or ellipse of a dozen lights, in the midst of which was the dark body of the air ship'.

All the elements of other-world mystery were there, but the observers were not taken in by science fiction, then in its infancy in those days. The paper reported that the lights had the 'steady clearness of acetylene or electric light'. Spencer and Hay 'could form no other opinion than that it was an air ship'. The writer concluded: 'It is quite possible that some inventor has set to work quietly and unostentatiously and thus put his theories into practice in the world; and if he hasn't come to grief in the wilds of Lake Superior, we shall soon know that air navigation has been accomplished on Canadian Territory.' (WINGHAM ADVANCE-TIMES, Ontario, 27 July 1967)

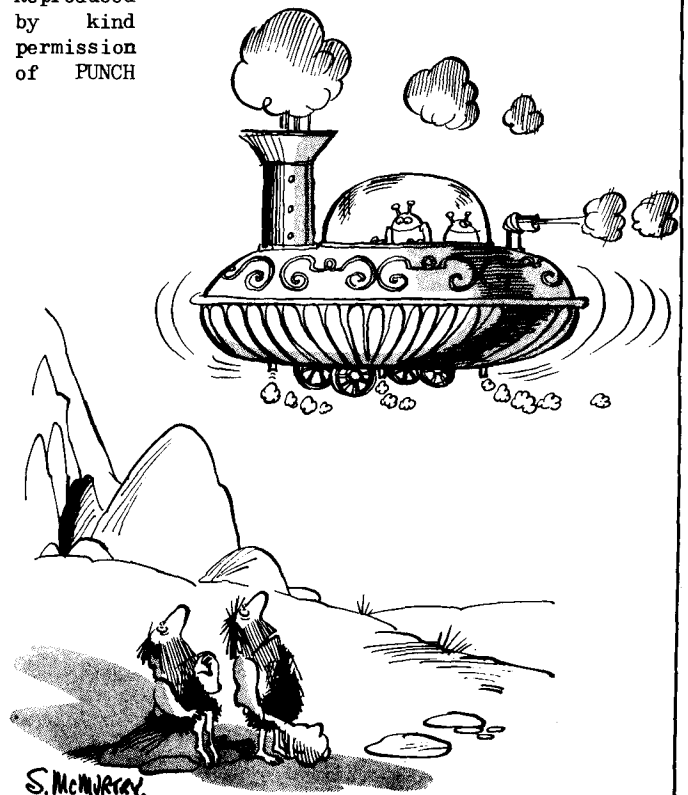
Source: SAUCERS, SPACE & SCIENCE, No. 49 - 17 Shetland Street, Willowdale, Ontario, Canada

Dr Doel comments: The first account fits in very well with my 'itinerary'; the airship was seen 15 miles north of Sioux City on 28 March 1897 by a gent who got the anchor mixed up with the seat of his pants. Mr R.H. Butler says he saw the machine on a Saturday evening/Sunday morning near Sioux City. This would allow ample time for the craft to arrive 100 miles away by next evening in Omaha, Nebraska, where it was seen by late worshippers leaving church (on 29 March).

Concerning the second account, as one of the probable origins of the airship was from the Pennington-Kane factory at Racine on the shores of Lake Michigan, it may well have had other sorties before being finally broken up. Ontario is directly north-east over the Great Lakes from Racine.....about 400 miles, and as we have seen from previous studies the airship could do this run in about 10 hours, the wind being favourable or at least calm. The conclusion of the reporter that 'some inventor has set to work' etc was a shrewd observation. Another point of significance is that he thought the ship might have come to grief 'in the wilds of Lake Superior'. Why Lake Superior if it was seen at Gravel River, Ontario? Presumably he saw it disappearing in the direction of that lake.... Again another shred of evidence in support of my thesis?

For further aspects of the 1897 sightings, read also 'The 1897 story' by Jerome Clark and Lucius Farish, published in three parts in FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, Vol.14 Nos. 5 & 6, and Vol.15 No.1. ●●

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"It's another of those flying saucer things."

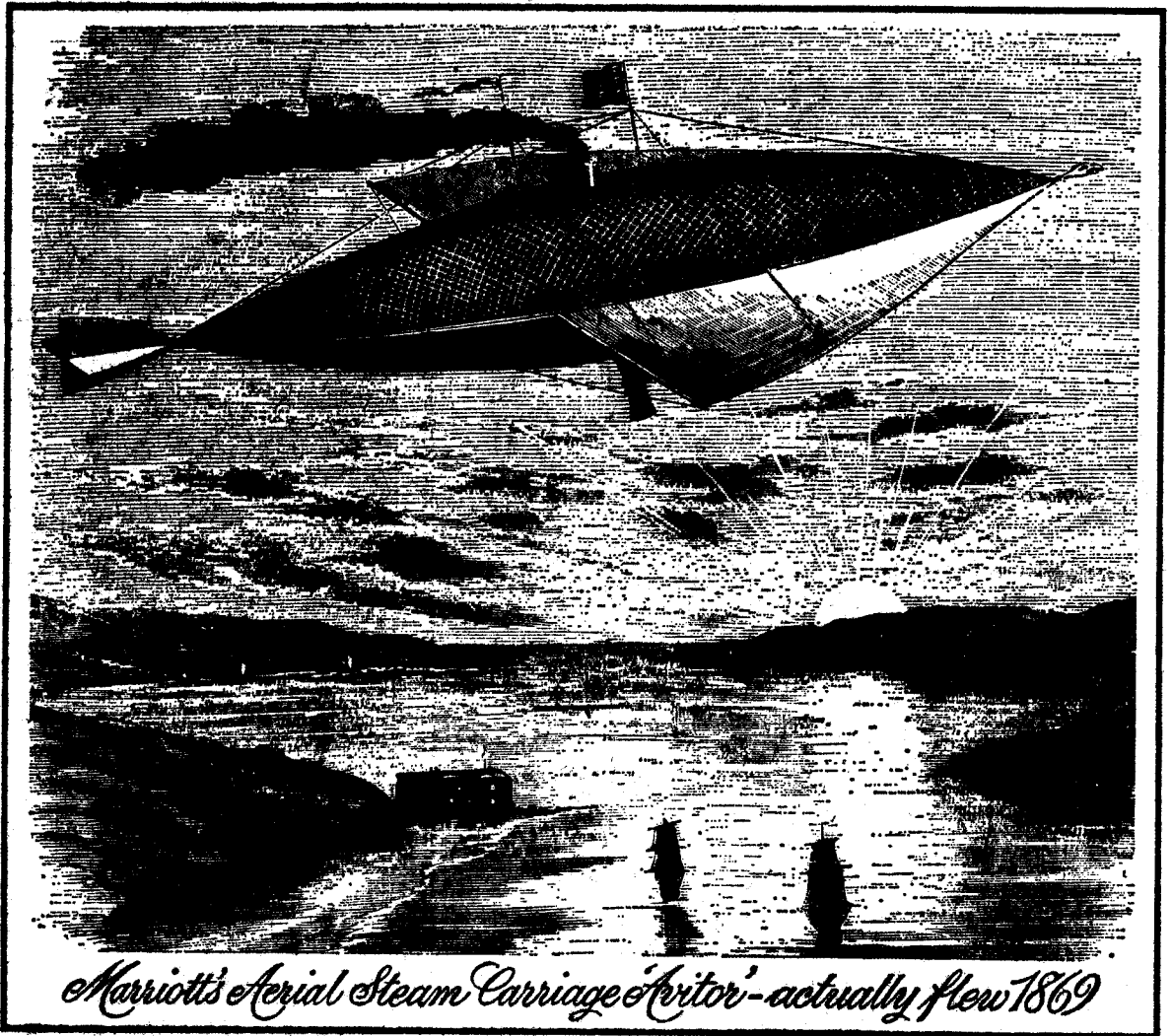
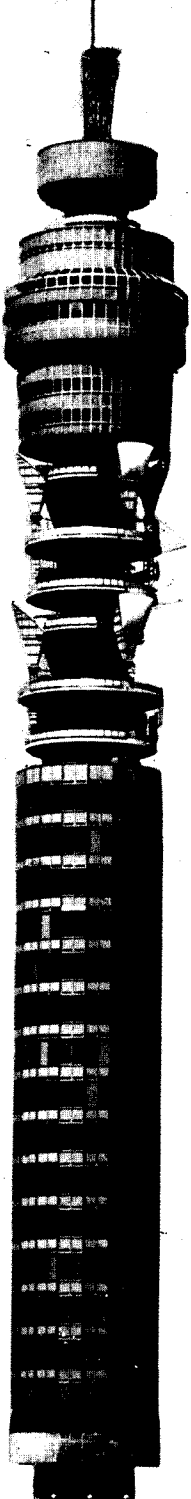
# SPACELINK

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# The 1897

See page 20

# CONTROVERSY



*Marriott's Aerial Steam Carriage 'Ariton' - actually flew 1869*

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attitude towards anything alien I think would give them cause.

Point 4, invasion, what would they hope to gain? Certainly not our superior knowledge, and most certainly not to find out how peacefully nations can live side by side. They could probably teach us all a well-deserved lesson.

Point 5, of course we must recognise their potential, since they are obviously far more advanced than we are. No doubt they could eliminate us if they so wished, but it would appear they intend us no harm, and neither will they contact us en masse until we stop our stupid wars, aggression, misuse of powerful weapons, etc. and learn to live in peace with one another. Just think what a lot we could learn from our extraterrestrial visitors. But will we? I doubt it.

Richard Thompson - 5 Western Avenue, Saxilby, Lincs

## THE 1897 CONTROVERSY

The following letter results from our item in the last issue of SPACELINK on the 1897 controversy, which itself followed an article entitled "The 1897 Flap Explained" by Dr. Geoffrey Doel in volume 5 number 4.

