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THE STRANGE CASE OF THE 1897 AIRSHIP

By Jerome Clark



To publish this vitally important article in more than one section would so destroy its impact that, despite its length, it has been decided to present it in its entirety. Accordingly our popular contributor's article The Greatest Flap Yet?—Pt. IV. has been held over for a later issue of the REVIEW.

It began in November 1896 in Northern California. All that month and into December, Western newspapers, publishing a confused conglomeration of truths, half-truths and outright falsehoods, gave sensational treatment to the appearances of—what, no one really knew, though just about everyone had an opinion. Those who had not seen it considered it proof that a great many of their fellow citizens were quite mad. Those who had seen it, understandably feeling that they were better qualified to judge their own sanity, called it "the airship". The "airship", they maintained, was a piloted craft of some kind, carrying brilliant searchlights and human-like passengers, capable of flying against the wind, landing and taking off when approached.



After December, there were no more reports. With no UFO enthusiasts to keep interest alive, the public quickly dismissed the stories from consciousness and went on to what it fancied more pressing concerns—temporarily.

For in March 1897 the airship—or airships—reappeared, this time all over the Midwestern and Western United States, in large numbers and in the presences of thousands of witnesses. By the time the phenomenon had left—in May—one of the most revealing, and neglected, chapters of the UFO saga had concluded.

What I wish to emphasize in the article that follows is not so much the *fact* of the airship as its meaning in relation to the whole UFO problem. Although the reports I and several others have uncovered to date constitute only a fairly small proportion of all the published incidents of 1897 (it is hoped that a more definitive, greatly expanded work can be published in the future), it is evident that continued probing into the mystery serves only to confirm the existence of a highly important pattern, the significance of which we turn to after we have examined some of the sighting reports. In this pattern, I suspect, we shall see the crux of the entire UFO situation—*present as well as past*.

The airship reappeared over Kansas and Nebraska in late March 1897. Sightings did not begin gradually, as they often do in the early stages of modern UFO "flaps", and there certainly is no justification for the view, expressed by a correspondent of mine, that the airship worked its way eastwards from California after December 1896. There simply were no reports of airships between January and mid-March; but afterwards reports suddenly began to be made in almost staggering numbers.

The first recorded sighting, so far as we know, was made from Belleville, Kansas, on March 25, where at 10 p.m. a "mysterious airship" (not described) passed over the town and was seen by "at least 50 citizens", according to newspaper accounts. (It appeared on the two following nights as well.) Previous to this, however, it seems to have been observed by ranchers and farmers mostly in northern Kansas and southern Nebraska, but Iowa may have received at least one visitation, if the testimony of Robert Hibbard is to be credited.

Hibbard, who farmed 15 miles north of Sioux City, claimed that one night late in March an "anchor" hanging from a drag rope attached to the rear of an airship caught him in the slack of his trousers and dragged him several dozen feet. When finally his trousers ripped, he said, he fell to the ground. "His reputation for truth-telling has never been bad", one newspaper noted, "and the general opinion is that he either 'had 'em' or dreamed his remarkable experience".

Another source refers to sightings at Lincoln, Beatrice, "and other Nebraska points," and at Marysville, Washington, and Hadham, Kansas.

On the night of the 29th, worshippers leaving an Omaha, Nebraska, church saw a strange object pass through the sky, hover and fly away again. It was visible to them for half an hour. Shortly thereafter, residents of the south-east portion of Omaha viewed the ship, seeing a large bright light, "too big for a balloon". Travelling slowly

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and close to the ground, it disappeared in the north-west behind a series of bluffs just outside the city.

Some of the best reports of the flap were made on the night of April 1, when sightings occurred in both Missouri and Kansas. At 8.15, at Kansas City (in the first state), "thousands of people", claimed the city's newspaper, "saw the mysterious light", as it moved from west to north to south, then back to north. Its altitude varied: it would descend close to the ground, only then to rise rapidly away.

According to the *Kansas City Times*, "The light seemed about the size of a big street light and didn't seem to be as high as the clouds. It shot out a beam of light very much like a search-light. Some of the time the light was white, and then it changed to a bright red. Its general course was towards the north-west, but several times it reversed and travelled for awhile in the opposite direction. It moved with a regular motion, not comet-like. Some said they watched it go out of sight over the northern horizon".

Citizens of Everest, Kansas, watched the airship for an hour and twenty minutes the same night and got a particularly detailed view of the phenomenon.

"For five minutes at one time the airship seemed to skirt the lowest edges of a cloud that hung low down in the heavens and it was then that the powerful lights on board were reflected on the clouds and the outlines of the ship were clearly distinguished.

"The basket or car seemed to be 25 to 30 feet long, shaped like an Indian canoe. Four light wings extended from the car, two wings were triangular. A large dark hulk was discernible immediately above the car and was generally supposed by the watchers to be an inflated gas-bag. That the same power that furnished the light was used for lifting the ship was evident from the fact that the lights grew dim as the ship went upward, and as the ship came nearer the earth, the light was as bright as the light of a locomotive. One observer claimed a blue colour appeared, other than white and red."

Someone, an anonymous 1897 Menzel, had an explanation: the "airship" was not that at all—it was the planet Venus. Upon hearing so, a witness snorted "Venus does not dodge around, fly swiftly across the horizon, swoop rapidly toward the earth, and then soar away until lost in the southern sky".

The same night a guard at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas reported seeing the airship, only to be warned that he would be subject to possible dismissal on grounds of mental illness if he continued to talk about it. But most other Kansans seemed

much more open-minded about the mysterious craft, and it became a favourite subject of conversation among them. An engineer at Fort Leavenworth, suggesting that airships might be used as weapons one day, remarked, "Just think of it—an army corps of soldiers sailing over large cities and shells of every size and description being dropped among the people. The slaughter would be something awful. War now, as compared with war *then*, is mere child's play".

II

Far away from Kansas, in the Upper Midwestern state of Michigan, the airship passed over the village of Galesburg the night of April 1—one of a number of indications that more than one airship was involved in the 1897 flap. Witnesses reported seeing a brilliant light which revealed the vague shape of the machine's main body; from it emanated both an odd "crackling" noise, apparently the sounds of its motor, and the distinct sounds of human voices.

Four days later, hundreds of Omaha natives sighted a steel cigar-shaped object cruising at an altitude of about three-fourths of a mile. Visible for five minutes, it flew against the wind into clouds, reappeared briefly, and disappeared, moving at a high speed and still against the wind, into the northern sky.

A rash of airship sightings broke out on the nights of the 9th and the 10th, in three states. To mention some of the localities reporting visitations:

Norman, Oklahoma, April 9. Mr. T. J. Wiggins, assistant cashier of the Norman State Bank—"a sober man and a devout church member"—saw a long dark object carrying a very bright light on its end and flashing red lights along its sides. (Two nights later, nearly 400 persons in Norman claimed to have sighted an identical phenomenon.)

Illinois. A brilliantly-lighted construction appeared low in the sky over a lake near Evanston, then flew erratically over the city on a westward course. It was observed at the same time, though at a greater distance, at Niles Center and Schermer-ville.

At 9.30, South Chicagoans watched the airship cross the lake, fly inland, turn slowly to the north-west, and disappear in the darkness. According to the *Chicago Tribune* for April 10.

"At several points the moving wonder was observed by persons equipped with small telescopes or powerful field glasses, and these persons claimed to have described the outlines of the structure bearing lights, the consensus, on the uncertain basis for estimating dimensions of bodies moving through the air at unknown distances, is that the

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main body of the night flyer was about 70 feet in length, of slender proportions and fragile construction.

"To this body, it is reported, were attached the movable headlight and the other lights . . . A few observers claim they also saw, a short distance above the body, lateral structures resembling wings or sails. These appeared to be about 20 feet in width, and as they were seen from one side, their length could not be accurately estimated."

One of the first witnesses, a young jeweller, maintained that the airship was actually two cigar-shaped bodies attached together by girders. Since this sighting occurred apparently in the dusk, while most of the others took place in the dark, it should be taken seriously, in my opinion, as perhaps a more accurate description of the ship's appearance.

If estimates of the object's length are to be accepted literally, an airship, but a smaller one than its Evanston-South Chicago counterpart cruised over Mt. Carroll, Illinois, at 8.40 p.m. Coming out of the north-east, it crossed the city, turned west, and flashed away "at a terrific speed". Witnesses said the phenomenon was about 8 or 10 feet in length and no more than two or three feet high. It was "oblong" in shape and carried a large red light.

Iowa, April 10. At Newton at 8 p.m., 2000 citizens viewed an airship as it hovered over the southwest part of the city for forty minutes. Heading north-west it dropped what looked like a parachute with a light attached to it. Some observers thought this might be a message from the craft's occupants and went out to retrieve it, but newspaper accounts do not say whether the searchers found anything.

The airship also appeared briefly over Eldon at 7.25, Ottumwa at 7.40, and Albia at 8.10.

Illinois. A mysterious object carrying an intense white light took 15 minutes to fly over Galesburg. Viewers who watched it through binoculars estimated it to be at an altitude of three-fourths of a mile.

All of this activity caused Professor George Hough, an astronomer from North-western University, to smile. "Alpha Orionis has been roaming through its regular course in the firmament ten million years", he said, "and why it should have been settled upon in the last three weeks, and pointed out as the headlight of a mysterious aerial vessel, is a hard thing to explain" Not that Professor Hough had ever seen what his "gullible" fellow countrymen called an "airship", of course. He had better things to do, he said.

Joseph Pierson of Evanston sighted red, green and white lights which reflected off two cigar-

shaped bodies. The object—or objects—gave off a "hissing" sound. "This phenomenon," he emphasised, presumably with tongue in cheek, "took a course entirely out of the route of Alpha Orionis."

III

An airship followed a train all the way from Howard to Artesian, South Dakota, on the night of the 15th. Conductor Joe Wright told a reporter for the Madison (South Dakota) *Sentinel* that the object appeared just after dusk and flew progressively closer to the ground until it had "passed-out of view", i.e., apparently landed.

Another airship was seen at 9.00 p.m. the same night by observers at Eureka, Kansas. Yet another reportedly approached the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., at an altitude of 600 feet, then sailed for Georgetown and disappeared behind hills back of the city.

Twenty-four hours later, half a dozen Texas cities saw a craft "shaped like a Mexican cigar, large in the middle, and small at both ends, with great wings, resembling those of enormous butterfly. It was brilliantly illuminated by the rays of two great searchlights, and was sailing in a south-easterly direction, with the velocity of wind, presenting a magnificent appearance". (*New York Sun*.)

Three days afterwards, at about 9 p.m. a gigantic object flashed searchlight beams along the ground at Sistersville, West Virginia. According to a reporter, "An examination with strong glasses left an impression of a huge cone-shaped arrangement 180 feet long, with large fins on either side."

IV

April 19 produced two of the most interesting reports of the flap. The first is the well-known Sistersville incident (see above), described in more detail in Keyhoe's *The Flying Saucers Are Real*. The second is the until-recently unpublicised "operator" report from LeRoy, Kansas, clearly one of the best such stories in the annals of the UFO saga. The witness seems to have been a highly reliable man, and moreover, I have been able, through the efforts of a Kansas correspondent, to obtain further substantiation for the claim.

The Yates Center, Kansas *Farmers' Advocate* for April 23, 1887, reported, "Hon. Alexander Hamilton of Vernon came to town last Wednesday [April 21] and created quite an excitement by announcing that he had been having some experience with the much-talked-of airship. Mr. Hamilton is an old settler, was a member of the legislature in the early days and is known all over Woodson,

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Allen, Coffey, and Anderson counties." Hamilton told the following story to the newspaper :

"Last Monday night about half past ten o'clock we were awakened by a noise among the cattle. I arose, thinking perhaps my bulldog was performing some pranks, but upon going to the door, saw to my utter amazement, an airship slowly descending over my cow lot about forty rods from the house.

"Calling Gid Heslip, my tenant, and my son, Wall, we seized some axes and ran to the corral. Meanwhile the ship had been gently descending until it was not more than 30 feet above the ground and we came up to within 50 yards of it. It consisted of a great cigar-shaped portion possibly 300 feet long with a carriage underneath.

"The carriage was made of panels of glass or other transparent substance, alternating with a narrow strip of some other material. It was brilliantly lighted within and everything was clearly visible. There were three lights : one like an immense searchlight and two smaller, one red the other green. The large one was susceptible of being turned in every direction.

"It was occupied by six of the strangest beings I ever saw. There were two men, a woman, and three children. They were jabbering together but we could not understand a syllable they said. Every part of the vessel which was not transparent was of a dark reddish colour.

"We stood mute in wonder and fright, when some noise attracted their attention and they turned their light directly upon us. Immediately upon catching sight of us, they turned on some unknown power, and a great turbine wheel about 30 feet in diameter, which was slowly revolving below the craft, began to buzz, sounding precisely like the cylinder of a separator, and the vessel rose as lightly as a bird.

"When about 30 feet above us, it seemed to pause, and hover directly over a three-year-old heifer which was bawling and jumping, apparently fast in the fence. Going to her, we found a cable about half an inch in thickness, made of the same red material, fastened in a slip knot around her neck, one end passing up to the vessel and tangled in the wire.

"We tried to get it off but could not, so we cut the wire loose, and stood in amazement to see ship, cow and all rise slowly and sail off, disappearing in the north-west. We went home but I was so frightened I could not sleep but arose Tuesday morning, mounted my horse and started out to find some trace of my cow, but coming back to LeRoy in the evening found that Lank Thomas, who lives in Coffee county about three or four

miles west of LeRoy, had found the hide, legs and head in his field that day.

"He thinking someone had butchered a stolen beast and thrown the hide away, had brought it to town for identification but was greatly mystified in not being able to find a track of any kind on the soft ground. I went home last night but every time I would drop to sleep, I would see the cursed thing with its big lights and hideous people. I don't know whether they are devils or angels or what but we all saw them and my whole family saw the ship and I don't want any more to do with them."

"Mr. Hamilton looked as if he had not entirely recovered from the shock and every one who knew him was convinced he was sincere in every word," the *Advocate* concluded. It published the testimony of prominent citizens who knew Hamilton well :

"As there are now, always have been, and always will be, sceptics and unbelievers, whenever the truth of anything bordering on the improbable is presented, and knowing that some ignorant or suspicious people will doubt the truthfulness of the above statement, now.

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, do hereby make the following affidavit.

"That we have known Alex Hamilton from 15 to 30 years and that for truth and veracity we have never heard his word questioned and that we do verily believe his statement to be true and correct.

E. V. Wharton, State Oil Inspector
H. H. Winter, Banker
H. S. Johnson, Pharmacist
Alex Stewart, Justice of Peace
F. W. Butler, Druggist
H. C. Rollins, Postmaster
M. E. Hunt, Sheriff
E. K. Kellenberser, M. D.
J. H. Sticher, Attorney
H. Waymire, Druggist
Jas. L. Martin, Register of Deeds

"Subscribed and sworn to before me this 21st day of April, 1897. W. C. Willie, Notary Public."

