

THE LEROY, KANSAS CALFNAPPING HOAX OF 1897

Jerome Clark

SINCE discovering this past September that the famous Alex Hamilton calfnapping case was a piece of fiction concocted by a local liars' club, with Hamilton and *Yates Center Farmer's Advocate* editor Ed F. Hudson the principal inventors, I have received a number of comments from ufologists. Some were addressed to me personally. Others have been circulated by individuals who did not bother to ask me for clarification or further information. Most have suggested in one way or another that the hoax explanation is a hoax itself.

To clarify this issue I am writing this as an open letter to individuals familiar with the new developments in what has been a classic UFO case. (Articles explaining the matter in more detail will appear in *Fate*, *Fortean Times* and *The APRO Bulletin*.) I believe the following will lay to rest any reasonable doubts about the authenticity of the statements made separately (and over a 33-year period) by Mr. Hudson and Mrs. Shaw.

Several letters have asked me why I did not contact members of the Hamilton family for their reaction. I did just that early in September, shortly after Bob Rickard, editor of England's *Fortean Times* (Post Office Stores, Aldermaston, Berks. RG7 4LJ), sent me a copy of Hudson's statement published in a 1943 *Buffalo Enterprise*. Only one member of the family still lives in Yates Center, Kansas, and that is Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton Linde, the daughter of Wallace Hamilton (another supposed witness) and the granddaughter of Alex. I made a further phone call just this morning and last month mailed a manuscript copy of my *Fate* article "The Great Airship Hoax," which will appear in the February 1977 issue.

Mrs. Linde, a very nice lady who is 72 years old, told me during both interviews that, though the family believed the story to be true, they never believed it to be true very firmly. They never heard either Alex or Wall discuss the incident. They were familiar with the news accounts which would periodically reappear and they enjoyed the story as a "family legend." They knew that Alex Hamilton, who died in 1912, had a "darn good imagination"; on top of that contemporaries of the elder Hamilton had told them that *the story was a hoax concocted by Alex and the newspaper editor*. This happened, of course, several decades ago, when those who best knew the circumstances surrounding the "incident" were still alive. Asked her opinion of the veracity of Hamilton's account of the calfnapping, Mrs. Linde, who seems reluctant to give up her belief in such a charming family legend, said, "I guess it could have

been true or it could have been a lie." I asked her if she believes Mrs. Shaw's statement. Her reply: "If she says that's the way it was, that must be the way it was." Referring to modern aircraft and UFOs, she remarked, "What my grandfather told has come true, even if it wasn't a fact at the time. That's what is most interesting."

Mrs. Linde confirmed that Mrs. Shaw, then named Ethel Howard, lived near the now-nonexistent village of Vernon and was a close friend of Nell Hamilton, Alex's daughter.

It is extraordinarily improbable that Mrs. Shaw and Mr. Hudson should have lied about this matter. What could their possible motive be? One correspondent suggests it was to "clear the family name." As my wife comments, "Isn't it kind of late to do that now?" If that were the case, why should it be Mrs. Shaw (with whom Mrs. Linde has no social contact) and the late Mr. Hudson who tried to do this — and not a direct descendent such as Mrs. Linde, who apparently wants to believe in the "incident"? Moreover, what kind of attempt is it to "clear the family name" when its patriarch is revealed as a liar?

A second criticism has it that Alex Hamilton never would have revealed the hoax in front of Ethel Howard (Shaw). Nonsense. First of all, the tale was never meant to be much more than a harmless practical joke and there was no great effort to keep the truth a secret from the locals. The only people who were fooled were outsiders. Furthermore, Ethel Howard was a trusted friend of the Hamilton family and in fact later married Mrs. Linde's uncle.

The time has come for us as UFO researchers to admit that we were fooled by the Hamilton yarn, to learn the necessity of caution from it and to go on to deal with the many genuinely puzzling, genuinely unexplained aspects of the UFO mystery. If it is remembered at all, the LeRoy, Kansas, calfnapping should be recalled as a first rate modern fairy tale. Lake Bluff, Illinois.

— November 19, 1976.

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SOME RECENT SPANISH REPORTS

Translated and edited by Gordon Creighton.

WE are much indebted to Sr. Ignacio Darnaude Rojas-Marcos of Sevilla for a great number of xerox copies of reports of recent cases in Spain. I give a resume translation of the most interesting of these.

1. Pollos, Province of Valladolid (N. Central Spain) (August 22, 1975): A vivid red UFO shaped like a rugby ball was seen by a number of witnesses hovering over a local cemetery at 9.45 p.m.

Julio Hernández and his girl friend Begoña Macías (their ages 24 and 21 respectively) were driving from Pollos to Castroño when they saw a huge red thing, shaped like a vertical rugby football, approaching. It passed right over, at only about four metres from their car roof. The girl was terrified. Her companion, while trying to calm her, watched the object swing away and then make a second pass at them, swooping overhead once more. (Meanwhile their engine had not given out.)