With regard to the 1897 controversy, may I say, once and for all, that whatever it was that was seen over the USA in that year, the object (or objects) was no kind of conventional or experimental balloon or airship made by man. One or two of the freak designs for airships in the 19th century were built, and one or two rose from the ground, such for example as Delamarne's creature: but they could not be propelled. It was not until 1884 that even the most sophisticated airship that Europe could build (Renard and Krebs LA FRANCE) could fly at some 12-14 mph; and nothing in the USA could proceed at anything like that pace, even for a mile or two. After 1884 there was a virtual lull in Europe, with a few dirigibles being tried out; but nothing that could get up a speed to make it fully independent of the wind. In America there was no dirigible of any kind that could possibly have travelled faster than the wind could blow it.

The next point is that all the talk of dirigibles that arose concerned airships of various shapes, and odd forms of propulsive units - often man-powered - whose ascensions were always in full daylight and accompanied by much ballyhoo and witnesses. The Pennington story can be ruled out completely, on propulsive power alone.

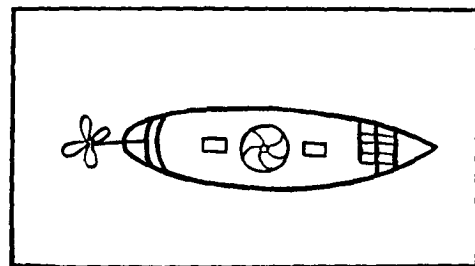
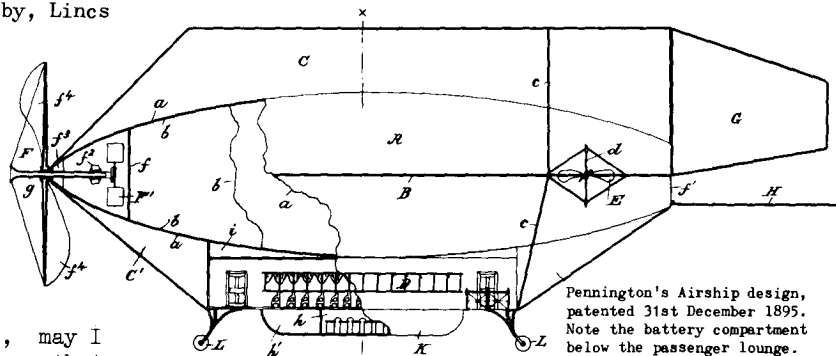
In all the accounts of the 1897 phenomena I have read, the UFO was always able to move away at speed. No manmade object ever did any such thing in the USA. It might have drifted away, but not sped away.

Finally, I cannot see how the 1897 phenomena could have been normal spherical balloons reported as airships. Balloons would be very well-known over much of the country, and no balloon could ever, by any stretch of the imagination

be confused with what I have seen described, unless there was a deliberate effort, or efforts, at a hoax.

Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, MA, FMA, FRSA - The Royal Aero Club, Pall Mall, London S.W.1.

(Ed: Charles Harvard Gibbs-Smith is an Honorary Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society, and is regarded as a leading authority on aeronautical history. In 1970 Her Majesty's Stationery Office published his well illustrated, 356 page book entitled AVIATION, AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF ITS ORIGINS TO THE END OF WORLD WAR II, which is based on a widely acclaimed earlier edition published in 1960. He is a director of F.S.R.)



A newspaper reporter's sketch of an airship which passed over Nashville, Arkansas, late in April 1897.

### DR. DOEL REPLIES TO CHARLES GIBBS-SMITH

Mr. Charles Gibbs-Smith's assertion that the object seen over the USA in 1897 "was no kind of conventional or experimental balloon or airship made by man" is simply a sweeping statement of opinion which is not supported by the facts which come to light when the evidence available is studied carefully. I cannot think that Mr. Gibbs-Smith has assimilated my article in detail otherwise some of the objections, raised in his letter, to the 1897 USA object being a manmade dirigible balloon would seem to have been answered.

His main objection appears to stem from the assumption that the propulsive power available at that time was not sufficient for a craft to perform even as modestly as that operated over America in 1897. America at that time being a nation of rapidly advancing technology undoubtedly would have been the equal of Europe in

S.L. APRIL 71

possessing power units suitable for experimental work on dirigibles. With the resources, wealth, inventiveness and drive of persons such as Pennington, advances surpassing those made in Europe in this field were very likely. There is no evidence that the 1897 airship attempted to fly against the wind, indeed the erratic itinerary suggests that it was operated with the wind in the manner of the balloon aeronauts of the time, so that speeds up to and beyond 40 mph were feasible.

The limitations of such a craft must have been only too clear to a man like Pennington who was nothing if not a capitalist, and that as a commercial venture it was a non-starter. 'Motor-cars' appeared to him to be a much better money-making proposition which would account for the quiet disappearance of his airship to await development at some later date. Before his death in 1911, Pennington is reported to have said that he intended to return to the building of airships.

Mr Gibbs-Smith refers to the speed of the 'UFO' on moving away, as reported by witnesses. Well, to a surprised observer who had never seen anything faster than the trains of that period, 40 mph or so would have seemed a remarkable velocity, particularly close to the ground. Freshly charged batteries plus the lift of the gas-filled envelope would have provided a very swift getaway when Pennington's craft took off. It is also possible that the lift / stabilising side-screws were compressed air driven, the evidence of witnesses rather suggests this.

In Europe, experimental craft of the airship type were not quite as primitive as Mr. Gibbs-Smith indicates around 1897. At that time, Count Zeppelin was building his first airship, and in 1884 Tissandier flew a dirigible which would seem rather similar to Pennington's. It was electrically propelled and could stem a wind of 7 mph. Flying with the wind, it could do very much better than this, and had a modest motor of 1.5 horsepower.

We know that Pennington evolved a large electrically driven model airship in 1891, and by employing a kerosene-electric system for battery charging, a far more powerful motor could have been installed.

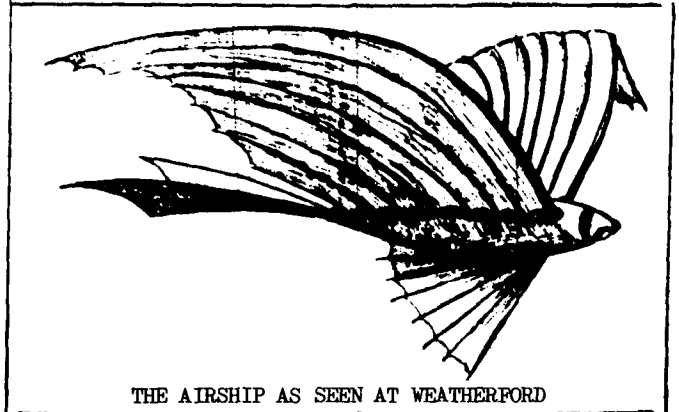
The development of the electric motor was rapid in the latter years of the last century, and at one time seemed likely to oust the petrol engine as a method of propulsion.

I have met with blank disbelief when I have stated that the world land speed record stood at 65 mph in 1898. It was achieved by Camille Jenatton in an electric car, the JAMAIS CONTENTE.

It may seem from my opinions regarding the 1897 USA 'airship' that in some way I am attempting to debunk UFOs in general. Far from it. It is also clear that some of the reports originating from the USA in the 1890s were due to 'genuine' UFOs and were associated with objects which resembled the now familiar 'flying saucer' and which behaved in a manner which has been reported from all over the world for many years. With great respect to Mr. Gibbs-Smith, I think it is clear that all the ingredients for a craft

such as the USA airship were in existence in 1897. It would have taken a Pennington to co-ordinate them successfully.

Geoffrey G. Doel, MRCS, LRCP, DMRE.  
Concord, Vaggs Lane, Hordle, Lympington, Hampshire



THE AIRSHIP AS SEEN AT WEATHERFORD

The above illustration comes from THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS, Friday 16th April 1897, and refers to a sighting of the airship at Weatherford, Texas on 14th April. The airship was also reported to have been seen at Cresson and Corsicana, Texas on the same night. The drawing with exaggerated artistic licence illustrates some of the reports, eg: "It is much the shape of a cigar. The main body appeared to be about 30 feet long. Great wing-shaped fans spread out on either side. At the front end was a large wheel much like the side wheels of a steamboat. At the rear end was a fan-like projection like the tail of a fish. The whole was about 75 ft. long." The ship was said to be electrically driven.

The third week of April 1897 saw a run of airship sightings reported in the DALLAS MORNING NEWS, and the headlines above the sketch said: "LOOKS LIKE A PASSENGER COACH" "Powerful Search Lights Fore and Aft-Has Monstrous Wings That Fan the Breezes" "Last night at 9 o'clock (at Weatherford) the airship that has been mentioned in The News from Oklahoma and other points, was seen here. It passed over the city in a southwesterly direction and lights were thrown out from the front resembling the headlight of a (railway) engine. The machine was seen by many people, The News correspondent included."

"Various and truthful citizens of Corsicana to-day declare that the airship, which has received not a little mention in the press this week, passed over the city last night. It was described by one, who is emphatic to the statement that he saw it as a bright light a long distance from the earth and was moving at rather a fast speed across the firmament. It was said to have been seen at about 8.30 o'clock, came from the north and was moving in a southerly direction when first noticed."

The airship sightings were very widely reported and it appears to have been the 'in thing' to have sighted it. Consequently the papers published quite a few obviously fictitious reports. Equally there were many sceptics, who not having seen the airship themselves, vehemently declared it a fake. Just as

then, so nowadays, we still have the professional debunkers. Although a few people declared the airship had come from Mars, most of the reports appear to be consistent with a man-made machine, and it appears to have been generally accepted as such. It should also be remembered that its daytime appearance when witnesses would have seen the full extent of its wings, gas envelope and rudder, would appear quite different from the night-time reports, when people would probably only see the searchlight and illuminated "passenger coach", which is clearly shown in Pennington's 1895 patented airship design.

