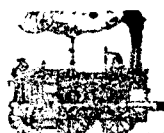


P A R T E G R Á F I C A

Imágenes de "La Aeronave" de fin de siglo



colores rusos, los designados con número impares: 1, 3 y 5. No sufrieron ningún "inconveniente" en su trayectoria, ni siquiera el "Sputnik III" el 15 de mayo de 1960, con 968 kg. de instrumentos delicados. En cambio, de los cuatro tuvieron encuentros con OVNIS y el sexto, no se recuerda...

ALBO, N° 139,
LOS «CURIOSOS» VUELVEN
AL ATAQUE... 1969

Los satélites «Ecos» también han sido seguidos, o al menos han cruzado su vuelo con el de algún cuerpo extraño. Dejamos para otra ocasión el análisis de las múltiples observaciones que se han llevado a cabo sobre extraños cuerpos que giran en torno a nuestro planeta y se desplazan de Este a Oeste, al contrario que nuestros satélites, demostrando con ello que deben estar dotados de un potentísimo método propulsor. Asimismo la discusión sobre la posible existencia de bases orbitales extraterrestres.

Es destacable el hecho de que la presencia repetidamente registrada de «no identificados» en el espacio pesó en los ánimos del Pentágono hasta el punto de intentar a crear el «Proyecto Santos» en 1960. El cometido de dicho proyecto consistía en averiguar la naturaleza de estos cuerpos extraños, sirviéndose de sondas debidamente equipadas.

La información que este proyecto suministró o está acumulando aún, constituye un reservorio de secreto encerrado entre las paredes del Ministerio de Defensa de los Estados Unidos.

Tal vez algunos lectores piensen que todo son suposiciones imaginarias.

Si en realidad estos objetos existen, se preguntarán: ¿por qué no se ha dado este hecho al conocimiento público, como se hace con todo lo referente a la carrera espacial? Y, además, si se trata de algo real, no debía existir duda alguna al respecto, pues da precisión con que todo lo referente a nuestra técnica astronáutica se realiza y controla es algo asombroso.

En efecto, gracias a este enorme control, no tan perfecto como nuestro dichoso orgullo nos mueve a pensar, «los grandes», tanto de los Estados Unidos como de la Unión Soviética, saben que todas sus maniobras son cuidadosamente vigiladas por entes dotados de portentosa inteligencia, que parecen acercarse a nuestro planeta en cumplimiento de una determinada misión...

Son varias las fotografías obtenidas por los astronautas de estos «curiosos» visitantes. Aunque, desde luego, no todas han trascendido al dominio público. Tan sólo se conocen aquellas cuya existencia no pudo ser negada.

Tenemos el argumentado convencimiento de que —de lejos— no se dice ni una pequeña parte de cuanto se sabe sobre el particular. Tan sólo llegan hasta nosotros jirones de información.

Aun así, como ya indicamos, obran en nuestro poder cinco series de fotografías —fuera de toda duda— de estos «intrusos», que fueron publicadas por la NASA.

Versión de Tabera, sobre el insólito encuentro que tuvo Jim Hoeton, en abril de 1967, en Arkansas (Estados Unidos).

Una de éstas fue obtenida por Bornmann y Lovell el 4 de diciembre de 1965, desde el «Gemini VII», sobre dos extraños cuerpos que súbitamente aparecieron dentro de su campo de visibilidad.

Los técnicos, desde tierra, supusieron que se trataba del cohete impulsor. Suposición a la que Bornmann respondió inmediatamente: «Sabemos dónde se encuentra el proyectil impulsor. Esto es una aparición verdadera...».

Por supuesto que con aquellas palabras se refería a algo que no le era imposible identificar.

Los dos astronautas observaron asimismo en la lejanía multitud de extrañas luces que se movían en ángulos rectos. Y esto nos recuerda las «luciérnagas» o luminosos corpúsculos, verdosos que ya habían sido observados en febrero de 1962 por John Glenn.

Scott Carpenter, a bordo del «Mercury VII», logró fotografiar el 24 de mayo de 1962 una insólita embebe verdosa constituida por miles de partículas brillantes...

Por cierto que unos cuantos años antes, el maltratado George Adamski escribía en su insólito libro «En el interior de los navíos espaciales» (Neville Spearman Ed.; Londres 1966):

«...Aparte de los efectos de luciérnagas, vi una apreciable cantidad de grandes objetos luminosos desplazándose por el espacio. Los cuerpos de mayor volumen no se consumían, sino que eran simplemente luminosos...»

Aunque ésta es tan sólo una de las múltiples sorpresas que el insólito volumen mencionado contiene...

LAS POLITICAS DEL «TOP SECRET»

Otro par de interesantes secuencias fotográficas fueron obtenidas por Mc Divitt, que volaba en compañía de White a bordo del «Gemini IV», el 11 de junio de 1965, sobre un cuerpo no identificado con una especie de proyecciones como briznas, que se desplazaba a la altura de las islas Hawaii. Minutos después, a unos 800 kilómetros (White se encontraba durmiendo en la anterior ocasión) observaron dos nuevos OVNIS sobre el Caribe. Y ya días atrás habían tenido ocasión de contemplar uno que desapareció inmediatamente sobre la China comunista.

Y así toda una serie de insólitos incidentes que el espacio y el tiempo nos impiden notificar, aun brevemente.

Mientras tanto, el Centro de Inteligencia Aérea estadounidense se continúa negando la realidad que los OVNIS representan como fenómeno digno de estudio; atendiendo a la recomendación hecha por el «Panel Robertson» —simple marioneta movida por los interesados dedos de la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA)— al «Project Blue Book» de la Fuerza Aérea, en enero de 1963, acerca de la necesidad de «desacreditar a los platillos volantes a fin de reducir el interés público por los mismos».

Recomendación a la que atendió el «Proyecto de Colorado», cuyo director, el desgraciadamente famoso doctor Edward U. Condon, mostró sus cartas desde el primer momento, al declarar descaradamente que: «El problema consiste en eliminar la ansiedad en torno a los OVNIS que parece existir en determinados sectores de la sociedad. Indicando acerca de los caminos por los que se proponía calmar el logro de su propósito».

«Nuestro estudio lo realizarían casi exclusivamente no creyen-

tes que, aunque no podrían nunca demostrar un resultado negativo, sí podrían aducir suficientes pruebas de la irrealidad de dichos fenómenos. El truco consistiría, en mi opinión, en describir el proyecto de tal forma que para el público se tratase de un estado totalmente objetivo...»

Poco había de esperarse Condon que no todo iría como él lo había planeado. En febrero de 1968, antes de que el «Proyecto» estuviese finalizado y el «Comité» emitiese sus conclusiones, dos de sus diez miembros principales fueron expulsados del mismo, «por incompetencia». Aunque en realidad se trató de que los doctores Saunders y Levine habían descubierto un monumental confabulario en que se especificaban las directrices que regirían el Proyecto, y lo habían facilitado, para su publicación, al doctor McDonald, gran luchador por la causa de los OVNIS.

«¿POR QUÉ? ¿QUÉ? ¿QUÉ? (OVNI?) ¡SI! es el título del libro —traducido ya al castellano y de muy próxima publicación en edición argentina— en el que los dos doctores —que nunca llegarán a alcanzar la categoría de «sabios» por su lamentable equivocación— lanzaron su desafío al Informe de Condon.

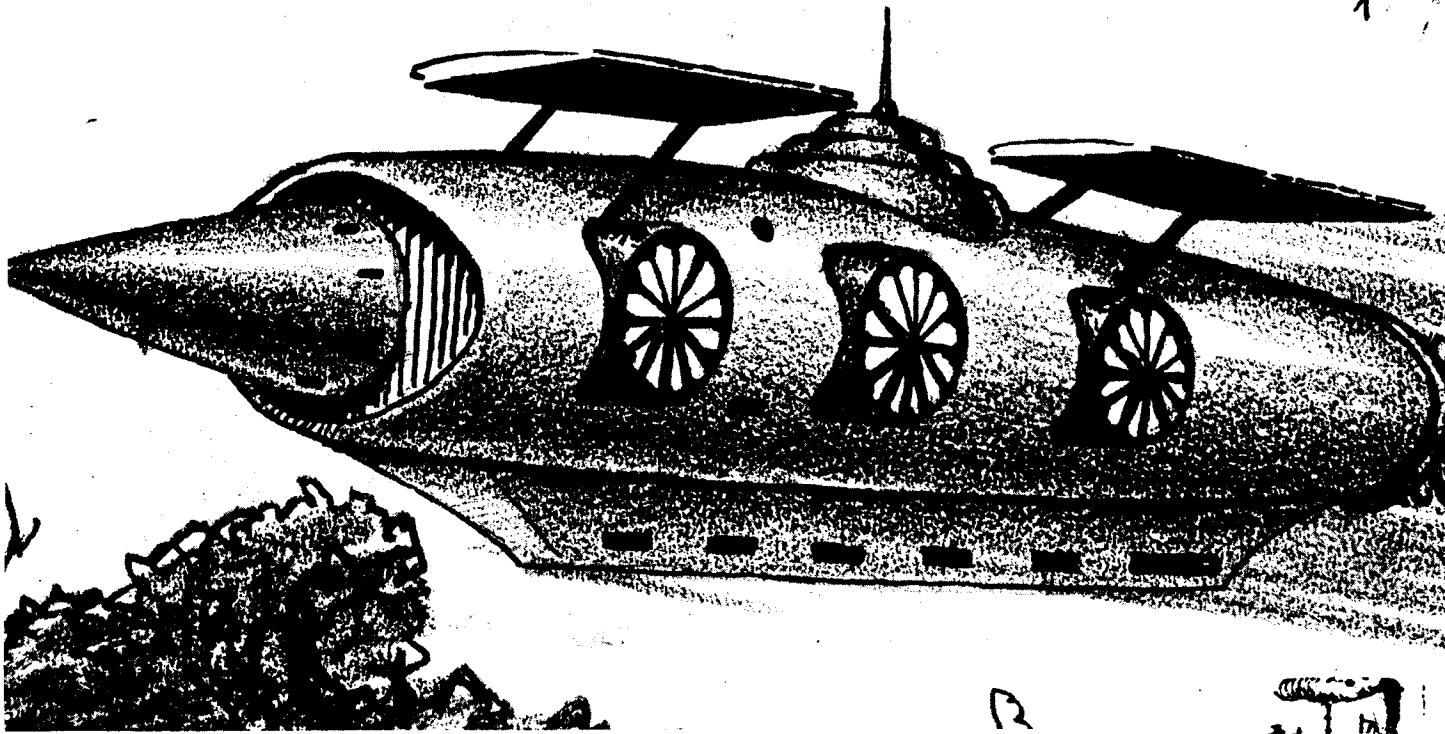
...

Muchos han sido los particulares tocados brevemente en estas páginas. Mucho es lo que queda por añadir sobre los mismos. Próximamente esperamos poder regresar sobre algunos puntos que apenas hemos mencionado de pasada. Hasta entonces, pensemos con Plinio que «no hay nada increíble en la naturaleza; algunos esperando e investigando; el enigma se resolverá».

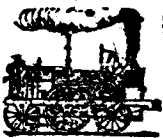
ENRIQUE VICENTE

(Dibujos de F. Tabera.)





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



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

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

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

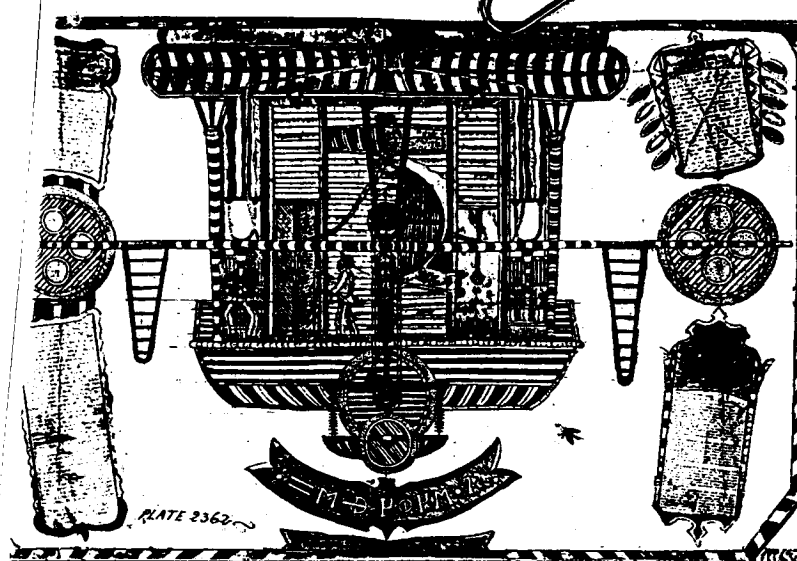
account was "a well studied one" and "ingeniously wrought," the reporter quoted the Judge as follows:

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

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

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

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



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."

he was lying. Sometimes it was "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: armhands 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.

Recent Arrivals, continued:

NO RESEARCH items, continued.

ey, Robert G. UFOs OF 1896/1897: THE AIRSHIP WAVE. No date, spiral bound, 4pp. Another wonderful historical item, by far the best journalistic history of the 1896/7 U.S. airship wave, with added sections at and which evaluate reports known or considered to be hoaxes, reports considered to be mistaken observations of astronomical objects, and reports which are considered to have "real." The only truly serious attempt to deal with this century-old "ic attitudes of the age. Somewhat difficult to read because of dot-matrix nt--but persevere, and ye shall be rewarded! \$50.00

THE AIRSHIP CHRONICLE. No date, 263pp, spiral bound. Case synopses of ship sightings from August, 1896 through May 7, 1897, with the great major- drawn from the April 1897 period. Marvelous item for Porters, UFO re- searchers and students of "man-made" UFOs. \$40.00

cliner, Don. THE BLUE BOOK UNIDENTIFIEDS. No date, 65pp, stapled. Case catalogue of 565 Project Blue Book "unidentifieds." About 80% contain the original sightings, which were later collected and were therefore unavailable. \$13.00

FBI-UFO CONNECTION. No date. Vols 1-3, over 600pp loose-leaf plastic-wrap. From FBI files, these were released in 1976, pursuant to a request under the Freedom of Information Act by Bruce Maccabee. Goldmine of U.S. government data relevant to cases and personalities. \$80.00

Carfield, Keith, and Vladimir Godic, eds. MUNDARRILLA, AUSTRALIA--FOMM-JAN- URY 1980 INVESTIGATION REPORT. 1980, 70pp, stapled. This was the incident d the discovery of some strange dust off the ground and then dropped back to it, search Australia investigation. \$14.00

ler, Louis. CATALOG OF UFO-LIKE DATA BEFORE 1947. No date, 84pp, consists Parts 1 and 2. Great item for proto-ufoologists. \$18.00

HALL'S STONEDICIONARY OF FOLKLORE, MYTHOLOGY AND LEGEND. Harpen, '84, softbound, 1234pp. Had to look up "Nephale" yesterday. Looked all over my ancient histories and folklore texts, but found it only here. A must! \$34.95

lie. THE MAGNIFICENT NUMBERS OF THE GREAT PYRAMID AND STONEDICION. The author, ml. soft, 201pp, 2nd prtg. Dimensions, measures & correlations. \$6.95

Tony. STEALTH B-2 BOMBER: TEN AMERICAN-MADE UFO. The author, '90, 8 1/2 x 11, revised, by all means, see our previous write-ups for this fascinating work, probably have "60 Minutes" knocking at Gonsalves' door real soon! \$20.00

ry, ed. THE UFO REPORT 1990. Sidgwick & Jackson, '89, HC, 223pp, it's in, which has, among other goodies, 40 pages on the British "crop circles." his Mind, Paul Norman, Ralph Hayes (on UFO landing), etc. \$24.95

E. UFOs: A HISTORY. The first 4 volumes of this great contribution to pure are available as follows:
1. 1947. 93pp + index, \$8.95
2. 1948. 106pp text, + index, \$8.95
3. January-June, 1949. 86pp text + index, \$8.95
4. July-December, 1949. 79pp text, + index, \$8.95

llan. THE CENTER OF THE VORTEX. Talos, '86, 8 1/2 x 11, spiral bound, 86pp. stated work, with physical energies being related to spiritual ones. \$15

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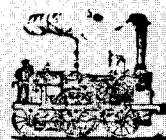
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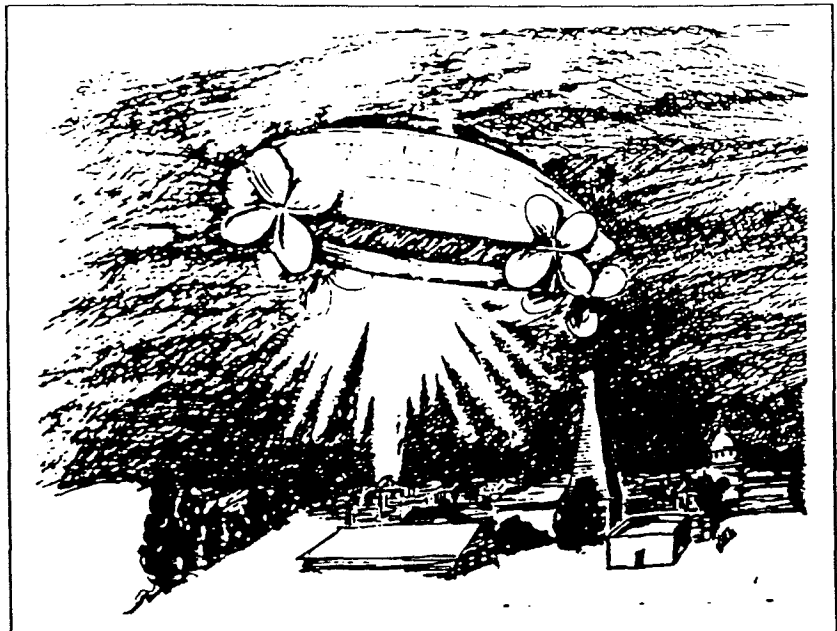


Airships—the mystery solved





rious, and apparently
ies would serve as a small
much greater epic to come,
ld occupy newspapers all
ted States for six months
ember 1896 and April 1897.
emplify the many problems
earcher faces in trying to
of early press accounts of
ents. The alleged witnesses
d, and there is no way to
eir sincerity or the accuracy
mony. We do not even know
es if the tales are anything
ournalistic inventions.
uropean reports seem to have
dibility (if nothing to do with
wn of the aviation or weapons
of the period), the New
port is absurd on its face.
the sort described in the
account were not flying, or
fly, in the America of the late
ry, or even of the early 20th
81; Lore and Deneault, 1968). Air traffic
hina and the United States was a technological
ity. To all appearances the story is someone's
oke; if so, however, it would be a joke often
the years ahead.
merican publication of Jules Verne's popular
Conqueror, a sort of airborne version of his
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (1870)
marvelous airship takes the place of Capt.
ondrous submarine, was seven years away
Galisteo Junction story saw print, but by 1880
no shortage of popular speculation about
an-air flight, which figured prominently in
ctional adventure tales (Miller, 1987; Moskow-
In 1862 aviation enthusiasts in France formed
to promote research and experiments in this
the following year Verne became its recording
In the United States inventors published
or rigid dirigibles and powered aircraft, but what
re were consisted of little more than short hops.
for example, Frederick Marriott of California
to keep a winged, steam-powered dirigible aloft
ile. In 1872 German engineer Paul Haenlein
ur-cylinder internal-combustion engine (which
al gas from a supporting bag) to power a semi-
ne dirigible. The following year the *New York*
aphic sponsored an attempt to send a 400,000-
ot balloon, with attached lifeboat, across the
Ocean, but the bag tore open as it was being
On November 13, 1897, the first metal dirigible
n successfully from Berlin, but leaking gas
t to crash after several miles in flight. No history
on reports flights of large, powered dirigibles and



Artist's conception of the airship that appeared in newspapers of the era
(From the files of August C. Roberts).

other aircraft over the Western United States at any time
in the 19th Century, the dreams and schemes of would-be
inventors notwithstanding (Berliner, 1978).

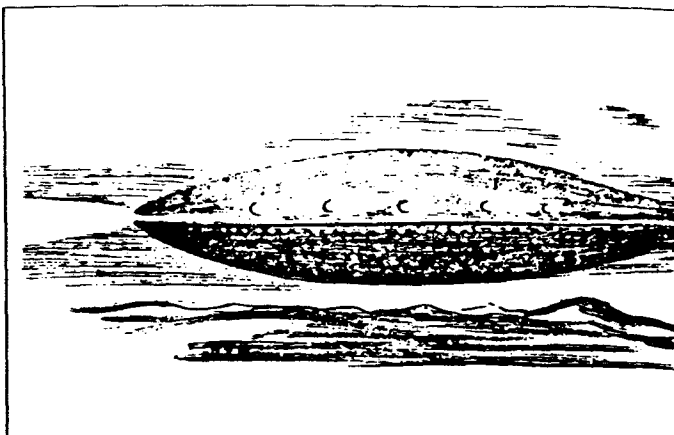
In the summer of 1896 a man looking out the door of
a mail car on a train moving through Iowa saw a strange
sight. He reported the incident to the *Monthly Weather*
Review:

"The darkness was intense; not a ray of light was
visible from any point, except from the train. When a few
miles out from Princeton, and while traveling almost due
north, I observed a peculiar light low down on the
western horizon. It appeared to be perfectly round and
about a foot in diameter, of a dull rose color, or, possibly,
like a piece of live coal. When first observed it seemed to
be floating within a hundred feet of the earth, but soon
rose to a height about midway between the horizon and
the zenith. For a time it floated very steadily, but soon
began to oscillate up and down, at times even dropping
out of sight behind hills. The wind was quite strong from
the east, but the light traveled in an almost due north
course. Its speed varied, sometimes seeming to outrun the
train considerably, and at others it would fall behind, but
never far enough to be lost to sight. Most of the time it
appeared to be nearly abreast of the train and apparently
from half a mile to a mile distant. Soon after it was first
observed by me, my companion arose, and we both
watched it closely until the town of Lineville, Iowa, was
reached. There it passed out of sight behind the depot,
and we saw it no more" (Corliss, 1982).

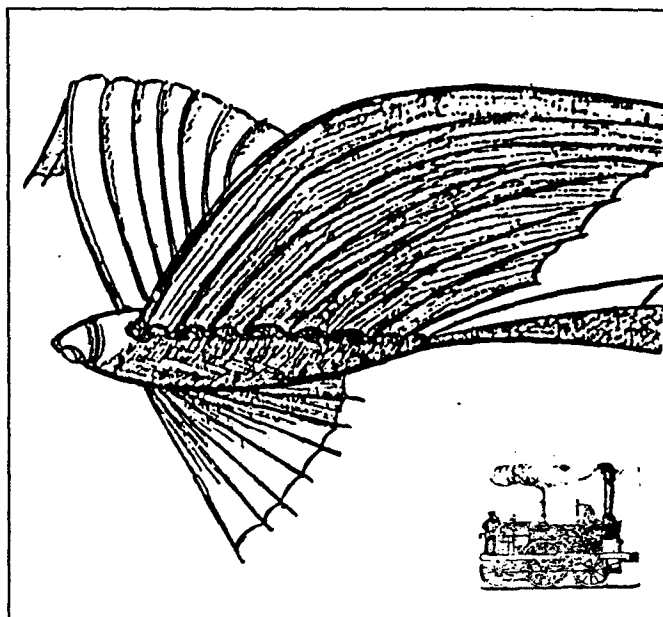
If this sighting had occurred a few months later—
and in fact many similar sightings would be made from
moving trains—the observer would probably have
reported that he had seen the light of an airship.