After copying Hamilton's story, the Burlington *Daily News* printed another affidavit.

"We, the undersigned, residents of Burlington, Kansas, do hereby certify that we have known Mr. Alexander Hamilton ever since he was chased out of Missouri in 1855 [apparently a reference to Hamilton's possible involvements with pro- and anti-slavery elements then in conflict in Missouri and Kansas]; that he was the first County Clerk of the Coffee county; that he is in all respects a

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perfectly truthful and reliable man. And no lover of truth will ever question any statement made by him

"J. M. Lane, H. E. Cowgill, Orson Kent, Wm. Manson, M. E. Grimes, J. M. Baldwin, David Grimes.

"Subscribed and sworn to before me this 29th day of April, 1897. H. B. Cheney, Notary Public.

A final piece of evidence for Hamilton's veracity is given by his granddaughters, (the daughters of Wallace Hamilton—identified as "Wall" in the narrative), who were interviewed late in 1965 by Mr. Harry Fleenor of Topeka, Kansas. Both women told Mr. Harry Fleenor that the story was a well-known one in their family, and that their grandfather had maintained until his death (in 1912) that he had seen a strange craft and its equally peculiar occupants take off with a heifer calf. Their father, perhaps fearing ridicule, refused to discuss the subject.

V

The next "operator" story which allegedly occurred about the same time (we have been unable to determine the exact date), is less easy to judge because we have less information concerning the witness's character. The man appears to have been fairly prominent, however, and news-references to him are universally favourable. Even the *Arkansas Gazette*, which previously had ridiculed much more "mundane" airship sightings, termed this the "most authentic story printed".

The speaker is Captain James Hooton, described as "the well-known Iron Mountain railroad conductor".

"Of course I 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 bush 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

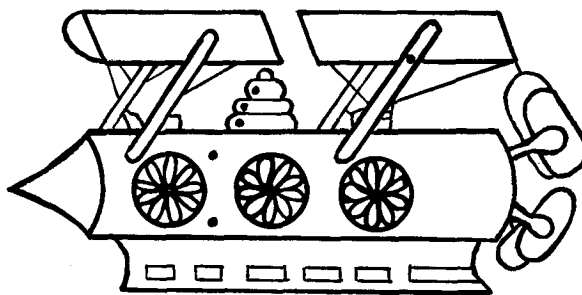
famous airship seen by so many people about the country.

"There was a medium-sized looking 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 airship?' 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-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,' some one called out, when the party all disappeared below. I observed that just in front of each wheel a two-inch tube began to

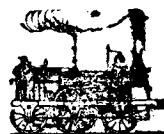


Captain Hooton's picture of the airship

spurt air on the wheels and they commenced revolving. The ship gradually arose 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

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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."

The airship Hooton sketched strikes one as being ridiculously improbable in appearance and may constitute a barrier to full acceptance of the story. On the other hand, it may offer circumstantial evidence for it. Somewhat similar ships had been reported before (see particularly the South Chicago airship description), and the fan-shaped wheels on the side figured prominently in some 1896 California sightings with which it is unlikely Hooton was familiar. Alexander Hamilton, remember, reported the presence of a "wheel" connected with the propulsion mechanism, although this one was larger and *beneath* the craft rather than on its side. Further, Hooton's airship bears a definite resemblance to the mysterious machine that crossed New Mexico in 1880. (See Lucius Farish's *An 1880 UFO*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, May/June 1965.)

VI

The 1897 flap had definitely reached its peak after the third week of April, although scattered sightings continued to be made into May. Only one is worth mentioning in detail.

The testimony below is that of two Hot Springs, Arkansas, law officers, Constable Sumpter and Deputy Sheriff McLemore who were on an official duty when they allegedly encountered an airship and its passengers.

"While riding north-west from this city on the night of May 6, 1897, we noticed a brilliant light high in the heavens. Suddenly it disappeared and we said nothing about it, as we were looking for parties and did not want to make any noise. After riding four or five miles around through the hills we again saw the light, which now appeared to be much nearer the earth. We stopped our horses and watched it coming down, until all at once it disappeared behind another hill. We rode on about half a mile further, when our horses refused to go further. About a hundred yards distant we saw two persons moving around with lights. Drawing our winchesters—for we were now thoroughly aroused to the importance of the situation—we demanded: 'Who is that, and what are you doing?'

"A man with a long dark beard came forth with a lantern in his hand, and on being informed who we were proceeded to tell us that he and the

others—a young man and a woman—were traveling through the country in an airship. We could plainly distinguish the outlines of the vessel, which was cigar-shaped and about sixty feet long, and looking just like the cuts that have appeared in the papers recently. It was dark and raining and the young man was filling a big sack with water about thirty yards away, and the woman was particular to keep back in the dark. She was holding an umbrella over her head. The man with the whiskers invited us to take a ride, saying that he could take us where it was not raining. We told him we believed we preferred to get wet.

"Asking the man why the brilliant light was turned on and off so much, he replied that the light was so powerful that it consumed a great deal of his motive power. He said he would like to stop off in Hot Springs for a few days and take the hot baths, but his time was limited and he could not. He said they were going to wind up at Nashville, Tenn., after thoroughly seeing the country. Being in a hurry we left and upon our return, about forty minutes later, nothing was to be seen. We did not hear or see the airship when it departed.

"John J. Sumpter, Jr.

"John M'Lemore.

"Subscribed and sworn to before me this 8th day of May, 1897.

"C. G. Bush, J.P."

The Fort Smith *Daily News Record* noted that while Sumpter and McLemore were subjected to a great deal of ridicule, "they, however, most seriously maintain that it is absolutely true, and their earnestness is puzzling many, who, while unable to accept the story as a fact, yet see that the men are not jesting". The *Arkansas Gazette* added, "As both are men of undoubted integrity, their statement can be fully relied upon as being true".

Especial attention should be paid to one detail in the last paragraph of the affidavit: the relationship between the ship's light and its motive power. We have already seen that independent witnesses had commented that **whenever the ship accelerated its light dimmed**. If Sumpter and McLemore were lying, then, we must conclude that they were quite familiar with other sightings, even those in newspapers that may have been inaccessible to them. (By coincidence or otherwise, in mid-April Illinois farmhands claimed to have come upon an airship also piloted by two men and a woman.)

VII

Among those who accepted the existence of the airship, there was little doubt that the craft was piloted by terrestrials, presumably American inventors. Except for an editorialist in the Colony,

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Kansas, *Free Press* (who theorised it was a spaceship from Mars), it does not seem to have occurred to anyone that the phenomenon could have been anything more than that. (For an elaboration of this point, see my article *A Contact Claim* in the January/February 1965 FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.) **This may be the single most important fact of the 1897 flap.**

It should be evident that the events of 1897 are not "typical" of UFO activity as we know it today. Indeed, I have even refrained from referring to the airship as a "UFO", for while that is what it was *in the literal sense*, it is not at all like that which we call a "UFO" today. The phenomenon seen in the United States in 1880, 1896 and 1897 (and Wales and New Zealand in 1909 and South Africa in 1914) was an *airship*, a kind of heavier-than-air construction built for limited flights through the immediate atmosphere. It was most decidedly *not* any sort of spacecraft, as modern "flying saucers" appear to be.

In every contact claim of the period, the idea that the ship was a terrestrial construction was bolstered in varying ways conveniently supporting the technology and temperament of the times. It was widely believed that, with the relatively rapid advances in science then being made, an aircraft of some sort would be invented in the near future (just as now interplanetary spaceships are expected in the next few years). Every action of the airship could conceivably have been predicted by Americans of the late Nineteenth Century. Here there were no concepts beyond their comprehension: no UFOs powered by "anti-gravity", no craft of highly advanced design, no "little men" or golden-haired Venusians. Nothing, in short, we who today grant the reality of UFOs have come to expect.

The 1897 contacts were inevitable, if one accepts the premise that limited contact can and does occur. Because of the peculiar nature of the airship, contact could not have been anything other than what it was: reinforced belief in a terrestrial construction. If the operators had been unconcerned with the human reaction to their appearance, they would presumably have flown machines of more advanced design, rather than the almost ludicrous creations cited in contemporary newspapers.

Studying the 1897 reports, one noted ufologist has concluded—and will so argue in a forthcoming book—that the airship was invented by an American scientist. While I do not know whether he has special information which leads him to this conclusion, I rather suspect that his idea is based upon a superficial, somewhat incomplete examination

of the existing data. Certainly, almost everyone who has studied the period at one time or another wonders if terrestrials were completely responsible—there were enough rumours published in the press to confuse anyone. But eventually one must conclude, as Thomas Edison did, that "it is absolutely impossible to imagine that a man could construct a successful airship and keep the matter a secret".

Moreover, to accept this researcher's view, we must believe that our anonymous inventor—and the dozens of persons who would have had to pilot the airships—appeared in New Mexico in 1880, California in 1896, the entire United States in 1897, Wales and New Zealand in 1909, and South Africa in 1914. We must also believe that all this was carried out in virtually complete secrecy—and that since that time nothing has come to light to discredit the role of the Wright Brothers in the creation of the first heavier-than-air machine.

I submit that the truth is more likely to be, as I have assumed throughout this paper, that the airship was extramundane (though not necessarily interplanetary) in origin. Making these assumptions, we suggest that the mystery can be understood if we theorise that the intelligences behind the UFOs (1) wish to mislead us or (2) wish to present themselves **within the context of the observer's environment**. These points may overlap, but they are based upon opposite presumptions about the ufonaut's purpose.

In the first case, we envision a long-term mission carried out by beings from Elsewhere; though not necessarily hostile, these beings do not care to have us know what their identity and purpose are, and so have contrived (through subtlety, their more obvious activities, the messages imparted in contact) to give us false ideas about them. (For a more detailed discussion, see my *The Meaning of Contact*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, September/October 1965.) What they are doing here is not particularly relevant in the formation of this hypothesis though I hope to discuss this subject in a later article.

To mislead us, the ufonauts assume a character easiest for us both to believe and to understand. In ancient times the superstitious called them gods or wizards, and we have an odd story, cited by W. R. Drake (*Spacemen in Norman Times*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW March/April, 1966), in which beings announce they are from "Magonia" or "Magus"—"magic land". Paul Misraki (Paul Thomas) in his excellent *Flying Saucers through the Ages* (Neville Spearman, 1965), argues that the angels of the Bible were actually UFO entities. Today, in the "Space Age" we are led to believe that "flying saucers" are spacecraft. In April 1897, then—six and a half years before Kitty

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Hawk—what more logical than a terrestrial aircraft?

In the second theory we follow much of the same reasoning, but we take a less suspicious view of the motives of our visitors. Perhaps, we speculate, the UFO beings **cannot** make extensive contact with us, by reason of the very nature of the UFO. Unable to land and prove conclusively their existence, they attempt to make themselves known by showing themselves in forms that witnesses are able to comprehend—airships in 1897, spaceships in 1947. If they appeared in their **true** form, they might well be so strange that we might not recognise them at all. Presumably, as in the passing of time human knowledge and consciousness expand, the UFO mystery will continue to evolve until at last we understand what it really means.

Admittedly, here we are involved in speculation of a grand order. I should make clear, however that these latter suggestions are not generally original with me, but with a ufologist whose writings, under the name "Peter Kor", have appeared

in several American UFO magazines. Kor, in creating a series of highly complex hypotheses relative to the UFO problem, has argued that researchers have completely misinterpreted the significance of the mystery they are dealing with. While he is not always totally convincing, Kor is mapping out important new territory that we would do well to explore, and we must not ignore him.

At any rate, whatever the truth may ultimately prove to be, I submit that the 1897 wave indicates the futility of any attempt to divorce flying objects from the general situation in which they operate. It may well be, as Kor has written, that individual reports only hinder our understanding of the enigma. Perhaps saucers in particular mean very little, saucers in general everything.

The airship, then, may be one of the greatest clues to the enigma. Its lesson for researchers into the Post-Arnold period should be obvious. Whether we are being duped intentionally or whether the UFOs simply cannot meet us on their terms, they have created a much deeper mystery than most of us are willing to concede.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Speaking as an aeronautical historian who specialises 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.

Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, M.A., F.M.A.,
Hon. Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

JOINING THE TEAM...

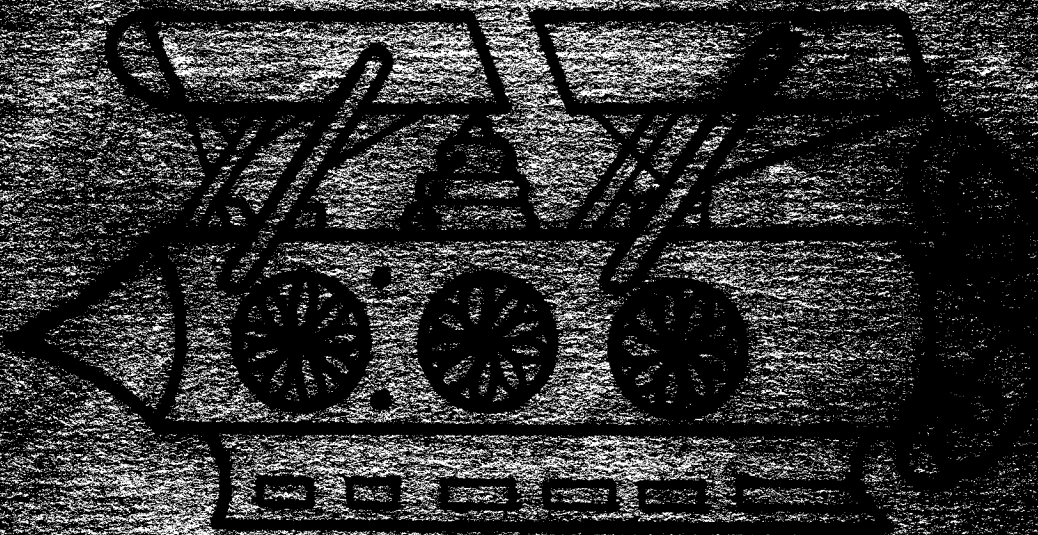
The Editor is pleased to announce that Mr. R. H. B. Winder, C.Eng. B.Sc., A.M.I.M.E., has accepted an invitation to act as engineering consultant to the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.

Mr. Winder, who obtained his honours B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering at Leeds University in 1944, has devoted his career to mechanical research and design, with emphasis on advanced concepts and automation. His early interest in the UFO mystery fell dormant about 1952, but was re-awakened in 1960 after reading the Ruppelt and Keyhoe books, and "discovering" the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW.

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FLYING SAUCER REVIEW

JULY - AUGUST 1968



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THE STRANGE CASE OF THE ...

FSR, N^o 4, 1967

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MORE ON 1897

by Jerome Clark



Our contributor from Minnesota makes a welcome return to the columns of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW after a long illness.

THE 1897 UFO wave has been ignored far too long. Until 1965 UFO students had been little more than aware of its existence, relying upon the incomplete and somewhat misleading data of Fort,¹ Keyhoe,² and Ruppelt.³ With the appearance of Jacques Vallée's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*—which drew attention to the LeRoy incident—interest in the period has grown considerably, and preliminary studies into the "airship" and related matters have already been published in the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW by Vallée, Donald Hanlon, Lucius Farish, and this writer.⁴ Gordon Lore of the NICAP staff has written an important new book, to be published this year, that will deal in part with the airship.