#### A HOME MADE ONE

In addition to the literary hoaxers, there were also the practical hoaxers, which is well-illustrated in this story from THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS of 19 April. "A HOME-MADE ONE. Plano, Collin County, Texas, 18 April. The much talked of airship fell in Plano at 8.30 o'clock tonight and almost caused the destruction of Plano's large two-story public school building. It was first observed by Harris Wyatt coming from the southeast, and fell on the south gable of the school-house building. Some parties who saw the big light on the roof of the building alarmed the citizens by shooting off fire-arms and with the cry of "fire!" "The schoolhouse is on fire!" which brought out the whole town and emptied the churches of their congregations within a few minutes, but it all proved to be a dangerous hoax in the shape of a large "turkey buzzard" with a ball of cotton twine saturated with turpentine tied to one of the bird's legs. The bird had alighted on the roof of the school building and from a distance it looked as if the south end of the roof was on fire, which was viewed by hundreds of persons who were unable to do anything on account of the extreme height of the building. In a few minutes the ball of cotton burned itself loose from the bird's leg and rolled off the roof onto the ground, where the ball of cotton burned brightly for several minutes. The bird flew off the roof as soon as it was relieved of its warm burden. Plano has witnessed all the airships she wants to, and would prefer that they would pass some other way, if they all prove as dangerous as this one did to-night."

Ed: Thanks go to Ignacio Darnaude of Seville for so kindly supplying the newspaper material. ●●

#### UFOLOGY AND LIBRARIES

Thanks to SPACELINK (we say modestly) flying saucers now have their own subject heading. In BRAD - the "British Rate and Data", an important advertising directory, BUFORA JOURNAL, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, INTERPLANETARY NEWS and SPACELINK can all be found under the heading "UFOLOGY". Because few libraries appear willing to put UFO books together under a common heading, our humble start could be used to influence librarians to change their ways. At present one searches through Astronomy, Astronautics, Flight, Meteorology, Psychology, Religion and you can probably think of a few other sections in order

to find your UFO books. This situation is downright unsatisfactory and the Dewey decimal system of book classification appears to be at fault. It allows UFOs/Flying Saucers to be placed under 001.9 which is intended for "Controversial and spurious knowledge". But few authors would admit or expect their manuscripts to fall into this category. Neither can one expect every librarian to be dispassionate about this; some books may be felt to fit this category while others may not. Hence the difficulty over classification using this coding.

Ref: DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION AND RELATIVE INDEX (1967) based on the system devised by Melvil Dewey.

000. is for Generalities  
001. is for Knowledge  
001.9 is for Controversial and Spurious Knowledge  
001.92 is for Controversies  
001.93 is for Curiosities  
001.94 is for Mysteries  
001.95 is for Deceptions and Hoaxes  
001.96 is for Errors, Delusions and Superstitions

The problem can be stated simply. The Dewey system which appeared in 1876 is now obsolete, but most public libraries persist in using it. A far better system, which is mainly restricted to academic and university libraries, is that advocated by the Library of Congress (most USA books include their L. of C. number). This is called the "Universal Decimal Classification" system, details of which are published by the British Standards Institution.

## APOLOGIES

The managing editor tenders sincere apologies for the long delay in bringing you this issue. Both he and the editor found it necessary to give more time to the pursuit of their work-a-day careers in different fields, which retarded researching and preparing material. Delays have also occurred through major mechanical faults in the electric typewriters used for the art-work, which itself takes a long time to prepare. Overseas readers may be unaware that there was a seven-week postal strike in the UK. Readers are thanked for their trust and patience, and reminded that they will still receive 4 issues for their subscription regardless of scheduling. A reappraisal of the schedule has had to be made and the aim is to publish SPACELINK twice a year, although with greater frequency if time and (voluntary) staff are available.

#### SUBSCRIPTION INCREASE

To meet rising costs, which are largely on postage including editorial correspondence, the four-issue subscription for volume 7 will be 75np - a rise of 7½np. This increase of just over 10% compares very favourably with the recent 20% increase in the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW's subscription rates.

→ 1.896-97



# AIRSHIPS OF THE 1890s

By Steven A. Arts (Nebraska, U.S.A.)

It is a long time since FSR published anything on the extraordinary UFO Wave over the United States in the years 1896-97. Long ago we devoted a lot of space to those events, but today there must be a great many folk among our newer or younger readers who may not even have heard about the curious phenomenon of the great "airships", carrying very powerful headlights or searchlights, which seem to have visited large regions of the United States in the last century. We shall therefore probably find an opportunity to carry a few recapitulations in the coming months. Meanwhile, two things seem to be quite certain about the UFO Wave of 1896/97 over the U.S.A. *Firstly, there does not appear to have been a single report anywhere in America of a craft of 'saucer' or 'disc' shape during those years (although there had been a notable one at Denison, Texas, in January 1875). And secondly, not a single one of the numerous reports from Americans who claimed to have seen the occupants of landed machines in 1896/97 referred to "small beings" or "big heads", although it is true that at least one account (on the Hamilton ranch at Leroy, Texas), referred to extremely unpleasant-looking creatures. Otherwise the encounter accounts — and there appear to have been quite a number of them — seem to describe very "normal" sorts of individuals resembling Americans in size and features. And every account of the craft seen seems to indicate something large and of the shape of an airship, or what we were later to call a dirigible or a "zeppelin". So, whatever and whoever it was that was examining the United States in 1896/97, it does not seem that they were anything like the small critters with big heads who are plaguing us at present.* EDITOR



\* \* \* \* \*

THE sightings started in the Sacramento (California) area, in November of 1896. One of the very first sightings, recorded in the newspaper *Sacramento Bee* of November 18, shows a difference. Voices are heard, but speaking English.

Titled "*Voices in the Sky*", the paper's account states: "Startled citizens last night living at points of the city along a rough diagonal line, yet far distant from each other, declare that they not only saw the phenomenon, but they also heard voices issuing from it in mid-air — not the whispering of angels, not the sepulchral mutterings of evil spirits, but the intelligible words and the merry laughter of humans.

"At those intervals where the glittering object, as if careless of its obligation to maintain a straightforward course, descended dangerously near the housetops, voices were heard in the sky saying:

*Lift her up, quick! You are making directly for that steeple.'*

"Then the light in the sky would be seen obeying some mystic touch and ascending to a considerable height (sic), from which it would take up again its southwesterly course."

The article goes on to give some other details, and refers to a man purported to be the inventor of just such an airship, and planning to fly it from New York to California.

Another section of the story relates the tale of one Charles Lusk, cashier of the Central Electrical Street Railway Company, who saw the airship. He, too, heard a voice saying:

*"Well, we ought to get to San Francisco by tomorrow noon."*

Carmen of the tram lines said they saw the airship, which was balloon-shaped. They considered it a balloon.

A Mr. G.C. Snyder, in the same article, claimed the airship was definitely not a meteor.

"I assure you," he is reported to have said, "there is no joke about this matter, so far as I am concerned. Last evening, about ten minutes before 7 o'clock, I saw a light, which was above, approximately, Twenty-seventh and P Streets, sailing in a southwesterly direction. It rose and fell and swayed from right to left as if it were being propelled by some motor power. It was a white light, and was not a star or a meteor, I am certain of that."

That south-westerly direction, mentioned twice, would, of course, take the airship in the general direction of San Francisco.

Two days later the *Sacramento Bee* copied an article published originally in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the airship reports gaining popular attention in

that city.

Asked the *Chronicle* story:

"Are there up in the sky four jolly and intrepid human travellers, paying their last respects to Mars, singing quartets to Venus, and saluting the planets generally within hailing distance, or are the people of Sacramento affected with the disease known in polite society as "illuminated stagers".

"That is the question."

Was it, though? Observers of the modern UFO sightings will notice a somewhat nasty turn of events here. The story suggested that the Sacramento witnesses of the airship were drunk. A subtitle of the above article was: "Freemasonry of Liars, Suggests Prof. Davidson."

People who saw the mysterious lights in the sky were accused of drinking too much. Airships were thought to be kites, balloons, the planet Venus, the star Sirius, hoaxes, fakes, or, in another vein, ships from an advanced civilization on Mars.

The man who claimed they were from Mars said: "In my investigations of this subject, it would seem that this visitor is from our neighboring planet Mars. We know, from the evidence of scientists and astronomers, that Mars is millions of years older than the Earth."

Elsewhere in his impassioned letter to the *Sacramento Bee*, he says:

"The speed of our Martian ships is very great, and can be regulated to the rapidity of a thousand miles a second."

Real heady stuff, to say the least. What was this aerial phenomenon that had folk talking for nearly a year, from California to Maine?

It was what modern observers would call "unidentified flying objects", or "UFOs" for short. Back then they were called 'airships'. The above quoted letter was dated November 24, 1896!

'*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*', dating back to about that period, defines airships as being "balloons".

These airships could not have possibly been balloons. What balloons, especially in the 1890s, could travel at an estimated 200 miles per hour, in one case that's on record?

There are similarities to modern UFO sightings, as one would expect, but there are many differences as well.

Another trend is visible in an article from the newspaper *Sacramento Union* of November 20th. They have started using nonsense humor, perhaps in an effort to downgrade the reports.

"The man who is alleged to have heard the chorus



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while the machine was doing the 'Corbett duck', has put his remembering tank to work, and recalls that one line was *Just Tell Them That You Saw Me*, and now goes about mournfully whistling, *It Never Came Back*. Another who heard the music declares the words to have been, *Will You Miss Me When I've Gone?* and the refrain was, *I Gave That Man a Fill?*"

Two paragraphs further down they make a very half-hearted attempt to appease the people of Sacramento by saying:

"There are some of the stories floating about concerning the aerial mystery, and "there are others". Still the citizen pays his money and takes his choice, and, as this is a free country, has a right to his opinion. The lunacy commission is taking a vacation now, so the danger is reduced to a minimum. The question yesterday was not 'What is it?' but 'Have you seen it?'"

The *Sacramento Bee*, on November 19th, reported an investigation of the airships by a Grand Jury. On the same day, in another article, a subtitle declared: "All Men Liars? Looks That Way!"

Newspapers, it seemed, were beginning to take pro and con sides in the great airship debate. Yet it was not always easy to tell who was who.