... I could observe no windows. ... We all experienced the weirdest feeling of our lives, and sat in our tent puzzling over it for some time" (Bauhan, 1953). Between Wathena, Kansas, and Rushville, Missouri, June 8, 1920: Two hundred persons, all of them rural residents, saw a large cylindrical object; they said it flew at an altitude of no more than 75 feet. When it reached Rushville, it turned sharply to the right and to the east and vanished in a cloud two miles away (*St. Joseph [Missouri] Gazette*, June 9). Osage hills of Oklahoma, January 1924: On a very cold night two riders saw a beam of light shining on the snow. The source was a large, cigar-shaped object "with white dots of lights on the side and a blue flame at the stern." The object "made a slight hissing noise" (Powers, 1953). North of Chicago, June 1925: At 2:30 a.m. a driver stopped his Model-T Ford to watch a 300-foot-long, cigar-shaped object fly south toward the city. "It was a lot of colors, such as blue, red, white, green; also, red sparks were flying away from its nose ... and about 100 feet down through the center [was] all lit up with windows. As it passed in front of us a heat wave came down from it" (*San Diego Evening Tribune*, August 12, 1965). Wolfe County, Kentucky, summer 1927: Nine-year-old Reece Lacey saw a "perfectly shaped, huge fish, with big fins extended outward near the front and small, short ones near the rear" (Lacey, 1958);

compare this object with the ones depicted in airship sketches published in the *San Francisco Call* of November 23, 1896, and in the *Dallas Morning News* of April 16, 1897. Between Lafayette and Newton, New Jersey, circa August 1942: Three adults saw a huge cigar-shaped object hovering near them. It "had two rows of windows" which "gave off blue, green, white and red fluorescent lights. ... We watched this object for approximately 10 minutes; then it silently and very slowly took off. From where I stood, I had the impression of hearing laughter or happy voices. My imagination? I cannot say. I know I felt this happiness very strongly. My husband and I also got in our car and drove to Ogdensburg [New Jersey] to our home. As we drove along, I again saw this large cigar-shaped object, and suddenly it took off very fast and disappeared" (Howell, 1979). Santa Barbara, California, October 1943: At 9 p.m., as she gazed out from the balcony of her home, an air spotter for the Civilian Air Command noticed a "huge dark aerial object approaching." Moving soundlessly, it barely skimmed over a



From the *San Francisco Call*, November 23, 1896.



From the *Dallas Morning News*, April 16, 1897.

nearby hill. "From the front of the object shot down at an angle toward the earth," : intervals it swung from side to side as if s and homes below. I sat in my balcony, to terror to move. I realized that the object v low, for it filled my view and seemed jus hitting our two-story house as it passed o 1958). Queens, New York, summer 1944 riding our bikes on a footpath adjacent to Parkway ... in a wooded section. As we a hill, we looked up and saw a cigar-sha broadside to us. ... [I]t was longer and s blimp; it was of smooth metal constructi windows or openings in sight. It didn't h its underside as normal dirigibles and bl land, 1961). Lafayette, New York, sprin in an open convertible, two men noticec sky. It turned out to be from the sun refl



Question 6 brought responses from eight who knew of their colleague's discovery of a circle in his field. It is not very revealing. But the next question is more interesting. Respondents were about equal in their belief that they could envision a way to duplicate a crop circle. A few were ludicrous, for example those that mentioned helicopters or hovercraft. Most of those who felt they could create a circle held to the notion of trampling the crop by foot or with rollers; some realized the need for precision and suggested pegs or stakes in the center to ensure roundness. Of course most circles and rings are not totally round, as Cameron has noted. Still, this seems a logical way to create the effect.

One comment about the use of stilts needs to be addressed here. After a British tabloid published instructions on how to create the circles, some hoaxers tried the methods described. Following the discovery of circles in Canada, local media advertised the techniques. Investigators fashioned makeshift stilts and tried to enter a field, but the instability of the soil ensured that the stilts left significant marks in the ground, and it was felt that the method was inappropriate for the local situation. Nevertheless some kind of stilts could likely be used to make certain markings found at crop-circle sites. In other words, investigators should not discarded the idea altogether.

As for the areas of expertise, physicists may be shocked to learn they have been nominated as the group most concerned with crop-circle research (perhaps atmospheric physics is what the respondents had in mind). Agriculturalists concede that they, too, should be involved, and it would have been surprising had they noted otherwise. Other fields of expertise suggested for crop-circle research ranged from history to geology (?),

and astronomers may be as embarrassed as botanists for their input into the important piece of information obtained. The question is that crop circles seem to be a rare phenomenon.

Should scientists study crop circles? Respondents replied in the negative, and this, considering the ridicule curtain that hangs with regard to anomalous phenomena. Their research probably would not look good *in vita*, especially when one is applying for a grant. Nonetheless three respondents suggested they were involved in investigations, and the previous formal investigations yielded some results.

Those who thought there should be a formal investigation of crop circles seemed open-minded to know only how the hoaxers had created them. They wanted to know more about the cause, not just the effect. Several indicated that scientific investigation might come out of an investigation. Of those who thought a formal investigation was in order, most thought crop circle research a waste of time, but it is likely due to a perception that the circles are a hoax. The need to catch circle hoax perpetrators is a high priority, and the possibility that the circles are something out of the ordinary was not considered. Most respondents acknowledged they had not investigated them personally. There was no consensus on whether it should lead a formal investigation: some thought it should, some university researchers, or ufologists.

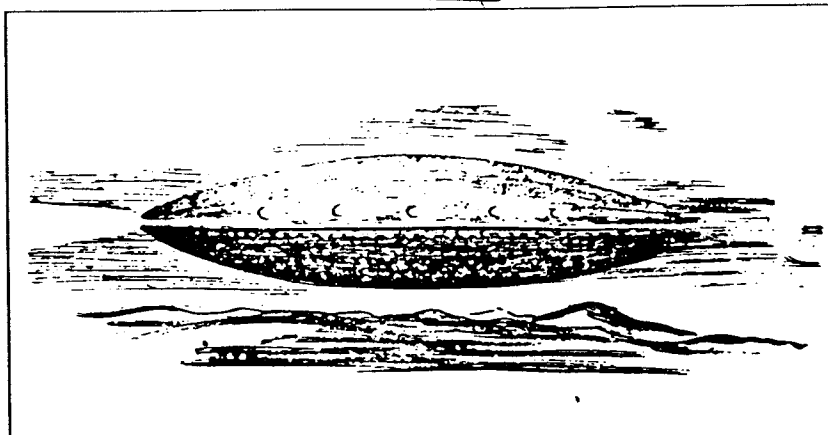
The miscellaneous comments offered in response to the survey form showed a wide range of opinions.



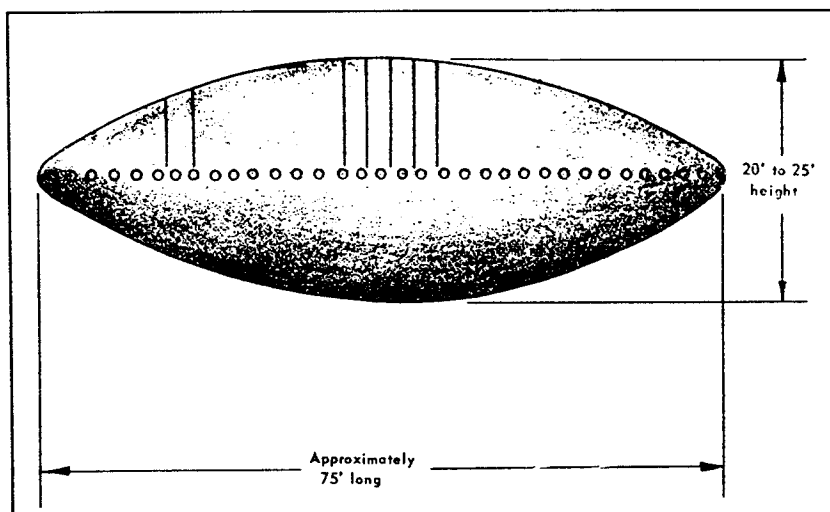
On August 25, 1952, around 6 a.m., a Pittsburg, Kansas, musician named William Squyres was driving to work at a local radio station when, according to the Air Force account, "he noted the unknown object off to the right side of the road at a horizontal angle of about 40 degrees and at a distance of about 250 yards. He immediately started slowing down his car and continued to view the object through the right side of [the] windshield. When he came to a point where [the] object was visible through the right door glass and about 90 degrees to [the] right of his vehicle, [he] opened the door and stepped out on the road. At all times, he attempted to keep [the] object in view.

"After he had stepped to [the] side of the road nearest the object, it began a rapid vertical ascent. Squyres estimated he viewed [the] object for about one-half minute. When [the] object reached a height 'about as high as an airplane flies' [the] object then increased acceleration at a tremendous rate and rapidly disappeared from view, straight up through broken clouds. Clouds did not obscure view of [the] disappearing object at any time.

"Squyres described the object as platter-shaped; by this he said it looked like two platters or bowls had been put together by reversing one platter and placing it over the first one. He estimated it was about 75 feet long and 40 feet wide and about 15 feet through the mid-section, measuring vertically in center of [the] object. [The] object was about 10 feet above the ground. Squyres then went on with a more detailed explanation of the object: It was of a dull aluminum color; smooth surface; one window in the front section, with head and shoulders visible of one man sitting motionless facing [the] forward edge of object, clear glass, light in forward section, medium blue continuous light. In the midsection of [the] object were several windows extending from [the] top to [the] near edge of [the] object; midsection of [the] ship had a blue light which gradually changed to different shades. There was a large amount of activity and movement in the midsection which could not be identified as being human as [but?] it did not have a regular pattern of movement such as mechanical objects would make in the blue light. There were no windows, doors, portholes, vents, seams, etc., visible to [the] observer in [the] rear section of object or under the object (viewed at time of ascent). Another identifiable feature was that along the outer edge of [the] object, there were a series of propellers about six



Drawing of an airship from 1896 California newspaper.



William Squyres' UFO from Project Blue Book Special Report 14.

to seven inches in diameter, spaced closely together[;] these propellers were mounted on a bracket so they revolved in a horizontal plane along the edge of the object. These propellers were revolving at a high rate.

"[Squyres] heard a deep throbbing sound coming from the object. When the object started its ascent, it emitted a sound like a large covey of quail starting to fly at one time. . . . [T]he grass was moving under the object when it was hovering" (Gross, 1986).

This incident could as easily have occurred in 1897 as in 1952. Everything here has an antecedent in earlier airship sightings: the occupant staring forward, the activity inside the craft, the propellers, the windows, the sounds. Presumably, if Squyres had seen it a few hours earlier, it would have been flashing a searchlight. For further evidence of the link between the late-19th-Century airship and this mid-20th-Century UFO, compare Blue Book's sketch based on Squyres' description with a drawing done 56 years earlier of an airship seen over California.

continued on page 24

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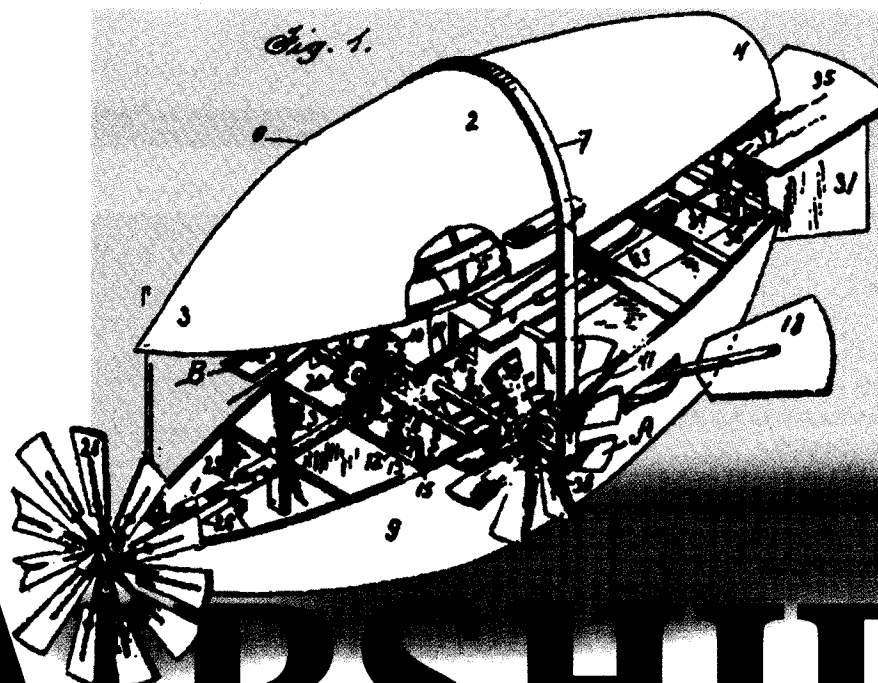
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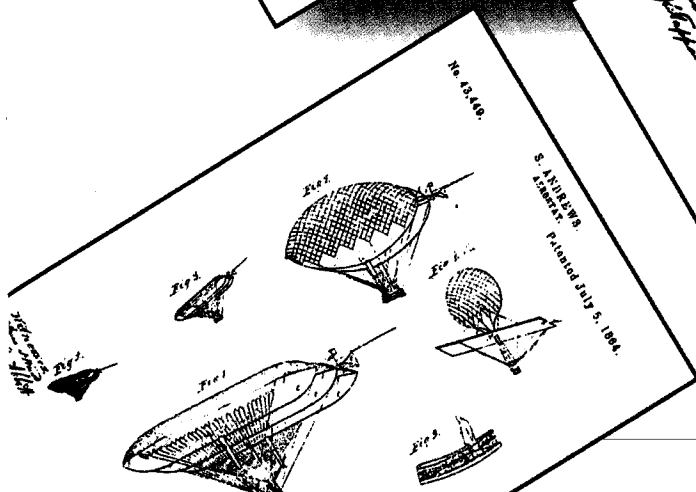
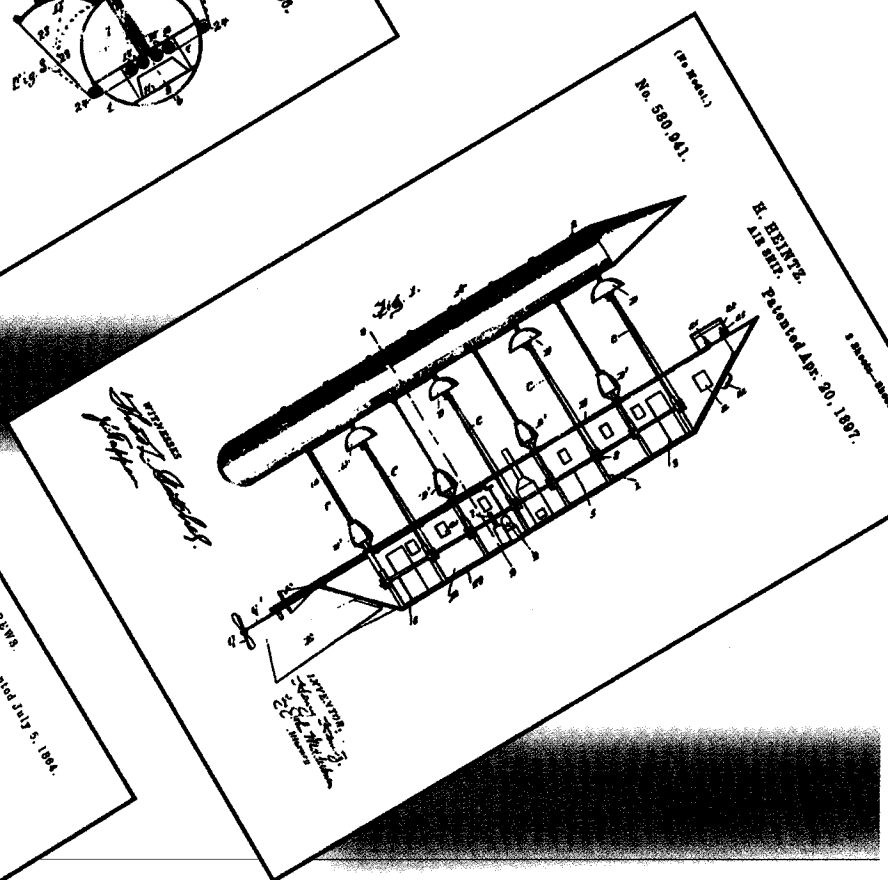
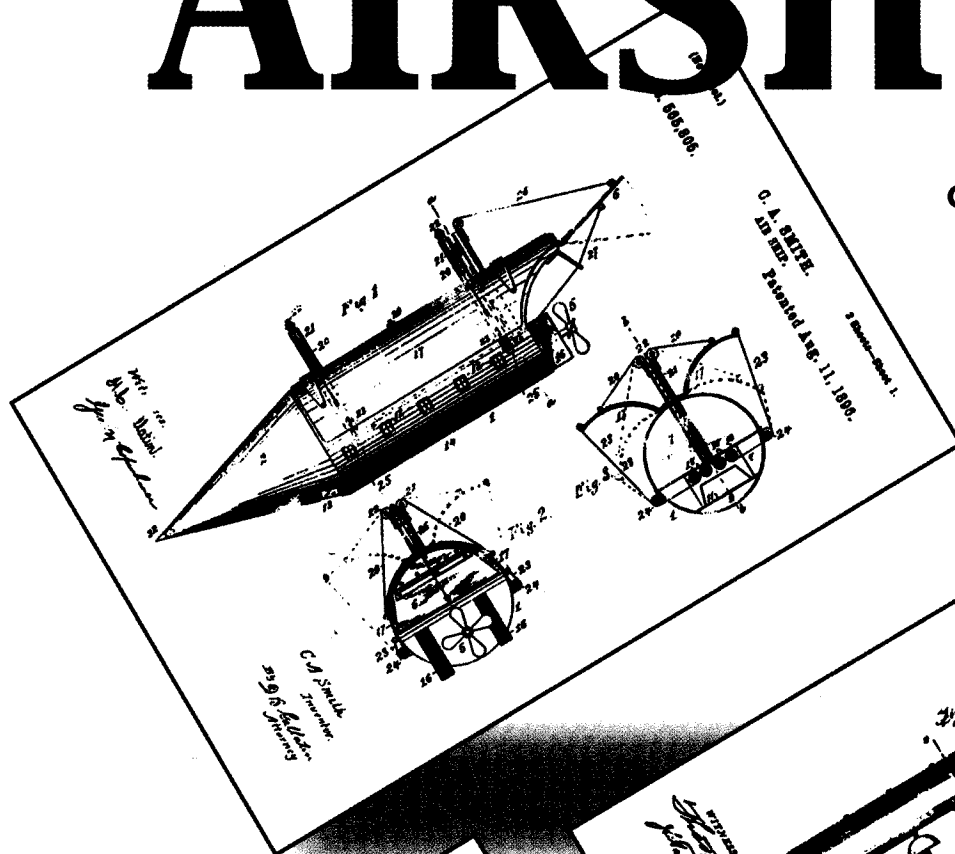


LATE 1896 ENGRAVING FROM SAN FRANCISCO CALL



AIRSHIPS

Una investigación
desvela el enigma de
los OVNIs de 1897



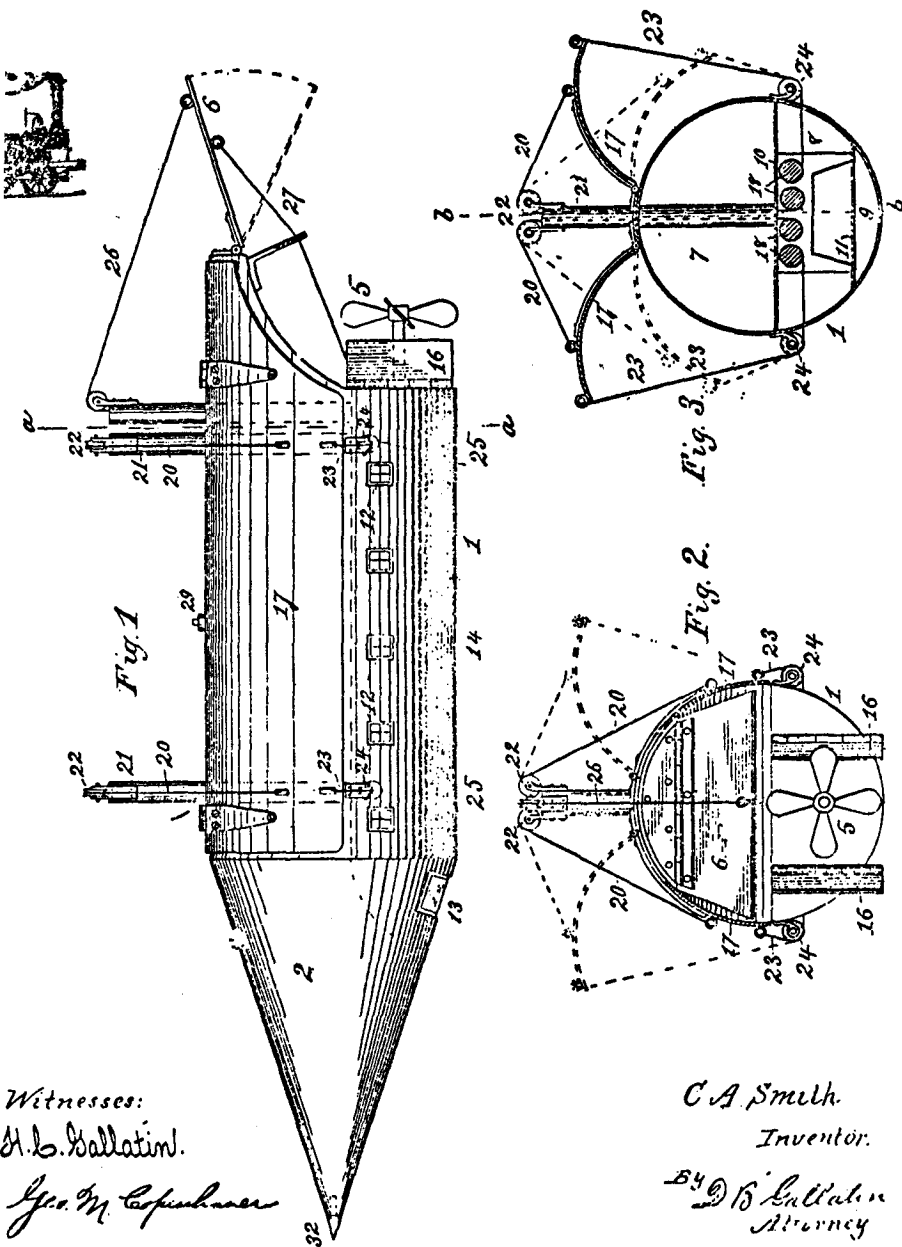
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C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

2 SHEETS—SHEET 1.

No. 565,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witnesses:

H. B. Hallatin.

Jos. M. Copeland

C. A. Smith.

Inventor.

By H. B. Hallatin
Attorney

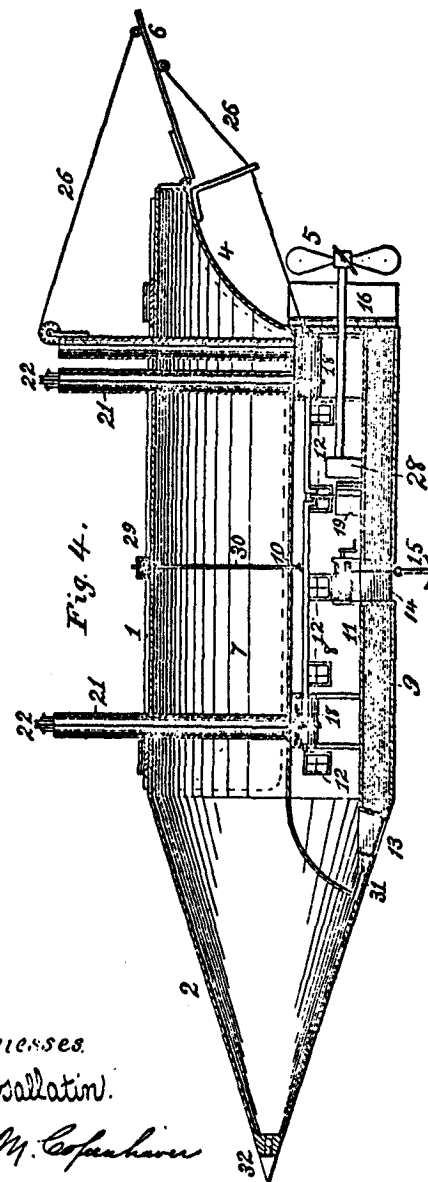
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C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.