It is now evident that the 1897 flap contains within it a number of highly significant clues to the UFO problem, and I suspect that a really thorough search through newspaper morgues, files of state historical societies, etc., would uncover masses of data that might place the general enigma in a new and radically different context. Even today, it seems to me, the "traditional" theories of ufologists are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the new light of the 1897 evidence. The relatively simple picture drawn by Keyhoe, Hall, Lorenzen, Oberth and most other serious investigators may eventually have to be discarded and replaced with—who knows?

A Photograph

In common with its latter-day counterpart, the "flying saucer," the airship was photographed. Although to my knowledge none of these photographs has survived, the following account, discovered by Farish, is interesting because of its extreme detail. The photographer and speaker is Mr. C. D. Lawrence, a view artist:

"At 5.15 this morning (April 26) I was awakened by someone who ran into the house, arousing the inmates with the explanation that a large balloon was hovering over Baring Cross, beyond the upper bridge. The house where I was stopping is located near the power house of the street railway company, commanding an excellent view of that portion of the city where the mystery was seen. With other members of the household I hurried out and saw what at first appeared to be a very large balloon moving toward the south at a very rapid rate. It was coming end-on and I soon saw that it was not a balloon but the airship about which we have so long been reading. It approached toward the river, and then suddenly veered towards the east and after proceeding a short distance, turned northward, soon disappearing from sight, after having been visible for at least fifteen minutes. I secured a negative while

it appeared broad-side toward the amazed observers, and as you may see a very good view was secured. The negative shows a large cylindrical body pointed at both ends like a cigar, apparently about forty feet in length, although it was seen at such an altitude that no one could accurately judge of its dimensions. A car, in which the navigators of the vessel resided, depended from the buoyant body, being a large box-like arrangement, from which a heavy anchor depended by means of a long rope.⁵ The propeller is arranged at one of the ends of the ship, as is plainly shown in the negative. I could not, of course, definitely give the velocity, but I think I am safe in saying that it could not have been less than fifty miles an hour. The testimony of the large number who witnessed the strange sight would be conclusive evidence of its genuineness, even if I had not been so fortunate as to secure this negative."

A Contact

The next story appeared in the Harrisburg, Arkansas, *Modern News* for April 23, 1897. I am, frankly, quite sceptical of this account, mainly because of its suspiciously excessive detail. But several points are significant: for one, we have here probably the first reference to a UFO powered by "anti-gravity", a feature not to become prominent until the advent of the post-1947 contact claims. Secondly, the aeronaut expresses an interest in terrestrial political problems, especially the plight of the Cuban people under Spanish rule; an April 15 contact near Springfield, Illinois, had the airship's occupants discussing the same topic.⁶ Third, as a point of *possible* corroboration, Mr. Harris's mention of an "old gentleman (who) wore a heavy set of dark, silken whiskers, which hung down near his waist", is reminiscent of Sumpter and McLemore's "man with a long dark beard".⁷ Harris's airship allegedly contained a crew of, in addition to the old man, two young men and a woman; Sumpter and McLemore reported an elderly man, a young man and a woman. On the minus side, a search through the files of a Dallas daily newspaper did not turn up any reported sightings of an airship shortly after midnight of the morning of April 21.

I am presenting this claim, despite my reservations, for the record. Parts of the story had faded so badly on the newspaper page that they were impossible to read. Where this had happened, I have so indicated with a dash.

"The airship of which we have read so much of late has caused considerable comment but no one ever dreamed that it would ever be anchored in Harrisburg. Wednesday night (April 21) Ex-Senator Harris was

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awakened about 1 o'clock by an unfamiliar noise, and upon taking a peep out he spied a peculiar looking object in the west. Instantly he thought of the wonderful airship which had so mystified the people of the west during the past few weeks, and hurriedly dressing he took his field glass and went out in the yard where he could get a good view. The first sight through the glass satisfied him that it was a wonderful airship. As the object came nearer he could discern the shape, but in a few seconds it came so near he threw down his glass. The mysterious flyer paused and gradually descended to within a few feet of the ground and only a short distance from Mr. Harris's yard. Mr. Harris says there was an elderly man, a woman and two young men on board. The old gentleman wore a heavy set of dark, silken whiskers, which hung down near his waist. He had jet black eyes and a deep, firm expression. Mr. Harris said he walked out a little nearer and hailed the old gentleman. The old man seemed a little surprised when he spoke, not expecting to see any one out at that hour of night, but he spoke pleasantly, and after taking on a supply of fresh well water, he said:

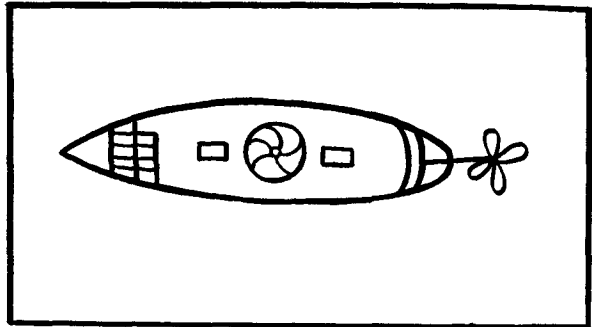
"Well, you seem to be a very clever man, and if you will promise not to divulge my secret in a way to do me harm, I will tell you the whole story, except how the effect is produced."

"After receiving satisfactory assurance, he continued:

"(—) you remember about 26 years (ago?), what is now called the *St. Louis Republic* was then the *St. (—)*. It changed to (—) and later to the (—), about 26 years ago (—) was, the *St. Louis Times* (—) exclusively, an account of a scientific invention made by a gentleman, whose name I will not mention, by which the laws of gravitation were entirely and completely suspended. He was offered big sums of money for it by several syndicates in this country, and also had large offers from parties at Paris, London and many other places. During the time he was considering these offers he was taken violently ill, and after lingering a few weeks died, leaving his invention in the vault. This man was my uncle and he had partially confided the secret to me, but not sufficiently for me to do anything without the original invention. After the lapse of about 19 years I managed to secure the original, and having plenty of money at my disposal and having devoted my time and talent during the past seven years to experimenting, I have an airship which is almost perfection, but I am not quite through experimenting, and so I continue to travel at night to keep from being detected. I will make an attempt to visit the planet Mars before I put the airship on public exhibition. Weight is no object to me. I suspend all gravitation by placing a small wire around an object. You see I have a 4-ton improved Hotchkiss gun on board, besides

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

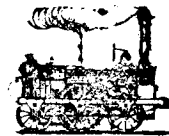
about ten tons of ammunition. I was making preparations to go over to Cuba and kill out the Spanish army if hostilities had not ceased, but now my plans are changed and I may go to the aid of the Armenians. To this improved gun we only have to pour the cartridges into a hopper and press a button and it fires 63,000 times per minute. No, gravitation is not in my way. I place my wire around this 4-ton gun and hold it out with one hand and take aim. Oh, I could place my anti-gravitation wire around the national capital building and take it by the dome and bring it over and set it down in Harrisburg as easy as I could an ink stand. Distance is almost overcome; why, we came over the suburbs of Dallas at 12.10, less than an hour ago, and we have travelled very slowly. I could take breakfast here, do my shopping in Paris and be back here for dinner without inconvenience, as soon as I get my new propellers completed."

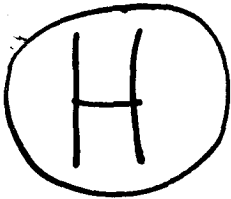
"He said he must be off before anyone else was disturbed and invited Mr. Harris to take a ride with him, but he kindly declined the offer. He bade Mr. Harris adieu and floated up and drifted away to a place among the stars and in a few seconds was hid beyond the darkness of the night."

References

- ¹ Charles Fort, *New Lands*, 1923.
- ² Donald E. Keyhoe, *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, 1950.
- ³ Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1956.
- ⁴ Donald B. Hanlon and Jacques Vallée, *Airships over Texas*: FSR, January/February 1967.
- Hanlon, *Texas Odyssey of 1897*: FSR, September/October 1966.
- Lucius Farish, *An 1880 UFO*: FSR, May/June 1965.
- Jerome Clark, *A Contact Claim*: FSR, January/February 1965.
- Clark, *The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship*: FSR, July/August 1966.
- ⁵ See the Sioux City, Iowa, and Merkel, Texas, reports. (*Strange Case* . . . p. 10, and *Texas Odyssey* . . . p.10, respectively.)
- ⁶ *A Contact Claim*, p.31.
- ⁷ *Strange Case* . . . p.15.

NOTE: The author wishes to thank Mr. Lucius Farish of Plumerville, Arkansas, one of the real pioneers of 1897 research, for the information used in this article.





THE 1897 STORY - I

By Jerome Clark & Lucius Farish



THE FILE on the great UFO flap of 1897—if and when it is published *in toto*—will be both immense and revealing. It will spotlight a major but almost completely unrecognised area of human experience: the relationship between unexplained phenomena and mankind; and, properly understood, it will enable us to interpret the vast mysteries suggested by the appearance of unknown aerial vessels in our own time. It will show us how limitations in human consciousness prevent acknowledgment of the real nature of extramundane occurrences; even more important, it will demonstrate how these limitations affect *the occurrences themselves*.

Most students of the Unknown, unfortunately, have yet to grasp this last point. If they did, they would find that the forces responsible for all those manifestations of what Allen Greenfield likes to call “alternate reality” (whatever *that* means) possess remarkable insight into human perception, to the degree that these forces (however they choose to pose) can appear or disappear, or communicate nonsense or remain silent, or merely imply what they know will be inferred. They cannot mask all of their activities, but they can make certain that what we experience is not what actually happened. On another level (and they work on many levels, partially because they are in conflict) they can deliberately show themselves in attempts to establish limited contacts for specific objectives, only adapting guises to prevent those they approach from going insane or dying from sheer fright.

These considerations must enter strongly into any theorising whose point of departure is 1897. Evidently, contact of one kind was being sought, and contact of another kind was being avoided. Contact whose intention was to reinforce the carefully nurtured terrestrial origin idea was not at all uncommon. Such incidents, in fact, numbered in the thousands.

A case of deception ?

In the contacts we have uncovered to date, however, we have not found anything about the purpose of the whole affair. Is there anything at all important contained in these contacts—anything we can infer beyond the observation that the ufonauts used deception? *How much* deception? Are the “messages” imparted by the airships’ occupants of no significance, or are there truths in them, hidden somewhere amidst the lies that are not readily apparent? In other words, were the incidents of 1897 an attempt by the ufonauts to establish a kind of communication with us—or were they a means, instead, to keep us as far as possible from an awareness of what they were and what they were doing?

Obviously, if the ufonauts were attempting to impart something to us, it was not that superhuman agencies were operating on Earth—something quite the contrary. But by flying over cities, following trains, landing, and

in other ways revealing themselves to tens of thousands of Americans, the airships insured, whether intentionally or not, that they would be sighted by great numbers of witnesses.

Something was going on between human beings and ufonauts, or the latter would never have gone to the trouble of assuming the “terrestrial” rôle. What this “something” was, what the place of the 1897 events in the history of humanity’s dealings with entities from elsewhere is, what the ufonauts have tried to tell us or not to tell us—these are matters that publication of the whole 1897 story may clear up.

The Midwestern “airship” story unfolds

Newspapers in the Midwestern United States first became aware of strange objects in the air when reporters began wiring in accounts of a glowing fireball. The Hudson, Michigan, *Post*, in a dispatch out of Jefferson, related that on March 26: “A beautiful ball of fire was seen in the clouds of this place. For a short time it was very bright, and then it appeared to go down. It lasted for some time.” And, according to the Grand Traverse *Herald* for April 1: “A beautiful ball of fire was seen in the clouds near Holland the other night. One moment it was brilliant, the next dimmed, as if covered by a veil. It lasted about an hour.”

Then events began to crystallise with an account from Galesburg, Michigan. On the night of March 31, at about 10 o’clock, a brilliant white object, accompanied by “a sharp crackling sound”, soared over the city and was visible for 30 seconds or so. One of the witnesses maintained that the phenomenon was a huge black object tipped with flame and flying far above the earth. A Mrs. Wyngate, in nearby Charleston township, swore that she heard human voices from above at the time of the sighting.

As excitement about the airship swept through mid-America, some curious persons stayed out nights to watch for signs of the construction, and one man claimed to have had a terrifying experience as the occupants of the craft tried either to kidnap him or just to play some weird practical joke. One night Robert Hibbard, tramping about his Iowa farm hoping to see the airship, caught sight of a dark object, lighted on each side by what appeared to be incandescent lamps, as it flew in from the south at a mile altitude. When it came directly over his head, the machine changed direction and descended until a grapnel attached to the end of a drag rope hooked his trousers. Then the ship rose again and headed back in the direction it had come. Terrified, Hibbard was dragged some distance, saving himself only when he grabbed on to a small sapling with both hands. The hook tore through his pants, and the airship continued on its way.

Iowa had a large number of sightings throughout late

March and early April. One of them, one of several during the period involving railroads, was made by station agents and operators all along the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway on April 8. First seen at Cedar Rapids at 9 p.m., an airship moved slowly down the line until it faded from view an hour later. A newspaper account describes it as "having a bright, glaring headlight revealing a glistening steel hull, dim wing-like projections on each side, and producing a hissing sound as it glides through the air."

Another railroad story came from engineer F. L. Bullard, on engine 950 of the fast mail, whose train a large airship raced out of Chicago. The airship, by Bullard's estimate, travelled 150 miles an hour as it rapidly outdistanced the locomotive.

Message from "Pegasus"

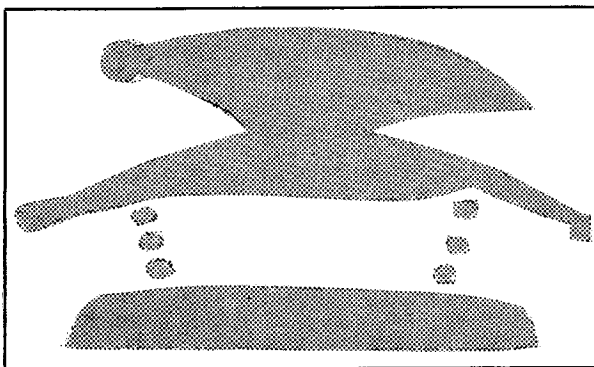
Residents of Appleton, Wisconsin, saw the mysterious object pass over their city on the night of the 11th, and a few days later, N. B. Clark, a farmer living north of the town, found an 18in. iron rod sticking in the ground. Attached to it, he told a local newspaper, was an unsigned letter:

Aboard the Airship "Pegasus", April 9, 1897—The problem of aerial navigation has been solved. The writers have spent the past month cruising about in the airship "Pegasus" and have demonstrated to their entire satisfaction that the ship is a thorough success. We have been able to attain a speed of 150 miles an hour and have risen to a height of 2,500 feet above sea level.