To give you an idea of the controversy engendered by the airship issue, we quote here from six short reports from newspapers all over California and Nevada. From the *Sacramento Bee*, November 23rd:

"Our Citizens Are All Bright."

(From the *San Francisco Report*):

"Many of Sacramento's best citizens are said to believe they saw a real air ship Wednesday night and heard people in it talking. Never mind, Lady Somerset and Miss Willard are coming, and will of course visit Sacramento."

"What Kind Do You Mean?"

(From the *Fresno Republican*):

"Up in Sacramento some people claim to have seen a mysterious air ship coursing through the air against the wind. Spirits, boys, spirits!"

"No, The Same Old Brand."

"The *Bee* puts a dozen or more witnesses upon the reporter's stand to prove that an air ship passed directly over Sacramento this week. The reporter must have struck a brand which is stronger than his ordinary drink."

"The *Bee's* Assurance Goes."

(From the *Nevada Silver-State*):

"However, whatever it was, or whatever it pretends, it cannot be reasonably denied or doubted that the thing actually occurred as alleged by our frightened neighbors of Sacramento. For we have the assurance of the *Bee* that the whole population of the city was not drunk between 6 and 7 o'clock that evening."

"The Wicked Reporter Man."

(From the *San Jose News*):

"The story doubtless originated in the brain of some ingenious newspaper reporter in Sacramento, who has prepared the narrative with considerable care, going so far as to secure the co-operation of alleged witnesses, a comparatively easy matter, as there are many people who would "stand in" to support an improbable report yarn of that kind, considering it a huge joke."

And finally:

"Oh, Now, You Stop!"

(From the *Woodland Democrat*):

"A toy balloon was turned loose in Washington a night or two ago. It floated over Sacramento and the people were deluded with the idea that it was an air ship."

The reporter of the last dispatch got his facts

wrong. The supposed balloon was not a toy, and its alleged originating city was New York, not Washington. These articles were obviously written long before the age of litigation for libel against newspapers became popular.

The airship, or rather airships, moved east. There were various sightings in such states as Colorado, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa and South Dakota, west of the Mississippi River, during the spring and summer of 1897.

The population size of a state seemed to have no bearing on the number of sightings reported. Nebraska, with a population then of a mere 1,060,000, had dozens of reports.

One of the first reports in Nebraska came from the city of Hastings, when an airship, west of that town, was observed by several people floating 500 feet above the ground, for 30 minutes. That was from the fall of 1896.

When it reappeared in February 1897, it was 800 feet above the ground, and lights were seen on it. This mention of lights is reported on numerous occasions. It then descended 200 feet and "travelled at a most remarkable speed for about three miles. It then stood perfectly still for about five minutes and then descended for about 200 feet, circling as it travelled at a most remarkable speed for about two miles and then, slowing up, it circled for about fully 15 minutes, when it began to lower and disappear as mysteriously as it had made its appearance... A close watch is being kept for its reappearance."

A report from Hastings dated February 12, is a longer article, but has all the earmarks of the above one. The craft was reported to have been seen by a dozen people.

A report from the *Kearney Daily Hub*, of February 22, tells of a sighting there. Something of an editorial paragraph precedes the article itself.

"The *Hub* must admit that it has taken all air ship stories coming out of our sister towns with a grain of salt, and in one or two cases the dose of the saline accompaniment has been doubled. It doesn't believe in air ships, and the writer personally has never seen anything that resembled the much talked of 'light in the sky' more than one of the 'free' arc lights furnished in the past by the Kearney Electric company. Yet any belief should be held subject to revision when confronted by good and sufficient evidence. That evidence appears now to be on top."

They go on to report:

"If Mr. Prescott has seen an air ship he doesn't know it. In fact, if he was to see one he wouldn't be sure of it without it was labelled in large Gothic letters. But Wednesday evening, while walking home, between the hours of nine and ten o'clock, he saw a light in the west, a description of which strongly resembles the stories of the air ship that have come from other towns. The light appeared to be a great distance away, and its size looked to be about the same as the head of an ordinary wooden water bucket. It didn't move around to any great extent, but stayed out in the western atmosphere long enough to be seen distinctly. Whether it was an air ship, or one of the populistic signs of the times forecasting the selection of Sullivan as judge, has yet to be determined."

Besides politics, commercialism played a role in the reporting of the airship phenomenon, especially in Nebraska. The *Wilsonville Review* of April 9, 1897 reported that its editor had heard the craft's inhabitants yell "*Weiver Eht Rof Ebircsbus*". (It sounds like an alien version of Latin, but spells out "*Subscribe for the Review*", backwards.)

*The Wymorean*, published in Wymore, Nebraska,

(March 19) reported:

"That Air Ship Again.

"The air ship passed over this city last night at 15 minutes to 8. It came from the south and disappeared to the NW, moving at a rate of about 15 miles per hour against a strong wind from the east. As near as could be judged by those who saw it, it was about 2000 feet above ground. At times its motion was steady and at other times it would move up or down. Quite a crowd gathered on the street and watched the strange light for at least 10 minutes. Many of them have been skeptical heretofore, but now they are forced to admit that there is something in it."

Sightings ranged across Nebraska at least until May 1897 in such places as Omaha, Inavale, York Beatrics, Grand Island, Lexington, Odell, Peru, Central City, Table Rock, Norfolk, Fremont and others.

Among the many sightings in Kansas, one at LeRoy, on April 19, stands out. It occurred at 10.30 p.m. One Alexander Hamilton, owner of the farm in LeRoy, stated:

"I arose, thinking that perhaps my bulldog was performing his pranks, but upon going to the door saw to my utter astonishment that an air ship was slowly descending upon my cow lot, about forty rods from the house."

It was described as being three hundred feet long, cigar shaped, with a carriage beneath. Sounds much like a dirigible would be described.

Sightings also occurred at Topeka, Belleville, Atchison, Holson, Hiawatha, and Everett, Kansas.

There were sightings at Canton and Deadwood, South Dakota. But a report from the *Sioux Valley News* (S. Dakota) says of a report in Minnesota, dated April 16:

"The air ship has come and gone. It was the same air ship that has been seen floating above the Western states for the last three weeks. It is not a fake, but a genuine aeronautical conveyance. A square-shaped reddish light that looked half as large as the moon was seen by a number of persons from the Guaranty Loan restaurant windows at 9.25 o'clock last night. It was first seen in the direction of Hopkins, the crowd in the restaurant being congregated by J. J. Barrett, the St. Louis dispatch agent on the eleventh floor, whose attention was called to it by the operator at Hopkins, who saw it moving west. Jasper Gibbs, proprietor of the restaurant, saw the light first; it was then blazing red, but it gradually lost its redness, and suddenly again brightened again like a flash of light. It was moving in a diagonal line away from Minneapolis; and slowly commenced to sink over the horizon until 9.35, when it became invisible."

Next we move to Texas, where there were literally dozens of sightings. On April 17, 1897, one was spotted near the town of Aurora. This sighting will be quoted in whole, since it was different from its predecessors.

"About 6 o'clock this morning, the early risers of Aurora were astonished at the sudden appearance of the airship which has been sailing throughout the country.

"It was travelling due north and much nearer the earth than before. Evidently some of the machinery was out of order, for it was making a speed of only 10 or 12 miles an hour and gradually settling toward the earth.

"It sailed directly over the public square, and when it reached the north part of town collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water

"The pilot of the ship is supposed to have been the only person aboard, and while his remains are badly disfigured, enough of the original has been picked up to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world.

"Mr. T.J. Weems, the U.S. Signal Service officer at this place and an authority on astronomy, gives it as his opinion that he (the pilot) was a native of the planet Mars.

"Papers found on his person — evidently the records of his travels — are written in some unknown hieroglyphics and cannot be deciphered.

"This ship was too badly wrecked to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power.

"It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminium and silver and it must have weighed several tons.

"The town is full of people today who are viewing the wreck and gathering specimens of strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow."

The pilot's funeral? Subsequent investigation has offered no proof of the above crash, let alone burial. It has been termed a hoax.

Though definitely different from the bulk of reports from this era, it does not qualify as the first report of a crashed airship.

In Dundy County, Nebraska, in 1884, an airship supposedly crashed some 35 miles north-west of the town of Benklemen, on a ranch. A cowboy named Williamson had his face blistered by the intense heat. This story, from the *Holdrege Nugget* (Nebraska), has not been verified from other sources.

A report from Merkel, Texas of April 26, says:

"Some parties returning from church last night noticed a heavy object dragging along with a large rope attached.

"They followed it until in crossing the railroad it caught on a rail. On looking up they saw what they supposed was the airship.

"It was not near enough to get an idea of the dimensions. A light could be seen protruding from several windows; one bright light in front like the headlight of a locomotive.

"After some 10 minutes, a man was seen descending the rope, he came near enough to be plainly seen, he wore a light blue sailor suit, was small in size.

"He stopped when he discovered parties at the anchor and cut the rope below him and sailed off in a north-east direction.

"The anchor is now on exhibition at the blacksmith shop of Elliot & Miller and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people."

This report, and many others of that era, bring to mind the old television series "*Wild, Wild West*", where American spies thwart the plans of evil men in the old West, trying to take over the nation.

A report from Waterloo, Iowa and another from Burlington were purportedly hoaxes (April 10, 1897). Other sightings in Iowa were reported at Ottumwa, Des Moines, Belle Plaine, Fontanelle and others.

Then the sightings went into a wide number of states east of the Mississippi River.

One of the main ways in which the 1890s reports differed from modern ones was that these people, for the most part, considered the airships to be guided by human, earthbound agencies. There are, of course, a few exceptions, already cited. Among the supposed human inventors claimed to be hovering above American cities were: Hiram Maxim, Octave Chanute (an aviator), an unnamed associate of Thomas Edison, and many relative unknowns.

To give you an idea, here is a quote from the *Sioux Valley News*, South Dakota (May 14, 1897)



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"Sioux City, Iowa. May 11. P.E. Jewell of this place claims he has an air ship which actually flies. Thus far he has not entrusted his person to the tender mercies of his craft, but a ship of sufficient size to carry a man is now being constructed on the pattern of a successful model already tested. The model soared to a height of 100 feet and was then pulled in."