No. 565,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witnesses.

H. B. Hallatin.

Jos. M. Copeland

C. A. Smith.

Inventor.

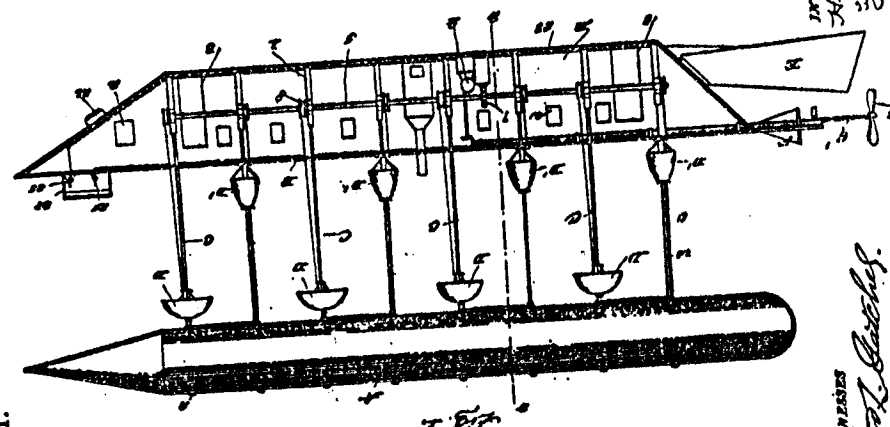
By H. B. Hallatin
Attorney



55

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(No Model)
H. HEINTZ.
AIR SHIP.
Patented Apr. 20, 1897.
No. 580,941.

3 Sheets—Sheet 1.



INVENTOR:
H. Heintz
By J. H. Matthews
Attorney

WITNESSES
Theodore L. Smith
John H. Smith

- 42 INAS
- Recent Arrivals, continued:
UFO RESEARCH items, continued.
149. Robert G. UFGS OF 1896/1897: THE AIRSHIP WAVE. No date, spiral bound, 149p. Another wonderful historical item, by far the best journalistic history of the 1894/7 U.S. airship wave, with added sections at end which evaluate reports known or considered to be hoaxes, reports considered to be mistaken observations of astronomical objects, and reports which are considered to have an "real" value. The only truly serious attempt to deal with this century-old wave, and one which faces well in the light of the prevailing modern scientific attitudes of the age. Somewhat difficult to read because of dot-matrix type—but perservere, and ye shall be rewarded! \$50.00
150. THE AIRSHIP CHRONICLE. No date, 263pp, spiral bound. Case synopsis of airship sightings from August, 1896 through May 7, 1897, with the great majority drawn from the April 1897 period. Marvelous item for Portians, UFO researchers and students of "man-made" UFOs. \$40.00
151. Burliner, Don. THE BLUE BOOK UNMANS. No date, 65pp, stapled. Case catalogue of 505 Project Blue Book "unidentified flying objects" and were therefore unavailable. \$13.00
152. THE FBI-UFO CONNECTION. No date. Vols 1-3, over 600pp loose-leaf plastic-wrap. FBI files, these were released in 1976, pursuant to a request under the Freedom of Information Act by Bruce Maccubbin. Goldmine of U.S. government data relevant to cases and personalities. \$80.00
153. Basterfield, Keith, and Vladimir Golic, eds. MAMORAKILLA, AUSTRALIA, 20th-JANUARY 1968 INVESTIGATION REPORT. 1988, 70pp, stapled. This was the incident which featured an auto being lifted off the ground and then dropped back to it, and the discovery of some strange dust on the vehicle. Here is the UFO Research Australia investigation. \$14.00
154. Minkler, Louis. CHRONOLOGY OF UFO-TYPE DATA REFUGES 1947. No date, 84pp, consals of Parts 1 and 2. Great item for psych-ufologists. \$18.80
155. FINE & MCGILL'S STANDARD DICTIONARY OF FOLKLORE, MYTHOLOGY AND LEGEND. Harper's, '84, 8 1/2 x 11 softbound, 1736pp. Had to look up "megaphone" yesterday. Looked all over my books, ancient histories and folklore texts, but found it only here. A must! \$34.95
156. Gant, Bonnie. THE MAGNETIC NUMBERS OF THE GREAT PYRAMID AND STONEHENGE. The author, 1984. Q.ual. soft, 201pp, 2nd prtg. Dimensions, measures & correlations. \$4.75
157. Connelley, Tony. STERNALTY 3-2 HOMER: TEN AMERICAN-MADE UFO. The author, 1984, 112pp, revised, by all means, see our previous write-ups for this fascinating work, which will probably have "60 Minutes" knocking at Connelley's door real soon! \$20.00
158. Good, Timothy, ed. THE UFO REPORT 1990. Sidgwick & Jackson, '89. H.C. 223pp, 11 1/2 x 10, back covers have been sent, and we still have a supply of this anthology of current research, which has, among other goodies, 40 pages on the British "crop circles." Also, Cynthia Hind, Paul Norman, Ralph Noyes (on UFO landing), etc. \$24.95
159. Coosa, Karen E. UFOs: A HISTORY. The first 4 volumes of this great contribution to UFO literature are available as follows:
A. Vol 1: 1947. 198pp, 10 1/2 x 11, 100p text, 4 index, \$9.95
B. Vol 2: January-June, 1949. 86pp text, 4 index, \$8.95
C. Vol 3: January-June, 1949. 86pp text, 4 index, \$8.95
D. Vol 4: July-December, 1949. 79pp text, 4 index, \$8.95
160. Hamilton, William. THE CENTER OF THE VORTEX. Telos, '84, 8 1/2 x 11, spiral bound, 86pp. An energy-related work, with physical energies being related to spiritual ones. \$15

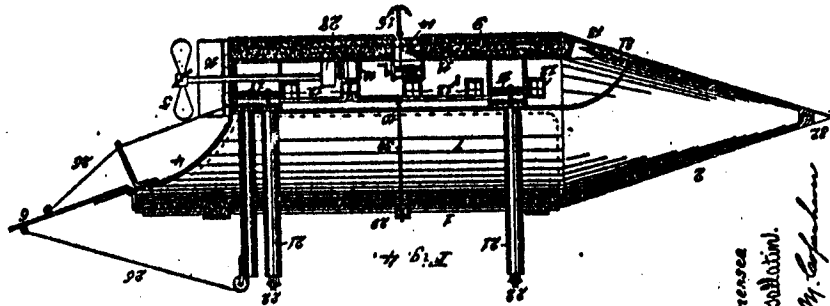
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C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

No. 605,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1906.

3 Sheets—Sheet 2.



Witnesses

A.B. Sullivan

Geo. M. Caplan

C. A. Smith,
Inventor,
By G. A. Sullivan
Attorney

Page 9, 1990-9, Recent Arrivals, continued:
60. FUND FOR UFO RESEARCH, continued.

- J. Maslow, Robert C. UFOs of 1896/1897: THE AIRSHIP WAVE. No date, spiral bound, 24pp. Another wonderful historical item, by far the best journalistic history of the 1896/1897 U.S. airship wave, with added sections at end which evaluate reports by the press, and comments on the wave, reports considered to be mistaken observations of aerostatic objects, and reports which are considered to have been "real." The only truly reliable account of the wave, and one which deals with the wave, and one which faces well in the light of the prevailing social and scientific attitudes of the age. Somewhat difficult to read because of dot-matrix print—but persevere, and ye shall be rewarded! \$50.00
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- M. THE FBI-UFO CONNECTION. No date. Vols 1-3, over 600pp loose-leaf-staple-wrap. From FBI files, these were released in 1976, pursuant to a request under the Freedom of Information Act by Bruce Macabee. Goldmine of U.S. government data relevant to cases and personalities. \$80.00
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- O. Winkler, Louis. CATALOG OF UFO-LIKE DATA BEYOND 1947. No date, 84pp, contains of Part 1 and 2. Great item for UFO-ologists. \$78.80
- P. PARK & MACGILL'S STANDARD DICTIONARY OF FOLKLORE, MYTHOLOGY AND LEGEND. Harper's '64, 84 x 11 softbound, 1236pp. Had to look up "Mephale" yesterday. Looked all over my bible, ancient histories and folklore texts, but found it only here. A must! \$14.9
- Q. Gault, Bonnie. THE MONTICENT NUMBERS OF THE GREAT PYRAMID AND STONEHENGE. The authentic 1981. Qal. soft, 201pp, 2nd prtg. Dimensions, measures & correlations. \$6.95
- R. Connelley, Tony. SPECIAL 8-2 NUMBER: TEN AMERICAN-MADE UFO. The author, 90, 84 x 1 1/2pp, revised by all, contains, as our previous write-ups for this fascinating work which will probably have 40 minutes "knocking at Connelley door" mail soon! \$20.00
- S. Good, Timothy, ed. THE UFO REPORT 1990. Sidgwick & Jackson, '89. HC, 223pp, 11 1/2 x 10. Back covers have been sent, and we still have a supply of this anthology of current sightings, which has, among other goodies, 40 pages on the British "crop circles." Also, Cynthia Blunt, Paul Norman, Ralph Brown (on UFO "sighting"), etc. \$24.95
- T. Gross, Loren E. UFOs: A HISTORY. The first 4 volumes of this great contribution to UFO literature are available as follows:
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- U. Swinton, William. THE CENTER OF THE VORTEX. Tulsa, '64. 84 x 11, spiral bound, 86 p. An energy-related work, with physical energies being related to spiritual ones. \$1

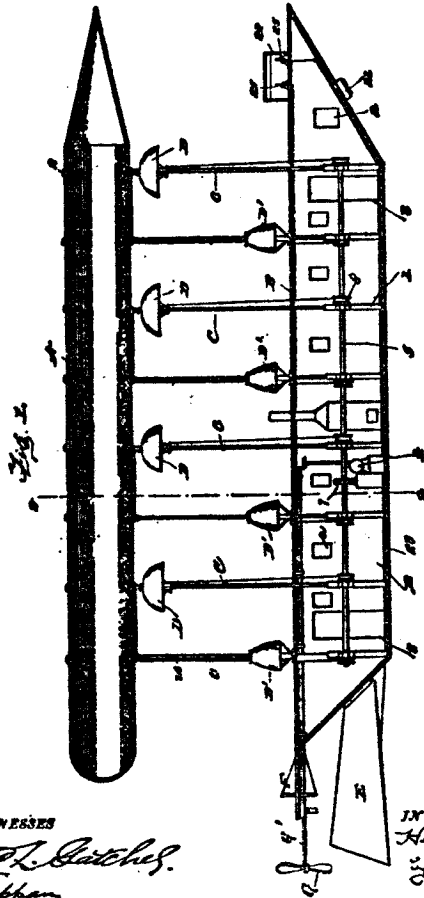
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H. HEINTZ.
AIR SHIP.

3 Sheets—Sheet 1.

No. 580,941.

Patented Apr. 20, 1897.



WITNESSES

Thos. L. Hutchins.
J. H. Appen

INVENTOR,

Harry Heintz
J. H. Appen
Attorney

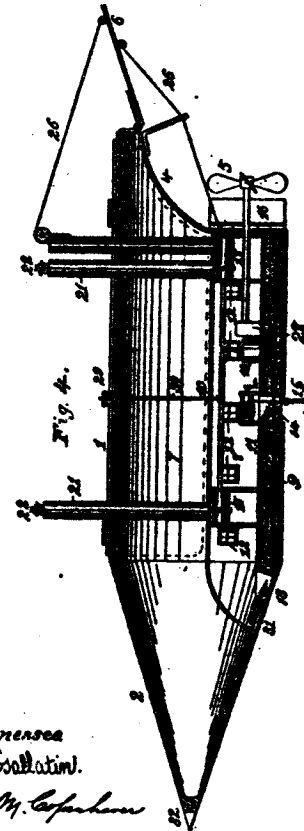
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O. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

3 Sheets—Sheet 2.

No. 565,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witnesses
A. B. Callahan

Jas. M. Capshaw

C. A. Smith,

Inventor,

D. B. Callahan
Attorney

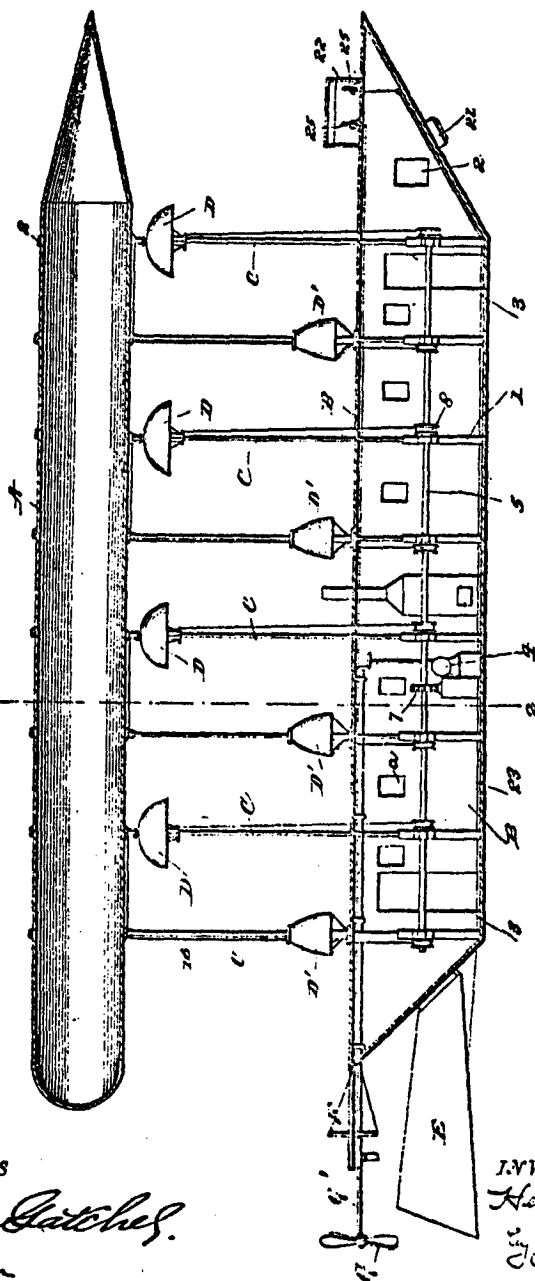
No. 580,941.

AIR SHIP.

Patented Apr. 20, 1897.

1 of 2, 57

Fig. 1.



WITNESSES

Theo. L. Gatchel.
J. E. Appan

INVENTOR.

Henry Heintz.
By John W. Alderson
Attorney

Reproduction of an airship patent granted Henry Heintz of Elkton, South Dakota, on April 20, 1897. (Courtesy of the U.S. Patent Office, Washington, D.C.)

(NO MODEL.)

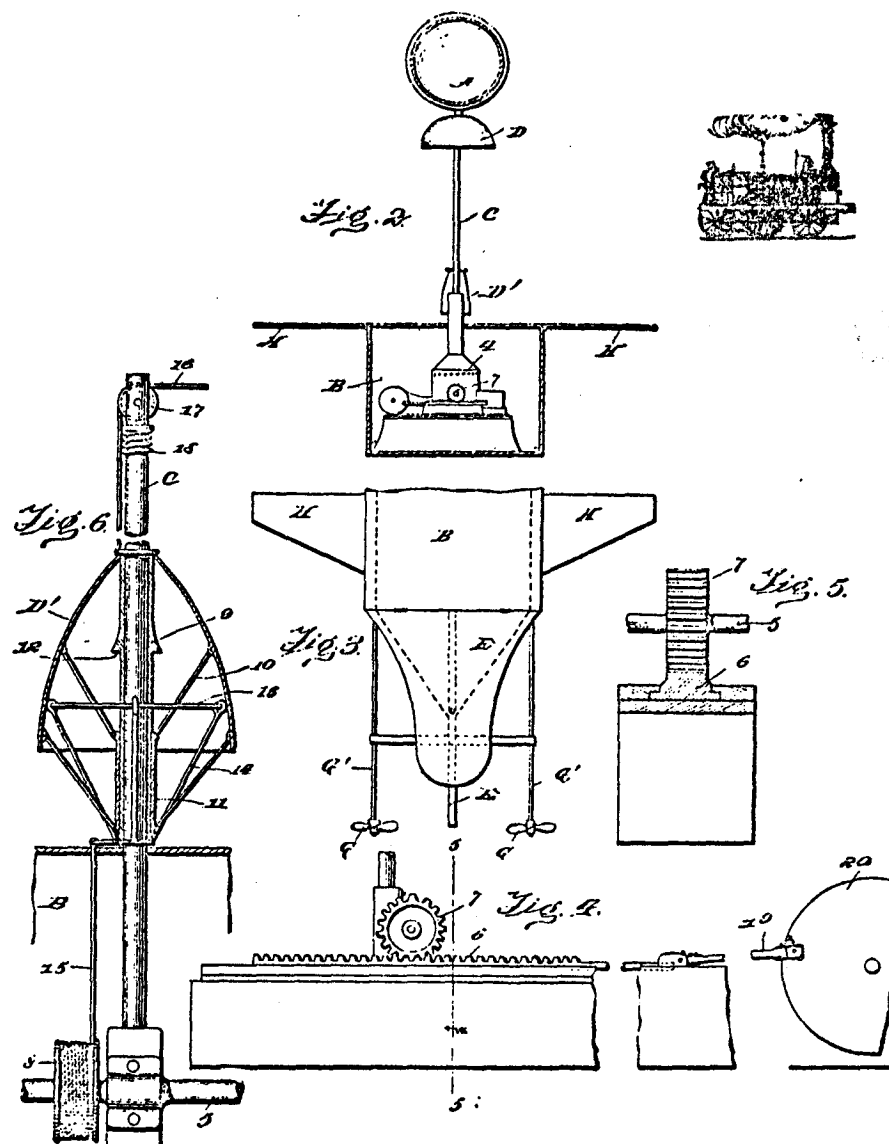
H. HEINTZ.

AIR SHIP.

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.

No. 580,941.

Patented Apr. 20, 1897.



WITNESSES

Theo. L. Gatchel.
J. E. Appan

INVENTOR.

Henry Heintz.
By John W. Alderson
Attorney

Cincuenta años antes de que la palabra OVNI fuera inventada, numerosos testigos estadounidenses mencionaban extraños aparatos que surcaban el cielo. Se habló incluso de "marcianos" y más tarde los historiadores sentenciaron que todo había sido un fraude. Recientes investigaciones han empezado a arrojar luz sobre esta historia.

por Santiago Camacho

El año 1897 fue un período de grandes logros y esperanzas en la historia de la humanidad. Aquella fue una época de maravillas en la que se produjo uno de los primeros casos OVNI documentados de la historia; éste aún suscita controversia entre los ufólogos. Nos referimos a la oleada de avistamientos OVNI que se produjo en Estados Unidos entre 1896-97, y que pasaron a la historia bajo el nombre de *Airships* (naves aéreas). Todo comenzó el 18 de noviembre de 1896, cuando el *Sacramento Bee* recogía el avistamiento de algo que parecía "un inmenso cigarro con cuatro grandes alas conectadas a un cuerpo de aluminio". Miles de videntes pudieron verlo. A partir de ahí, y durante todo el año siguiente, las observaciones de objetos similares se sucedieron en California, Nevada, Utah, Nebraska,

Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, Nuevo México, Arizona, Oklahoma, Louisiana y, sobre todo, Texas, donde durante el mes de marzo de 1897 tuvo lugar una oleada casi continua de incidentes de este tipo.

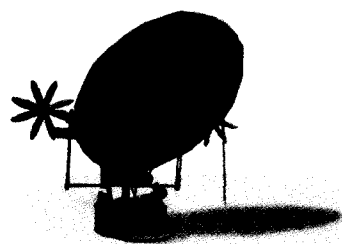
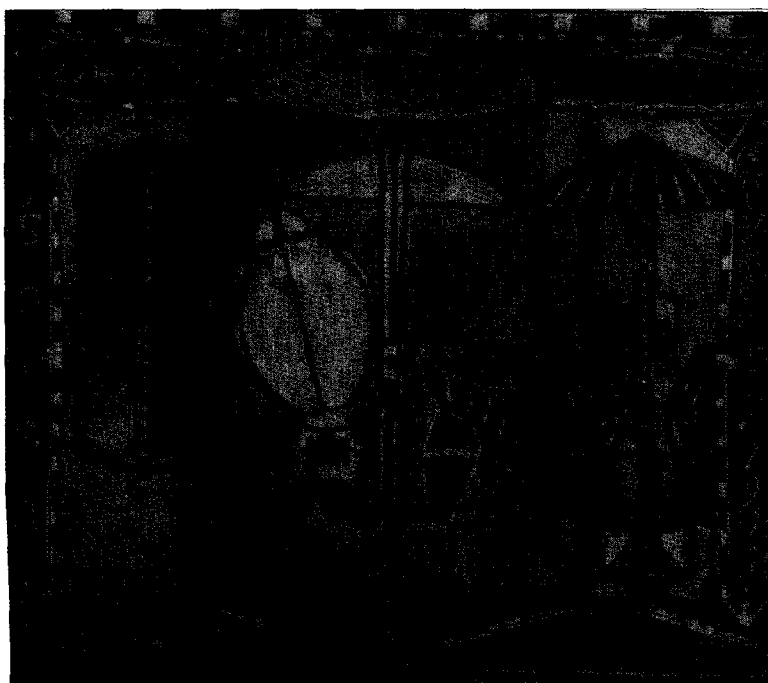
Los periódicos no dejaron de imprimir historias de naves que surcaban el cielo. Muchos ciudadanos se acercaron a los periódicos para contar sus encuentros nocturnos con aquellas extrañas máquinas voladoras. Pero no todos los relatos fueron publicados. A veces, sólo el testimonio de personas de sólida reputación conseguía vencer la resistencia de los editores, que aun así se curaban en salud mostrando su escepticismo en sus editoriales.

LA PRIMERA "OLEADA OVNI"

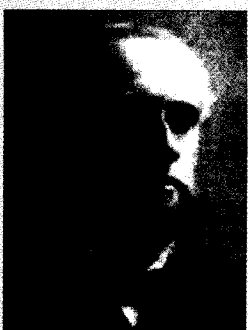
¿Cómo explicar este fenómeno? ¿La imaginación delirante de los testigos? ¿Dema-

siado alcohol en la taberna? ¿Histeria colectiva? ¿Un fraude a gran escala? Aunque el misterio comenzó en California con la observación inicial en Sacramento el 18 de noviembre de 1896 (seguida de numerosas observaciones en San Francisco y otras ciudades de California), pronto, en otras regiones se informó de la presencia de los extraños aparatos. Usando como guía los relatos de los periódicos, uno puede comprobar que los avistamientos siguen una ruta identificable desde California, siguiendo hacia el Este hasta llegar a Illinois, Indiana y Michigan, cambiando entonces su curso hacia el Sur atravesando Missouri, Kansas y Oklahoma hasta llegar a Texas y Luisiana en abril de 1897.

A lo largo de toda esta ruta los informes de los avistamientos siguieron un mismo patrón general (ver recuadro). Los testigos



Los dibujos de Charles Dellschau fueron la primera pista para desentrañar la increíble historia de las naves aéreas.



De arriba abajo, algunos de los protagonistas de esta fascinante historia: Charles Dellschau, el capitán Samuel Tillman, el profesor Amos Dolbear y el doctor Salomon Andrews.