The "Pegasus" was erected at a secluded point ten miles from Layfayette, Tenn., and the various parts of the machine were carried overland from Glasgow, Ky., to that point, being shipped from Chicago, Pittsburg and St. Louis. We have made regular trips of three days each from Layfayette to Yaukon, and no harm has come to the "Pegasus" thus far.

Within a month our application for the patents for a parallel plane air ship will be filed simultaneously at Washington and the European capitals. The ship is propelled by steam and is lighted by electricity and has a carrying power of 1,000 pounds.

■ Hundreds of Holland, Michigan, residents watched an airship floating over Black Lake at 8.35 on the night



This sketch of an unknown airship that passed over Holland, Michigan, appeared in the Benton Harbor Evening News of April 19, 1897.

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of the 11th. "It was a large dark mass," stated the Grand Rapids Evening Press the next day, "apparently lighted with coloured electric lights." After hovering for several minutes, it travelled north-west "in a zig-zag style" and soon disappeared from sight.

In the midst of all this, odd tales of an unknown four-legged creature began to circulate. The Niles, Michigan, Weekly Mirror for April 14 reported, "That terrible animal that made its appearance near Pine Lake and Edwardsburg last year came again the latter part of the week. The men spearing on Pine Lake made for the shore rapidly and three guns were fired in the direction of the terrible noise." Whatever this "terrible noise" was, the creature escaped. The Saginaw Evening News a few days later noted that the animal had slaughtered sheep and cattle, and resembled a panther.*

At about the same time various people in the Niles area saw a huge lighted object (on the night of the 11th), and an airship put in an appearance at Pine Lake just several days later, according, at least, to the nearly incredible testimony of William Megiveron.

Megiveron told the Lansing State Republican that on the night of the 15th he was awakened by a tap on his window, and when he opened his eyes, an intense glare of light nearly blinded him. Stepping outside, he heard a voice from above him. The voice explained that the light emanated from the airship, which had lain concealed behind a bank of clouds since afternoon, when a stray shot from a duckhunter's gun had injured one of the wings. The occupants had been working on repairs since then, the voice said. It then asked for four dozen egg sandwiches and a kettle of coffee for the crew. After Megiveron had complied, a large scoop containing Canadian quarters in payment was lowered from the clouds and pulled back up when the supplies had been loaded on.

The witness thought the craft hovered at an altitude of 300ft., and that it might be as much as half a mile long. All he could see, however, were the outlines of the machine, due to the brilliant searchlight "which made everything below as bright as day and above as dark as midnight during a cyclone."

Megiveron asked several times to be taken aboard, but hoots of laughter greeted each request. He suspected that the crew might have been drinking, since they had asked for a corkscrew.

Whatever the case, just as dawn started to break, the airship took off, heading toward the city.

At least twenty persons observed an airship hovering above the Battle Creek, Michigan, sanatorium on the night of the 12th. According to them, the craft was all ablaze with lights. Describing the phenomenon, a Mr. Dixon said, "The upper part was in the form of a cone, from which was suspended a large object, cylindrical in form. At the rear end of the lower object was some kind of wheel, which made a buzzing sound that was distinctly heard."

Suddenly there was an explosion. Sparks flew, and the ship began to descend from an altitude of a mile down to a half-mile. Another explosion sounded, sparks flew from the wheel, and the craft began to rise again. Its two lights—a red one in front, a light blue one behind—went out, and it no longer could be seen.



Explosion over Kalamazoo

At Kalamazoo, George W. Somers and William Chadburn saw a lighted object passing over them at a great speed. Within moments they heard a dull explosion, followed by a sound as of projectiles flying through the air. Several other people told the newspapers that they, too, had heard an explosion, but had passed it off as thunder.

"But the discoveries of the morning are sufficient to establish the veracity of the two actual observers," noted the Bay City *Times-Press*. "In one place, two miles from Scotts, there was found a large coil of heavy wire, evidently a part of some electrical appliance. At another point a propeller blade of some very light material was discovered in a partially fused condition. Three men engaged in shingling a barn in Comstock township affirm that, upon resuming work on the morning following the occurrence, they found their completed work covered with minute fragments which had in some instances penetrated the shingles and entered the boards beneath."

In a related incident, the next evening an airship crossed over lower Michigan; among the witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. George Parks of Pennfield, who saw a very bright "humming" object flying about 100ft. above their farm. When a portion of it broke off and buried itself into the ground, Parks' wife, badly frightened, would not let her husband approach it.

The next morning Parks and his brother Benjamin dug it up and found a large aluminium wheel, three feet in diameter and in the shape of a turbine. "This is the first time," Parks commented, "that I ever heard of a meteor having wheels." Not particularly impressed, the Saginaw *Courier-Herald* asked, "Will someone tell how an aluminium wheel, made presumably as light as possible consistent with required strength, would fall and bury itself so far in the ground that it would have to be dug up?"

A number of reports on the 12th, in any case, suggest that a crippled airship may have been in operation. At 2.30 p.m. a craft landed at the farm of Z. Thacker near Nilwood, Illinois, and was seen by three men. At 6, a large crowd of miners watched it alight in a grove north of the Green Ridge mining camp. The craft fled as the observers began walking toward it. Sightings were later made at Sherman (8 p.m.) and Williamsville (8.45). "Those who saw it," stated a newspaper account, "say it had a boat which was cigar-shaped, with ears or wings extending from the side, and a canopy on the top similar to a picnic stand." Near Green Ridge a mine operator while hunting saw a man working on the airship's machinery. "The fact of its alighting twice and remaining such a long time in the same locality," the newspaper writer suggested, "leads to the conclusion that the machinery was injured in some manner."

On the 13th, lumberman James G. Macpherson, eating supper in the dining car of a train stopped at Spooner, Wisconsin, had his attention drawn to a strange ruddy glow in the sky. Macpherson estimated it to be ten miles away at first, but in 15 minutes it had flown within half a mile of the train. The witness could not see any definite shape with his naked eye but was certain that he would have been able to with the aid

of binoculars. The light "dipped" and then flew away, and was quickly lost to sight.

Professor John Friske of Harvard, a writer on scientific subjects, was another witness to the sighting. Friske told a reporter that anyone who had doubts about the airship's existence should direct his questions to him.

Warned that the airship was approaching, over 150 persons gathered at the depot in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the same night. The story had been telegraphed from Merrillan by an operator who had seen the craft himself. Shortly afterwards, some of the spectators, among them the Eau Claire depot agent, viewed the high-flying construction through field glasses.

About the same time that night, several individuals in Waukegan, Illinois, watched a red light moving on an erratic course for the north. It was visible for about an hour. Earlier, an object with blue, red and green lights sailed over Benton Harbor and St. Joseph in Michigan. William Peckmann sighted a similar phenomenon over Adrian.

Creature Report

According to several Michigan newspapers, a curious incident occurred at about 4.30 on the afternoon of the 14th, when a balloon-like object, after hovering for an hour near Reynolds, descended and alighted on the ground. A group of farmers cautiously approached and were able to observe a "strange man," 9ft. in height, sitting inside the craft. Next to him lay stacks of heavy clothes "which looked like the pelts of polar bears," yet he was almost naked, as if suffering from the heat.

ADVERTISEMENT

BUFORA NEWS

Northern Conference in Manchester

The Direct Investigation Group On Aerial Phenomena will be acting as hosts. The conference will be held on Saturday, 12th October 1968 in the Friends Meeting House, Manchester. For tickets and details, send a S.A.E. to Mrs. J. Nelstrop, Hon. Sec., DIGAP, 5, Ridgmont Road, Bramhall, Cheshire.

Local Societies

BUFORA now has over 21 affiliated societies and groups. Most of these hold meetings locally and several issue their own publications. A list of organisations is published in BUFORA JOURNAL.

For details of the BRITISH UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, its London lectures and BUFORA JOURNAL, send a 9in. x 4in. S.A.E. to Miss C. Henning (FSR), 99, Mayday Gardens, London S.E.3.

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His speech sounded like bellowing. One farmer walked over to the being, apparently in an attempt to communicate, but the creature, none too hospitable evidently, kicked him savagely and broke his hip.

Reported the *Saginaw Courier-Herald* in a dispatch out of Reynolds, "Great excitement prevails here, and lots of people are flocking here from Morley and Howard City 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 incredulous, and those who have not seen refuse to believe the report, although six of the best people in that locality are here and affirm that it is the truth. From their excited manners we are led to believe that no hoax exists. His balloon seems to be out of repair. At 8.10 last evening the airship passed south and a little west of Howard City. Hundreds of people watched its flight."

Other reports of airships were made at Constantine and Battle Creek, Michigan, and Hillsboro, Illinois, that night. In each case witnesses told of sighting red lights on the craft.

NOTE

* See Charles Bowen's *Mystery Animals*, FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, November/December 1964.

FURTHER READING

- Jerome Clark, *A Contact Claim*, FSR, January/February 1965.
The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship, FSR, July/August 1966.
More on 1897, FSR, July/August 1967.
Gordon W. Creighton, *Saucers and South Africa*, FSR, September/October 1962.
Lucius Farish, *An 1880 UFO*, FSR, May/June 1965.
Donald B. Hanlon, *Texas Odyssey of 1897*, FSR, September/October 1966.
— and Jacques Vallée, *Airships over Texas*, FSR, January/February 1967.
W. H. Watson, *19th Century Paraglider?* FSR, November/December 1967.

1.948 TWENTY YEARS BACK

By Brinsley le Poer Trench



DURING the course of the hearing on UFOs before the House Armed Services Committee of Congress on April 5, 1966, Major Hector Quintanilla, Jr., head of the U.S. Air Force project Bluebook, was asked by Congressman Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania if it was true that none of the UFOs had been tracked on radar.

The major replied: "We have no radar cases which are unexplained."¹

This, of course, was an ambiguous and unsatisfactory reply. Whether the major intended to imply that no UFOs had ever been tracked on radar or whether radar sightings had all been rationally explained during his own tenureship of office is not clear. However, his answer could not have done our cause any good in front of the powerful committee.

Certainly, any implication that UFOs have not been tracked on radar must be refuted and nailed down once and for all.

In 1948, especially during the last quarter, there were many instances of UFOs being picked up on radar. I think it useful to close my 1948 casebook with a look at some of these.

On December 27, 1949, Project Saucer was finally closed down and soon afterwards succeeded by Project Sign. (Both these projects were prior to the formation of Bluebook in 1951). Aimé Michel in his excellent book² gives credit to Major Donald E. Keyhoe for digging out the following cases from the final report of Project Saucer. These cases are given here verbatim from that report.

Case 188. Goose Bay, Labrador, October 29, 1948: A non-astronomical phenomenon traced by radar. The experts should investigate the evidence.

Case 189. Goose Bay again, October 31, 1948: An identical phenomenon, followed by radar.

Case 196. Object travelling against the wind. Observed by radar.

Case 198. A spot on the radar screen moving rapidly and changing direction continuously.

It is interesting to note, too, what one of Major Quintanilla's predecessors at Project Bluebook has to tell us about radar sightings in 1948. The late Edward J. Ruppelt described in his book³ how on October 15, 1948, an F-61, a World War II "Black Widow" night fighter, was flying over Japan *when it got a UFO on its radar*. The object was at an altitude of about 5,000-6,000ft., and moving about at 200 mph. The fighter tried to get close but the UFO accelerated to around 1,200 mph, far outstripping its pursuer. Ruppelt wrote that the aircrew made six attempts to close in on the UFO. However, on one attempt they did get close enough to observe that the UFO was about 20 to 30ft. long and shaped "like a rifle bullet".

Ruppelt went on to relate how a wire was received from Germany on November 23, giving details of what he emphasised was the first report where *a UFO was seen from the air and simultaneously tracked on radar*. This concerned an air force pilot who spotted what looked like a reddish star moving in a southerly direction across Munich. The pilot called base operations and they contacted the radar station. At first radar reported seeing nothing, but after checking again called back to state they did have a target at 27,000ft, some 30 miles south of Munich, travelling at 900 mph. The pilot reported that the object he saw was now in that area. A few minutes later radar called again to say that the UFO had climbed to 50,000ft. and was circling 40 miles south of Munich.

Ruppelt added that the Air Weather Service stated the object was not a balloon. No other aircraft was in the area.

The cases that I have outlined indicate quite clearly that as long ago as 1948 UFOs were being tracked on radar over such widely scattered areas as Germany, Japan and the United States.

Since then there have been a great many radar trackings of UFOs. The late Frank Edwards in his last book¹ states that the Civil Aeronautics Administration
(continued on page 22)

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THE 1897 STORY Part 2

By Jerome Clark and Lucius Farish



ON the morning of April 15, 1897, citizens of Linn Grove, Iowa, saw a large construction moving northward slowly, and several of them—identified as James Evans, F. G. Ellis, Ben Buland, David Evans and Joe Croskey—followed it out into the country, thinking that it might land. About four miles from town, it did. But when its pursuers got within 700 yards of it, the craft spread out its four monstrous wings and flew away. As it rose, its occupants tossed out two boulders "of unknown composition."

Concerning the beings aboard the machine, a news account mentions "two queer-looking persons . . . who made desperate efforts to conceal themselves." The observers said the entities had the longest beards they had ever seen in their lives. (Airship occupants with very long beards figure in two Arkansas contact claims of the period.)

A large dark balloon passed over Shelby, Michigan, at 9 that evening. Viewers described it as having two lights, one white and one green. At Middleville at exactly the same time, "moving and changing lights" coloured red, blue and green appeared in the southwest sky as they travelled northward and downward. An hour and a half later, another object rose out of the east and floated southwestward. This one was shaped like a large balloon with an attached car which possessed coloured lights and which scattered smoke. At 11, college students in Olivet saw three red lights moving rapidly and at great altitude.

To the local paper several Hudson residents gave their impressions of the airship that overflew their city late at night:

Gene Knapp: "It's no hoax about that airship. We had just drove [sic] down to the depot when some of the boys called my attention to the bright red light which seemed to be sailing into town from the west. It looked like a shooting star at first, but when it got down opposite us, on West Main street, we saw a green light about 25 feet from it, and sure, right there before our eyes. We saw the outline of a dark object against the sky, and some of 'em thought they could see several men aboard. It looked as if one of 'em was trying to wave his hat at us."

Charlie Lane: "This is no mariner's yarn. As sure as I live, I saw the airship last night. How high was it? About 400 feet from the ground I should say. Shape? Cigar-shaped and covered with a canvas canopy. It sailed right along rapidly and easily against the wind, which did not seem to have any effect on it."

Sid Lawrence: "It was certainly 25 feet long, had a rudder, was quite a curiosity."

Professor George J. Tripp, asked his opinion, said, "How do I account for it? I don't try to"—then tried to. "I think it was a star the people saw. I would like to have trained my telescope on it, anyway, that would have settled it. Of course, I didn't see it at all, but how

do I account for its moving so fast? Hallucination, some men's minds move swifter than others." So much for the scientific approach.