They returned into Pollos and got a man named Mariano "El Colorao" to go back with them to see the UFO, and this time they found it stationary over a mound in the local cemetery. Very shaken, all three repaired to a local bar. Other witnesses were found by the Charles Fort Group when investigating, and some of these said that when they had gone home at 3.00 a.m. the object was still over the cemetery.

All described it as like a vertical rugby ball or egg. The colour on one of its sides was of a vivid, almost incandescent red, while the other side was a paler, more yellowish red. The object was rotating on its axis, and from time to time projecting a beam of vivid white light on to the ground. Julio Hernández said the UFO had three projectors, one on top and two below, and that it was from these that the vivid white light came which lit up the ground. They said they experienced no discomfort in the eyes when looking at either the UFO or the projected white beam of light. All witnesses said that when stationary over the cemetery the UFO looked far bigger than the apparent size of the full Moon. The night was clear with good visibility. There is a power-line near by, and the River Duero is about one kilometre distant. There is a big dam (el embalse de San José) at a distance of some 20-25 km., near the town of Castroño.

2. Valladolid area (N. Central Spain) (November 16, 1975): A priest, who has asked that his name be not divulged, had been to visit a sick person at about 3.00 o'clock in the morning. Driving home, between the towns of Bocos and Curiel, at a place called Vale del Cuco, he was immensely shaken by the sight of a huge ellipsoidal reddish object... "much bigger than the full Moon." It was at a distance which he estimated at between one and 1½ km. to the left of the highway, and lower than the peaks of the nearby mountain range. He tried to turn his car round and drive back to the last town, but after moving it a little he found the engine died suddenly, leaving the car partly in the ditch. He was quite unable to get it going again. His lights seem to have remained unaffected.

The members of the Charles Fort Investigation Group at Valladolid, who questioned the priest, found him at first very unwilling to talk at all about the affair, and they think that there are still details which they failed to extract from him. He said the object was stationary the whole time until its departure, when it vanished very rapidly.

Unable to shift his car or start it up, he said he turned off the lights and walked two km. to the next village to get help. A man from there returned with him to the car, got it out of the ditch, and they found the engine started up with no trouble.

The priest has the reputation of being a very stable and solid sort of person, not easily alarmed, but when questioning the villagers the Charles Fort Group were told that he had been a very scared man indeed when he walked into their village to ask for help.

3. Valladolid area (Mid-December 1975): Two people, who have also asked for complete anonymity, were driving at 7.00 p.m. along the road from Castroño to Pollos when they encountered, near the bridge over the river Trabancos, a vivid white transparent light shining down on the road in front of them. They were unable to see the source of the light. The car engine failed, but the lights remained on.

They remained there for a few seconds observing it, and then the light moved off towards their left. The engine now started up with no difficulty. They drove up the track to a

nearby farmhouse to ask if the people there had seen the phenomenon or knew anything about it, and the farmer told them that his son had seen something very similar a few days previously.

They said the width of the light was about three-quarters the width of the road.

Investigating this case, the Charles Fort Group discovered that there were quite a number of other cases in surrounding villages.

4. Manuera, Province of Navarra, Northern Spain (February 25, 1976): The newspaper *La Voz de Galicia* (February 27, 1976) quoted a report from the Bilbao paper *La Gaceta del Norte* that a UFO had landed two days previously at Mañeru in Navarre Province, and left marks. Five children from Mañeru were playing on a nearby hill at about 4.00 p.m. when they saw it land in a field of barley. They said it had a transparent cupola on top and was a disc of metallic appearance and some eight to ten metres wide.

From the machine, according to the children, there emerged a being more than 2 metres 30 in height. The being took a few paces in the field and then returned to the disc. He was dressed in a sort of black overall from head to feet.

The report stated that the representative of the *Gaceta del Norte* found five big footprints in the field, and that these prints were over 40 cm. long.

This case was also investigated by the Charles Fort Group of Valladolid.

5. Valmaseda, near Bilbao, Northern Spain (June 3, 1976): According to the newspaper *ABC* of June 6, 1976, (Sevillian edition) numerous people of Valmaseda saw four UFOs between 11.00 p.m. on June 3 and 2.00 a.m. on June 4.

The paper recalled that, on the night of November 3/4 of 1975, a UFO had been stationary over the same town, Valmaseda, for more than four hours.

6. Las Palmas, Canary Islands (June 22, 1976): According to *ABC* (Seville edition) of June 26, hundreds of people on Grand Canary Island saw a UFO which landed on the north-western part of the island, at Galdar.

One witness described it as transparent, as high as a two-storeyed house, and circular in form. Inside it could be seen two figures, much