A la derecha, la representación de estos mismos personajes, acompañados ocasionalmente con un gato, ha quedado plasmada en los dibujos del excéntrico Dellschau.

solían permanecer en silencio hasta que un miembro respetable de la comunidad informaba de la observación. Entonces, otros testigos perdían el miedo a hablar. Si hacemos caso a lo que nos cuentan los testigos hubo casi un centenar de observaciones de "naves aéreas" en los Estados Unidos durante los años 1896-97, la mayoría de ellas en los estados del Medio Oeste; eso sin contar los casos que nunca llegaron a oídos de la prensa y aquellos que nunca fueron recogidos a causa de las dudas de los editores. Así, tenemos por ejemplo el caso mencionado en el clásico *Pasaporte a Magonia* de **Jacques Vallée**, que tuvo lugar en Sioux City (Iowa) el 26 de marzo de 1897, donde un hombre llamado **Robert Hibbard** fue presuntamente enganchado por un ancla que colgaba de un aparato volador y arrastrado más de veinte metros. Ocasionalmente, los testigos vislumbraban a seres extraños que trabajaban en lo que parecía la maquinaria de las naves, lo que suscitó más inquietud aún si cabe en la opinión pública de la época. ¿Eran los enigmáticos tripulantes de estas naves extraterrestres que exploraban nuestro planeta? El momento culminante de estas observaciones tuvo lugar en Aurora, Texas, el 17 de abril de 1897, cuando uno de estos aparatos se estrelló contra un molino. Fue encontrado un cadáver calcinado, bautizado por el periodista **F. E. Hayden** como "el marciano". Para él: "Era evidente que no se trataba de un habitante de este mundo". Fue enterrado en el cementerio masónico de la localidad. Hoy, los únicos recuerdos visibles del incidente son un pequeño fragmento de lo que fue la lápida y un cartel que menciona el asunto.

EL ESLABÓN PERDIDO

La historia de las "naves aéreas" tiene mucho en común con los relatos de **Julio**

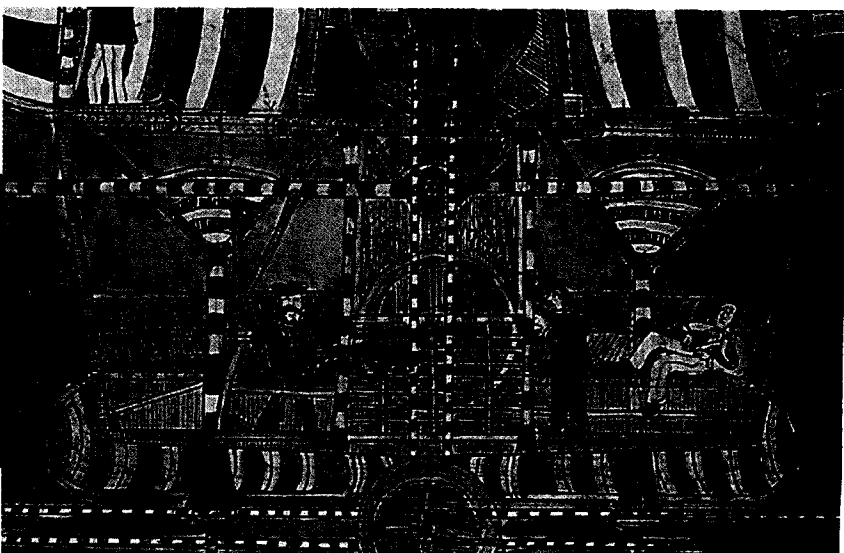
Verne. Pero poco a poco se ha ido desentrañando una historia menos heroica, menos mítica, pero más fascinante. Una historia de hombres normales entregados a un sueño...

En 1899, **Charles Dellschau**, un jubilado de humor huraño y mala fama entre sus vecinos, comenzó una curiosa afición: pintar dirigibles asombrosos, *collages* que muestran brillantes naves aéreas equipadas para la guerra y pilotadas por un grupo de caballeros acompañados ocasionalmente de un gato a rayas. A día de hoy, sus trabajos han alcanzado gran estima entre los coleccionistas de arte y antigüedades y una página de las libretas de Dellschau puede venderse por 15.000 dólares. Pero su contenido ilustra algo más que la fértil imaginación de su autor.

El enigma de los dibujos de Dellschau intriga tanto a historiadores de arte como a ufólogos. Los *collages* de Dellschau documentan las hazañas del Aeroclub de Sonora, un grupo reservado, casi una sociedad secreta, dedicado a la creación de *Aeros* o máquinas voladoras. Como si fuera un testamento en clave, Dellschau dejó constancia en sus libretas de cómo él y sus compañeros reinaron durante una época en los cielos estadounidenses, pilotando los dirigibles que en secreto habían construido.

En esta crónica se narran -acompañando el relato con recortes de prensa procedentes entre otros del *Scientific American* y el *Houston Chronicle*- éxitos y fracasos, espectaculares vuelos y accidentes mortales... Los aparatos son bautizados con los nombres de sus pilotos -*Aero Trump*, *Aero Schnabel*, *Aero Mary*, *Aero Jordan* y *Aero Smith* (de ahí viene el nombre del grupo musical).

Dellschau hace hincapié en el extremo sigilo con el que el club llevaba a cabo sus



actividades. La existencia de los dirigibles era un secreto que protegían celosamente. La mayor parte de los vuelos tenía lugar de noche. Por el día se recurría a ingeniosos trucos para camuflar los aparatos. Cuenta Dellschau que el piloto del *Aero Goet* viajaba por el día disfrazado de gitano y conduciendo un carromato que, en realidad, era su nave aérea camuflada. El secreto era tan grande que, incluso después de disuelta la sociedad, el propio Dellschau escribió gran parte de sus diarios en una clave que aún no ha sido descifrada, tal vez recordando que un miembro del club demasiado locuaz fue asesinado por revelar a extraños su existencia.

LA RUTA DEL ORO

Buena parte del misterio pudo deberse a las tremendas posibilidades comerciales que tenía el invento. Una compañía de Nueva York, *R. Porter & Company*, anunció en la prensa (1848) su proyecto de comercializar en breve viajes aéreos: "*¡La mejor ruta hacia el oro de California!*" La compañía dijo que organizaría vuelos de Nueva York a California en abril de 1849 y que el viaje de ida y vuelta duraría sólo siete días. Pero esto nunca se llevó a cabo. Según el relato de Dellschau, las hazañas del Aeroclub de Sonora tuvieron lugar en California entre 1848 y algún momento de la década siguiente, hasta el momento en que fallece en un accidente aéreo **Peter Mennis**, el genio que estaba detrás de la construcción de los *Aeros*. Por lo tanto, las hazañas de este grupo no tendrían con nuestra historia más que una relación meramente anecdótica de no ser por un hecho que por sí solo constituye el eslabón perdido para comenzar a desenredar el hilo de la historia de 1897.

En 1895 Charles Dellschau se instala en Texas, epicentro de la oleada que tendría

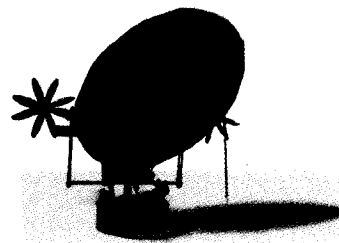
lugar dos años después, y coincide allí con tres antiguos camaradas de su grupo: el **Dr. Charles A. Smith** (el del *Aero Smith*), **Willard Wilson**, y algún colaborador, aún no identificado del **Dr. Salomón Andrews**, quien había fallecido recientemente pero que había seguido trabajando durante aquellos años en el perfeccionamiento de la navegación aérea. Dado lo ocurrido posteriormente, es muy probable que se decidieran a llevar a cabo la refundación del grupo. Pero hacía falta para ello un considerable aporte financiero que ninguno de ellos estaba en disposición de realizar. Durante la época de Sonora, de la financiación se encargaba un personaje que aparece recurrentemente en los diarios de Dellschau como el mecenas del grupo. Se trataba de **George Hearst**, padre del magnate de la prensa **William Randolph Hearst**. Pero Hearst padre falleció en 1891, por lo que la única oportunidad que tenían los veteranos de Sonora de financiar su nueva aventura era recurrir al hijo de su antiguo compañero. ¿Lo hicieron? ¿Lo consiguieron? Todo parece indicar que sí, pero que el precio fue mucho más alto que el que esperaban pagar...

LOS PROTAGONISTAS

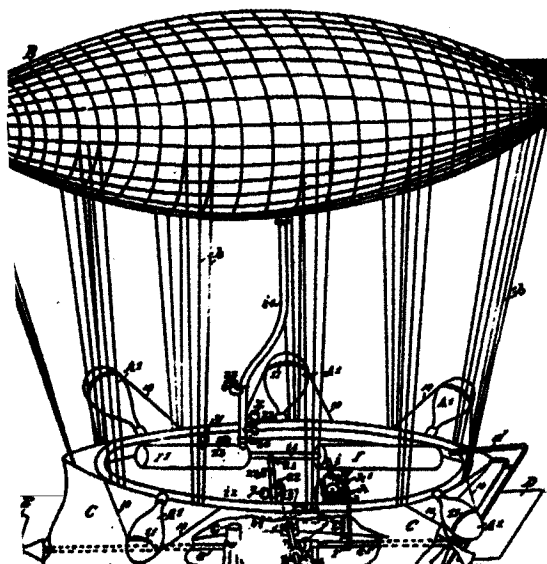
El 19 de abril de 1897, el *Dallas Morning News* y el *Galveston News* reproducían uno de los casos más notables de observación de naves aéreas. El día anterior, gran número de ciudadanos de Stephenville había sido testigo del aterrizaje de uno de estos aparatos, teniendo ocasión de conversar con sus tripulantes, que se identificaron como el capitán **Samuel E. Tillman** y el profesor **Amos E. Dolbear**. Entre otras interesantes revelaciones realizadas por la pareja a sus interlocutores, ambos confirmaron la existencia de otras naves y comentaron que el proyecto era financiado

por un millonario de Nueva York. Éste es quizá el testimonio más valioso aportado en toda la oleada de avistamientos, ya que ambos nombres corresponden a personas reales y con una relación en absoluto circunstancial con este asunto.

El ingeniero aeronáutico e historiador científico **Michael Busby** ha realizado un esfuerzo de investigación a lo largo de seis años que ha culminado con la identificación de varios de los principales implicados en la trama de las naves aéreas, sus relaciones y sus actividades en esta época. Amos E. Dolbear era profesor en la *Tufts University de Massachusetts*. Su especialidad eran los motores eléctricos, de los que



El relato de las "naves aéreas" tiene mucho en común con los relatos de Julio Verne. Pero poco a poco se ha ido desentrañando una historia menos mítica.



El dato

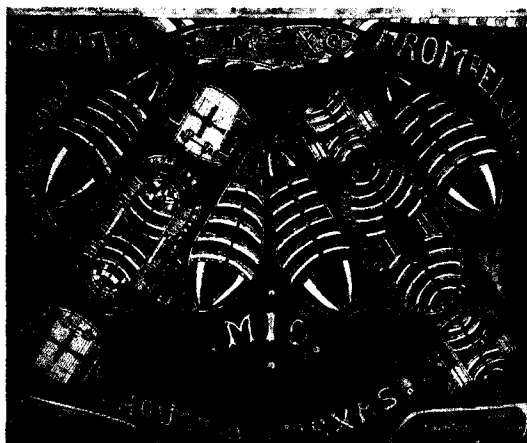
¿Un cadáver alienígena?

Uno de estos aparatos se estrelló en Aurora, Texas, el 17 de abril de 1897, contra un molino de viento,

estallando posteriormente. Entre los restos fue encontrado el cadáver calcinado e irreconocible del piloto... En aquella

época se especuló que podía tratarse de un "marciano". La verdad era otra muy distinta: era un hombre de carne y hueso.

construyó varios de los más grandes de aquella época. Su amigo, el capitán, **Samuel Escue Tillman** era profesor de química en la Academia Militar de *West Point* y es probable que fuera el enlace militar en las actividades del grupo, ya que durante la primavera de 1897 se encontraba ausente de la academia en cumplimiento de una "misión especial". Las investigaciones de Busby han revelado



que ambos científicos conocían a "un millonario de Nueva York" en posición de financiar su empresa. Efectivamente, se trataba del hijo del antiguo mecenas del Aeroclub de Sonora, **William Randolph Hearst**, propietario del *San Francisco Examiner* y el *New York Herald*, quien fue uno de los principales beneficiarios del asunto, ya que la extravagante historia debió incrementar las ventas de sus periódicos. Pero sus intereses iban más allá. Los múltiples contactos del multimillonario se extendían a la poderosa industria de armamento y al ejército. Busby y otros autores han documentado la vocación que ya por aquel entonces tenían las fuerzas armadas estadounidenses en embarcarse en todo tipo de proyectos secretos. De hecho, se encuentran perfectamente documentadas diversas pruebas secretas realizadas en aquella época con "globos dirigidos" para hacer un reconocimiento en territorio enemigo o transportar torpedos. Ello explicaría la presencia en el equipo de aeronautas del capitán Tillman y la misión especial que le había hecho ausentarse de *West Point*.

EL CASO AURORA

2

A la luz de lo expuesto, el caso del presunto "marciano" que perdió la vida en su nave, toma una nueva dimensión. Si el accidente de Aurora realmente tuvo lugar, parece razonable conciliar dicho evento con otras observaciones similares ocurridas en otros lugares. Pues bien, a primeras horas de la mañana del 17 de abril de 1897, el mismo día en que horas más tarde tendría lugar el siniestro, se informó de la presencia cerca de Stephenville, 84 millas al suroeste de Aurora, de uno de aquellos dirigibles que había tomado tierra por lo que parecían dificultades técnicas, partiendo después en dirección a Aurora.

Según los testigos, el dirigible navegaba hacia el molino de viento contra el que finalmente colisionó en línea recta. Es razonable suponer que el piloto habría intentado eludir el molino si le hubiera sido posible, y en este caso también parece razonable que los testigos habrían comentado el hecho. Como los testigos no dieron cuenta de ninguna maniobra evasiva por parte del dirigible, sólo queda

Radiografía de los avistamientos

PRIMER AVISTAMIENTO:

LUGARES DE LOS AVISTAMIENTOS:

2	3
4	5
6	7
8	9
10	11
12	13
14	15
16	

PATRÓN DE LOS AVISTAMIENTOS



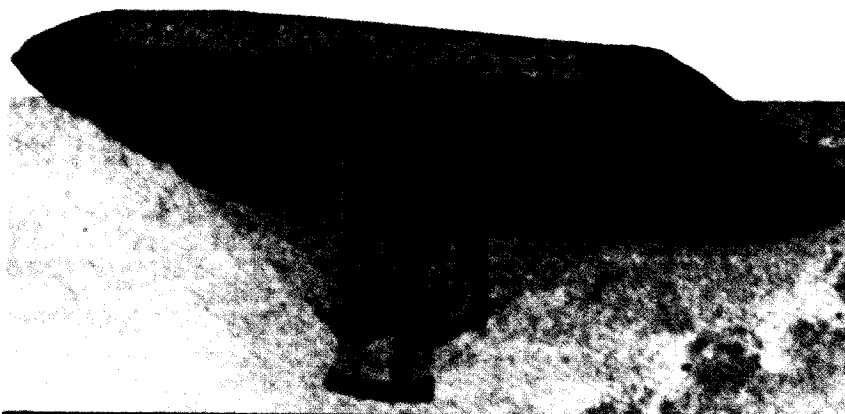
Eco MEDIÁTICO



concluir que el piloto, por los motivos que fuesen, se encontraba incapacitado para llevar a cabo dicha maniobra. También es probable que el piloto simplemente perdiera el control del dirigible y no pudiera hacer nada para evitar el desastre.

En la actualidad, varios equipos de ufólogos afirman haber encontrado restos del accidente. Los análisis de este material revelaron que se trataba de aluminio, algo compatible con la tecnología de un ingenio de aquellas características y también con las declaraciones de presuntos tripulantes e inventores de los dirigibles recogidas en los periódicos de la época.

Durante los dos días siguientes a la tragedia, los avistamientos se multiplican por la zona. Todos los testigos señalan que los aparatos que han visto dirigían potentes focos hacia el suelo, como si buscaran algo, quizá a su compañero perdido. Si vamos punteando en un mapa las diversas observaciones descubriremos cómo se nos queda dibujada a la perfección la trayectoria de dos aparatos que batían una amplia zona del estado de Texas en lo que parece un patrón de búsqueda. Esta frenética actividad finaliza coincidiendo con el momento en el que el accidente de Aurora es dado a conocer



Este grabado es el único testimonio gráfico de los experimentos militares con dirigibles llevados a cabo en EE.UU. a finales del siglo XIX.

"MÁS ALLÁ"

por la prensa, el 20 de abril. Dos días después, el registro de un hotel de Nueva Orleans nos revela que dos de los intrépidos pilotos, Tillman y Dolbear, se habían retirado a aquella ciudad para disfrutar de un merecido descanso y quién sabe si llorar al compañero caído.

Respecto al destino del resto de los dirigibles y sus pilotos, sólo podemos especular. Es probable que aquél fuera el primero de tantos proyectos de alto secreto del ejército estadounidense que se han

mantenido ocultos a la opinión pública hasta que su tecnología ha quedado obsoleta. También es posible que a esto contribuyese la tremenda influencia que tenía la industria del ferrocarril, la mayor afectada, como se pudo comprobar décadas más tarde, por la aparición del transporte aéreo. En cualquier caso, es muy difícil que algún día la historia rinda el tributo que se merece aquel grupo de pioneros, casi sacados de una novela de Julio Verne, que se atrevieron a "tocar" el cielo. ■

30 Comunicados

- Le Parisien Libéré, 14.9.54
- La Montagne, 14.9.54
- La Croix, 14.9.54
- Libération, 14.9.54
- Feuille d'Aviz de Neuchâtel, 14.9.54, p.1
- La Croix du Nord, 15.9.54, p.2
- L'Observateur d'Avesnes, 15.9.54, p.1
- The Clearwater Sun (Clearwater, Florida), 21.10.54, p.3
- Nord-Matin, 29.10.54, p.1
- France-Soir, 15.9.54, pp.1,6
- Le Parisien Libéré, 15.9.54
- L'Union de Reims, 15.9.54, p.8
- Nord-Eclair, 16.9.54, pp.1,8
- Télégramme de Brest, 16.9.54
- Nouveau-Nord Maritime, 16.9.54, p.2
- Feuille d'Aviz de Neuchâtel, 16.9.54, p.1-9
- La Croix de l'Aisne, 26.9.54, p.6
- France-Dimanche 25 ó 26.10.54
- L'Observateur d'Avesnes, 29.9.54
- Radar, 13.10.54
- Radar, 17.10.54
- La Liberté, 19.10.54
- La Cité (Mons, Belgique), 19.10.54
- Nord-Eclair, 15.9.54, pp.1,9
- La Voix du Nord, 14.8.68, p.17
- La Face a Matin, 30.10.54, pp.1,10
- Sin referencias "French landing reports"
- Del dossier de Ted Blocher, Nov. 1 1954
- La Semaine du Nord, 4.2.55
- Ouranos nº 24 (3º Trim. 59) p.11-13
- Ouranos nº 25, pp.20-24
- Nord-France, 17-9-54, pp.10-11

COMUNICADO

Jean Sider me ha encargado la publicación en suscripción de su obra titulada: **L'AIRSHIP DE 1897 - Contribution a l'étude socio-historique de la vague de dirigeables-fantômes aux Etats-Unis**.

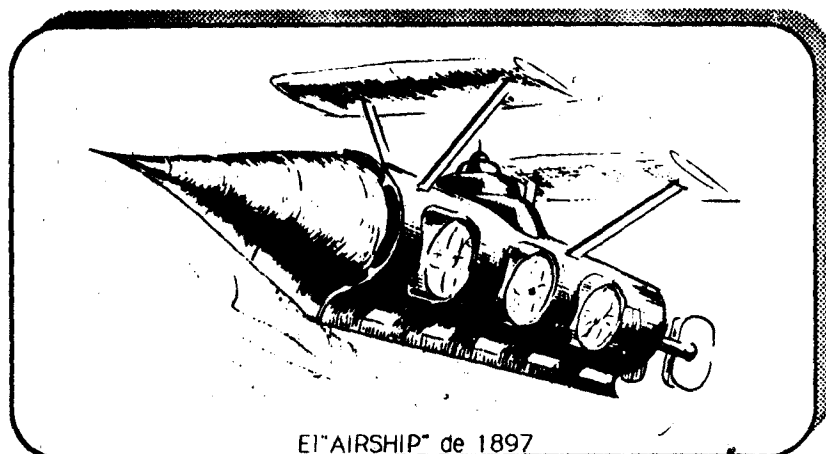
Se trata de una edición artesanal que cuenta con 373 paginas. Para reunir esta documentación inmediata, Jean Sider ha tenido que contactar con numerosos organismos especializados (bibliotecas públicas, museos, universidades, etc) e incluso pagar a estudiantes americanos para que llevaran a cabo revisiones de diversos periódicos de la época.

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El "AIRSHIP" de 1897

0050



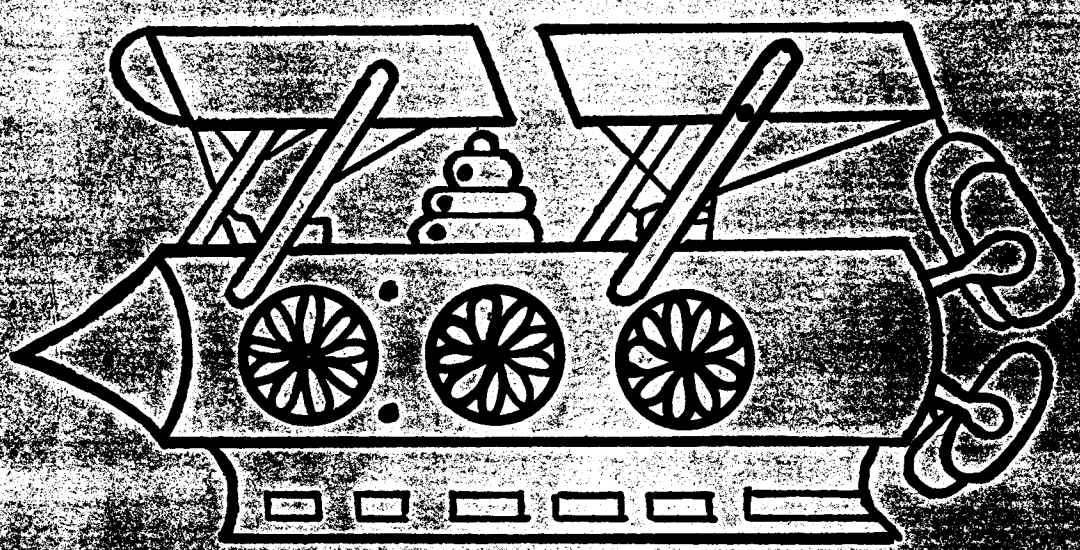
FLYING SAUCER REVIEW

JULY - AUGUST 1966



VOLUME 12, No. 4

12th YEAR OF PUBLICATION



Was it a UFO that
appeared like this
to a witness just
before the turn of the
century?

See . . .