Mentioning a sighting made by many persons at Charlotte the night before, the April 16 *Detroit Evening News* noted, "Charlotte is a dry town." So much, too, for the perceptiveness of journalists.

After an airship passage the previous night, pressmen at the office of the *Battle Creek Daily Moon* found a large sailor's needle at the door; attached to it was a letter, purportedly from the airship's crew, relating that the craft had flown from San Francisco to the Great Lakes in one day and was now on the return trip.

"Driven by steam"

Saginaw hosted mysterious aerial phenomena in the early morning hours of the 16th. Shortly after midnight, a cloud-like object, dimly lighted, came out of the southwest and kept on a northbound course "at a terrific rate of speed." At 2.45, as they patrolled on the corner of Astor and Jefferson, Roundsman Halsey and Patrolman Foley of the police force heard what sounded like the rattle of a drum. Looking up, they sighted a cigar-shaped machine and something hanging about 10 feet below the main body, carrying a red and yellow light that appeared to be shining through canvas. The airship travelled at approximately 25 miles per hour, by the policemen's estimate. A telephone workman, Thomas S. Prentice, claimed to have seen the object from the west side of the river.

"According to late reports from different parts of the country," stated a local newspaper later in the day, "the strange messenger is a real airship, operated by some of its inventors, who are simply making a trial trip and who have already made applications for patents. The principle on which it is constructed is that of the parallel plane and it is operated by steam."

Several residents of Bay City saw what at first resembled a "flying cloud" as they walked home at 12.30 a.m. from a lodge meeting. When the object got closer, it revealed itself as a material construction passing through an overcast sky. Flying slowly over Center Street, it seemed not more than 50 feet high. There was a red light at each end, and the craft itself shone with a dull red glow, as if there were lights on the other side. Conical in shape, it was from 50 to 75 feet in length, perhaps one-third that in width. The observers could see nothing that offered a clue to the object's method of propulsion.

The ship crossed into nearby Essexville and then seemed to land. No one ventured out to see if it had.

Sky-"swimmer"?

Mount Vernon, Illinois, recorded what must surely rank as one of the weirdest reports of the 1897 period. The *Saginaw Courier-Herald* recounted the bare details

(our italics): "What is thought to have been the mysterious airship was seen [at Mount Vernon] by more than a hundred persons. It was first observed about 8.30 o'clock and continued in sight for half an hour. Mayor Wells, who had an excellent view of the mysterious visitor from the observatory attached to his residence, says it resembled *the body of a huge man swimming through the air with an electric light at his back.*"†

Airships appeared at Pittsford, Clayton, and Ann Arbor (all in Michigan) the same evening. At Cadmus, one excitable soul shot at the object, thinking it was a flying dragon.

Three night men employed by the Wallin Leather Company in Grand Rapids reported seeing a bright white light in the western sky. They watched it at intervals over a three-and-a-half hour period, until it disappeared in the north at 3 a.m. on the 17th.

An 1897 "message"

Later in the morning, at 6.15, on his way to work, Mr. C. T. Smith stumbled upon something on the sidewalk. Upon examination it proved to be an envelope on which someone had written "From the Airship Travellers." Inside was a letter, "written," related a news story, "on note paper with a purple indellible [sic] pencil, . . . attached to a piece of stiff wire about five inches long, at the other end of which was fastened, as a weight, one of the iron combination stoppers and bottle openers commonly used to open beer bottles."

The message read:

To whoever finds this. 2,500 feet above the level of the sea, headed north at this writing, testing the airship. afraid we are lost. we are unable to control our engine. please notify our people. think we are somewhere over Michigan.

Arthur B. Coats, Laurel, Miss.
C. C. Harris, Gulport, Miss.
C. W. Rich, Richburg, Miss.

April 16th, '97. 9 p.m.

An unidentified flying object flew over Three Rivers that night.

In another incident involving airships and railroads, persons at Grant Station in Bailey reported watching a

huge object, about 200 feet in length, flying above the northbound evening train. The phenomenon seemed to be about a mile above the earth.

The next afternoon, a strange explosion rocked the village of Saline. Upon hearing the sound, workers just north of town had their attention attracted to a large dark object moving rapidly westward against a strong wind.

Between 8 and 9 p.m. an airship passed over Saginaw at a fast rate of speed, heading in a northerly direction. At Manistique, citizens viewed the craft travelling westward. C. R. Orr, a witness, estimated its speed at 1,000 m.p.h.—which certainly sounds extravagant, considering the relatively slow speeds other observers in other cases had reported. At any rate, the construction resembled, the Sault Ste. Marie News said, "a Washington cigar with a bright light in the centre of it."

Shortly after midnight, a railroad fireman named Widosky left the village of Wakefield and began walking back to his home in Thomaston. He happened to be looking down as he stepped over a mud puddle—and there he saw reflected the swaying lights of something above him. Glancing upward, he caught sight of three lights—red, green, and white—soaring across the sky with an odd undulating motion. The next morning, when he told friends, they laughingly suggested he had taken his first drink. (Mr. Widosky did not indulge.) To back up his story, he saw to it that the next night he had six potential witnesses with him, and, just after midnight, they all observed lights identical to those Widosky had seen 24 hours earlier.

An airship with a light at each end flew over Jackson on the evening of the 21st. The following night, at 11, two men of Hemlock watched an aircraft sailing southward "at a fearful rate of speed."

[This article will be concluded in our next issue]

NOTE

† "I'd like to know what Mr. W. H. Smith saw, Sept. 18, 1877, in the sky, moving over the city of Brooklyn. It looked like a winged human form (New York Sun, Sept. 21, 1877)." Charles Fort, *Lo! Ch. 12.*

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assuredly be reported as UFOs. Many of them must be hidden away in our files unrecognised. Where are all these UFO reports?

Theories

There have been many theories to explain ball lightning, but only two stand up to examination. One involves chemical combustion, the other a direct current electrical discharge. The first supposes that a very low concentration of an inflammable gas is in the air, when a lightning discharge ignites it: little balls of flame form and dart about. This theory is inelegant, but it has been demonstrated in the laboratory. The second theory supposes that a highly charged thundercloud has not yet reached the point where it can produce the usual lightning flash. If, beneath it, there is a localised patch of air that is electrically different from the rest, then the

"FLYING SAUCER REVIEW", LONDON, VOL. 15, N^o 1, JAN. - FEB. 1. 1969

THE 1897 STORY Part 3

Jerome Clark and Lucius Farish



ON April 23, 1897, on a farm in Burton township near Flint, Daniel Gray heard a rumbling, whizzing sound over his head. For a few seconds he could see a dark object flashing away, and then, even before he was able to regain his composure, something fell from the sky and thudded into the ground near him. When he picked it up, he found that it was a Toronto, Canada, newspaper dated October 5, 1896, dry and in almost perfect condition.

An airship was observed at Omer on the 24th, and on the same date the South Haven *Sentinel* noted, "So many people have seen the noted airship that has been flitting for the last two weeks back and forth over South Haven, it would take much space to give all their names."

Cigar-shaped objects

Two residents of Freeland, Leonard and Henry Krause, viewed an unknown object on the evening of the 25th. At Sidaw, a resident related his experience of the 26th to the *Marquette Mining Journal*: "I was taking a short walk before retiring for the night. As a rule, I am a person who retires early, but this night I happened to be out late. It was about 11 o'clock.

"I happened to cast my eyes upward, and to my astonishment I saw three large lights, red, green and white. When I first noticed the strange object, it seemed to be over Booth's mill, and was sailing in a south-easterly direction. It was going, perhaps, sixty miles an hour. I was near the Nester estate warehouse at the time, and before I could get anyone else to the site, the ship had disappeared from view.

"It was a bright night and I could plainly discern a cigar-shaped object and a basket below, somewhat resembling a street car. I should judge it was about 2,000 feet from the ground."

Two Dayton people, returning home at 2 a.m. from staying up with a sick neighbour, were startled by the

electrical lines of force may preferentially pass through there and cause a localised breakdown of the air. A corona discharge may form in this region—something less than a full-scale spark, but rather similar in principle to a Neon sign. Going into the theory in detail and solving the mathematical equations predicts spherical or ellipsoidal shapes, with characteristics very like those actually observed. The beauty of this theory is that it can account satisfactorily for all the well-established properties of the phenomenon, and can probably be modified slightly if necessary.

Understanding of ball lightning has progressed a long way even since Maxwell Cade wrote about it in these pages. It is beginning to become possible to distinguish several different categories of the phenomenon. It would be a triumph if UFO research could contribute something to a further understanding of ball lightning.

appearance of a huge cigar with a lighted basket under it. In the light could be seen the forms of three human-looking occupants.

Occupants, music and a grappling hook!

Occupants also figure in a Holton story. On the night of the 29th, at 11.30, a huge lighted object came out of the north and slowed down, finally hovering over the bridge. People streamed out into the street to hear the sounds of revellers aboard the ship. Loud talk and music, "the like of which never was heard in this place," could be heard all during the craft's 55-minute appearance. The phenomenon itself measured 300ft., plus a 40ft. tail; in width and depth, about 90ft.

Just as the tail started to whirl, the beings dropped a grappling hook which caught one of the viewers on the ground. Then the ship flew away. The captured man returned from White Cloud the next day "and has been talking ever since about aerial navigation."

"Mysterious lights have been seen on Long Lake during the past week," the Grand Traverse *Herald* a bit enigmatically informed its readers.

And on May 1 the Saginaw *Evening News* related that a shoe of huge proportions, discovered on the railroad track near O'Donnell, Spencer & Co.'s plant, may have fallen from the airship.

* * * * *

Hints of a whole new dimension to the airship enigma, suggesting that it may have been a world-wide phenomenon rather than solely an American, have been furnished by aviation historian Dale M. Titler. The original manuscript of his *Wings of Mystery* serves as the source for the information which follows.

On July 11, 1897, Swedish aeronaut Salomon Auguste Andree, together with a crew of two, attempted to pilot a balloon from Spitzbergen across the North Pole to a mainland on the other side. In the wake of great public

interest in the venture, a number of sightings of a balloon-like object, believed to be one of Andree's, were made—but it later developed that Andree's balloon had been in none of the areas reporting sightings.

On July 17, a woman in a small Swedish town saw a balloon with drag ropes and a net. She said there was a man in the gondola.

The crew of the steamer *Kong Halfdan*, off Norway between Raugesund and Ryvarden on August 13, sighted a "big balloon" which passed so close that its drag ropes could be seen.

Siberian sighting

At Antsiferona, Siberia, on September 17, observers watched a "round object" for five minutes as it headed northwest.

"The night of September 26th, at half past two in the morning," wrote a Russian engineer, "I observed a balloon drifting rapidly southeast over the town of Yakovlevskaya. . . . The balloon had an electric (phosphorescent) sheen. It was visible for less than three minutes, disappearing rapidly over the horizon."

As Titler comments, "An *electric sheen*? *Rapidly disappearing*? Surely this wasn't Andree's balloon. But what other aerial craft could the engineer have described?"

What other aerial craft, indeed?

Some time during the summer (the date is not furnished) an Indian youth near Winnipeg, Canada, saw "an object resembling a balloon giving out a considerable amount of light. . . ." In August a woman and her daughter in Caribou, British Columbia, sighted a round object moving from west to east. As it approached, it grew larger and sank lower in the sky. Then the witnesses saw two shapes, one above the other, and the object shot upward over Quesnelle Lake and disappeared from sight.

"None of these last three objects could have been balloons—much less Andree's," Titler concludes. "They were something else."

[Comment

1. With specific reference to the American 1897 reports, a word of caution is necessary. Two of the stories are rather suspect, we fear, and before they find a place in the literature of ufology, we feel that we had better outline our reasons for entertaining doubts about them.

First, the Reynolds, Michigan, landing of April 14. Our source is the *Saginaw Courier-Herald* for April 17, but the incident is also described in the *Lansing State Republican* for the same date; only the latter paper gives the date as the 17th (rather than as the 14th) and the location as Williamston. Otherwise, the account is the same, word for word, except where the *Herald* mentions "lots of people . . . from Morley and Howard City," the *Republican* refers to the same "from Okemos and Locke."

All of which leads one to suspect a journalistic hoax something like the Aurora, Texas, fiasco. It may be, however, that an irresponsible editor of the *Republican* got the story and gave it a more local base, changing the date to add to the sensation.

Nonetheless, we must be careful in studying the

report for another reason; the description of the occupant certainly does not tally with those supplied in other accounts of the time. The 1897 ufonauts were quite human-like in appearance and size, and so a "monster" story will naturally be viewed with suspicion.

We do not necessarily urge rejection of the story, only very cautious consideration of it.

Secondly, one cannot help wondering if the Holton "merry-makers" of the 29th were some sort of newspaper joke. The story, which appeared in the April 30 *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, is written in so trivial a manner that it tempts one to classify it with the many other satirical pieces that the airship inspired in contemporary newspapers. Notice, for example, how the writer treats the abduction of a Holton citizen: "But just as [the airship] began to move, a grappling hook was let down and caught one of our most truthful citizens who was instantly hoisted on board and carried away. The truthful citizen came back on the 11.30 train from White Cloud and has been talking ever since about aerial navigation."

Perhaps the reporter heard the story second-hand and simply could not take it seriously. Or perhaps he invented the "abduction" to poke fun at Robert Hibbard's claim (which received wide publicity and with which he could well have been familiar) and the alleged gullibility of airship witnesses and believers.

But we have included the account among the serious reports because of similar testimony about loud noises and music emanating from airships.

2. Since we began digging up some of the 1897 data, we have noted with satisfaction a growing interest in the period. One individual to whom UFO researchers owe a debt of gratitude is Mr. Gary Larreategui, who is responsible for bringing our attention to most of the material we have used in this article. Mr. Larreategui, showing dedication that unfortunately very few ufologists possess, has spent many hours carefully researching the newspapers of his native Michigan, providing us with some of the most revealing accounts yet.

Donald Hanlon, an associate of Jacques Vallée, is in the early stages of putting together a comprehensive study, tentatively titled *Enigma of the Airship*, based upon his own collection of approximately 200 reports. Another American writer, author of a valuable reference work on UFOs, is considering a new book which will use 1897 data. And by the time this article appears in print, Gordon Lore and Harold Deneault's long-awaited volume on the historical sightings, including 1897, should be available. In the meantime ufologists like Charles F. Flood and Ted Bloecher continue quietly to amass information.

Some of us have even begun to expand our efforts to include the 1896 California and 1909-10 Eastern U.S.A. wave, finding material too long ignored. Still, we have barely begun, and there is much, much more to do.

One thing that would greatly facilitate our work, of course, would be the discovery of research contemporary to 1897. John Keel suggested in a personal conversation with Jerome Clark that some enterprising turn-of-the-century journalist may have done a book on the airship scare. If we could locate it somehow, we could be taken

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2

a giant step forward.

For many reasons 1897 is vital to our comprehension of the great UFO riddle. Therefore, we strongly urge readers of the FLYING SAUCER REVIEW to join us in our undertaking. Interested North Americans should study newspaper files of late March, all of April, and early May 1897. West Coast researchers should check the papers of November and December 1896, with spot checks into months before and after.