The report goes on to give details of this wondrous machine.

The similarities between the old and modern UFO sightings are remarkable. Detractors called the witnesses 'deluded', 'lunatics', or worse. Airships were 'Venus', 'balloons', 'kites', the usual standbys.

The author of this present article does not claim to know what those people saw 90 years ago. *One thing is certain, though. They did see something.* It may have been humans flying before it was officially recorded; pre-Spanish-American War fever; aliens; or the planet

Venus. No one will ever know.

NOTE BY EDITOR, FSR

Like pretty well everyone else no doubt, I have seen exhaustive pieces of research thoroughly debunking every one of these various cases. But somehow I don't feel able to accept that they were all faked by humans. And I note that, in his latest book DIMENSIONS, Dr. Jacques Vallée still accepts as genuine the case at the Hamilton Ranch at Leroy, Kansas, on April 19, 1897, and I think I am correct in saying that Dr. J. Allen Hynck was also inclined to accept it. (Though, as readers may recall, the version given above is not the full one. For the alien craft was actually reported to have lassoed and carried off a calf from one of Mr. Hamilton's paddocks. And *that rings a bell, doesn't it!*) All the same, great effort has gone into proving the Hamilton story to be a fake. And we can fully appreciate that in 1896 and 1897 many 'excellent folk' thought it fully justified to spread any sort of lie in order to prevent the truth from getting out. *After all, don't they still do precisely the same in 1989!*

MAIL BAG

The Claims of George Adamski

Dear Mr Creighton, — It continues to puzzle me that so many people still believe George Adamski; if they lived in his home town as I do, they would have ample opportunity to learn otherwise. At the least, Desmond Leslie and anyone else interested in the facts should have written to the various persons mentioned by Adamski before accepting his statements at face value. In any case I hope that the enclosed article will not be too controversial for FSR. (What am I saying? Nothing is too controversial for FSR!)

Yours sincerely,

Eric Herr,  
6250 1/2 Stanley Avenue,  
San Diego, CA 92115,  
U.S.A.

August 6, 1988.

Readers will find Mr Herr's article on page 15 of this issue. — EDITOR

Correspondents are asked to keep their letters short and give full name and address (not necessarily for publication). It is not always possible for the Editor to acknowledge every letter personally, and so he takes this opportunity to thank all who write to him.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh H. Trotti Jr,  
230 Wilton Drive,  
Decatur, Georgia 30030,  
U.S.A.

July 24, 1989.

(\*Modern *Tortosa*, on coast of N.E. Spain, south of Barcelona. ED.)

A bouquet for FSR!

— Please give my best regards to the Editor, Gordon Creighton, and to everybody working with FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.

We love you all. Great job!

Eugene Bauer,  
U.S.A.

March 8, 1989.

Two Small Beings

Dear Sir, — Having discovered the book "*Above Top Secret*", and then your publication, I feel that I must mention this experience of mine, just for the record.

It was February 1974, I was driving back home after taking my children to school. As I was approaching the house (I live in Kent) I saw two children on the pavement in front of my garden. I will never forget my first reaction and what followed. I wondered whose children they were, "skiving" from school. They looked about 7 or 8 years old. I did not recognize them as any of the local children. They wore identical dufflecoats and the hood was covering their faces. They were shuffling their feet playfully. The colour of their garments struck me by its intensity, and I remember wondering where I might buy such beautiful coats for my girls.

\*The lady is very wise. However, I have in my records a large number of similar cases, and those who have been reading FSR for years will recall several very striking ones that we have published. Of course the episode was "impossible". We all know that! *Lecturing on psychic phenomena to an audience of doctors and scientists, one of France's most famous pioneers in Parapsychology said: "Messieurs — I did not say that it was possible. I merely said that it happened!"*

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As a car came past them from the other direction, I saw them cross the metal bars, which form a feature of the front wall, as if nothing was there, and carry on with their playful movements.

I was still sitting in the car, and what I was seeing did not at first strike me as odd. Then I got out of the car, and went looking for them in the back garden, convinced that they must have gone to the back of the house, as they were nowhere at the front. They were nowhere at the back either. They had vanished into thin air and I knew it, although the need for rationality made me go looking for them in the back garden.

I then sat down and started recollecting my thoughts, and realized that what I had seen was not possible. I considered the many details I had noticed in a few seconds, and nothing made sense. Conflicting thoughts began to occupy my mind. I related my experience to my husband and to some friends, but their reaction was so completely negative that I never spoke of it again.\*

Yours faithfully,

Mrs — — (Full name and address on file)

June 1989.

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"Missing Persons" on Ships

Dear Mr Creighton, — In connection with the "*Mary-Celeste*" type of incident reported by Robert Perry Collins in his recent article *The Double Deception* (page 14 of FSR 34/2), I wonder how many of your readers remember their Suetonius?

In his chronicle of the Lives of the Caesars, this Roman historian (A.D. 70-160 approx.) gives the account of a ship from Alexandria which, approaching Dertosa,\* *was noted to have lost all its crew.* (See: Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*, Penguin Classics, p.253).

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## Charles Fort actually proves a Johnny-come-lately in historical perspective.

objects may have been, the descriptions derived from expectations of the day. Louis Winkler holds out for the airship being an actual invention on trial (*MUFON UFO Journal*, Mar. 1982), while Daniel Cohen's book, *The Great Airship Mystery* (1981), takes the opposite view that (all the sightings originate in conventional phenomena.) The longest study is Jean Sider's *L'Airship de 1897* (1987), a careful history based on extensive sources. Unlike Cohen, Sider recognizes the dynamic aspects of the wave and traces its spread throughout the country. He analyzes the descriptions along with the context of experimentation and fiction literature, then eliminates alternative explanations to conclude that a legitimate unknown accounts for some of the reports.

### EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS

England joined the airship business with waves in the spring of 1909 and winter of 1913, both discovered by Fort and explored in depth by recent researchers. In *FSR* (Nov. - Dec. 1970, Jan. - Feb. 1971), Carl Grove published his collection of 1909 reports. Paul Screeton followed one newspaper's coverage (*MUFOB*, Summer 1980). David Clarke, Granville Oldroyd and Nigel Watson have just completed a massive catalogue of 1913 newspaper reports for the Fund for UFO Research. These two waves intertwine so closely with fears of German invasion that they have provided ammunition for an interpretation of airships as a form of social panic (Roger Sandell, Peter Rogerson, *MUFOB*, Autumn 1978; Watson, *Magonia*, Spring 1980). Hints that the Russians also shared in the 1913 wave have appeared in *FSR* (Mar. 1984, Feb. 1987).

Scandinavia has been another busy area for UFOs, with "balloon" reports from 1897, phantom airships in 1909, and phantom airplanes during World War I. Then the action really began: An article by David G. Markham in *Doubt* (Jan. 1942) dealt with "ghost

fliers" over Sweden, and John Keel reported in depth on these 1933 - 37 sightings in *FSR* (May - June, July - Aug. 1970; July - Aug., Sept. - Oct. 1971). The "ghost rockets" appeared in 1946 and again received mention in *Doubt* (#16, 17). A survey by Bjorn Overbye was published in *FSR* (May - June, July - Aug. 1970), and Loren Gross devoted a booklet, *The Mystery of the Ghost Rockets* (1974, 2nd. ed. 1982), to these reports. Swedish investigators have obtained access to extensive Swedish government files concerning these sightings and are also collecting newspaper reports and interviewing witnesses, so the "ghost" waves promise to be the best-researched of all historical UFO events. Some results have been published by Anders Liljegren (*FSR*, Dec. 1986; nearly every issue of the *AFU Newsletter* [Box 11027, S-600, 11 Norrkoping, Sweden] also contains an article on this work). In 1987 Erland Sundqvist published *Spokflygarna - 46*, a book devoted mostly to the ghost rockets. The best summary of Swedish research is "The Ghost Rockets," by Liljegren and Clas Svahn, in *UFOs 1947 - 1987*.

### OTHER WAVES

A summary and bibliography of other waves can be found in Nigel Watson's booklet, *Phantom Aerial Waves and Flaps* (1987), an essential survey of UFO concentrations over the past century and a half. Historical reports not associated with a wave are scattered and difficult to find. Of course Fort's books are major sources, as are the pages of *Doubt* and Carl Pabst's ongoing "Notes of Charles Fort" column in each issue of *Pursuit*. The sourcebooks compiled by William Corliss from old scientific publications carry on Fort's work in a more systematic way, and often provide full texts of reports. Louis Winkler's *Catalogue of UFO-Like Data Before 1947* (Fund for UFO Research, 1984) contains a valuable list of reports as well. Lore and Deneault's *Mysteries in the Skies* and Loren Gross's *Charles Fort, the For-*

*tean Society and UFOs* cover the period from the 1896 wave to 1947 by revealing many unfamiliar reports. The series by Clark and Farish in *UFO Report* also includes some "strays," especially the article on UFOs from the 1920s.

Perhaps the most thorough survey of all is Michel Bougard's *La Chronique des OVNI* (1977), which culls reports for the period 1800-1947 from many UFO publications and lists summaries in chronological order. A survey of historical New Zealand reports by Harold J. Knapman and a similar survey for Australia by Bill Chalker appeared in *UFO Research Australia Newsletter* (Nov. - Dec. 1983). George M. Eberhart's *Geobibliography of Anomalies* includes a great many historical reports from the U.S. and Canada, while from England, David Clarke and Granville Oldroyd concentrate on a particular kind of phenomenon often reported early in the century in their booklet, *Spooklights: A British Survey* (1985).