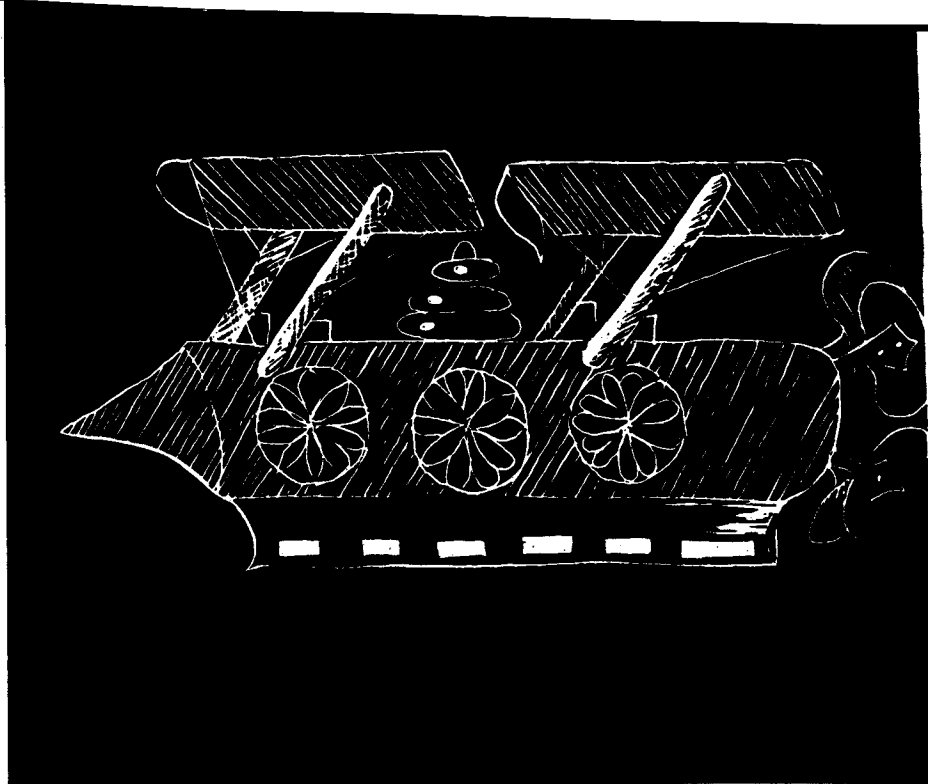
THE STRANGE CASE OF THE 1897 AIRSHIP

ton, Michigan, April 17, the account says:

"This morning at a point a mile and a half south and west of this village, a balloon or flying machine alighted. The airship was seen about an hour before it alighted, by a dozen farmers or more, who had been watching it. On its attempt to alight, they gathered around, but a good many of them did not remain long after the landing of the ship. A strange man, if man he might be called, was in charge of the ship. While he seemed to have plenty of clothes, he seemed to have no use for them, as he was almost naked, and seemed to be suffering from the heat. He is almost 9-1/2 feet tall and his talk, while musical, is not talk at all, but seems to be a repetition of bellowing. One of the farmers, who was somewhat braver, attempted to go near him and got a kick that will last him for some time, having got his hip broken. Great excitement prevails here, and lots of people are flocking here from Okemos and Locke to view the strange being at a distance, as no one dares to go near. He seems to be trying to talk to the people. The people here are credulous and those who have not seen refuse to believe, although six of the best people are here and affirm that it is the truth. From their excited manners, we are led to believe that no hoax exists. At 8:10 last evening the airship passed south and a little west of the village. Hundreds of people watched its flight."

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

Said the Captain: "Of course I



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 :

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"I went at once in the direction of the sound

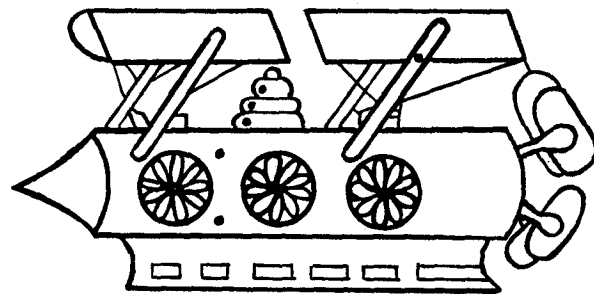
famous airship seen by so many people about the country.

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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

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 Winchester—for we were now thoroughly aroused

others—a voling through plainly distinct was cigar-sh. looking just the papers r the young m about thirty particular to ing an umbra whiskers inv could take u him we believ

"Asking t turned on an was so powe his motive po in Hot Sprin baths, but hi He said they Tenn., after in a hurry we minutes later hear or see th

"John

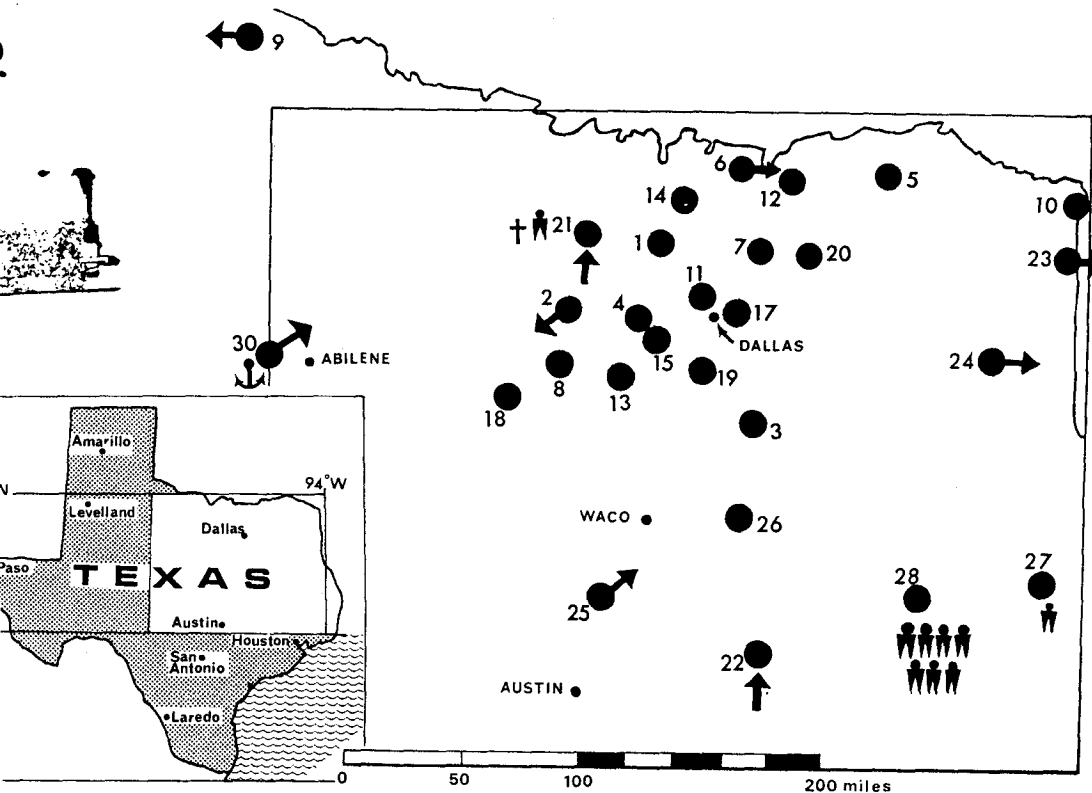
"John

"Subscribe day of May, 1

"C. G

The Fort S while Sumpte a great deal seriously mai their earnestu unable to acco men are not je "As both are statement can

Especial at in the last pa ship between We have alre had comment ated its light were lying, th quite familiar newspapers th them. (By coi Illinois farmh airship also pil



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

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

2: 'There was considerable excitement here caused by a visitation last night by the mysterious ship. It was first seen by Jim Nelson, a farmer, five and a half miles west of here. He had walked his yard just after midnight, when his attention was attracted by a peculiar noise and looking up he dis-

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

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

'Dr. Crossly, Jack Bangus, Dr. Connelly, Chess Mayes, Tom Swint, Dick Hogan, Paul Dunklin, R. T. Cope and Mr. Huffmaster, night operator, all are reported to have seen the ship, and verify the statement and description given by Boothe and Wicks. When first seen by Jim Nelson, there were only faint gleams of red, green and blue lights showing, but just after starting off horizontally it

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

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

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

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

27. Rockland: 'Mr. John M. Barclay, living near this place, reports that last night about 11 o'clock, after having retired, he heard his dog barking furiously, together with a whining noise. He went to the door to ascertain the trouble and saw something, he says, that made his eyes bulge out and but for the fact that he had been reading of an airship that was supposed to have been in or over Texas, he would have taken to the woods. It was a peculiar shaped body, with an oblong shape, with wings and side attachments of various sizes and shapes. There were brilliant lights, which appeared much brighter than electric lights. When he first saw it, it seemed perfectly stationary about five yards from the ground. It circled a few times and gradually descended to the ground in a pasture adjacent to his house. He took his Winchester and went down to investigate. As

of cold chisels. I suppose the articles and the Here is a ten-day and keep the chisels.

Mr. Barclay: Let me go on. Smith said: "any nearer, but business will be a future day and on a trip."

Mr. Barclay: chisels, but to change and Mr. but same was and thanked follow him to him and asked he was going.

be in Greece when there was gone, as of a gun. Mr. I

28. Josselyn: this writing is caused by a visit at so many prominent farmer a man of unknown before last night similar to that he was startled from a ponder rested upon the

'Having read of the noted a over him that with all the Mr. Nichols saw the strange men men with buck from his well visitors instead granted. Mr. them to the s composed of

The machinery interview he c. However, one aerial navigators built of a new party of self-sufficiency is highly condensed five of these sl. Soon the immense stock the next year Mr. Nichols li and will conv place where the



sort above the luminous point (according to newspaper accounts).

The strange flying light appeared a second time, so the story goes, on the evening of November 21, at which time the public and press are said to have taken the phenomenon much more seriously. Reportedly, witnesses to the second passage included a sizable number of the citizens of Sacramento, but, as before, a dark, cloudy sky masked any detail that would explain how the light was being carried through the atmosphere.

Soon after the light passed out of sight, it was reportedly seen over the city of Folsom, some twenty miles to the west. Later that night, reports of lights in the heavens came in from the San Francisco Bay area.

Unexplained flying lights and the story of the sighting of an airship by one R. L. Lowry prompted a San Francisco attorney to "disclose" that a man had supposedly contacted him some months earlier for legal advice concerning the "world's first practical airship," a craft that the supposed inventor asserted he had nearly completed. Flashing impressive blueprints and boasting of strong financial backing, the inventor convinced the attorney that the airship would soon be operational. The attorney, a George D. Collins, told the press that, in his opinion, the phenomenon in the skies over Sacramento must have been his client conducting nocturnal test flights before making an official announcement of his secret invention. This suggestion, a reasonable one in the minds of many, was given extensive publicity by San Francisco newspapers, stirring up imaginations all over California. Rumors and wild stories soon began to spread. For a while, the "phantom airship" was the biggest news story in northern California.

As more reports of strange lights in the sky were tallied, enhancing the mystery, Attorney Collins became so tormented by reporters and curious busybodies that he regretted his earlier bragging and fled into hiding.

Cities reporting airship sightings after November 23 included Stockton, Lathrop, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, Red

Bluff, Chico, Auburn, San Jose, Modesto, Woodland, Fresno, Visalia, Hanford, Bakersfield, Tulare, Delano, Los Angeles, Redlands, and Anderson.

As to the exact nature of the mystery light, many reports were vague, mentioning only a bright light in the western sky early in the evening, indicating possible confusion with the planet Venus. Reported velocities of the light as it passed overhead were slow by modern standards, and if one considers the testimony of a number of witnesses that the light moved in an undulating fashion, this might indicate that some sightings were due to wind-blown balloons with a lantern attached. Again, some witnesses said they saw something large supporting the light but very few details were given. The most common terms used to describe the "supporting structure" were: "dark body," "misty mass," "cigar-shaped," "egg-shaped," and "barrel-shaped."

In spite of the difficulties involved, about a half-dozen reports can be explained satisfactorily. These were the sightings of three strange lights in the heavens a month before the passage of the mystery light (or lights) over Sacramento. There is a good possibility that people were confusing the "phantom airship" with the passage of a triple-headed bolide that had crossed the night sky with majestic slowness several weeks previously.

However, all things considered, there were still some puzzling episodes that took place in November 1896:

(1) A fiery object displaying three points of light was spotted resting on the ground near Knight's Ferry, California. Two witnesses, both Methodist ministers, said the thing suddenly took off as they approached, flying away in a shallow climb.

(2) A fast-moving cigar-shaped object surrounded by a shifting luminosity and making small explosions was reported by the captain of a steamboat.

(3) According to hundreds of citizens of Tulare, California, of which fifteen are named in news accounts, something in the night sky came down quite a distance, and then went up and took a straight, quick move westward. Red, white, and blue lights were seen in succession.

(4) A resident of Tacoma, Washington, said he watched something strange in the sky over Mount Rainier one night. For over an hour, he said, an object emitted various colored rays, which shot out from the thing's center in every direction like spokes of a wheel. The "object" reportedly moved about with a waving motion, swayed back and forth, and darted from one position to another.

The Canadian press, which reported on the puzzling events taking place in California, seemed to take the airship possibility very seriously, even though one of the most intriguing reports of the year came from Rossland, British Columbia, on August 12, 1896. It told of a strange aerial body that approached the town, paused momentarily above a nearby mountain peak, made several wide circles in the sky, and then sped away on a straight course. The thing was described as a "luminous ball of fire that glowed amidst a halo of variegated colors." The object

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

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

The patents, and the newspaper stories concerning one of them, discovered by the authors are anything but convincing.⁴ Such patents in the "Machine Age" were a dime a dozen, and no individual has ever stepped forward with conclusive proof that he had mastered heavier-than-air flight. Among the various individuals in the Midwest who claimed to have invented "the airship" we have an A. C. Clinton who claimed he would give a demonstration of his machine at the trans-Mississippi exposition on April 17; he never showed up. A certain Mr. Carr made a deal with the famous Ringling Brothers' circus to demonstrate the airship designed by one F. Meyer at a ticketed performance. At the time agreed upon neither Mr. Carr nor the airship could be located.

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

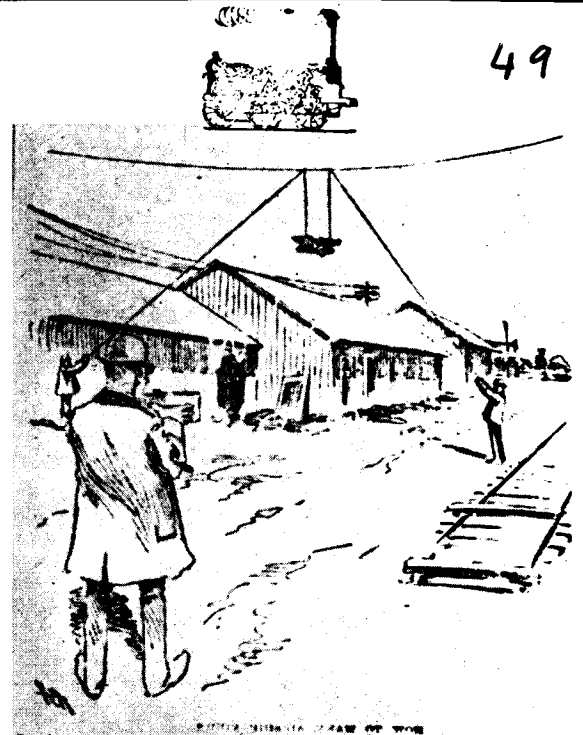
"Taylors Falls, Minnesota, April 10—The famous airship has been found near here. Upon receipt of a bulletin from Minneapolis, your correspondent hastened to the thick woods south of town. He penetrated them with great care. Moving cautiously he came to the edge of a considerable clearing in which he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

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

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

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

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



Preparing the 1897 fake!

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

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

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

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

NOTES

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

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 Lafayette, 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 Lafayette 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

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. 50

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.

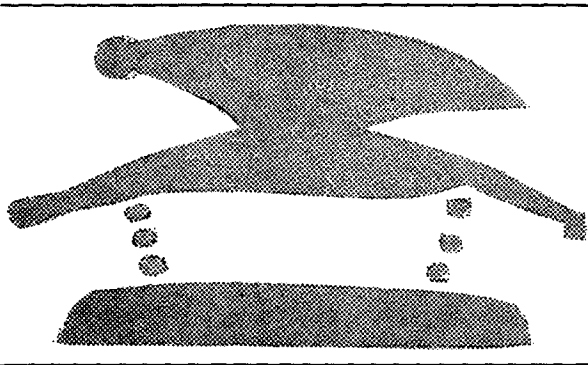
The witness thought the craft hovered at an altitude of 300ft., and that it might be as much as half a mile long. All he could see, however, were the outlines of the machine, due to the brilliant searchlight "which made everything below as bright as day and above as dark as midnight during a cyclone."

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."

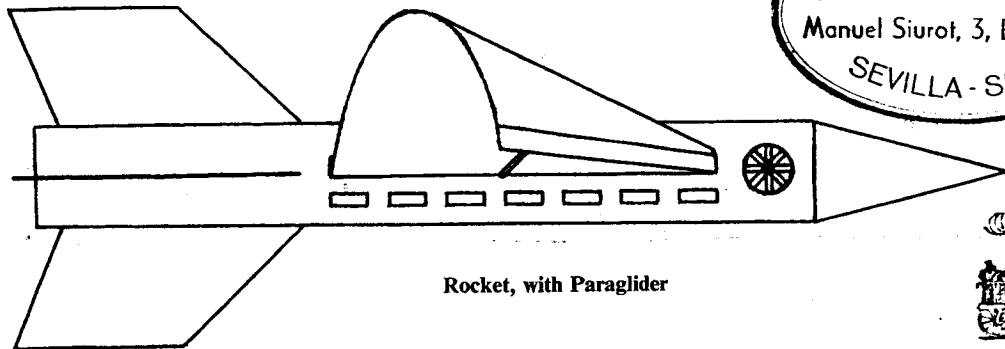
Suddenly there was an explosion. Sparks flew, and the ship began to descend from an altitude of a mile down to a half-mile. Another explosion sounded, sparks flew from the wheel, and the craft began to rise again. Its two lights—a red one in front, a light blue one behind—went out, and it no longer could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



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

SR 14-5



FSR, N^o 6, 1967

19th CENTURY PARAGLIDER?

by W. H. Watson

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

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

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

We hear from Donald B. Hanlon² of one over Iowa three days later, on which "the vibration of the wings could be plainly seen."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recalling Captain James Hooton's description³ we read of "condensed air and aeroplanes" . . . "The aeroplanes suddenly sprang forward, turning their sharp ends skyward, then the rudders at the end of the ship began to veer to one side . . ."

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

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

NOTES

¹ Clark, J. *The Strange Case of the 1897 Airship*, FSR July/August 1966
² Hanlon, D. B. *Texas Odyssey of 1897*, FSR September/October 1966. Also, in collaboration with Vallée, J., *Airships over Texas*, FSR, January/February 1967.

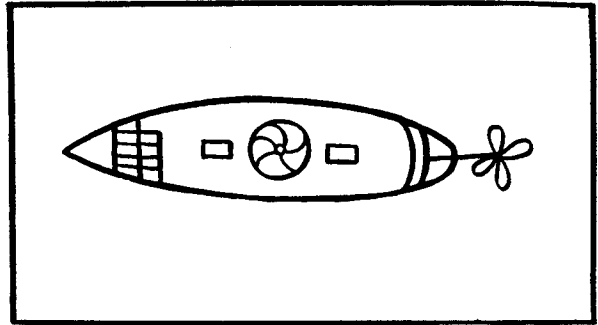
³ Captain Hooton left a sketch of the airship he claimed to have encountered, and this Heath-Robinson looking object will be found adorning the cover of the July/August 1966 issue of the REVIEW.

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



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."

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- 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.



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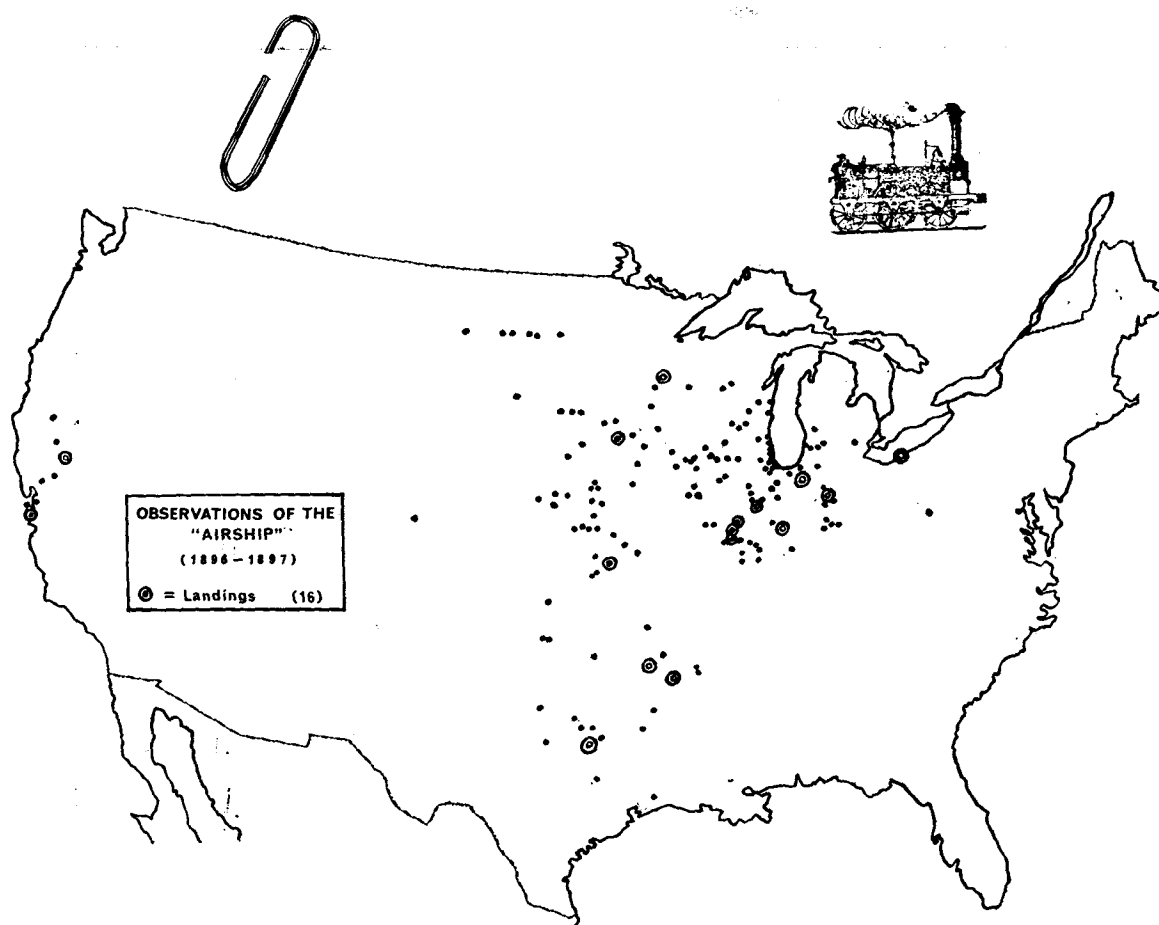


Fig. 1

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

supposedly heard at Galesburg, Michigan, on April 3, and also at Vermillion, South Dakota on April 17. Both accounts are mentioned by Clark.¹⁾ The following appeared in the *Chicago Chronicle* of April 13, 1897, under the headline AIRSHIP SEEN IN IOWA :

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

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

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

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

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

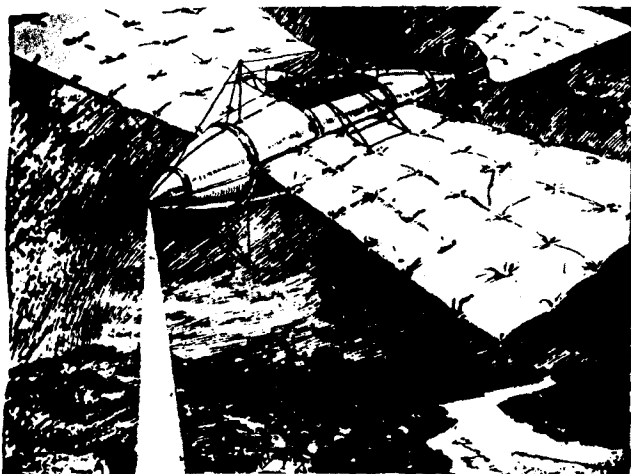
"It sailed directly over the public square, and when it reached the north part of town collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water tank, and destroying the judge's flower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

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

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

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

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



This airship (above) seen over Oakland, California, in November 1896, was identical to one seen earlier over Sacramento. Right: Winged airship seen in Oakland, California, on November 22, 1896. (Courtesy ICUFON)



What differentiated these UFOs from modern day UFOs was that the majority of occupant cases involved flight crews who appeared to be ordinary American citizens and claimed that their invention was about to revolutionize travel and transportation. One series of encounters which perpetuated this claim involved a mysterious man named WILSON. Witnesses often gave or sold water, food and repair equipment to UFO crews. Singing and music was sometimes heard as low-flying UFOs passed overhead. Mysterious rusted iron rods were found on the ground. Attached to them were letters reportedly left by airship crews stating the capabilities of their craft and the impact they would soon have upon the world.