There is cause to believe as well that 1880, 1883 (in fact the whole 1877-87 period, termed by the late M. K. Jessup "the incredible decade"), 1907-10, and 1913 have something to offer American and Canadian investigators.

Residents of the British Isles might check out the airship flap of 1909, which Fort describes briefly in *Lo!* Ufologists in middle Europe, especially Germany, should study the newspapers and magazines of the late 1850's, and Frenchmen should find the 1860's fertile territory. South Africans should concentrate on 1914.

One last suggestion: Perhaps a Canadian ufologist could go through the Toronto papers of October 5, 1896, to see if there is anything in them of conceivable relevance to our subject. By dropping this specific issue at Dan Gray's feet, the ufonauts may have been trying to tell us something.

Flying Objects, related how the March 1950 issue of *True* magazine carried an article called "How Scientists tracked Flying Saucers", written by Commander McLaughlin himself.

"I am convinced," McLaughlin wrote, "that it was a flying saucer, and further, that these discs are spaceships from another world, operated by animate, intelligent beings."

For some extraordinary reason his story had been given full clearance by the military, but according to Ruppelt the material in the article was in direct contradiction to all releases made by them during the previous two years. This is another example of the confusion and conflicting views foisted on the public. Hot news and then cold douches repeated alternately all the time.

The impact of the Commander's article in *True* magazine was formidable and many people were convinced that if scientists were seeing UFOs then there was something very real from outer space watching our planet.

The sequel was that Commander McLaughlin suddenly found himself posted from White Sands to the destroyer *Bristol*. Possibly the United States Navy prefers its regular officers to maintain silence over some matters in the same way that our Royal Navy is traditionally known as the silent service.

SOURCES

The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects by Edward J. Ruppelt (Doubleday) 1956.
with about Flying Saucers by Aimé Michel (Criterion Books)

20 YEARS BACK

Brinsley le Poer Trench 1949

THE year 1949 was not a vintage one as regards the number of reported sightings. However, two notable incidents occurred and the first of these took place on April 24.

At that time Commander R. B. McLaughlin, a regular Naval officer, was in charge of a team of scientists at White Sands Testing Ground, New Mexico. Actually, during 1948 and 1949 McLaughlin and his team made several UFO sightings, but the April 24, 1949, one is generally considered to be the best one.

At about 10.30 a.m. Commander McLaughlin's team were preparing to send up one of the giant 100-foot diameter Naval Skyhook balloons. The sky was crystal clear. They had already sent aloft a weather balloon to check lower altitude winds. Some of the team under Charles B. Moore, Jr., were busy tracking this balloon at about 10,000ft. when suddenly one man shouted and drew their attention to another object much higher and away to the left of the balloon.

To their astonishment the team of scientists saw an elliptical-shaped UFO which was whitish-silver in colour. One of them swung the theodolite being used to track the weather balloon round on to the UFO and tracked it for a whole minute. The unknown object finally climbed away very fast and was lost to sight in a matter of seconds.

Subsequently, the scientists estimated that the UFO had been at a height of 56 miles when first spotted and travelling at 7 miles per second, that is at 17,000 miles per hour!

The late Edward J. Ruppelt, former head of Project Blue Book, in his book *The Report on Unidentified*

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Mystery Airships of the 1800's



PART ONE: "No form of dirigible or heavier-than-air machine was flying — or could fly — at this time." And yet . . .

By Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman

MARCH 26, 1880, was a quiet Friday night in tiny Galisteo Junction, N. Mex. (now the town of Lamy). The train from nearby Santa Fe had come and gone and the railroad agent, his day's work finished, routinely locked up the depot and set out with a couple of friends for a short walk.

Suddenly they heard voices which seemed to be coming from the sky. The men looked up to see an object, "monstrous in size," rapidly approaching from the west, flying so low that elegantly-drawn characters could be discerned on the outside of the peculiar vehicle. Inside, the

occupants, who numbered 10 or so and looked like ordinary human beings, were laughing and shouting in an unfamiliar language and the men on the ground also heard music coming from the craft. The craft itself was "fish-shaped" — like a cigar with a tail — and it was driven by a huge "fan" or propeller.

As it passed overhead one of the occupants tossed some objects from the car. The depot agent and his friends recovered one item almost immediately, a beautiful flower with a slip of fine silk-like paper containing characters which reminded the men of designs they had seen on Jap-

MYSTERY AIRSHIPS OF THE 1800's

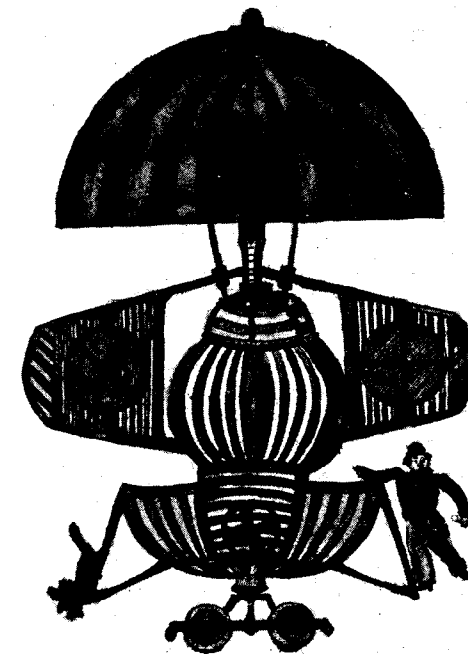
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its propeller clearly indicate it was heavier than air, but such a flying machine didn't then exist according to British authority Charles H. Gibbs-Smith: "Speaking as an aeronautical historian who specializes in the periods before 1910, I can say with certainty that the only airborne vehicles, carrying passengers, which could possibly have been seen anywhere in North America . . . 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."

NEVERTHELESS, mysterious "airships" were seen in many parts of the world in the last half of the 19th Century and the early years of the 20th. And plans for the construction of such craft were not unknown.

In 1848 gold fever seized America. On January 24 a workman discovered the precious metal in Sutter's millrace in California's Sacramento Valley. Within weeks the entire Pacific coast knew about it and a few months later "gold" was on the tongue of every easterner who ever dreamed of easy fortune.

Getting to those goldfields, how-



Dellschau alleged bizarre aircraft actually were test-flown in 1860's.

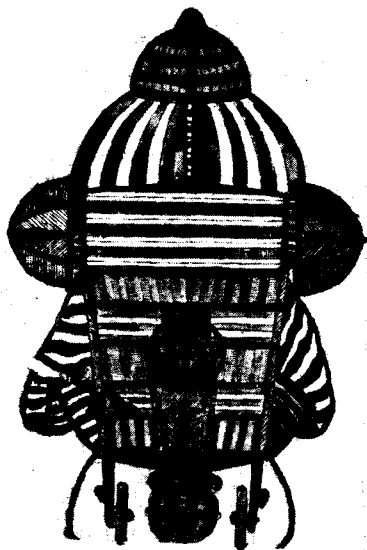
ever, was a problem, for the inland parts of the young nation were largely unsettled. A unique solution — air travel — came from "R. Porter & Company," a firm which listed its address as Room 40 of the Sun Building in New York City. In the latter part of 1848 the company distributed an advertising flyer in the eastern United States which promised more than it ever delivered.

Touting "THE BEST ROUTE TO THE CALIFORNIA GOLD!" the flyer read

anese chests which held tea.

Soon thereafter the aerial machine ascended and sailed away toward the east at high speed.

The next morning searchers found a cup—one of the items the witnesses had seen thrown



Dellschau scrapbooks contained great variety of peculiar airship drawings.

out of the craft but had been unable to locate in the darkness.

"It is of very peculiar workmanship," the *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican* reported, "entirely different to anything used in this country."

The depot agent took the cup and the flower and put them on display. Before the day was

over, however, this physical evidence of the passage of the early unidentified object had vanished. In the evening a mysterious gentleman identified only as a "collector of curiosities" appeared in town, examined the finds, suggested they were Asiatic in origin and offered such a large sum of money for them that the agent had no choice but to accept. The "collector" scooped up his purchases and never was seen again.

Of course the story of aviation does not begin on December 17, 1903, the date of Orville Wright's 12-second aerial hop at Kitty Hawk. Long before that scientists and inventors had struggled to unlock the secrets of powered flight and to build what an 1897 issue of *Scientific American* called the "true flying machine; that is, one which is hundreds of times heavier than the air upon which it rests, (and flies) by reason of its dynamic impact, and not by the aid of any balloon or gasbag whatsoever."

But nothing in the early history of flight tells us what a huge airborne cigar was doing over New Mexico in 1880, especially as it "appeared to be entirely under the control of the occupants and . . . guided by a large fan-like apparatus," and also could ascend with startling speed. Its "monstrous size" and

in part that the company was "making active progress in the construction of an 'Aerial Transport' for the express purpose of carrying passengers between New York and California.

"It is expected to put this machine in operation about the first of April, 1849, and the transport is expected to make a trip to the gold region and back in seven days. . . ."

On the flyer the "aerial locomotive" is illustrated—a huge cigar-shaped device, identified as a "gasbag," with a tail. Under it, attached with "sturdy material arrows can't puncture," is a similarly-shaped car with windows in its midsection. "Snug gondola with benches for 50 or more passengers," the caption reads. From the top of the gondola stretches a long pipe which is identified as "a steam engine for controlled propulsion through sunny skies at 60 miles the hour."

Except for this pipe, entrepreneur Porter's vessel is almost a dead ringer for the type of "UFO" widely reported in the late 1800's and early 1900's which came to be called "the airship," although obviously there had to be more than one of them and they did not all look alike. But in the advertisement of an obscure company lie the first hints of a bizarre mystery which is stag-

gering in its implications.*

DURING THE 1850's mysterious "airships" regularly crossed the skies of Germany and just before that, probably in the year 1848, an enigmatic young German named C. A. A. Dellschau immigrated to the United States. Dellschau's own testimony places him in Sonora, a California mining town, in the 1850's. Where he might have been in the decades after that is unknown. We do know, however, that about the turn of the century he married a widow and took up residence in Houston, Tex., where he lived in virtual seclusion. He had no friends; by all accounts his quarrelsome disposition kept everyone at a distance. Dismissed as an eccentric by the few who knew him, Dellschau devoted hours to the compilation of a series of scrapbooks filled with clippings, drawings and cryptic notations. He died in 1924 at the age of 92.

Were it not for a chance discovery many years later Dellschau's life would have gone unnoticed. But one day in May 1969 a UFOlogist named P. G. Navarro happened to stroll past an

*We do not pretend to "solve" this mystery. What we offer instead are possibilities suggested by a wide range of often conflicting evidence complicated by the distance in time separating us from the events described (which makes firsthand investigation impossible in all but rare instances).

aviation exhibit at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. Two large scrapbooks (Dellschau's) caught his eye and he stopped to take a closer look.*

He found that the scrapbooks contained old news stories and articles about attempts of various inventors to construct heavier-than-air flying machines. But these were not nearly so interesting as Dellschau's drawings of strange-looking, cumbersome vessels which he claimed *actually had been flown at one time.*

Navarro, his curiosity aroused, sought more of the scrapbooks and over a period of time acquired 10 more—from such places as a junk shop in Houston and from a woman art collector who had been interested in Dellschau's strange drawings. Navarro even talked with Dellschau's stepdaughter, then an old woman. Finally he set out to make sense of Dellschau's notes which had been penned in English, German and code. When he had finished he had reconstructed an incredible story.

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The club worked in secrecy and its members were not permitted to talk about their activities or to use the aircraft for their own purposes. One member who threatened to take his machine to the public in the hope of making a fortune died in an

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Several days into the controversy, the inventor dispensed with the services of lawyer Collins because he was talking too much. W. H. H. Hart, a former state attorney general and a highly respected man, took over Collins' job. In subsequent newspaper interviews Hart revealed that two airships existed, one in the east and the other in California. "I have been concerned in the eastern invention for some time personally," he said. "The idea is to consolidate both interests."

The western craft would be used as a weapon of war. "From what I have seen of it," Hart said, "I have not the least doubt that it will carry four men and

1,000 pounds of dynamite. I am quite convinced that two or three men could destroy the city of Havana in 48 hours."

Hart thus represented both airship inventors, one in California and one in New Jersey. The former had Hart say, "... if the Cubans would give him \$10 million he would wipe out the Spanish stronghold." This was not the last time airships and Cuba* would be mentioned in the same breath, as we shall see.

Early in December 1896 a stranger appeared at a business establishment in Fresno, Calif., and inquired for a George Jennings. Covered with dust, the man looked as if he had traveled a long distance. When Jennings stepped out of a back room he greeted the visitor like an old friend. The two men engaged in whispered conversation and the persons standing nearby were nonplussed to overhear the word "airship" spoken more than once.

Later Jennings talked freely to a reporter for the *Fresno Semi-Weekly Expositor*, balking only at giving his friend's name.

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The next afternoon an airship passed over Oak Park, Calif., leaving a trail of smoke and soon San Francisco, Oakland and other cities and towns in the north-central part of California had their own stories in all the newspapers.

Several persons now stepped forward to tell of earlier sightings. One was a fruit rancher near Bowman, Placer County, who said he and members of his family had watched an airship fly by at 100 miles an hour in late October. Even more remarkable was the statement of a man who claimed that in August he and fellow hunters had tracked a wounded deer across Tamalpais Mountain until they came to a clearing where six men were working on an airship.

The most baffling part of the whole flap, which lasted well into December 1896, was the role of "E. H. Benjamin," a dentist whose name the newspapers always enclosed in quotation marks, as if they had reason to doubt his identity. It was either Benjamin or his uncle who that November approached George D. Collins, a San Francisco lawyer, and asked him to represent his interests in the patenting of an airship. He told the incredulous Collins that he had come from Maine to California seven years before in order to

conduct his experiments without danger of interruption.

Collins told reporters that his wealthy client (whom he never identified) did his work near Oroville where Collins himself had viewed the invention — an enormous construction 150 feet long. "It is built on the aeroplane system and has two canvas wings 18 feet wide and rudder shaped like a bird's tail," the attorney said. "I saw the thing ascend about 90 feet under perfect control."

On November 17, Collins went on, the airship had flown the 60 miles between Oroville and Sacramento in 45 minutes. This was not the first flight the inventor had made. For two weeks he had been flying in attempts to perfect the craft's navigational apparatus.

This led to the story in the *Sacramento Bee* for November 23, datelined Oroville: "The rumor that the airship which is alleged to have passed over Sacramento was constructed near this town seems to have a grain of truth in it. The parties who could give information if they would are extremely reticent. They give evasive answers or assert they know absolutely nothing about it.

"Not a single person that saw or knew of an airship being constructed near here can be found

where I do not know myself. It is also true that the man who was in here a short time ago is one of the inventors. He told me the trip to this country was involuntary upon the part of the men in the airship. In other words the machine came itself and they couldn't stop it. (I was told) that they were flying, as usual, around Contra Costa County hills and rose to a height of about 1,000 feet. Suddenly the airship struck a current of air and refused to answer to its steering gear. It was borne rapidly southward against all efforts to change its course until suddenly the current of air seemed to lessen and the machine once more became manageable. The men aboard at once descended and flew about looking for a hiding place, which they at length found."

