

A WEIRD AMERICAN PHENOMENON OF 1874

We are indebted to FSR reader Mrs Florence Dyess of Mobile, Alabama, for this interesting item from the newspaper *Mississippi Press* of 26 March, 1986. — EDITOR

1874 'UFO' SIGHTING TELLS OF LUMINOUS 'ELECTRIC CLOUD'

By Don Broadus, Mississippi Press Staff

CHARLES Hickson and Calvin Parker reported they were taken aboard a UFO in October 1973, while fishing from the west bank of the Pascagoula River.* Through the years, other UFO sightings have been reported in and around Pascagoula, but the Hickson incident gained more attention than any of the others.

Perhaps, however, another sighting almost 100 years before the Hickson incident would have rivalled the Hickson venture if it had been afforded today's communications network.

Instead, the event was reported in the August 22, 1874, edition of the *Star of Pascagoula*, and no doubt was read and discussed for years by the newspaper's readers, who probably numbered no more than a few hundred.

The report follows:—

Singular phenomenon

On the night of 13th inst. (i.e. August 13, 1874 (ED.)), a singular and awe-inspiring phenomenon was observed at the village upon the sea-shore, corroborated by several reliable witnesses.

The evening had been very close and sultry, and between 10 and 11 o'clock a violent squall and thunderstorm, accompanied with heavy rain and hail, came down from the North.

This did not last more than half an hour, the wind lulling and shifting to the west, but coming in fitful gusts, when the luminous electric cloud, for such it seems to have been, passed through the western extremity of the village.

Coming from the north-west, which would be from over the marsh and bays of the Pascagoula Rivers, just above their mouths, it moved south-eastwardly along the Sound towards Horn Island Pass, the extreme left flank — so to express it — sweeping over Mrs Willis's, the White House (apparently a local hotel. ED.), and buildings adjacent.

It contained intense heat. Mrs Willis had just put her head out of the front window when she was stifled by the burning hot gust from the west, and felt as if her hair had been scorched from her head.

She instantly thought "the house is on fire", and ran back to observe the kitchen. She thinks the heat was sufficient to have set the house on fire had it continued ten minutes. It felt as if she had put her face near a red-hot furnace.

Mr Trudel — host of the White House — and several of his boarders felt the heat and saw the illuminating cloud. Mr T. thought, from the light and heat, that the hotel was on fire, and upon that instant came near to sounding the alarm. The heat he imagined had blistered his face and hands, and he felt to see if his beard had gone. As the heat-blast passed, he noticed the light, which illuminated the buildings and surrounding objects.

A Mr Ladnier, who was asleep on the front gallery of the building adjoining the White House, whither he had taken refuge from the rain, was awakened by the intense heat on his face, and clearly observed the

cloud of light, which was moving slowly along and seemed to be about half-a-mile in length, on a line between him and Horn Island, and about thirty feet deep. It illuminated all objects over which it passed, and seemed itself to be moving about three or four yards above the inky black water below it. And all around it was dark, nothing being distinguishable except *that light*.

He noticed it pass over a vessel at anchor, about half a mile from the shore, making the ship's spars and rigging become distinctly visible. He was much alarmed, and remarked to his brother, who was with him, that "the whole world was on fire".

Several other people also saw and felt the effects of the phenomenon. Some thought "the Comet had struck us", and others thought "Judgement Day" had come.

It soon passed, and all was again dark and still.

* * * * *

Early in 1986, Betty Rodgers, vice-president of the Jackson County Genealogical Society, sent a copy of the above article to the Climatic Data Center at Asheville, North Carolina. And she received the following reply from Paul Hudspeth:—

"We have no information about the phenomenon in the newspaper article. The only weather station in Mississippi in 1874 was in Vicksburg. The article seems to me to be a very good description of 'ball lightning'."

According to the *Weather Almanac*, ball lightning appears as a luminous globe, or doughnut-shaped. It hisses as it hurtles from clouds to Earth, maneuvers at high speed, rolls along structures, or lies suspended in the air.

FOOTNOTE BY EDITOR, FSR

*See (1) *The Pascagoula UFO and Occupant Incident*, by Richard Heiden, in FSR 20/6 (1974)

See also (2), *The Cappelquin Sighting*, by Charles Gibb-Smith, in FSR 12/2 (1966).

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