The UFO literature contains many other old reports, but the reader must look far and wide for these individual cases, some of them accidental discoveries and some the reminiscences of witnesses speaking out after decades. A few examples include Jerome Clark's discussion of a supposed 1884 airship crash in Nebraska (*IUR* Nov. - Dec. 1986), Dwight Whalen's discovery of a mystery airplane over Ontario in 1911 (*Fate* Dec. 1982), and the reprint of a newsclipping about an 1889 airship over Paris, Texas (*Crux* Summer 1985). Madge Brosius Allyn kept secret her observation of a flying "cucumber" in 1903 for 68 year (*Fate* March 1971), Paul T. Collins recalled the 1942 "Battle of Los Angeles" UFO (*Fate* July 1987), while William D. Leet and Leonard H. Stringfield reported their "foo fighter" sightings from World War II (*MUFON UFO Journal* Jan. - Feb. 1979; *Inside Saucer Post ... 3-0 Blue* [1957]).

### PRE-1800

Treatments of aerial phenomena before 1800 are even more hapha-

zard; and often left to the discredited "ancient astronauts" school. Yet the peoples of ancient and Medieval times saw strange sights in the sky, and the Reformation period was a golden age for aerial wonders. Donald H. Menzel draws on original sources for reports included in *Flying Saucers* (1953) and *The UFO Enigma* (1977), as does Jacques Vallee in *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* (1965) and *Passport to Magonia* (1969). Historical reports from all ages are plentiful in *Flying Saucers on the Attack* (1954) by H.T. Wilkins, and W. Raymond Drake bases a whole series of books on historical records. Again instances turn up throughout the literature, for instance Chinese reports (FSR June

1985) or 18th century sightings in the Clark and Farish series. George M. Eberhart includes an extensive bibliography of pre-1800 UFOs in his *UFOs and the Extraterrestrial Contact Movement* (1986). A concise summary of UFOs in these eras appears in Michel Bougard's article in *UFOs: 1947 - 1987*.

Charles Fort actually proves a Johnny-come-lately in historical perspective. A Roman author, Julius Obsequens, gathered reports of "prodigies" from Roman historians, most notably Livy, and these reports include the aerial objects and falls of substances such as blood which we now identify with Fort (the surviving fragments of Obsequens are included and

translated in v. 14 of Loeb Classical Library set of Livy's works). In the 16th century a French author, Simon Goulart, collected similar strange events, and his interest in UFOs is treated in *Les Soleils de Simon Goulart* (1981), by I.L. Olivier and Jean-Francois Boedec. Another 16th century author qualifies as the most ambitious collector of all: This was Conrad Lycosthenes, who scoured numerous sources to compile a collection of every strange event reported from the creation of the world to his own time. His *Prodigiorum ac Ostentorum Chronicon* (1557) is a huge listing of mainly aerial phenomena. An English translation entitled The Conrad Chronicle is forthcoming this year from the Dahlin Family Press.

## Linguistics Expert Vouches For MJ-12 Briefing Paper

By Robert H. Bletchman, J.D.

**Attorney Bletchman is MUFON State Director for Connecticut.**

After viewing the Ted Koppel ABC-TV "Night Line" program on June 24, 1987, in which Bill Moore debated the validity of the MJ-12 documents with Philip J. Klass, I was intrigued as to how the briefing papers might be authenticated. Since Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter (MJ-1) was listed as the briefing officer on the report for President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower, dated 18 November 1952, and was listed first, I proposed to Bill Moore that Hillenkoetter most likely authored the memo. Consequently, it was felt that the authenticity of the author could be tested by a comparison of the writing style between known writings of Admiral Hillenkoetter and the briefing memo.

Dr. Roger W. Wescott, Professor of Linguistics at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and a reknowned linguist, was contacted and his expertise solicited to make such an analysis and evaluation. Dr. Wescott advised that he would approach the problem

through stylistics, a discipline of linguistics, which deals with the more-or-less unique design or syntax of everyone's written language. Twenty-seven (27) letters and memos written when Admiral Hillenkoetter headed up the C.I.A. were provided to Dr. Wescott along with the briefing memo.

The following constitute quotations made by Dr. Wescott in his letter of April 3, 1988 to me. "Admiral Hillenkoetter's epistolary style resembles that of most bureaucrats, very blandly conventional and lacking the eccentricities of diction which make the writings of some individuals so distinctive (and consequently so hard to counterfeit). While it is true that some of his memoranda contain errors of spelling and punctuation, these are rare and do not recur often enough to constitute stylistic markers.

"On the other hand, I did find time today to re-read all 27 of the Hillenkoetter communications that you have sent me since August, 1987 and to order them chronologically. They seem to fall rather clearly into three groups: those written before 1947 and 1950,

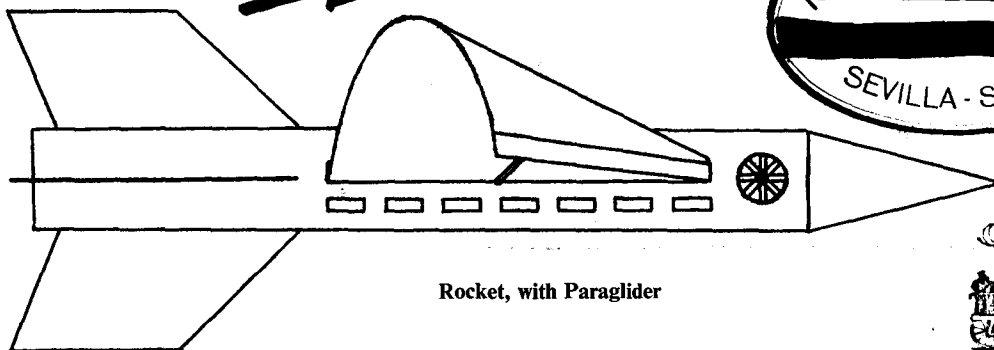
which don't concern unidentified flying objects (hereafter UFOs); those written between 1952 and 1961, which express an urgent interest in obtaining more information about UFOs and preventing military 'cover-ups' of the subject; and those written between 1962 and 1970, which adopt a non-committal stance, maintaining interest but exhibiting scepticism about the extra-terrestrial hypothesis (hereafter ETH).

"The crucial time-period here is obviously the fall of 1961, when Hillenkoetter apparently withdrew from participation in the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). Philip Klass and other critics of MUFON predictably treat both the presidential briefing memo of November 18, 1952, and the congressional letter of August 22, 1961, as forgeries. But the stylistic evidence that he cites seems to me to be quite inconclusive: I myself, for example, alternate between writing 'April 3, 1988' and '3 April 1988' in my own letters.

"In ambiguous situations like this, I  
MUFON UFO JOURNAL, No. 243, July 1988

FSR, N<sup>o</sup> 6, 1967

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## 19th CENTURY PARAGLIDER?

by W. H. Watson

Our contributor, who lives in South Australia, makes an interesting suggestion that seems to underline the idea that the Ufonants are generally a few decades ahead of us with their devices.

WHILST perusing recent articles on the mystery airships over the United States between 1880 and 1897, a particular peculiarity of the descriptions struck me repeatedly as being exceedingly odd and yet strangely familiar.

Apart from the fore-and-aft mounted propellers, one reads again and again of sails, great wings, or occasionally large fins. Some reports mention light wings, triangular in shape. "Fragile construction" seems to be a prominent feature, most notably in an April 9, 1897, report from Illinois, mentioned by Jerome Clark.<sup>1</sup> The same report adds that "a short distance above the body, lateral structures resembling wings or sails" were noted.

We hear from Donald B. Hanlon<sup>2</sup> of one over Iowa three days later, on which "the vibration of the wings could be plainly seen."

Reading of sails in connection with airships recalled to mind medieval legends of "sky people" or "celestial sailors" cavorting around the firmament in airboats or "cloud ships," closely related in appearance to the sailing vessels of their day.

Like others before me I assumed that each generation was interpreting what it had seen in terms of what was familiar to it.

But there was an obvious anomaly. Who in the nineteenth century would have visualised flexible sails above an airship? And triangular wings were, if anything, even less feasible inventions at that time.

Something niggled at the back of my mind, and remained niggling for some six months.

Then the February, 1967, copy of the British Interplanetary Society's magazine *Spaceflight* arrived, and there it was on page 50—*A New Recovery System for Sounding Rockets* by W. Pittelkow, of Dornier-System GmbH, West Germany . . . the Paraglider.

To find a concise explanation of the paraglider I turned to the March, 1964, edition, page 54,

wherein G. Scheffler stated: "Two lifting-surfaces constructed on the paraglider principle are covered with a metallic silk material. They can be easily folded together and stowed in the centre of the rocket. When the rocket nears the Earth on the return leg of the trajectory, a command from a ground station via a compressed air mechanism releases the flexible wings from their compartments. The thin leading-edge booms hinge outwards and between them and the rocket body conical half-cups are formed."

The wing dihedral is 30°, angle of sweepback 56°. The experimental rocket has four conventional elevator-rudder fins at the tail, and the paraglider wing-tips are attached to the body by extending booms beneath the wing fabric.

America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration is also testing a similar device for landing the *Gemini* capsule.

Recalling Captain James Hooton's description<sup>3</sup> we read of "condensed air and aeroplanes" . . . "The aeroplanes suddenly sprang forward, turning their sharp ends skyward, then the rudders at the end of the ship began to veer to one side . . ."

Coincidental descriptions—paragliders operating in a reverse manner to that intended by Dornier-System, or am I too interpreting the mystery in terms of what is familiar to our generation?

**Postscript:** In addition to the mystery airship sightings, the paraglider reminds me of the weird objects observed by Vauriat, France, on August 29, 1962 (FLYING SAUCER REVIEW July-August 1963).

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Clark, J. *The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship*, FSR July/August 1966
- <sup>2</sup> Hanlon, D. B. *Texas Odyssey of 1897*, FSR September/October 1966. Also, in collaboration with Vallée, J., *Airships over Texas*, FSR, January/February 1967.
- <sup>3</sup> Captain Hooton left a sketch of the airship he claimed to have encountered, and this Heath-Robinson looking object will be found adorning the cover of the July/August 1966 issue of the REVIEW.

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that achieved by Cape Kennedy type rockets. Yet men are specially trussed up and positioned for flights in the latter. No particular care seems to have been taken with our Austrian.