Jennings said he was sure that individuals in nearby Watertown and Selma must have observed the craft as it limped through the county in search of a "hiding place." Sure enough, the day be-

fore his encounter with the aeronaut, the *San Francisco Call* had published a letter from five Watertown men who said they had seen an enormous airship nearly collide with a cornice on the city's post office building the evening of November 20. The craft had an "intensely brilliant" light and the witnesses could see human forms aboard.

The evening of December 5 Selma citizens were treated to the unnerving spectacle of a low-flying brilliantly-illuminated object sailing rapidly toward the southeast.

"The character of the witnesses is such as to leave no doubt that they saw just what they described," the *Selma Irrigator* editorialized.

After the first week of December the airships seemed to have disappeared, the "inventors" were heard from no more and everything returned to normal — but not for long. The incredible part was yet to come.

(This is Part I of a three-part series.)



FROM POPCORN TO GINSENG

A POOR POPCORN vendor of Chonan, South Korea, claimed that a mountain god came to him in a dream in October 1969 and directed him to a strange mountain slope several miles away. There he discovered 10 herbaceous plants which turned out to be genuine wild ginseng. Experts have valued his find — which is treasured as an elixir of life — at \$2,146.00.

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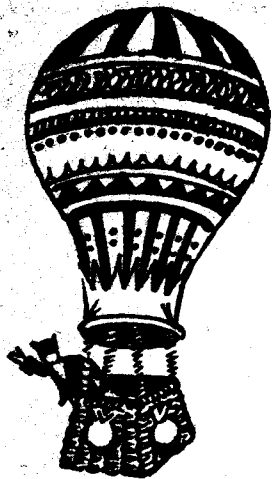
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FATE, JUNE 1973



PART TWO

The existence of the craft is beyond doubt but what powered them? Who were the members of the secret "Aero Club"?

Mystery Airships of the 1800's

By Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman

THE AIRSHIP as a practical invention is believed to be so nearly ripe that a story of its appearance in the sky is not necessarily to be received with disrespect," *Harper's Weekly* commented in its April 24, 1897, issue . . . not unless you assumed that thousands of Americans had lost their senses, a discomfoting notion which some scientists, editors and skeptics seemed to embrace. Prof. George Hough, a Northwestern University astronomer, assured everyone that the "airship" was nothing but the star Alpha Orionis as perceived by drunks, fools and hysterics. Most newspapers ridiculed reports of the airship, finally desisting only for fear of offending the growing numbers

of readers who had seen the craft.

California's airship, reported in November 1896, was the first to receive widespread publicity but that same month an unidentified flying object passed through central Nebraska and sightings in the state continued until the following May. Delaware farmers saw airships as early as January 1897.

It took a sighting in Omaha involving hundreds of witnesses to put the airships back in the headlines, however. The low-flying object, a large bright light, "too big for a balloon," appeared on the night of March 29, 1897, and was visible for more than half an hour.

From then on America's skies

The Call
 SAN FRANCISCO, SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 22, 1896—TWENTY-EIGHT PAGES.

SAW THE MYSTIC FLYING LIGHT

Oaklanders Who Believe an Airship Hovered Over Them.

Say That They Saw a Dark Body Above the Gleam.

It Was Headed for San Francisco and Seemed About to Come to Earth.

OAKLAND OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO CALL, 202 Broadway, Nov. 21.

were filled with airships. The reports came primarily from mid-western states and descriptions of the ships varied — as these random examples show:

Everest, Kans., April 1 (*Kansas City Times*): "The basket or car seemed to be 25 to 30 feet long, shaped like an Indian canoe. Four light wings extended from the car; two wings were triangular. A large dark hulk

was discernible immediately above the car and was generally supposed by the watchers to be an inflated gasbag."

Chicago, April 11 (*Chicago Times-Herald*): "The lower portion of the airship was thin and made of some light white metal like aluminum. The upper portion was dark and long like a big cigar, pointed in front and with some kind of arrangement in the

rear to which cables are attached."

Texas, April 16 (*New York Sun*): "... shaped like a Mexican cigar, large in the middle and small at both ends, with great wings resembling those of an enormous butterfly. It was brilliantly illuminated by the rays of two great searchlights and was sailing in a southeasterly direction with the velocity of wind, presenting a magnificent appearance."

Numerous persons reported seeing normal-looking men and women inside the ships. One of the most interesting "occupant" reports came from M. G. Sisson, postmaster at Greenfield, Ill. On the afternoon of April 19, 1897, while walking his dog through the woods he spotted an airship 150 feet above him — a phenomenon he found less unsettling than the sight of a woman standing on a deck on the bow of the craft netting pigeons. When she saw Sisson she quickly stepped inside and the craft flew off.

Later that day Thomas Bradburg of Hagaman, about nine miles east of Greenfield, found part of a letter supposedly dropped from the airship. On a printed letterhead of "Airship Co., Oakland, Calif." it read:

"We are having a delightful time and plenty to eat. Mollie's scheme for running down birds

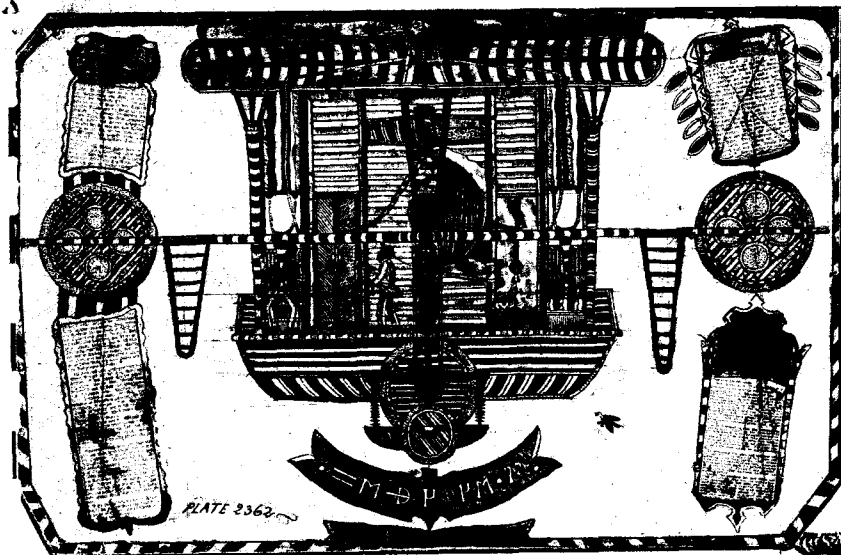
and catching them with a net works excellently; we feast daily upon pigeon pie.

"Since starting out we have greatly increased the velocity of the ship. The following figures will give some idea of the speed which we are now able to make: St. Louis, April 15, 8:30 P.M.; Chicago, same evening, 9:33; Kansas City, one hour and 4 minutes later."

Purportedly many such "messages" were released from air ships and no doubt the majority were hoaxes. We mention the letter found by Bradburg because of its possible tie-in with Sisson's experience (whether Bradburg had heard Sisson's story before he "found" the letter is unanswerable) and because "Oakland, Calif." on the letterhead takes us back to the controversies of November 1896 as to the inventor's place of residence discussed in Part I of this article.

* * *

THE EVENTS of 1896, incredible as they were, are relatively uncomplicated compared to what happened in 1897. California's controversy concerned only one alleged inventor, the mysterious "E. H. Benjamin," but April 1897 produced an onslaught of conflicting claims involving a host of people — stories which made it obvious that some



Drawings like this one from Dellschau's scrapbook reportedly were found also in John O. Preast's home in Nebraska, earning him title of "airship inventor."

one was lying. Sometimes it was he "witnesses," sometimes the newspapers and sometimes it may have been the airship occupants themselves.

Let us examine several "contact" claims of this period:

Springfield, Ill., April 15: Farmhands Adolph Winkle and John Hulle allegedly saw an airship land two miles outside the city and talked with its occupants, two men and a woman, who said they would "make a report to the government when Cuba* is declared free."

Harrisburg, Ark., April 21: At 1:00 A.M. a strange noise

awakened a man identified as ex-Senator Harris and through his bedroom window he saw an airship descending to the ground. The occupants, two young men, a woman and an elderly man with a dark waist-length beard, got out and helped themselves to a supply of fresh well water. Overcome by curiosity, Harris went outside and engaged the old man in a long conversation, during which the latter claimed he had inherited the secret of antigravity from his

*As we pointed out last month this period (1895-1897) spawned the Spanish-American War, over the issue of Cuban independence.

talked with the three for a while, saying they subsisted on birds which they would overtake and capture in flight. Before leaving the aeronauts offered any one of them a free ride and ended up taking James Davis to Huntington, 15 miles away.

This story appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in the form of a letter from two Jenny Lind residents, who urged the paper to contact R. M. McDowell, general manager of the Western Coal and Mining Company in St. Louis. McDowell told the *Post-Dispatch*, "Yes, I know all those persons. I have extensive works at Jenny Lind. I don't understand the letter, though. It is very strange."

Hot Springs, Ark., May 6: John J. Sumpter, Jr., and John McLemore, police officers testified in an affidavit that they had seen a 60-foot airship land that dark, rainy night. There were three occupants, a young man and a woman and an older man with a long dark beard. The latter approached the lawmen carrying a lantern while the young man pulled a large sack with water and the woman stayed in the shadows, apparently hoping to remain unobserved. The old man said they would stop off at Nashville after traveling the country. The officers turned down an offer for a ride and then left on other

business. When they returned 40 minutes later the ship was gone.

The *Fort Smith Daily News Record* noted that while Sumpter and McLemore were subjected to a great deal of ridicule "they, however, most seriously maintain that it is absolutely true, and their earnestness is puzzling many, who, while unable to accept the story as a fact, yet see that the men are not jesting."

Are these stories to be taken seriously? If they are hoaxes, at least they are not so obvious as many of the tales that circulated during the three months of the 1897 airship scare. And the incidents detailed above have a certain consistency. Three of them note the presence of a lone young woman with one or two young men; two of them describe one airship occupant as an elderly man sporting a long dark beard.

In two others the occupants give Sacramento and San Francisco as the points of origin of their flights and another mentions New York. These cities figure prominently in the November-December 1896 controversies as locations either where the craft were seen or where they were constructed. And the business of the birds in the Jenny Lind report is reminiscent of M. G. Sisson's Greenfield, Ill., sighting.

Even if every one of the stories

late uncle. "Weight is no object to me," he said. "I suspend all gravity by placing a small wire around an object.

"I was making preparations to go over to Cuba and kill off the Spanish army if hostilities had not ceased," he went on, "but now my plans are changed and I may go to the aid of the Armenians." He would accomplish all this with a gun which would fire, he said "63,000 times per minute."

After offering Harris a ride, which the ex-senator refused, the crew reentered their craft and disappeared into the night.

Stephensville, Tex., late April: Alerted by "prominent farmer" C. L. McIlhane that an airship had alighted in a field on his farm three miles from town, a large delegation of Stephensville's leading citizens (our source lists all their names) set out to see for themselves. They found a 60-foot cigar-shaped craft and its two occupants, who gave their names as S. E. Tillman and A. E. Dolbear. The pair explained that they were making an experimental trip to test the ship for certain New York financiers. Turning down requests from onlookers who wanted to examine the craft, the aeronauts boarded the machine and sailed off.

Conroe, Tex. April 22-23: Around

midnight four men, one of them hotel proprietor G. L. Wither spoon, were playing dominoes in the hotel restaurant when three strangers entered. They said they had landed their airship not far away and coming into town for supper "by way of a change," then went on to report they had flown from San Francisco en route to Cuba. Wither spoon and his friends declined an offer to examine the ship, suspecting they were the victims of a practical joke. But about an hour later, after the visitors had left, a brilliantly lighted airship passed over Conroe.

Chattanooga, Tenn., late April: Several Chattanooga citizens reportedly encountered a landed airship "in the exact shape of a shad, minus head and tail," resting on a mountainside near the city. Its two occupants were at work repairing it. One, who identified himself as Prof. Charles Davidson, said they had left Sacramento a month before and had spent the intervening time touring the country.

Jenny Lind, Ark., May 4: At 7:30 P.M. an airship passed over town. Three men leaped on their bicycles and pursued it until landed near a spring next to a mountain. Its pilots, who introduced themselves as George Autzerlitz and Joseph Edler,

is no more than a figment of some prankster's imagination, the fact remains that for the most part (the lesser part we shall examine shortly) the craft were piloted and probably built by human beings — as opposed to the hairy humanoids and golden-maned Venusians of modern flying saucer folklore. But who were the airship pilots and occupants? And what happened to their marvelous inventions?

* * *

WHILE 1897 newspapers printed reams of speculation about the mysterious inventor's identity, little of the material seems based on anything more substantial than rumor and hearsay. Amid all the nonsense, however, are several bits and pieces which ring true. One of these is a statement by Max L. Hosmar, secretary of the Chicago Aeronautical Association and presumably a reliable man.

Speaking the day after a sighting on April 9, 1897, Hosmar told reporters, "It was an airship. I know one of the three men who are in it. The ship is the customary inflated gas reservoir but the inventors have discovered the secret of practical propulsion. They can steer the vessel in any direction. Word reached me several weeks ago that the craft had started from San Francisco and would stop here for the pur-

pose of registration. The object of all the mystery is to arouse great interest in aerial navigation and demonstrate its practicability. The trip is to end in Washington."

Curiously enough, on the evening of April 15 an airship did appear in Washington, D.C. It reportedly approached the Washington Monument at an altitude of 600 feet, then sailed toward Georgetown and disappeared.

About 11:00 P.M. April 19 near Beaumont, Tex., a farmer and his son came upon an airship in a pasture. They found four men moving around the machine and one of them, who said his name was Wilson, asked for and received a supply of water from the farmer's well.

At Uvalde, Tex., 23 hours later Sheriff H. W. Baylor spoke briefly with the three-man crew of an airship which had alighted outside the town. One of the men gave his name as Wilson and said he was a native of Goshen, N.Y. Then he asked about a Captain Akers, whom he said he had known in Fort Worth in 1877 and understood he now lived in southern Texas. After getting water from Baylor's pump the aeronauts entered their craft and took off.

A newspaper reporter located Captain Akers who said, "I can say that while living in Fort

FATE, JULY 1973



PART THREE: Technology of that time does not explain these airships. Were extraterrestrial intelligences involved?

By Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman

AN ENTIRELY different kind of story of an airship and its occupants was published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for April 19, 1897, in the form of a letter from W. H. Hopkins, a St. Louis resident whose job as general traveling agent for the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company had taken him to Missouri that week. The incident he describes had occurred, he said, on April 16:

"... I was wandering through hills east of Springfield, Mo., and coming to the brow of a hill overlooking a small clearing in the valley a short distance below me saw a sight that rooted me to

the spot... I could not believe my eyes at first... There in the clearing rested a vessel similar in outline to the airship shown in the *Post-Dispatch* a few days ago and said to have been taken in Illinois...