Not all occupant encounters were pleasant. Some witnesses described the appearance of the crews as hideous, while others claimed they jabbered in an unknown language. In LE ROY, KANSAS, Alexander Hamilton reported that his cow had been carried off by an airship. A sensational airship disaster was reported in AURORA, TEXAS, supposedly resulting in the death of its extraterrestrial pilot.

As airship hysteria seized the nation, many HOAXES began to be uncovered. Eager witnesses ascribed fantastic qualities to hot-air balloons constructed of tissue paper, with candles used to supply hot air and light. Journalists wrote tongue-in-cheek tales which sometimes sounded no more absurd than the reports of seemingly sincere and honest citizens. Would-be inventors of the marvelous machines sprung up around the nation. Two photographs taken by Walter McCann in ROGERS PARK, ILLINOIS, were proclaimed genuine by the *Chicago Times-Herald* and the *New York Herald*. The *Chicago Tribune*, however, declared them fakes.

The case of the mystery airships has never been solved. Astronomers from 1896 until the present time

have attributed the sightings to misidentifications of STARS, PLANETS, FIREBALLS and PLASMA. Others ascribed the phenomenon to hoaxes, HALLUCINATIONS and alcohol. Among those who believed in the reality of the airships, the prevailing theory was that they were a secret invention. The EXTRATERRESTRIAL HYPOTHESIS (ETH) was considered as a possibility by those who thought Mars was inhabited by normal, air-breathing human beings. Another explanation concerned advertisers who sometimes employed balloons for publicity stunts. Some preposterous theories were developed such as that of the man who claimed he had originated the entire phenomenon by setting loose a pelican with a Japanese lantern tied to its leg.

Present day proponents of the PARALLEL UNIVERSE HYPOTHESIS believe the airship sightings may have been perpetrated by beings from another dimension. Their intention was either a joke to lead people astray, or a hint of future possibilities to spur mankind along the path of technological development. Other UFOLOGISTS suggest that the ETH cannot be ruled out since it is possible that the UFOs were spacecraft inaccurately described in terms of the emerging technology familiar to people of that period.

Bibliography: Jacobs, David Michael, *The UFO Controversy in America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975); Keel, John A., *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970).

AIR TECHNICAL INTELLIGENCE CENTER (ATIC), UNITED STATES AIR FORCE (USAF) division which was formerly known as the Intelligence Division of the Air Material Command (AMC) at Wright Field, Ohio (now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base), and which was the base for UFO investigations until 1961, when

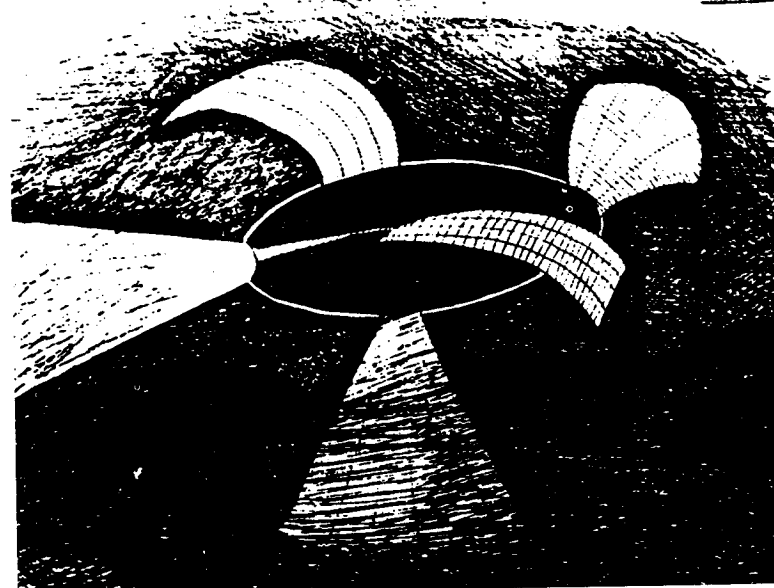
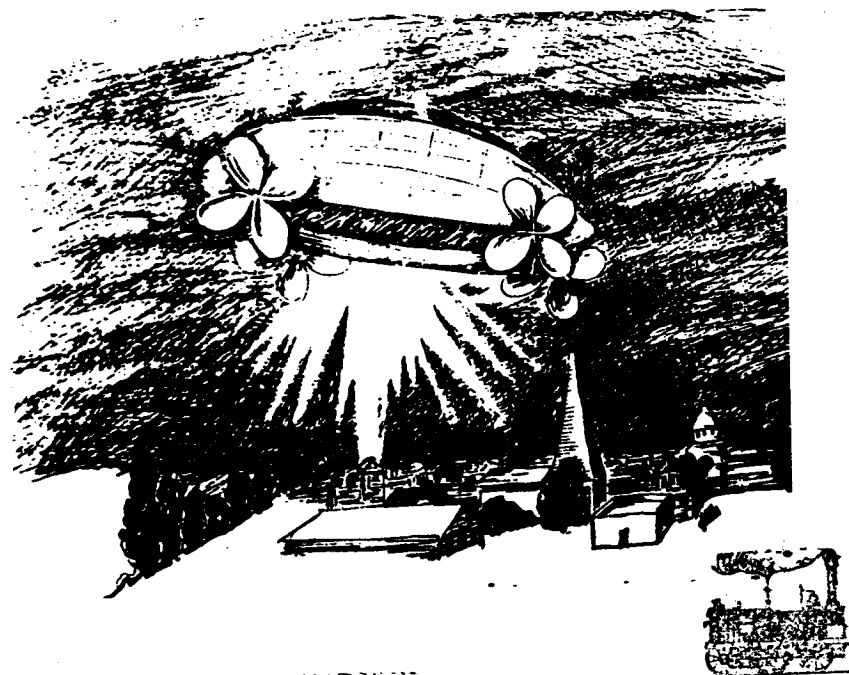
phenomenon came to be known as the "famous airship." Localities were genuinely insulted if the airship did not pay them at least one visit. In many places the airship became the prime topic of conversation. "People talk of nothing else," said one newspaper. Another paper complained that there would soon be a new disease known as "airship neck" resulting from people craning their necks to get a look at the thing. Witnesses to the airship's passage included governors, cigar store owners, and ranchers—in short, just about anybody and everybody.

In addition to the sighting reports, the newspapers carried more thrilling tales: accounts of meetings with the crew and the inventor of the airship, and trips aboard it at one hundred miles an hour or more. There were even a few hints that the origins of the airship were not necessarily of this earth.

America had never before experienced anything quite like the excitement generated by the mystery airship of 1896 and 1897, and was not to experience anything like it again for half a century.

What makes the story so astonishing is that as far as official aviation history is concerned, there was no airship, and there could not possibly have been one. The successful flight of the Wright brothers was still seven years in the future. Besides, the sort of sustained flight that was reported for the mystery airship would not be attained by airplanes for many years after the Wright brothers' first twelve-second flight.

The dirigible type of airship, that is, a rigid steerable balloon, was farther along in development in 1896, and in most reports the mystery airship sounds as if it were some sort of cigar-shaped dirigible. But again the known history of flight contains nothing about a wide-ranging dirigible in the United States in the late 1890s. Indeed, most historians of aviation would insist that a highly successful dirigible was impossible because the level of technological development was not high enough to produce such a vehicle at that time.



Two artists' conceptions of the airship that appeared in newspapers of the era (From the files of August C. Roberts)

the lights were manipulated there were at least three men on it. . . .

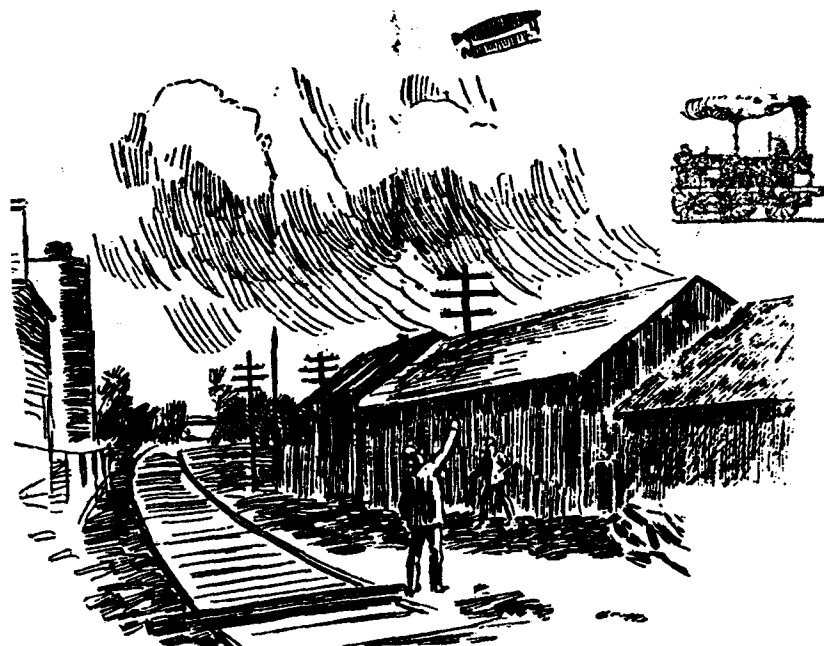
"Men who see it agree as to the general appearance of the airship, but they differ as to the size of it. One witness said he thought it was about seventy feet long, another put it at twice that size, and still another said it was not more than fifty feet in length."

A sensational new element was added to the airship controversy on April 11, when a young newsdealer in Rogers Park, then a northern suburb of Chicago, produced what he said was a genuine photograph of the airship in flight. About 5:30 A.M., Walter McCann was picking up his consignment of newspapers at the Northwestern Railway tracks when he saw a strange object in the sky coming from the south.

"It looked like a big cigar. It came nearer and I saw at a glance that it was not a balloon. Quick as a flash I realized it was the much talked of air ship. My boy won a camera not long ago in a contest for getting subscribers to a paper. It was in the store, fifty feet from where I stood gazing at the object. I ran and got it as the thing approached. The sky was clear. Conditions favored a good photograph. A plate was ready. I ran to Greenleaf avenue and Market street and got a good shot at it. With G. A. Overocker, whose attention was attracted to it, I ran down the Northwestern tracks and we got a second picture a few minutes later."

Overocker corroborated the story, as did E. L. Osborne and William Hoodless, both of whom insisted that they, too, had seen the airship. "I have lived here too long to try and fool people, I have no desire for notoriety," said McCann.

McCann also said that he had refused an offer from a Chicago newspaper to buy the negative of the photograph, and apparently handed out prints freely to all newspapermen who asked for them, though at least one of the many accounts of the incident insists that McCann was selling the prints.



Engraving from *Chicago Times-Herald*, April 12, 1897 (Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society)

The *Chicago Times-Herald* became an enthusiastic proponent of the McCann photographs. The paper had a pen and ink drawing made from the photo taken by the railroad tracks published on page one of the April 10 edition, along with a long story on the photograph and a recapitulation of the entire airship "craze" from its beginnings in California on November 17 of the previous year.

The *Times-Herald* also had the staff artist and etcher pronounce the photographs genuine. "It would be impossible to 'fix' a negative so as to show an object so relatively small and yet have it so perfect in the picture," said the artist.

The etcher, after testing the print with acids, said, "It is certainly a photograph of an object taken in the air. It would have been possible to cut the film in the negative before the print was made, but then there would be plainly visible a



DOES THIS EXPLAIN THOSE NOCTURNAL AERIAL APPEARANCES?

The airship was often used as a vehicle for political satire. This cartoon appeared in the *Chicago Times-Herald*, April 12, 1897. (Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society)

aimed to prey upon the curiosity of an incredulous public to the end that shining half-dollars would pour into the big wagons where tickets for the 'big show' are sold."

By April 15 an article in the *Chicago Times-Herald* stated flatly and without any reservation that the airship was a Ringling Brothers production, and that it was hidden in the shops of the Ringlings at Baraboo, where it was still being tested and perfected. The article went on to say that the Ringlings had found the ship in the possession of a man named Carr who had gotten the original model from a New York inventor who had died a few years earlier. The Ringlings denied the whole thing, but were probably grateful for the publicity.

The airship was reported to have exploded near Kalamazoo, Michigan. A widely circulated story dated April 15 told of two "old soldiers," George W. Somers and William Chadburn, who said they had seen the lights of the airship move rapidly through space, when there was a

sudden explosion and the lights disappeared. "They declare the report to have been like that of heavy ordnance and to have been immediately succeeded by a distant sound of projectiles flying through the air."

Others reported hearing the explosion, but at the time they thought it was ordinary thunder, though there is no indication that the night was a stormy one.

The following morning a number of odd pieces of debris were found in the area in which the explosion was supposed to have taken place. There was a coil of heavy wire, and what seemed to be the point of a propeller blade made of very light material. Three men who had been shingling a barn nearby insisted that when they came to work the morning after the reported explosion the barn was peppered with small pieces of debris, some of which had been propelled by a force powerful enough for them to penetrate the wood.

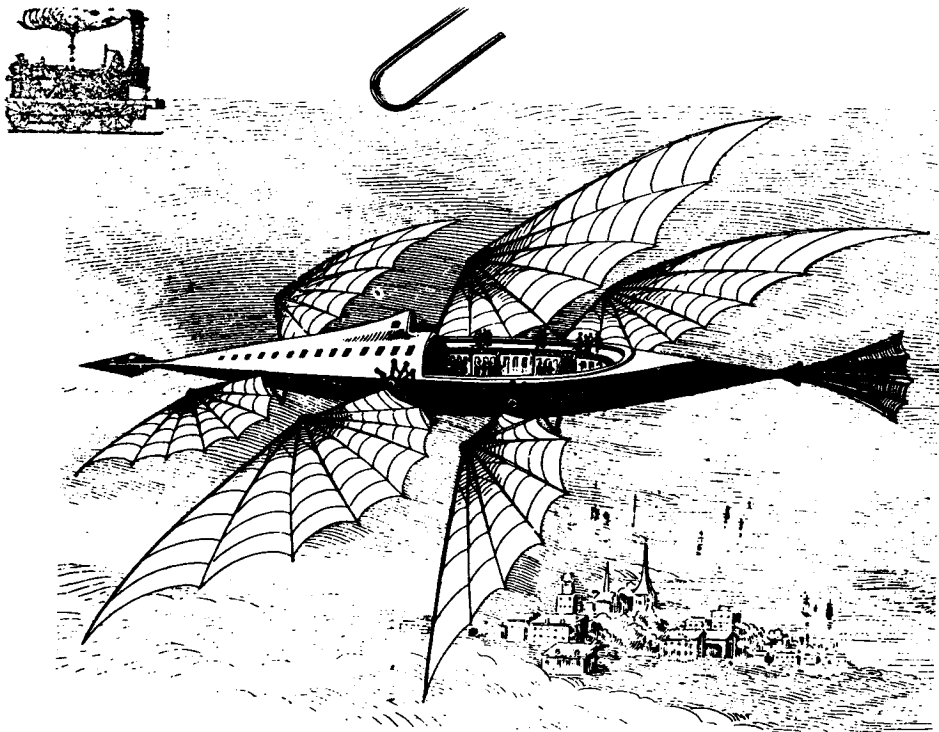
Another bit of alleged airship debris was dug up near Battle Creek, Michigan, in mid-April. A man named George Parks and his wife, from the town of Pennfield, were walking across an open field when they saw a bright light shoot across the sky. At first they thought it was just a bright meteor, but as it passed over them a piece of it fell to the ground.

Mrs. Parks, according to newspaper accounts, was so frightened of the thing that she would not let her husband go near it. But the next morning Parks and his brother Benjamin went to the spot and dug up what appeared to be a large wheel made of aluminum. The object was about three feet in diameter.

"Mr. Parks says it is the first time he ever heard of a meteor having wheels. He will keep the wheel as a memento, and it may be seen any time at his farm in Pennfield."

The present whereabouts of this alleged wheel from the air are unknown.

The airship excitement throughout the upper Midwest



Widely circulated drawing of "Edison's Airship." Edison, however, never worked on an airship and this drawing was a hoax that capitalized on the famous man's name. (Courtesy of the Mary Evans Picture Library)

story that in 1880 Edison accepted \$1,000 from New York newspaper publisher James Gordon Bennett to develop a practical flying machine. If Edison did actually accept the money (and I have seen no evidence that he did), there is certainly no indication that he actually worked on the project, and by 1897 he was professing a complete personal disinterest in airships.

The Edison letter story broke on the nineteenth of April. By the twentieth it had appeared in papers all over the country. It would probably be an exaggeration to say that the great man's debunking killed public interest in the airship, but the Edison interview was the last major burst of airship publicity.

Before the excitement ended, however, the airship achieved a degree of international fame. The French, it seems, scoffed at the airship stories, not because they were incredible, but because the airship was not French! The following article appeared in the respected French journal *Figaro*.

"The news [of the airship] seems to be more than a canard, seeing the details and preciseness in which are related in the *Herald* [European edition] the exploits of this airship. It has traveled over the new world at an average height of from 5 to 600 meters, and is stated to have been seen by thousands, and, what is more, photographed. . . .

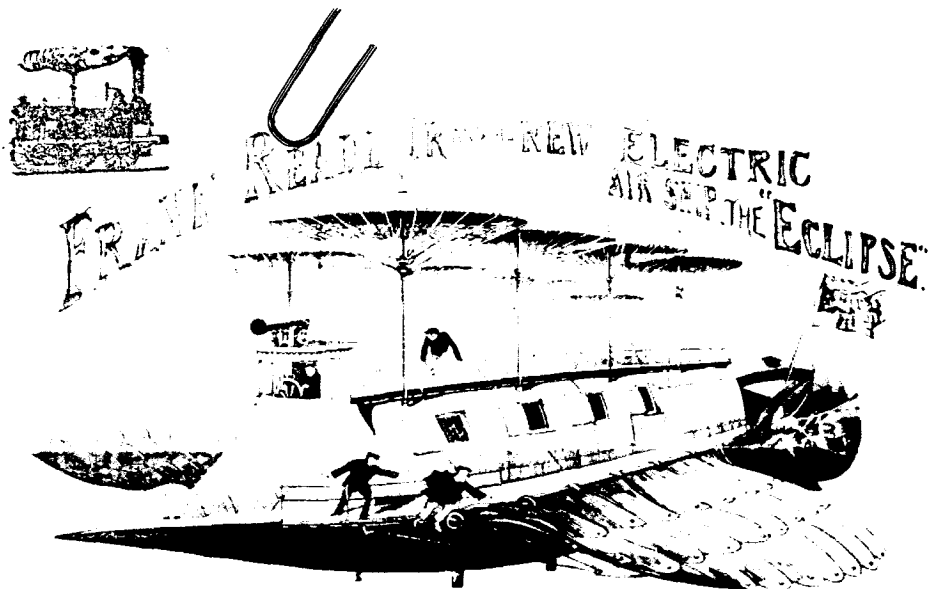
"With a telescope a human being was observed in the machine. In Chicago during the night, a searchlight flooded the city with rays, which caused in some quarters such terror that many people believed the end of the world had come.

"These statements are so astounding that one doubts their reality, notwithstanding the full details given by the *Herald*. No machine exists in France that can lift its weight by screws or any other system by one-third, without counting engineers and passengers or provisions or fuel.

"Americans are no further advanced in the science of aeronautics than the French, and to accept the statement of an airship travelling at 100 kilometers an hour we must admit the discovery of a new force or a new application of a force hitherto unknown to the extent of 3 or 4 times greater than any existing."

In an editorial the *Herald* noted:

"Even Paris has caught the airship contagion. The *Figaro* . . . publishes a special article based on the report sent from New York to the European edition of the *Herald*, which will undoubtedly furnish interest to Parisian readers for some time to come. Paris is evidently quite as anxious to get the truth about the high flier as we are, but unfortunately our



Cover from one of the Frank Reade, Jr., "Airship" books (From Penny Dreadfuls)

powered by storage batteries. Other descriptions from other places make the airship sound more like a powered dirigible than the helicopter proposed by Senarens and Verne. Electricity isn't the only motive power either; for example, anti-gravity is sometimes mentioned in accounts of the airship.

But electric-powered helicopters were not the only airships that figured in late nineteenth-century science fiction either. Lu Senarens himself had written invention stories employing the powered dirigible and regular winged planes as well as airships that operated on the helicopter principle. The anti-gravity machine was a subject often speculated upon by writers of late nineteenth-century science fiction. Indeed, virtually every principle and accomplishment that was attributed to the mysterious airship in 1896-97 had already been given extensive treatment by the science fiction writers of the era.

Just because an idea has been used in a novel, even a novel as popular and influential as Jules Verne's *Robur*, does not automatically mean that the fiction influenced airship

witnesses in Iowa, Illinois, and Texas, or that they were even aware that such science fiction novels existed. But recently Sam Moskowitz has unearthed an almost forgotten era of early American science fiction, and his discovery does seem to have some bearing on the origins and growth of the airship excitement.

You will recall that the first major airship sightings took place in Sacramento, California, some forty miles from San Francisco, and the sightings received extensive coverage in the San Francisco newspapers. Moskowitz has discovered that the center of imaginative and vigorous science fiction writing and publishing in America during the last decades of the nineteenth century was San Francisco.

The hero of Moskowitz's researches is Robert Duncan Milne, a mechanically minded Scotsman who first drifted out to San Francisco in 1874 to attend the Mechanics Institute Fair, and stayed on to become, in Moskowitz's view, America's first full-time science fiction writer. Though he was a confirmed alcoholic whose periods of sobriety grew progressively shorter, Milne still managed to turn out an impressive body of work before he staggered in front of a cable car in December 1899 and was killed.

Milne was extremely popular in his day, and his stories were very much in demand by both West Coast literary publications and newspapers which regularly printed fiction. Many of his stories appeared first in Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. For a time his reputation surpassed that of Ambrose Bierce and Robert Lewis Stevenson, both of whom he knew personally. But today, were it not for Moskowitz's efforts, Milne's work would be entirely forgotten, and given the rate at which old newspapers and microfilm deteriorate, much of what he wrote would probably have been lost forever.

Of course, airships were prominent in Milne's work. In his story, *A Question of Reciprocity*, which appeared in the

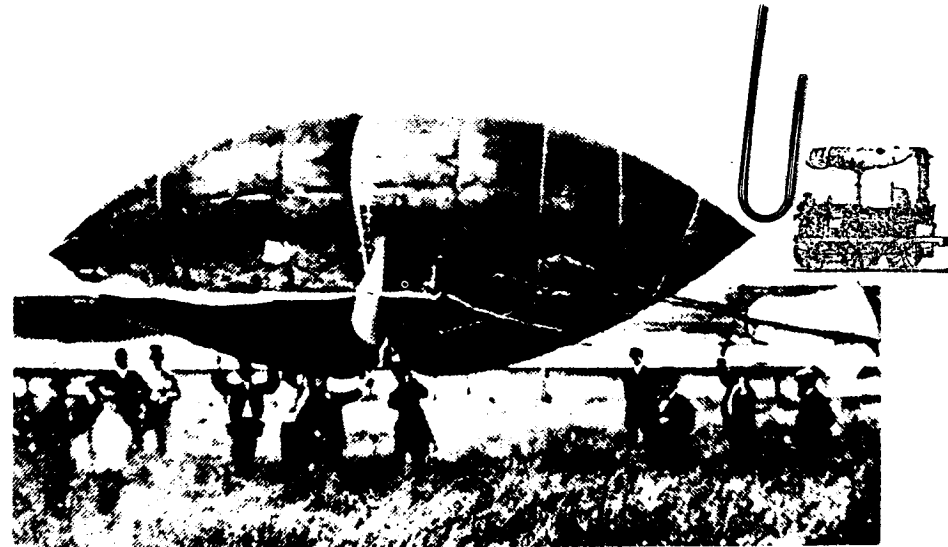
"gravitation propulsion" never caught on. He seems to have been the only one capable of mastering that form of flight, and one suspects that he was extremely lucky in never having encountered any difficult weather conditions during his flights. Despite promises, Andrews could get no money from the government to finance his flights, and plans to build more ships of the *Aereon* design finally ended when his aerial navigation company failed in the financial panic that broke out at the end of the Civil War.