3. Finally, although armed with maps, compasses, directional radio beams and so on, aircraft found it extremely difficult to 'home' on a target at night during the last war. How then did The Thing bring his charge back at terrific speed to the exact spot from which they had taken off?

4. There is a dream-like quality in the way they pull up "without a jerk" and in the way they seem to float in and out of the ship. Against this the Austrian "felt the heat of the sun". One doesn't usually feel things in dreams.

5. In spite of these objections, I do not necessarily disbelieve this story.

B. More on 1897

1. One makes certain reservations, it would appear that what was seen in 1897 was an airship. Consider its speed, its method of propulsion. The fact that the 'old gentleman' had "plenty of money", "experimented" and spoke perfect American—there is no comment on his accent!

2. The reservations would be:

(a) That, ordinarily speaking, a balloon suspends the law of gravitation. In fact it only counteracts it. But this is how we often speak.

(b) "I will attempt to visit the planet Mars. . . ." This could be a gentle leg pull. After all the man on the ground can't do much about it. And the 'old gentleman' would be tempted to exaggerate his good fortune!

3. If the latter really could lift a 4-ton Hotchkiss and ten tons of ammunition by placing a small wire around each object or group of objects, then why build an airship at all? The whole lot could be loaded on a platform, with wire under it: a sort of magic carpet.

4. It seems to me that the very reasonable sketch of the ship passing over Nashville is a view of its underside. Under the nose we see, probably, ailerons, the two oblongs are doubtless nacelles and part of the propeller shaft must be hidden behind an outer envelope. The machinery may well be in the rear nacelle.

5. There were military dirigibles before the First World War and I feel that 1897 is so close to this that it is more probable than not that this is a rather early and advanced type.

S. A. Paris, Brooklands, Upholland, Wigan, Lancs.

[Perhaps Mr. Paris will refer to the July/August issue of the REVIEW. Following Mr. Jerome Clark's article, The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship, he will find a note by Mr. Charles Gibbs-Smith, the eminent

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The Editor and Publisher  
a very Happy Christmas  
take this opportunity of

aviation historian. Mr. Gibbs-Smith states quite definitely that "No form of dirigible (i.e. gasbag propelled by an airscrew) or heavier-than-air flying machine was flying—or indeed could fly—at this time in America".  
—EDITOR.]

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stimulus is represented by the presence of the  
itself; that is, of a physical object or pheno-  
on with characteristics strange enough to deter-  
a stressful situation. So we come back to the  
ing point, having to admit the presence of a  
ical object starting the situational stress. Besides,  
transient personality disorders we are discuss-  
are to be expected *only* in situations of a catas-  
tic nature—e.g., fire, earthquake, war-time  
bat, severe illness, grief following death of a  
d one—such as would overwhelm the adaptive  
cities of almost all individuals.

do not think the sighting of a UFO in the sky  
ressful enough. Of course, if you see a UFO  
very close to you and you know (or you think  
know) that you are sighting an extraterrestrial  
hine, or if you see the "occupants" coming out,  
you are put into a stressful situation of the  
discussed above. And you can even show the  
of reaction we have observed in the so-called  
tact-cases", or the neurotic reactions we have  
in other people. But here again we have to  
it the presence of an unfamiliar physical pheno-  
on, object, or machine, starting the situational  
is.

n the other side, if we admit we may not be able  
identify the stressful situation capable of inducing  
UFO hallucination", but that such a situation  
ts in every UFO case and *is not* produced by  
sighting of an unfamiliar physical object—then  
might classify the UFO phenomenon into the  
gory of a subjective phenomenon with the four  
acteristics listed above. Incidentally, item 4  
ws that the characters of the witnesses are not  
important because their past stories will show no  
lence of pre-existing personality disturbances.

Until now we are discussing the individual case.  
ve study UFO sightings witnessed by groups of  
sons, then the problem takes a different aspect.  
chiatrists have proved by observations and experi-  
its that different persons react differently to the  
e stressful situation. In other words, it is  
ossible to obtain the same hallucination in dif-  
it persons submitted to the same stressful situa-

Their "breaking point" is never the same, and  
quality and intensity of their reactions will be  
pletely different from each other. The exception  
e particular case of a "mystic experience", where  
oup of people is already conditioned and pre-  
beforehand to experience the same kind of  
ion—through a mechanism of self-suggestion  
elf-hypnosis. This is not the case when a group  
ople unexpectedly witnesses the sighting of a  
The conclusion is that the "individual UFO

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THE AMERICAN UFO WAVE OF 1.896-97

TRANSCRIPTION FROM "THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS" DALLAS, USA

MONDAY APRIL 19th, 1.897, PAGE 5:

1  
IGNACIO DARNAUDE  
SEVILLA - SPAIN

"THE GREAT AERIAL WANDERER:" IT IS EITHER A REALITY OR ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA WERE (MARE) (illegible on the original) AMATEURS. EFFECT OF CHAMBERS GREEK WATER. FOUND ON THE GROUND AT GREENVILLE AND STEPHENVILLE AND EXPLODED AT DECATUR".

"Stephenville, Tex., April 17.- This afternoon Mr. C.L.Mollhany, a prominent farmer who lives three miles down the Bosque from here, came into "The News" correspondent's office and before seating himself he said:

"I have found it".

"Found what?"

"Found the airship "The Dallas News" has been talking about. It is no joke. I discovered the ship on the ground early this morning. It was in charge of two men, one an engineer and the other a pilot. They had been compelled to come to the ground to make some repairs on the machinery. At one came to Stephenville and reported my find."

"I got a large number of our citizens, who at once proceeded to the spot to view the aerial monster. Among those who viewed the wonderful machine were: Col. James U. Vincent, Eugene Moore of the Stephenville Empire, Mr. Charles Bassell of the Stephenville Journal, Judge W.W. Moores, Senator L.N. Frank, Mr. M.F. Martin, Dr. S.D. Naylor, Judge Thomas B. King, Mr. J.C. George, Dr. M. Day, J.H. Cage, S. Frank, W.P. Orr, mayor of the city, James Collins, Mr. Lee Young, Dr. R.B. Cameron, Dr. J.H. Stewart, A.M. Borders, S.C. Buck, Hon. J.T. Danfel, ex-district attorney Hon. J.W. Parker, district attorney Otho S. Houston and Hon. J.S. Straughan, district judge, and many other of our prominent citizens. The airship is very much as reported by "The News" heretofore."

It consist of a cigar-shaped machine with two immense aeroplanes, and the motive power is an immense wheel at each end, in appearance much like a metallic wind-mill. It is driven by an immense electric engine, which derives its power from storage batteries. The crew consisted, as stated, of two men, who gave their names as S.E. Tilman and A.E. Dolbear. They report that they have been making an experimental trip to comply with a contract with certain capitalists of New York, who are backing them. They are confident that they have achieved a great success and that in a short time the navigation of the air will be an assured fact. They refused to have their machine critically inspected and refused to talk further as to their plans for the future. They rapidly made the necessary repairs, boarded the ship and, adding adieu to the astonished crowd assembled, the ship rose gently into the air and sailed off in a southwesterly direction. "If you don't believe me, just ask any one of these men who saw it. And say, I want you to tell "The News" about it. This is one time old Earth is ahead - the first place the airship has been seen to light. And say, what you reckon is going to happen when dynamiter get to riding in airships and dropping bombs down on folks and cities?. Is this world ready for airships? Without an answer Mr. Mollhany went forth to tell the news."

"A JUDGE SEES IT. THE CURIOUS EFFECT OF CHAMBERS CREEK WATER"

"Waxahachie, Ellis Co., Tex. , April 18.- "The News" reporter has had an interview with Judge Love of this city concerning the mysterious airship, which has been puzzling the minds of many Texans. A rumor having gained currency that it had been seen by him. "The News" reporter called at his office in quest of further information. Judge Love said:"  
"Mr. Beatty and myself were on a fishing tour on Chambers Creek near the mouth of Great House branch yesterday. The wind was in the north and we were having very little success. About 5:30 or 6 o'clock in the afternoon we decided to go further down the creek about 600 yards from the mouth of Great House branch Mr. Beatty was slightly in advance, and I heard him say, "My God, what is that?". When I struggled, through the underbrush to him he pointed to the left and there, in a ravine, was a group of five peculiarly

Dressed men, and resting on the bank by them was a queer looking machine, which from the sketches and description heretofore published in "The News" we decided must be the airship. The men were taking their case-stretched out full length on some furs- and they were smoking pipes. We, with some trepidation, advanced upon them: when they saw us they appeared somewhat disconcerted, but one of them in fairly good English called to us, "Come on and join us". We advanced and after mutual introductions had taken place, I asked if that was the famous airship. The man who had first called to us, and who appeared to be the leader of the party, said, "That is one of the airships ; would you like to examine it?". The vessel or airship is thirty-two feet long and in the <sup>2</sup> center is fourteen feet wide, sloping gradually toward each end like a Mexican cigar. It has three pairs of wings, each is like the wings of a bird. They are ribbed fore and aft. and are covered, so that the stream of air can have its full lifting capacity somewhat after the manner of the wings of the kits sent up by Lamson in Rigby park. The airship contained machinery by which the wings can be worked or flapped very rapidly and by means of a lever the ship can be turned in any direction or made to ascend or descend at the will of the helmsman. The ship is fitted for the accommodation of its crew, containing bunks, cooking department, gasoline stove and other conveniences. We were told by the aerial navigators that the airship was capable of a speed of 250 miles an hour, but that its normal rate of speed was from 125 to 150 miles an hour. On evincing desire to hear whence they came and how long they had been navigating the air, their leader produced pipes and a sack of excellent tobacco and asked us to make ourselves comfortable while he proceeded to enlighten us.