"Near the vessel was the most beautiful being I ever beheld. She was under medium size but of the most exquisite form and features such as would put to shame the forms as sculptured by the ancient Greeks. She was dressed in nature's garb and her golden hair, wavy and glossy, hung to her waist, unconfined except by a band of glistening jewels that bound it back from her

make it vibrate. Instantly the ball was illuminated with a soft white light which lit up the whole interior... most beautifully decorated....

"At the stern was another large ball of metal, supported in a strong framework, and connected to the shaft of the propeller at the stern was a similar mechanism attached to each propeller and smaller balls attached to a point of metal that extended from each side of the vessel and from the prow. And connected to each ball was a thin strip of metal similar to the one attached to the lamp. He struck each one and when they vibrated the balls commenced to revolve with intense rapidity and did not cease till he stopped them with a kind of brake. As they revolved intense lights, stronger than any arc light I ever saw, shone out from the points at the sides and at the prow, but they were different colors. The one at the prow was an intense white light. On the side was green and on the other red.

"The two had been examining me with the greatest curiosity in the meantime. They felt of my clothing, looked at my gray hair with surprise and examined my watch with the greatest wonder. Signs are poor medium to exchange ideas and therefore we could express but little.

"I pointed to the balls attached to the propellers. He gave each of the strips of metal a rap, those attached to the propellers under the vessel first. The balls began to revolve rapidly and I felt the vessel begin to rise... I sprang out and none too soon, for the vessel rose as lightly as a bird and shot away like an arrow... The two stood laughing and waving their hands to me, she a vision of loveliness and he of manly vigor."

Incredible? Certainly. A skeptical *Post-Dispatch* reporter took the letter to Hopkins' employer, C. C. Gardner. After reading it carefully Gardner said, "That is Mr. Hopkins' handwriting and he is now in that territory. He was also at Springfield on the day named...."

Asked if he believed Hopkins' story Gardner nodded vigorously. "Indeed I do," he said. "Strange as it seems I am compelled to believe it. Mr. Hopkins is not a romancer. He never courts notoriety. What he writes he has seen and he believes it is his duty to make the facts public. He does not drink a drop. He has been connected with this company for a long time and is most reliable. What he writes you can publish as being absolutely true."

Other employees in the firm spoke just as highly of Hopkins.

The reporter also searched out

forehead . . . She was plucking the little flowers that were just blossoming . . . with exclamations of delight in a language I could not understand. Her voice was like low, silvery bells and her laughter rang out like their chimes. In one hand she carried a fan of curious design that she fanned herself vigorously with, though to me the air was not warm and I wore an overcoat.

"In the shade of the vessel lay a man of noble proportions and majestic countenance. His hair of dark auburn fell to his shoulders in wavy masses and his full beard . . . reached to his breast. He also was fanning himself . . . as if the heat oppressed him.

"After gazing for a while I moved forward and the woman, hearing the rustle of leaves, looked around. A moment she stood looking at me with wonder and astonishment in her beautiful blue eyes, then with a shriek of fear she rushed to the man who sprang to his feet, threw his arm around her and glared at me in a threatening manner.

"I stopped and taking my handkerchief from my pocket waved it in the air. A few minutes we stood. I then spoke some words of apology for intruding but he seemed not to understand and replied in a threatening tone and words which I could not make out. I tried by signs to

make him understand and finally he left her . . . and came toward me. I extended my hand. He looked at it a moment, astonishment in his dark-brown eyes, and finally he extended his own and touched mine. I took his and carried it to my lips. I tried by signs to make them understand I meant no harm. Finally his face lighted up with pleasure and he turned and spoke to the woman. She came hesitatingly forward, her form undulating with exquisite grace. I took her hand and kissed it fervently. The color rose to her cheeks and she drew it hastily away.

"I asked them by signs where they came from but it was difficult to make them understand. Finally they seemed to do so and smiling, they gazed upwards for a moment, as if looking for some particular point, and then pointed upwards, pronouncing a word which to my imagination sounded like Mars.

"I pointed to the ship and expressed my wonder in my countenance. He took me by the hand and led me toward it. In the wall was a small door. I looked in. There was a luxurious interior covered with robes of the most beautiful stuff and textures as I had never seen before. The ceiling was suspended by a gilded ball from which extended a strip of metal which he pointed

Hopkins' wife and two daughters.

"It's the truth if he wrote it," Mrs. Hopkins affirmed, "and I believe every word. Mr. Hopkins is a member of the Maple Avenue M. E. Church and has many friends . . . He undoubtedly wishes to acquaint his friends with the marvel he has seen and so uses the *Post-Dispatch* as the medium of communication.

"Mr. Hopkins left home a week ago," she continued. "Before he left he ridiculed the idea of an airship having been seen. But now I suppose he is convinced it is not a myth."

The other-worldly overtones of this incident hardly can be denied and it was not the only bizarre occurrence of the period. On the morning of April 15 a large airship moved northward slowly over Linn Grove, Iowa, and five men followed it about four miles into the country where it landed. But when the pursuers got within 700 yards of the vessel it spread out four monstrous wings and flew away. As it rose its occupants tossed out two boulders "of unknown composition."

The witnesses said the entities within the craft had the longest beards they had ever seen and a news account of the incident mentions "two queer-looking persons . . . who made desperate

efforts to conceal themselves."

The next day at Mount Vernon, Ill., the city's mayor focused his telescope on an "airship." What he saw was something that resembled, according to the *Saginaw Courier-Herald*, "the body of a huge man swimming through the air with an electric light at his back." It goes without saying that no theory which assumed terrestrial inventors were completely responsible for airship manifestations is going to account for a sighting like this one.

From the *Houston Daily Post* for April 28, 1897, comes the weirdest case of all:

"Merkel, Tex., April 26 — Some parties returning from church last night noticed a heavy object dragging along with a rope attached. They followed it until crossing the railroad, it caught on a rail. 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; on 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 ropes below him and sailed off in

Worth in '76 and '77 I was well acquainted with a man by the name of Wilson from New York state and was on very friendly terms with him. He was of a mechanical turn of mind and was then working on aerial navigation and something that would astonish the world. He was a finely educated man, then about 24 years of age, and seemed to have money with which to prosecute his investigations, devoting his whole time to them. From conversations we had while in Fort Worth, I think that Mr. Wilson, having succeeded in constructing a practical airship, would probably hunt me up to show me that he was not so wild in his claims as I then supposed.

"I will say further that I have known Sheriff Baylor many years and know that any statement he may make can be relied on as exactly correct."

Another candidate for "airship inventor" is described in the *Omaha Globe-Democrat* for April 10: "The indications are that John O. Preast of this county is the author of the mysterious machine. Preast is a unique character, spending his time at his country residence near Omaha in experimenting with airships, constructing models and studying all the subjects incidental to the theories of applied mechanics along the line of providing a

vessel that will propel itself through the air. He has consumed the past 10 years in this way and the walls of his home are covered with drawings of queer-shaped things, some resembling gigantic birds, while others look like a big cigar, all of which he says represent models of airships. He is a man of superior education. He came to Omaha from Germany 20 years ago and has lived the life of a recluse. Mr. Preast refuses to admit that the ship reported in different sections of the state is his invention but . . . (it is known that) he told several persons that he would surprise the world with a working model in 1897. . . The two times in the past week that the light has been seen in Omaha it disappeared near Preast's home, hovering over the place and then appearing to go out."

The most interesting thing about this Mr. Preast is how much he reminds us of someone else — the mysterious C. A. A. Dellschau. Both men were recluses, German immigrants, compulsive students of aviation who spent untold hours making drawings of odd-looking aircraft.

And who is "Wilson"? Could he be the "Wilson" of "Tosh Wilson and Co." to whom Dellschau refers in one of his scrapbooks? A wild guess, perhaps.

northeast direction. The anchor is now on exhibition at the blacksmith shop of Elliott and Miller and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people."

An ancient obscure Irish manuscript, *Speculum Regali*, records an incident that supposedly occurred in the year 956 A.D.:

"There happened in the borough of Cloera, one Sunday while people were at mass, a marvel. In this town there is a church to the memory of St. Kinarus. It befell that a metal anchor was dropped from the sky, with a rope attached to it, and one of the sharp flukes caught in the wooden arch above the church door. The people rushed out of the church and saw in the sky a ship with men on board, floating at the end of the anchor cable, and they saw a man leap overboard and pull himself down the cable to the anchor as if to unhook it. He appeared 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 fear it might kill him. The man was freed and hurried up the cable to the ship, where the crew cut the rope and the ship rose and sailed away out of sight. But the anchor is in the church as a testimony to this singular occurrence."

And about 1200 A.D. an anchor

plummeted out of the sky trailing a rope and got caught in a mound of stones near a church in Bristol, England. As a mob of churchgoers congregated at the scene, a "sailor" came skittering down the rope to free it. According to Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* the crowd seized the intruder and "he suffocated by the mist of our moist atmosphere and expired." His unseen comrades cut the rope and left.

We do not pretend to understand why an incident of this nature should continually recur but its occurrence in the midst of the 1897 airship flap should prove conclusively that we are dealing with phenomena whose implications boggle the mind.

Something astonishing, even incomprehensible, was taking place in 19th-Century America. Whatever conclusions we draw from it are bound to be unbelievable and little more than informed guesses, for the gaps in the story are often greater than the substance.

* * *

THROUGHOUT history innumerable groups, societies and cults have organized — sometimes secretly, sometimes not — around an idea that in one way or another they were in contact with "higher beings" who taught them and oversaw their lives. Almost

Germany is involved in the airship mystery because the objects first manifested there in the 1850's. Unfortunately we do not have access to the German reports — but how odd it is that so many German names crop up in Dellschau's list of men supposedly involved with the "Aero Club" of Sonora, Calif., in the 1850's: August Schoetler, Jacob Mischer, Ernest Krause, Julius Koch, A. B. Kahn and many others.

Whatever the truth or untruth of Dellschau's jottings it seems likely that some kind of secret organization of aeronauts lived and worked in the United States and possibly Germany as well during the 19th Century. The mysterious "collector of curiosities" who showed up in Galisteo Junction, N. Mex., in 1880 the day after an airship had flown over, and stole away with the evidence it had left behind may have been associated with the organization.

It would have taken several dozen aeronauts to pilot the in-

estimable number of airships reported in different parts of the country in the 1896-97 flaps. All of them presumably would have been involved with the society and sworn to secrecy, for no one ever stepped forward to answer the many questions raised by the sudden appearances of these airships. When aeronauts did speak up much of what they said was drivel, although there may have been some strains of truth.

Nevertheless, no one got a straight answer from an aeronaut about the airship's source of power. The words "gas" and "electricity" dot a number of accounts and once "antigravity" crops up. Most airships carried both large gasbags and powerful searchlights but from eyewitness descriptions the craft seem so unwieldy that one wonders how they flew. Maybe Dellschau's antigravity gas, "NB," is as good an explanation of their propulsion as we're likely to find.

(This is Part II of a three-part series.)



LAWYERS JINX CLAM BOX

THE SECOND FIRE in 10 years broke out last fall in a restaurant called "The Clam Box" in Westport, Conn. Dining upstairs were the members of the Westport Bar Association who adjourned to the parking lot to finish their wine. The last time the restaurant had a fire, about nine years ago, the Westport Bar Association was also on hand.

every religion assumes its adherents were and are guided in this manner — so do cults of magicians, spiritualists, flying saucer contactees and many others. Some gifted scientists and inventors have believed privately that non-human entities helped them in their work.

In the 19th Century we believe man had neither the knowledge nor the means to build and fly heavier-than-air machines. We are equally sure that somebody was doing just that and according to most eyewitness reports, the pilots of the ships appeared to be ordinary mortals. Even if we reject Dellschau's accounts as senile raving we still must confront the "impossible" fact of the existence of airships and human occupants.

Taking Dellschau seriously for the moment we might postulate that in both Germany and the United States, specifically in California and New York, a secret cult of brilliant scientists, technicians and inventors established contact with nonhuman agencies which told them how to construct aerial vessels but ordered them to keep the work under wraps. It is safe to assume the German and American branches were in communication and about 1848 some of the Germans immigrated to pool their efforts with those of the Americans.

Perhaps 1848 was the crucial year. Perhaps the eastern branch of the society had decided to market the airship with or without the approval of their "superiors." An advertisement appeared on the east coast proclaiming that "R. Porter Company" soon would have ships for air travel. For some unknown reason nothing came of the plan but by the 1850's many of the Germans had set up shop near Sonora, Calif., with the Americans and they were to spend the next several years conducting some incredible experiments.

Dissension and dissatisfaction no doubt developed as the group came to realize they might never be allowed to give their "aeros" to the world. They may have hoped that someone — Dellschau calls him "the right man" — would arrive to defy the "superiors" and make the airship public property. (Not all that public, of course. The group stood to collect a fortune for their enterprise.)

While airships were seen over America from time to time in the years before 1896, widespread sustained flights seem to have become necessary in that year for whatever reason. To maintain secrecy in a period when airships for the first time would be observed widely the society agreed to plant a series of conflicting and therefore misleading

claims. The ploy worked, of course.

The "superiors," the nonhuman entities, had their own ships but they took care not to be seen while their human agents captured the headlines. Conceivably the human beings were little more than pawns in some cosmic game. The weirdest incidents — those putting airships in a paranormal framework — well may have been the important ones, while the more mundane sightings were designed only to distract attention while the nonhumans set about doing whatever they intended to accomplish.

If Dellschau was lying, then we must revise our theory only to exclude the German and Sonora, Calif., headquarters. The exis-

tence of a secret society in contact with nonhumans still can be inferred from other evidence.

To pursue our initial hypothesis to its conclusion, let us suppose that Dellschau retired to Houston late in the 19th Century, as in fact he did, depressed and discouraged because it looked as if the whole amazing business would remain a secret forever. Still intimidated by the "superiors" and afraid to speak directly, nonetheless he determined to leave the world a series of clues in the hope that someday a "Wonder Weaver" would find them and sew the entire dazzling fabric together.

Too much to swallow, you say? But can you think of a better explanation?



REFUGE FOR A MONSTER?

By Lucius Farish

A GROUP of Newport, Ark., residents is concerned about the welfare of their local "White River Monster," a mysterious aquatic creature which reportedly has been seen in nearby White River for many years. Following a rash of monster sightings in 1971, the citizens submitted a proposal to Newport's Board of Directors. The resolution would declare a stretch of White River from New Newport to Batesville, Ark., as the "White River Monster Sanctuary and Refuge."

The board also was asked to designate a song about the mon-

ster, written by noted folk singer Jimmy Driftwood, the "White River Monster Anthem."

If these proposals are adopted the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission will be asked to give official sanction to the monster refuge.

In an editorial dealing with the proposals the *Northwest Arkansas Times* of Fayetteville, Ark., stated that the project "appears to be well conceived and deserves sympathetic attention." As the *Times* noted, "There aren't that many authentic monsters left in (Arkansas) waters."