An epilogue to Dr. Andrew's aerial career was written by John Toland in his book *The Great Dirigibles*:

"The doctor returned regretfully to his practice in Perth Amboy, taking up once again his duties as Port Officer and president of the Board of Health. His dream of flying was partially fulfilled, and he thought he'd left the secret of 'gravitational' propulsion to posterity in his book. But since his second memorable day over the city of New York, no other man has been able to fly an airship without a motor."

Because Dr. Andrews had received so much publicity in 1865, one wonders whether his career did not provide the spark for the rumor that the inventor of the airship came from New Jersey. That rumor circulated in California about the time the airship excitement broke out.

But Californians did not have to look all the way to New Jersey to find models for airship inventors. They had an excellent one right in their own backyard. He was Fred Marriot, an Englishman and publisher who founded the *London Illustrated News* and the *London Morning Chronicle*. Marriot migrated to San Francisco in 1856, and began publishing the *News Letter*. But his primary interest was inventing, and most particularly inventing an airship. He had already patented a steam-driven flying machine in England, but had never been able to raise enough money to build it. He seemed to feel that America, particularly the gold fields of California, would present greater opportunities. By



Fred Marriot's Avitor successfully tested in California in 1869. (From *Science Fiction in Old San Francisco*, by Sam Moskowitz)

1869 Marriot had obtained a United States patent on his invention and formed the Aerial Steam Navigation Company to finance the building and testing of the airship he called *Avitor*.

The first public test was to take place on July 3, 1869, at Shellmount Park race track. Marriot's airship was a balloon shaped like a fat cigar, and stabilized by two wings. Beneath the balloon was suspended a steam boiler which drove the propellers that powered the vehicle. Perhaps the best description of Marriot's airship appeared in John Bruce's book *Gaudy Century*:

"The wings were five feet long and came to points like those of a swallow. They were white cloth on a frame of heavy wire. At the rear was a rudder and elevator, four moveable planes set at right angles. The steam boiler and engine weighed about 34 pounds. Spirit lamps were under the boilers. There was a crank connected by cog wheels with tumbling rods that in turn went to two four-foot-long propellers. The propellers were on the wings. There were 1,360 cubic feet of hydrogen in the 'cigar.'"

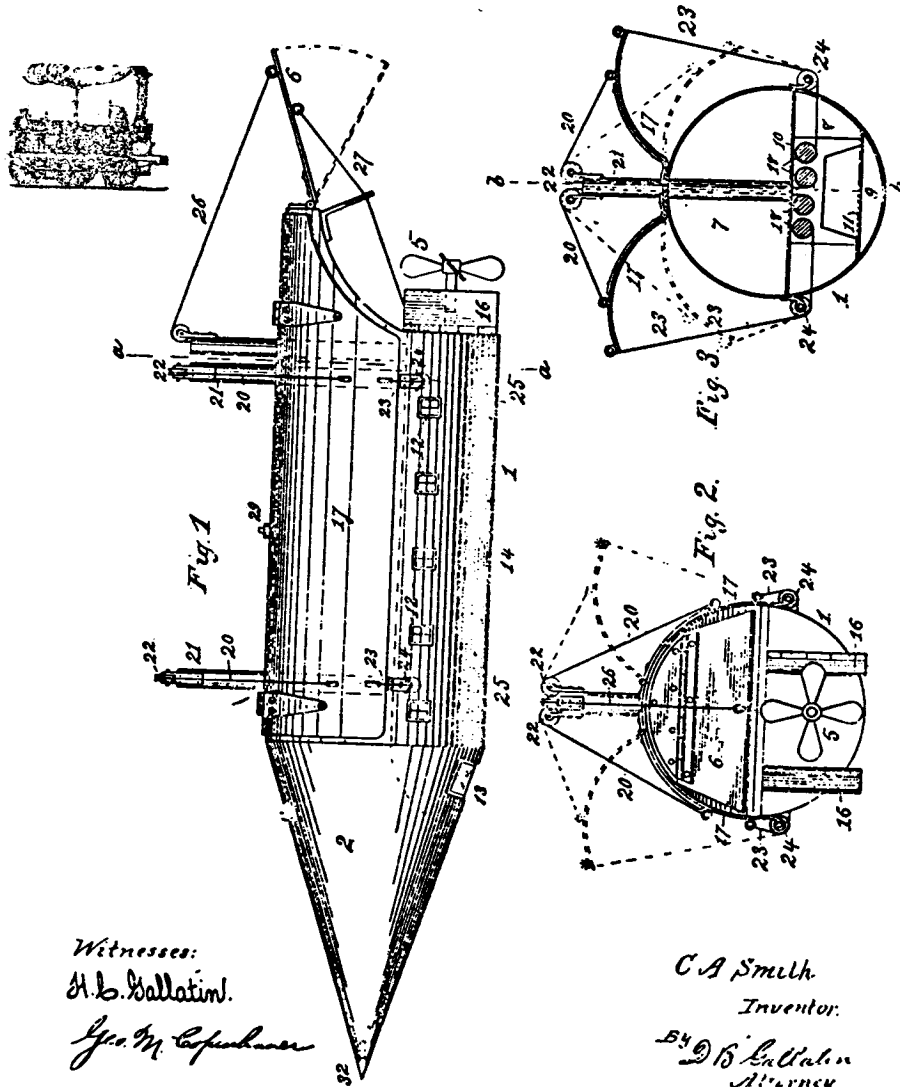
(No Model.)

C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

2 Sheets—Sheet 1.

No. 565,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witnesses:
H. B. Ballantine.

J. M. Carpenter

C. A. Smith
Inventor.

H. B. Ballantine
Attorney

Airship patent granted to C. A. Smith of San Francisco on August 11, 1896.
Just one of many airship patents granted during that era. (Courtesy of the U.S. Patent Office)

Before the Wright Brothers

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On May 6, Langley launched an unmanned twenty-six-pound propeller-driven model from a catapult on a houseboat on the Potomac. It flew for about a minute and a half before its fuel was exhausted and it set down gently in the water about half a mile from where it had been launched. In November 1896, Langley successfully tested a more advanced model on the eve of the start of the airship mystery. In fact, with Lilienthal's death and the Chanute and Langley experiments, flying made a lot of news in 1896 even without the mystery airship, and all of this surely helped to create an atmosphere in which the general public expected successful flight at almost any moment.

A couple of Texas inventors have occasionally been mentioned in connection with the airship mystery, probably because airship sightings were so frequent in Texas. One of these inventors, Jacob Brodbeck of Fredericksburg, Texas, has at least a local reputation for having beaten the Wright brothers to powered flight. Brodbeck was a German immigrant who taught school and tinkered with flying machine models during his time off.

Around 1865, Brodbeck began selling shares in a company that was to finance and manufacture the airplane that he had designed. Whether Brodbeck had actually flown in his invention before the stock sale is unclear—local legend says that he did. Be that as it may, his first major flight after the sale of stock was a total fiasco. Again according to local legend, Brodbeck himself was badly injured during the test and after that refused to speak to anyone about his aircraft ideas. In another version of the story, Texas investors deserted him after the crash, and thought him crazy. So Brodbeck went on the road, touring the United States, trying to raise money for his invention. One time, while speaking in Michigan, someone stole his only set of airplane plans. This was the final discouragement, and Jacob Brodbeck returned to his Texas farm where he died in 1909, undoubtedly



One of the biggest stories of 1897 was not about airships or inventions of any kind—it was of women's hats. The ladies of the day were fond of large, feathered hats which was cause for some concern to men trying to see around the bonnets during a theater performance. Texas newspapers of the day often had stories pleading with the ladies to make some changes in the size of their headgear. This drawing appeared in the Dallas Morning News during April of 1897.

from the beginning of time, man had watched the birds fly free and dreamed of being able to put on wings and give chase. As early as 1838, the *London Times* was occasionally running stories of a so-called airship seen in the sky above England. Shortly after gold was discovered in California in 1849, the R. Porter & Co. of New York ran huge advertisements announcing "The Aerial Locomotive." It was said to be a huge ship made of sturdy material that arrows could not puncture. There were



Bicycles were big news in 1897 and all sorts of ideas were advanced on how the unique machines might be used. One of the best ideas came from Deputy Sheriff Josh Messenger of Sherman, Texas. He proposed transporting prisoners on the back of his "wheel" and claimed the idea was foolproof, because the prisoner would have to hang on and if he made any move to escape, the deputy would know it in time to draw his gun. There is no record that the idea ever caught on. This drawing of how Deputy Messenger's idea was supposed to work appeared in the *Austin Daily Statesman*.

benches enough for fifty people and propulsion was supplied by a steam engine. The large gas bag could be refilled while en route, it was claimed, by an open bonfire on board. The Porter Aerial Locomotive never materialized, and it may have been an early newspaper airship hoax since the date the ship was to begin service was projected as April 1, 1849, better known as April Fool's Day.

THE BEST ROUTE TO THE CALIFORNIA GOLD!

To Be In Operation
The 1st Of April, 1849

THE AERIAL LOCOMOTIVE

R. PORTER & CO. (Office, Room No. 40 in the Sun Building, New York) are making active progress in the construction of an *Aerial Transport*, for the express purpose of carrying passengers between New York & California.

IT is expected to put this machine in operation about the 1st of April, 1849, and the transport is expected to make a trip to the gold region and back in seven days. The price of passage is \$50, including board. Books open for subscribers as above.



Skies To Be Filled With Aerial Locomotives!

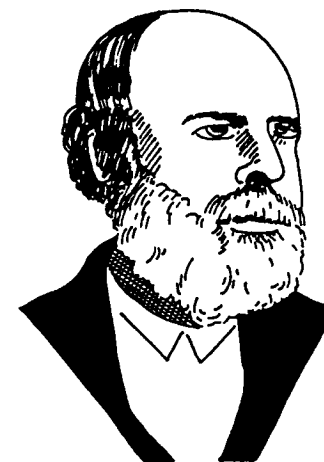
IT may be anticipated that within a few months these *aerial machines* may be soaring in various directions and at different elevations, some apparently among or above the clouds; and others, like swallows, sailing leisurely just above the surface of the earth... out over rich fields of broom and grain. Travelers soon will find themselves waving and conversing by the way with merry farmers.

CONTACT AS NOTED

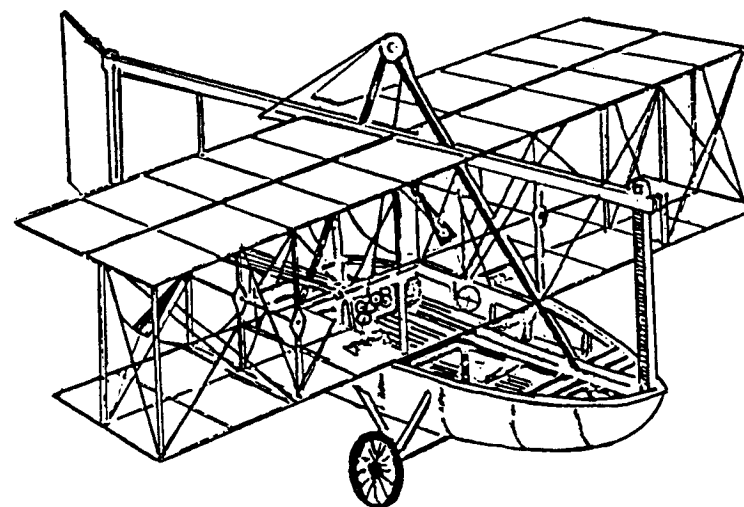
R. PORTER & COMPANY

An early airship advertisement that may have been an April Fool's Day joke. Courtesy of the Mutual UFO Network.

There were more strange sights in the heavens about the time of the Civil War. On September 20, 1865, five months after Lee surrendered, a German immigrant living near San Antonio actually did manage to fly. Jacob Brodbeck's flying marvel was powered by a spring which turned a shaft. His first flight covered fifty yards and he managed an altitude of twenty-five feet. Although there were several witnesses to his first flight and to the more than seventy additional flights he made over a number of years, he has been denied his rightful place in history as the pilot of the first mechanical airship. He died virtually unknown in Luckenbach, Texas in 1910.



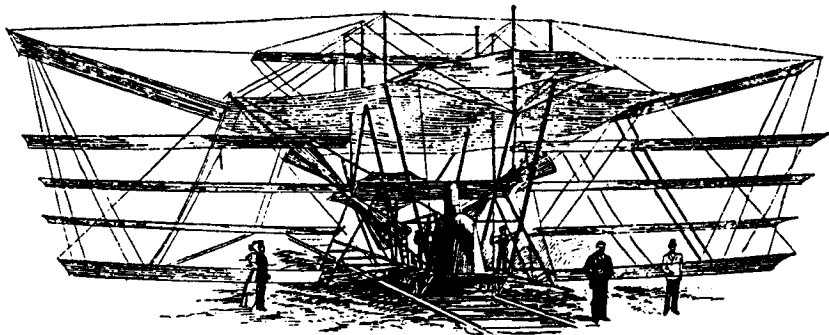
Jacob Brodbeck, as recreated from an old newspaper drawing.



A drawing of the spring loaded aeroplane that Jacob Brodbeck supposedly flew successfully near San Antonio in 1865. Before his death in 1910, Brodbeck is said to have made more than seventy successful flights.

During the early 1890s most of the airship stories centered around balloons. In 1892, when Russian troops massed in Warsaw, Poland for maneuvers, they were watched carefully by German troops hovering overhead in large balloons. Using a bright spotlight powered by a battery, the Germans were even able to keep tabs on the Russians at night. The Russians, convinced the balloons were spy vehicles, opened fire. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, the balloons were high enough to be effectively out of range of the crude Russian weapons.

There were occasional reports that various inventors, such as Edison, were working feverishly to solve the aerial navigation problem. But other than some successful balloon flights and the fanciful words of Jules Verne, little actual progress had been made. Opinion as to whether or not the problem would ever be solved ranged from a certainty that it would, to the more popular stance that if God had intended man to fly he would have given him wings. The truth is that in 1897 a lot of people were still marveling that they could travel so much easier by rail than they had by stagecoach just a few years earlier.



A year before the great airship mystery in the United States, American Hiram Maxim went to England to construct and fly an airship. With the assistance of a mechanical genius, a corps of skilled workmen, a perfect workshop, and lots of money, he was able to build the ship pictured above. And it almost worked. An accident on takeoff during the initial test flight damaged the machine so it was repaired for another trial. After several misfires, Maxim gave up in despair.

Another invention that wasn't all that new in 1897 was, nevertheless, becoming an integral part of life in America. As the United States closed in on a new century, telegraph wires were the sutures that held the nation together as one country. The lines reached out and brought the world to the smallest town, and a virtual explosion of information availability was gripping the nation. Then, shortly before the first airship was seen in Texas, the trans-Atlantic cable was completed, joining the continents. That monumental achievement was, to 19th century Americans, what seeing live pictures from the moon was to their 20th century descendants. And by 1897 there was some talk that a wireless telegraph was just around the corner.

Other than information companies like Western Union, the one industry which benefitted most from telegraph advancements was the newspaper business. By 1897 virtually every newspaper of any size had its own telegraph line, and stories were exchanged hourly by papers all over the nation. Unlike the old days, before telegraph, newspaper patrons could read about events only a few days after they happened instead of a few weeks or months. It was absolutely amazing to those '97 Texans that they could read about what happened in New York or Paris or Greece only a couple of days earlier. It must have been the 1897 equivalent of seeing pictures on the 10:00 o'clock news of stories that had just happened.

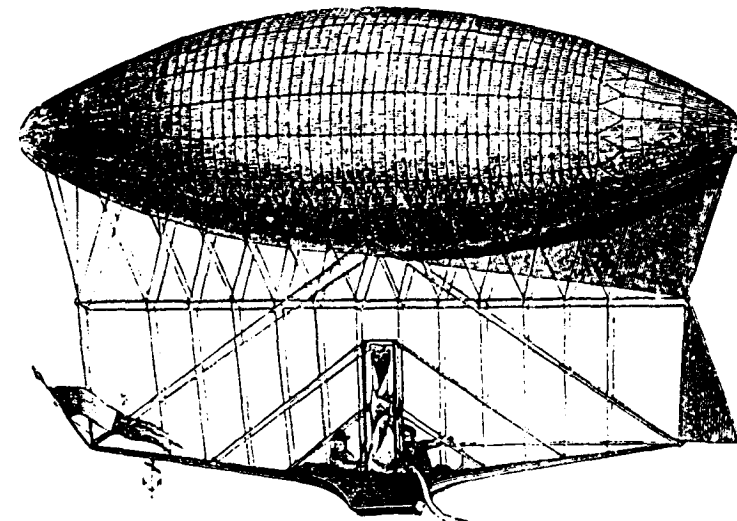
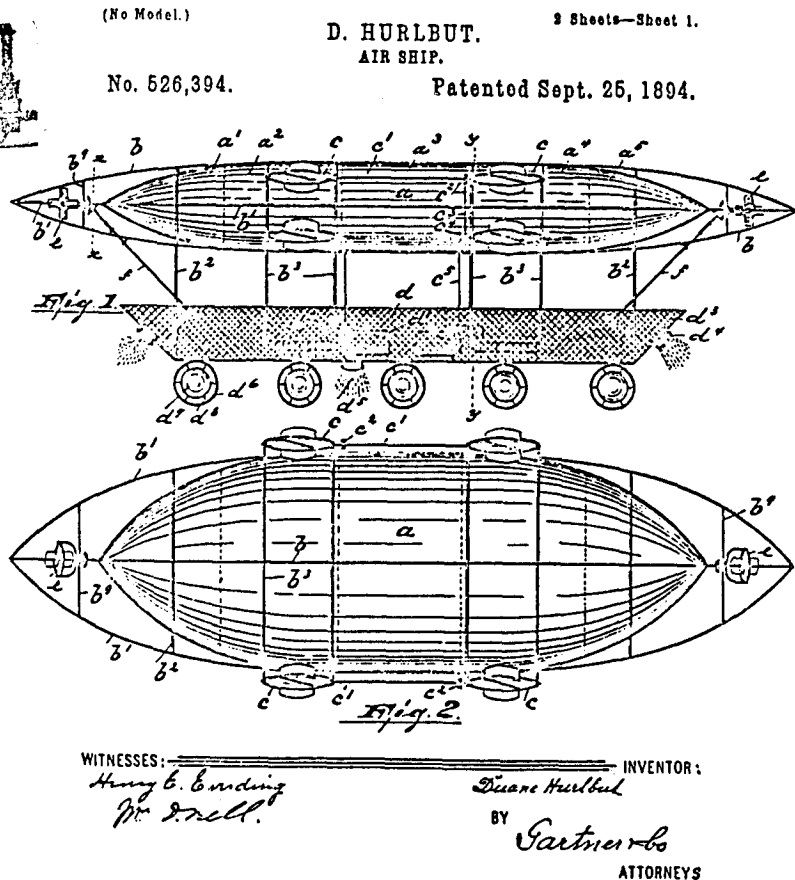
Despite the advantage of the telegraph, newspapers in 1897 were not all that sophisticated. In fact, by today's standards, '97 newspapers were downright crude, and much of what was printed was virtually worthless. News items like: Mr. Jones of San Antonio was in town yesterday; the weather yesterday was exceedingly hot; or the stars were not visible last night due to heavy clouds, served little or no purpose other than to fill space around advertisements.

Thanks to the telegraph, papers relied on wire stories for the vast amount of their news. Most papers of the period had only one or no more than two reporters, but a much larger editorial staff was assigned to weed through the vast amount of information received over the wire to decide what to print and what to throw away. In addition to relying on wire stories, every

paper in Texas maintained a large staff of "stringers," or local correspondents. All the major papers and most of the smaller ones had part-time representatives in virtually every other Texas city or town. The responsibility of these stringers was to sniff out local news and then telegraph the story to the main office. Although somewhat crude and often ineffective, this network of local correspondents accounted for a vast majority of the news items that filled the papers of Texas in 1897.

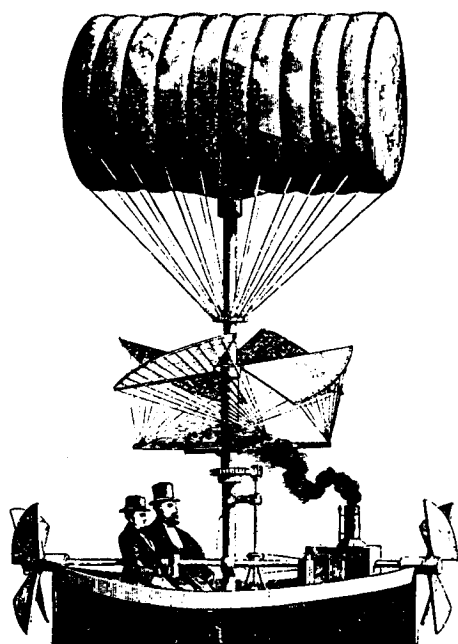
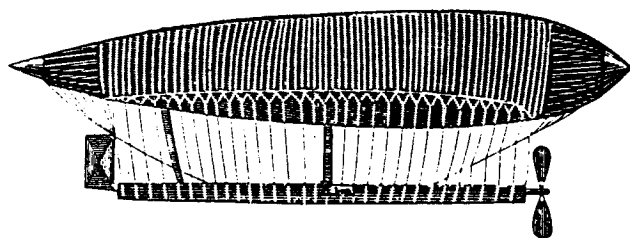
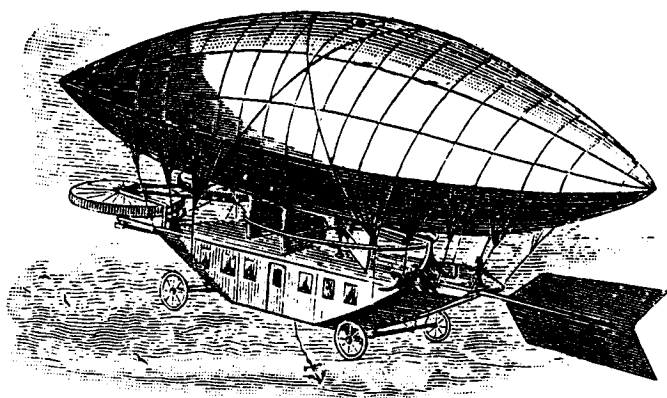
Another source for news items was the personal letter submitted for consideration by concerned or interested citizens. Unlike today's "Letters to the Editor," citizens in 1897 actually submitted stories in the form of letters and expected them to be printed as news. Such stories were even less reliable than those contributed by stringers, but the papers did get some news value at absolutely no cost. And cost was certainly a consideration since yearly subscriptions in those days amounted to no more than \$5.00, and that was often on credit.

Because newspapers relied on wire stories, local correspondents, or average citizens for the bulk of their news, there was usually little chance to verify the information. There was no such thing as investigative reporting and there was very little follow-up on the material presented. Instead, the stories were presented in more of a "take it or leave it, believe it or don't" format. Tag lines like "as we understand," "as it was reported," "according to our correspondent," or "local gossip has it" were common in the papers of the day. As a result, much of what

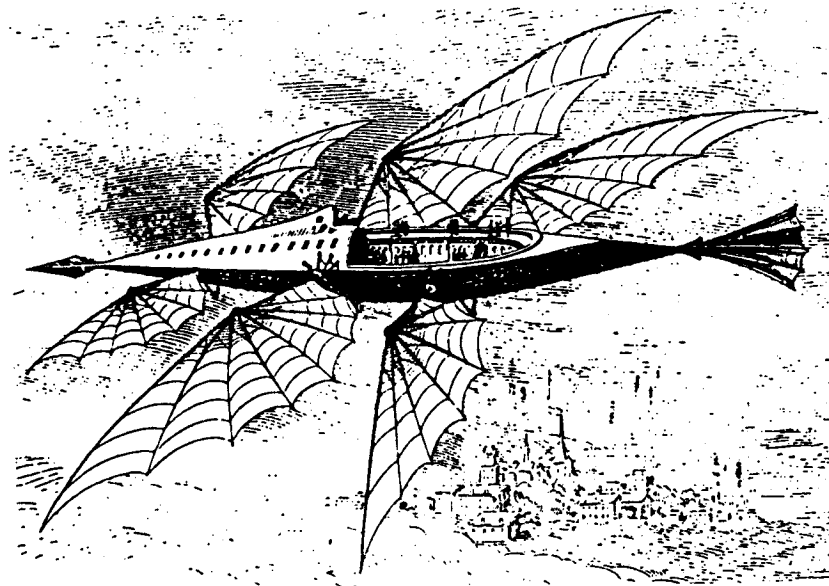


The illustration above and on the following page are all 1890s vintage newspaper drawings of proposed "flying machines." As far as is known, none of them ever actually flew.