"We, he said, live in the regions of the north pole. Contrary to the general belief, there is a large body of land beyond the polar seas, containing about 250 square miles of territory. The first time this land was visited by human beings, so far as we know, was when the ten tribes of Israel found their way there after the captivity and dispersion of the Jews. According to tradition they were attempting to cross Bering straits and were carried by a floating iceberg and landed on the shores of north pole land. The climate there, while at that time cold, was prevented from being uninhabitable by the influence of the gulf stream, which, after flowing for hundreds of miles many fathoms under the surface of the sea in that region, came to the surface and flows entirely



Well, the polar expedition of Sir Hugh Willoughby in 1,543, who, with his crew, was supposed to have been lost, as a matter of fact succeeded in reaching north pole land. The ship had been so wrecked and broken up by the voyage that Sir Willoughby and his crew were unwilling to risk a return trip, therefore they remained at north pole land. In the early part of 1,546 Sir John Franklin's crew reached north pole land. Sir John having died near what is now called Lady Franklin bay. Sir John's crew remained, as to return was impossible, the ship being crushed between two icebergs 100 miles from north pole land, to which they went in boats. In addition to the foregoing, various parties in the United States and Europe have from time to time reached this land in a (....) (one illegible word) condition".

"How do you manage to live?"

"Well, we have a splendid country now. You know how (....) (one i. word) are heated by steam?."

"Well, we have (....) through water steam to convey it all over the inhabitable part of the country and the (....) at such a temperature that we can produce all the (....)....the country is lighted....(4 illegible lines of text).

The oxygen burns very rapidly, giving out great heat. Now, by means of the chemical process, we take an iceberg, separate the hydrogen from the oxygen and use the latter for fuel and lights. For lack of timber we can not build ships or trains, therefore we were led to the invention of the airships. We have been using the airships in north pole land for many years for local travel, but not until recently have we made the experiment of taking such trips as the one we are now on".

"On the 1st day of January the Historical society of north pole land decided to send out a number of airships throughout the United States and Europe. Twenty airships were ordered built expressly for the purpose with a capacity of five men each. On the 1st day of March, 1897, ten of these ships were started to Europe and ten to America. There are ten airships in the United States. We have guns and fishing tackle and the speed which we go enables us to take any game we can sight. By agreement the ten airships in the United States will meet in Nashville, Tenn., to attend the Centennial Exposition on June 18 and 19 and the ships will be on exhibition for those two days free of charge."

"About 100 miles north of here we had to descend and saw one of your trains go by. They are very curious things, but go so slow. Now we must be going".

Judge Love continued:

"We then shook hands with the crew and they stepped into their ship, rose in the air and started toward Waco. The description of the ship I have given you is a very meager one, but you can all go to the Nashville Exposition June 18 and 19 and see for yourselves".

"HAS A MUSICAL CREW" ("The Dallas Morning News", April 19th 1897)

3

Hillsboro, Hill Co., Tex., April 18.- A number of persons in this city whose curiosity in regard to the airship has been aroused to fever heat by the graphic accounts of this mysterious wanderer of the heavens as published in "The Dallas News" sat up most of last night in hopes of seeing it. Their vigilance was not rewarded, probably from the fact that it had engagements to fill in other sections and could not get around.

However, a gentleman named Walter Williams, who camped with his wagon on a high hill about two miles east of here on the Hillsboro and Mount Calm road, and who slept on the extreme summit of the hill, says he heard and saw wonderful things that were not on the programme. He came to town this morning and "The News" reporter ran across him at the city watering trough as he was watering his team. The reporter observing that he appeared perplexed about something, halted and entered into a conversation with him, and soon learned the cause of his perplexity. An account of this man and his strange experience is best related in his own words. Said he: "My name is Walter Williams. I am a farmer and live in Anderson county near Mentalba, a small country village. I am on my way overland to Hardeman county, where I have land interests. Last night I stayed two miles east of here on a high hill.

I stepped my wagon and team at the foot of the hill, where I fed my team. After supper I strolled about a little for relaxation and eventually got to the summit of the hill. The night was an ideal one, with no clouds visible anywhere. The moon was cleverly up and the view from the hill was eminently beautiful and impressive. The city of Hillsboro lay off in the valley to the west in all its picturesqueness, while beyond it the shadow of the cross timbers showed darkly against the horizon. The timbered creek above and below me and the clear sky above, from which a few stars blinked sleepily added to the happiness of the occasion. Moved by an impulse, I took

ON MY MAT IN ACCORDANCE TO THE MANNERS THAT HAD FASHIONED THE HILLS AND SPREAD THE valley there. The place was so lonely and quiet I decided to spend the night there, and get my blankets and spread them on the ground, with nothing but the blue canopy above me.

I soon drifted away into the land of slumber. After a while I was awakened by the sound of music. I lay on my pallet with my eyes closed and listened to it. Softer, sweeter, weirder music was never heard. Its melody coursed through my veins and penetrated my very soul. Presently I was sufficiently awake to remember where I was, and it struck me as very strange that I should hear music at that place and time. I opened my eyes and looked around me. I could see no one and the music very strangely seemed to be in the air overhead. I sprang to my feet and peered into the air with all my might, but could not see anything. It must have been midnight or past, for the moon had climbed high up the heavens, and its silver rays filled the earth with their radiance. I felt as if I was in a spirit land listening to the weird music of spirits. It was like the music of an organ with flageolet, violin, flute and cornet accompanying. At times it seemed very near and then floated far away almost beyond the range of hearing, but always returning sweeter and more devotional than before. Look as I would, I could see nothing of the invisible musicians, and it is natural that I should have felt somewhat superstitious about it. Yet I was not as disturbed as one would suppose by it. I knew or felt reasonably certain that no human agency produced the music, still it did not terrify me. The tune was "Coronation", and while it was soft and low, it seemed to penetrate the entire universe. The very air seemed to thrill from it. The stars in the distance, dim and indistinct, appeared to feel its vibrations. After a while the music ceased and I noticed a commotion in the milky-way almost overhead. It seemed as if millions of stars, moved by a sudden impulse, had started revolving about each other in what appeared to be a space ten feet in diameter. They revolved around faster and faster, occasionally throwing off stars, which darted into the void and disappeared.



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This lasted for scarcely a minute, when the disorder ceased. In the center of the circle was plainly outlined a cross of stars, adorned with a crown of thorns. This presently faded and left the milky-way in its natural state. Just as it faded I plainly heard from myriads of tongues the refrain, "Peace on earth, good will to men". I fancied I could see in the far heavens flashing in the moonlight the silver tips of angel wings. The song died away and everything grew silent. After that I could not sleep till nearly day, when I fell into a soft slumber. I am at a loss to account for it. It could not have been a dream. It was too vivid, and I can not account for it. While it is possible that Eastertide may have had something to do with it. I am not prepared to say that it did. I relate it as it occurred to me, and I give you my word as an honest man and as a Christian that I saw what I saw. If you doubt it I refer you to any one at Montalba, Tex., who will tell you I am at least regarded as truthful. When the reporter recovered from the strangeness of the adventures, Mr. Williams was some distance down the street.

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"C.G. WILLIAMS SAW IT. IT WAS ON THE GROUND AND HE INTERVIEWED THE CAPTAIN"

Greenville, Hunt Co., Tex., April 17.- (To "The News").- I have surely seen the airship. I saw it last night about 12 o'clock. I was walking across a field two miles south of town. I was in a meditative mood, and suddenly I was aroused by a brilliant light in front of me. I was dazzled by the light and frightened almost out of my senses. I should have left the place at once but my legs refused to move.

As soon as I could recover a little I noticed that the lights had gone out and by the light of the moon I saw an immense cigar shaped vessel resting on the ground in front of me. I saw three men walk out of the vessel. Two of them went to work about the rigging of the ship. The other called to me and asked if I would mail some letters for him. This gave me courage to approach and talk with him. Having been at one time connected with a daily paper and by mere reporterial instinct I took out my pencil and paper. Seeing this the strange visitor said: "See here, young man, don't give this thing away. We are experimenting with this vessel. So far it is a success. We expect to revolutionize travel and transportation. We have seen a few copies of the daily newspapers and are very much amused and entertained at the accounts of the appearance of our ship. If you

will promise on the square not to reveal what I have just told you a little history of our adventures".

"At a little town in the interior of New York state I have worked for many years on my ship. About two weeks ago I started accompanied by these two assistants to make a trial trip. My intention at first was to make a very short trip. We started in the night to avoid being seen. Everything worked so well that I decided to keep going, and I soon found myself passing over the state of Indiana. We stopped in a secluded spot near a small railway station. I went into the town and procured a daily paper, which gave an account of my ship being seen. Since that time we have been passing from place to place at a rapid rate of speed. Occasionally we stop near a town to get the newspapers. I am going home in a few days to improve my ship. I find some improvements necessary to perfect it. This trial trip has been most satisfactory. You will hear from me again in a short while, and then it will not be vague reports, but a full description of the modern wonder, the airship".

I had a good opportunity to look at the exterior of the monster while its occupant was talking. It is much the shape of a cigar. The main body appeared to be about 30 feet long. Great wings shaped fans spread out either side. At the front end was a large wheel much like the side wheels of a steamboat, but made of very light material. At the rear end was a fanlike projection like the tail of a fish. The whole was about 75 feet long. I asked my visitor to explain his ship, how it was propelled, etc.. He simply replied: "Electricity. Within are electrical machines, which furnish the motive power, and the lights. When once in motion the wind operating on the large wheel in front like a windmill keeps the ship in motion and but little electricity is needed. Now, young man, I can't tell you any more. Just wait and you will learn all about it. If you will mail these letters and not disclose the names and address and keep this all quiet for awhile, and will give me your name I will return soon and take you with me on a trip to Mexico and South America". I promised not to give him away. He and his assistants went inside, there was a flash of light, a sizzling noise, the monster rose gracefully and flew away in a northeast direction. I am in honor bound not to disclose the names and postoffice address of the letters. I deposited them in the Greenville postoffice that night. When my visitor returns and I leave with him for Mexico and South America I will write "The News" regularly. It is a grand invention, and I am fully convinced that in a short while we shall discard slow railroad trains and ocean steamers.

C.G. WILLIAMS.

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