On September 25, 1894, a Mr. D. Hurlbut received a patent on his airship design. There is no record that the machine ever made a successful flight.



appeared in the papers has to be viewed as highly suspect from a reliability standpoint. So bad was the reporting in those days that some stories are sufficiently suspect as to make one wonder how they ever got printed in the first place. But for all their faults, the papers were the best, and about the only, source of information for an 1897 American public that was growing hungrier almost by the day for more information.



This drawing, widely circulated in 1897, was said to be of an airship designed by Thomas Edison. However, there is no record to substantiate the claim or suggest that Edison ever did actually work on an airship.

The lack of ability to verify the stories also led directly to a new phenomenon called the newspaper hoax. Occasionally, the newspaper staff invented stories to see what would happen. More often than not, however, the hoaxer was a private individual out to fool the world with some tantalizing story that had no more substance than smoke in a bottle. It was, remember, the "Gay 90s" and practical jokes, often at the expense of the newspapers, were the order of the day. In some instances the stories were so good and believable that it was obvious that



me. I don't understand it. It might be that aerial travel has been accomplished. It seems as strange and improbable as were the inventions of the telephone, phonograph and the electric power applied to streetcars."

Unlike the day of the original sightings, on November 22 the airship, or apparition as it was sometimes referred to in the west coast press, did not confine its flying to Sacramento. It was also reportedly seen by hundreds of people as it sailed along through the heavens over the San Francisco Bay area. In 'Frisco, as in Sacramento, the majority of the sightings were of a brilliant, arc-type light, and there seemed to be a lot of trolley men



A drawing of the California airship that was widely circulated during 1896. Although it appeared in several newspapers around the nation, it was not printed in any *Times* paper.

involved in the reports, which just added to the possibility of the "car barn conspiracy."

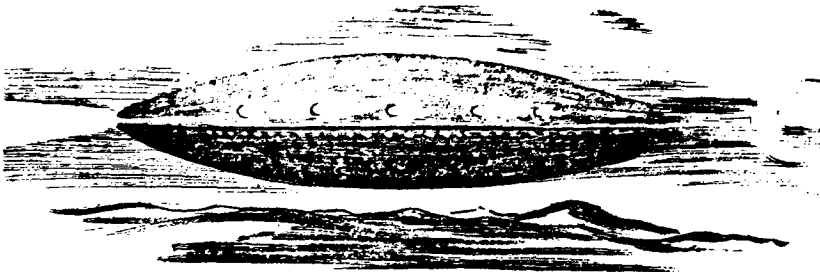
One person who did not have a thing to do with the trolley car service but who did make an airship report was San Francisco Mayor Sutro Hughes. Even though the mayor did not personally witness the phenomenon, he did faithfully report what his servants had seen. According to Hughes, his domestic help had seen a bright light sail in from over the Pacific Ocean about 500 feet above the ground. As the object traveled over the beach, it could be seen that there were actually two lights and some sort of "misty-looking mass" above it. As the object neared the mayor's residence, it supposedly cast out a strong beam of light perhaps 500 feet in length. Although his honor speculated that while the beam might have seemed that long, it was probably much shorter. Mayor Hughes was emphatic that his servants would not try to tell him some fanciful ghost story and that they saw just what they described. He concluded, "I certainly think some shrewd inventor has solved the problem of aerial navigation and that we will hear about it in a short time."

Of all the numerous San Francisco sightings none was more interesting than the report of the airship sailing over Cliff House, a seaside mansion for the rich and powerful of California society. Supposedly, as the ship sailed over Seal Rocks on the beach near the mansion, its bright light was cast upon the sleeping seals below causing them to awake and dive into the sea for cover. Although it was not specifically stated, the implication was that the light was not naturally occurring, for if it had been, the seals would not have been aroused from their sleep.

There is, however, one major complication to the sightings in Sacramento and San Francisco. Even though newspaper reports of the two events are inconclusive as to the exact time of occurrence, it appears the sightings were at approximately the same time, just after sunset. Because of the distance involved, it was speculated that perhaps there was more than one object navigating the heavens. The complication of the airship being seen in two (or more) places at the same moment would be repeated throughout the California, Midwest, and Texas sightings.



After November 22 the range of the mysterious airship was dramatically increased. Two days later it was sighted in Tacoma, Washington; San Jose, California; and numerous smaller towns. On November 25 it was seen east of Los Angeles and at Oakland, 400 miles away, at about the same moment. Before the airship moved east it would be seen all up and down the California coast, as well as in Washington, Oregon, and western Canada.



Another newspaper depiction of the California flying machine. Although the shape in this drawing appears to resemble a cigar, the person who claimed to have seen the machine said it looked like a canoe.

The putative airship presented the California print media with the same dilemma it would later cause in Texas. Essentially the problem was to print or not to print the fantastic stories. Literally hundreds of reports of firsthand sightings poured into the California papers, and there would have been no problem if only someone had stepped forward, identified himself as the inventor of the ship, and produced the craft for public inspection. It never happened.

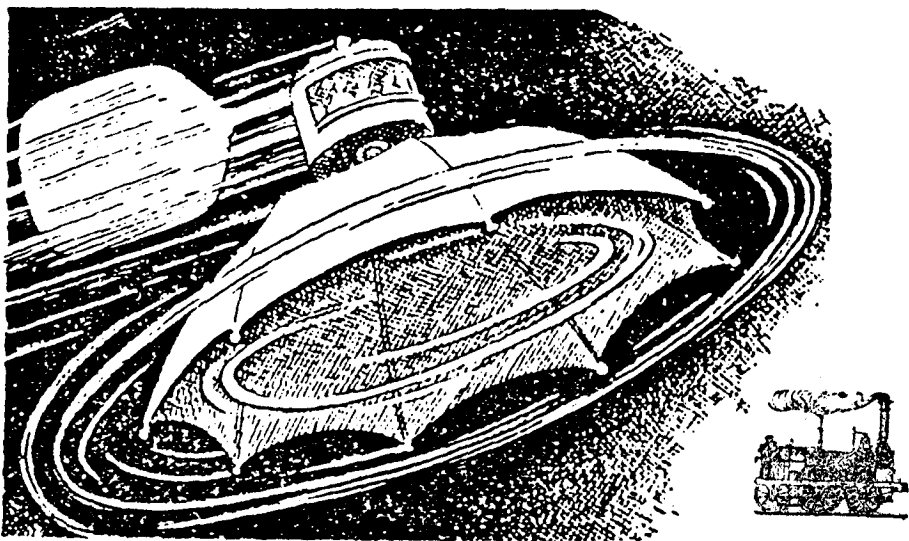
While most California newspapers ultimately contained some mention of the mystery craft, the larger papers settled into one of two classes, either pro-airship or anti-airship. The *San Francisco Call* was the unquestioned champion of the pro-airship papers. The *Call* often carried banner front page headlines informing the public of the progress of the airship. The stories and interviews with witnesses were frequently enhanced by dramatic drawings. Always, it seemed the *Call* would land the most provocative stories that were skewed

toward the sensational. With history in proper perspective, it is difficult not to speculate that perhaps the *Call* was a bit overzealous in its pursuit of what the editors might have perceived as the hottest news story to come along in years. There is the possibility that some of the *Call* stories were a result of its coverage rather than a result of actual sightings. It should not be forgotten that in the 1890s, as well as the 1990s, people simply loved to get their names in the paper. In California, during late November and early December of 1896, the best way to accomplish that may have been to send an airship story to the *San Francisco Call*.

At the opposite end of the airship reporting spectrum was William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. Although Hearst himself was certainly no stranger to sensationalized journalism, the *Examiner* refused to enter the airship reporting derby. The first mention of the airship in the *Examiner* was on November 23 when the paper printed an article refuting the whole affair. The story was in response to one that appeared in the *Call* about employees of a rail line having seen an airship. The *Examiner* quoted a superintendent of the line as saying that only a light was seen and that no one considered for a moment that what they saw was an airship.

Attacks on the airship story continued in the *Examiner* over the next several days. The editors ran stories under headlines such as "Probably Due To Liquor" or "The Result of Beer." The cartoonist for the *Examiner*, James Swinnerton, produced a series of drawings with the clear implication being that anyone connected with the airship was "nuts." One cartoon depicted a sad sea serpent and accompanied a story under the headline, "The Sea Serpent Has Drawn in His Horns and His Nose is Out of Joint." The *Examiner* believed the legendary sea serpent had been unceremoniously replaced by the airship as the world's foremost hoax. That opinion would soon be echoed by some newspapers in Texas.

The single most bizarre report from California came courtesy of a young attorney named George D. Collins. As the story was told, for several weeks prior to the November 17 sighting, Collins had mentioned to some friends that he had an eccentric



Anton Pallardy of Nebraska claimed he built the mysterious airship and that it actually looked more like an umbrella than a cigar. No other witness ever claimed to have seen an umbrella-shaped airship.

newspaper reports. In March a large number of sightings were reported throughout Kansas, a fact that did not escape the attention of many Texas editors. One Kansas report that was actually printed in a Denver, Colorado paper claimed the ship, carrying a blood-red light, had been seen over four different Kansas towns and that two hundred men in Topeka were prepared to swear that aerial navigation had been accomplished. The report also stated that many residents of the Sunflower State were so frightened by the strange light that they took to their cyclone cellars for protection.

As the airship sightings continued, so did the strange stories that followed. A black minister in Omaha proclaimed the mystery flyer was a prophet bearing news of the impending end of the world. Another man expressed the opinion that x rays could be used to communicate with and, if need be, destroy the airship. He did not explain how either could be accomplished. The references to liquor also continued. The *Kansas City Times* claimed that residents of Bellevue had seen airships "floating

in the circumambient ether" even though Kansas was a prohibition state. That same paper suggested, "Those citizens of Kansas towns who have seen a strange-looking airship sailing over their heads with voices issuing from it should swear off at once."

One of the most interesting stories was the report that the airship had passed over the Kansas state capitol at Topeka and it was seen by a number of people including Governor Leedy, his private secretary, and Harold T. Chase, editor of the *Topeka Capital* newspaper. The governor was quoted as saying, "This is a very strange light. I don't know what it is, but I hope it will solve the railroad problem. If it is an airship, maybe it will." Obviously the state leader was wishing for some relief against the economic blackmail orchestrated by often ruthless railroad investors. Unfortunately, Governor Leedy was long since dead and buried before air travel did, in fact, break the back of the railroads. As for the editor, he said the light did not have the shape or the color of a planet or star. He said it was very large, oblong-shaped, and the color of blood.

Not everyone had the governor's optimism. The *Atchison (Kansas) Daily Globe* reported: "It is not surprising that some people believe that an airship is floating about the country: some people believe in spiritualism, occultism, etc. So many people believe in miracles that charlatans advertise in the newspapers to perform them. A man who believes that a fortune teller can take a pack of cards and tell his past and future has a perfect right to believe that an airship is floating about the country at night."

The day after that story was printed, more airship stories appeared in the paper and the editor of the *Daily Globe* caught what he believed to be a fatal flaw. He wrote, "The airship fake is the best that has been sprung for years. They always make it appear at night, and then at such a height that it cannot be investigated. But then the newspapers will have to be careful, as it was 'seen' last night at two different places 75 miles distant at almost the same moment." The editor obviously believed the newspapers themselves were staging a gigantic hoax.

Stories in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Post*, and the *Detroit Evening News* all pronounced the photograph a total fake. Experts at the *Tribune* and *Post* proclaimed that McCann had doctored the negative to make it look like there was an airship in the picture while the representative at the *Evening News* maintained McCann had used a four-foot model of an airship to rig the photo.

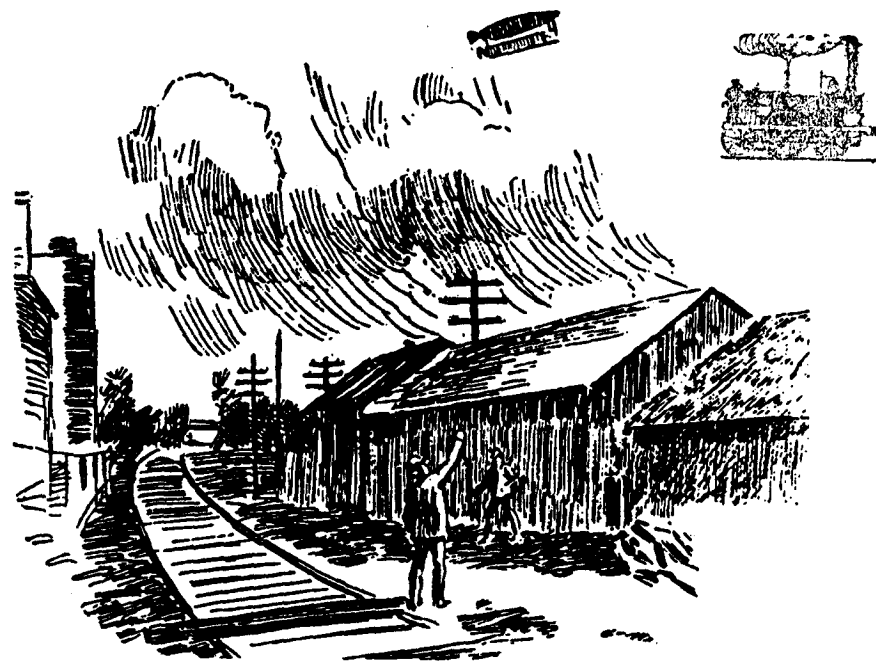
Since there was only one negative and that remained in the possession of McCann, it's hard to imagine what evidence the other papers used, and it's difficult not to surmise that some professional jealousy might have been involved. That possibility is perhaps enhanced by the fact that the description of the famous photo used in the other papers seemed to vary dramatically from the genuine article. One paper suggested the photograph even included a likeness of McCann and the camera used to take the picture but there was no explanation of how a camera could take a photo of itself. Perhaps the photo debunkers should themselves be debunked, and such might be possible if not for the fact that the original negative of the McCann photo has not been located. It is also curious that none of the alleged copies handed out by the photographer have ever surfaced. The only evidence that remains is the crude drawing that appeared in the *Times Herald* and that is not sufficient to make a definitive decision. Despite a raging controversy in the north, not one word of McCann or his famous picture ever appeared in any Texas newspaper.

While the experts in Chicago continued to argue over the possible validity of the McCann photograph, the airship sightings continued in other parts of the country. More and more reports came in from Kansas and Missouri. There were also new sightings in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Colorado, and Indiana. And while the reports continued, so did the skepticism over the failure of the airship inventor to come forward and stake his claim to immortality.

As the story continued, yet another part of the mystery began to surface, that being the obvious airship fakes. From Nebraska came the report that one man had been flying kites to purposely fool people into thinking they were seeing an airship. From

Minneapolis came the story that a young boy, who was never named, had fooled the public by sending up small, cigar-shaped balloons with lanterns attached to simulate the airship he had read about in the paper. If that is what happened, the plan worked to perfection because hundreds in Minneapolis reported seeing the mysterious ship.

There was, however, a significant problem with the stories of the contrived fakes. In most cases, the reports were carried by newspapers that could be classed as anti-airship. And there is little evidence that any investigative work was done to verify that the fakes were, indeed, fakes. In actuality, the anti-airship papers were probably quicker to print "fake" stories than pro-airship papers were to print supposedly true stories. The net result of such a situation is that it is difficult to decide what should be believed and what should not. One point perhaps



The drawing of the Walter McCann photograph which appeared in the *Chicago Times-Herald*. The original of the photograph has never been found.

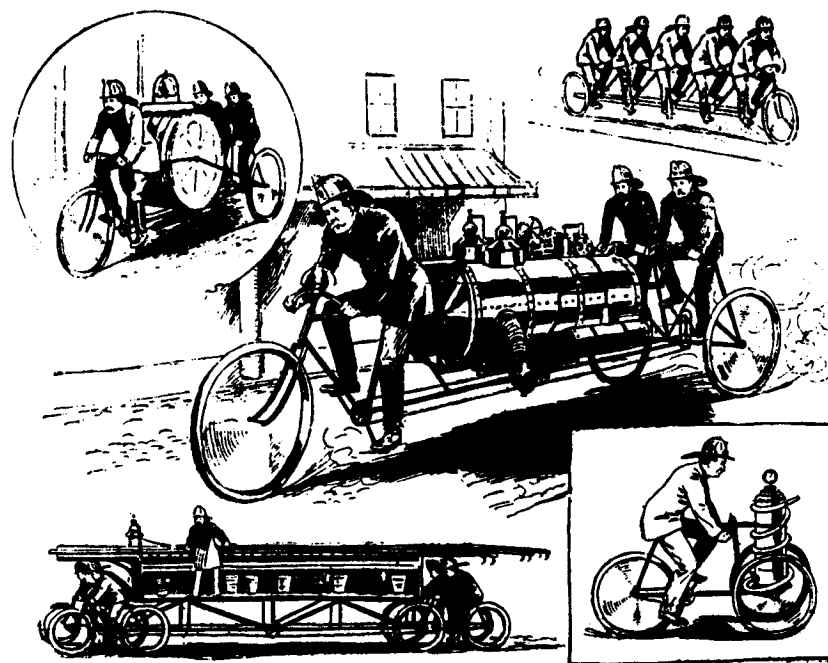
here, just let him shoot me between the eyes and end my misery." As it turned out, The Kid was somewhat short in the friend department because no one came to his rescue. Cramer suffered until 6:00 p.m. the following day, despite repeated requests for someone, anyone, to go ahead and kill him. As for Walker, plenty of witnesses testified he acted in self-defense, and the Kid himself, with his dying words, pleaded that no one go to jail for the killing. No charges were ever filed in the case.

On March 24, the day after the Kid died, something strange happened in the skies over Texas although it was not reported as an airship. Many people in Brenham reported that a large meteor was seen passing over the city. As it reached a point halfway between the zenith of its path and the horizon, the meteor appeared to explode but no sound of an explosion was heard. Following the explosion, a thin cloud of white smoke or "a small cloud" was seen in the sky for about ten minutes. The meteor was described by several people who saw it as "a bright ball of fire, burning with a bright light in front and leaving a bluish white tail in its wake."

Supposedly, the meteor was also seen at Marlin, Galveston, Melborne, and Huntsville. Some of those witnesses reported hearing a strange rumbling sound, much like that of a train engine, as the meteor passed over head. Since meteors don't normally make rumbling noises, one of the news stories ended with a simple statement: "An explanation of the phenomenon would prove of interest."

The meteor reports were very strange. In fact, if "airship" had been substituted for "meteor," the stories, without the part about an explosion, would have been similar to the tales of the mystery flyer in the Midwest. It does not take much imagination to conclude that had Texas newspapers been running stories about alleged airships instead of alleged submarines, the Brenham meteor might very well have been reported as a flying machine.

A couple of days after the meteor sighting, the *Galveston News* printed another peculiar story under the headline "Phenomenon of the Heavens/ Strange Appearance and Disappearance of Three Lights." According to the story, following a strong thunderstorm on March 28, 1897, near Colesnell, Texas, three



In 1897 a Racine, Wisconsin firm tried to market a line of bicycle-powered fire fighting equipment to replace the horse drawn variety. The machines never panned out, probably because on its worst day, a horse could still pull a fire wagon to the top of a hill better than a man could pedal one.

strange lights were seen in the heavens. One large light and two smaller ones were grouped in a pattern. Intermittently, for several minutes, each of the lights seemed to alternate between being bright and then fading while another brightened. Then suddenly they were gone. The *Galveston News* speculated the lights resulted when a concentration of electricity on the earth caused stars to shine brighter than usual. Obviously, whoever wrote that wasn't quite up on his astronomy. Either that or he didn't believe stars are millions of miles away. In any event, there wasn't even the slightest hint that the lights might have been from an airship.

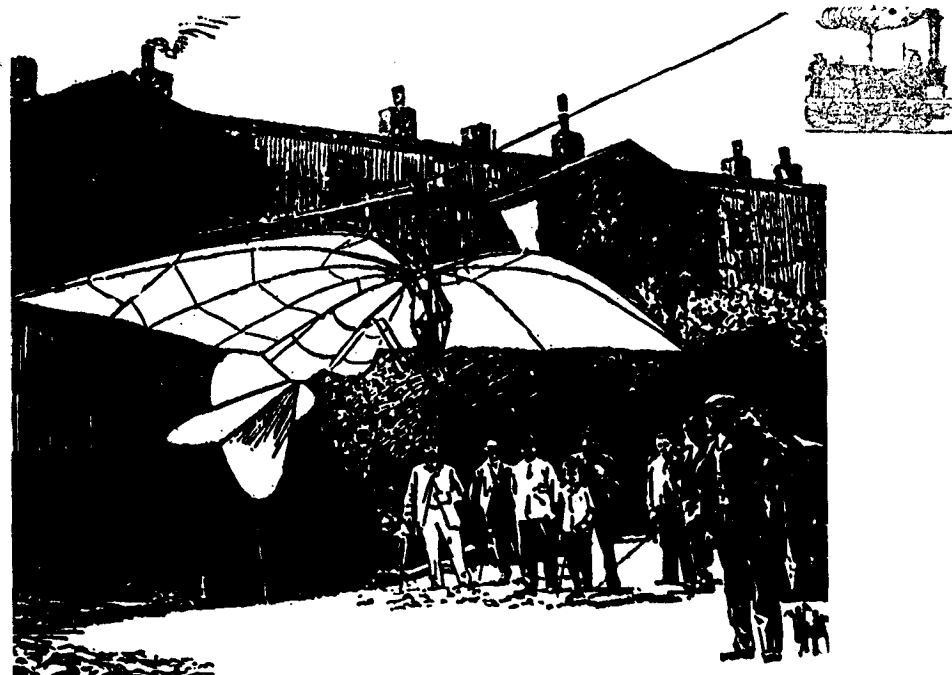
About the time of the meteor sightings, many Texas newspapers carried the first reports of what could be expected at the

Great Exposition that was to be held at Paris, France in 1900. One of the future attractions was said to be a "city in the air." Supposedly, a giant balloon would actually lift the city above the exposition grounds and people would lounge around as if they were at home. Although details of the balloon were not released, it most certainly would have to be the largest balloon ever created and the largest flying object ever seen. It's not hard to understand why Texas papers would print the story of a French flying city and ignore stories of one small American flying machine.

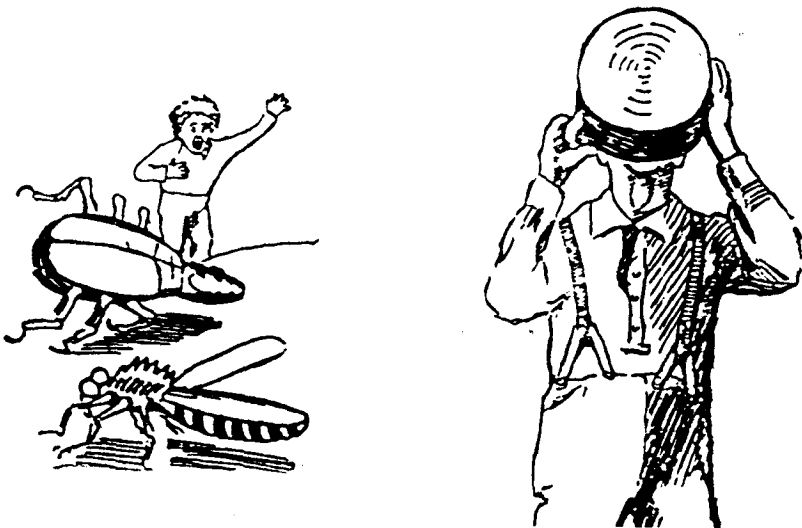
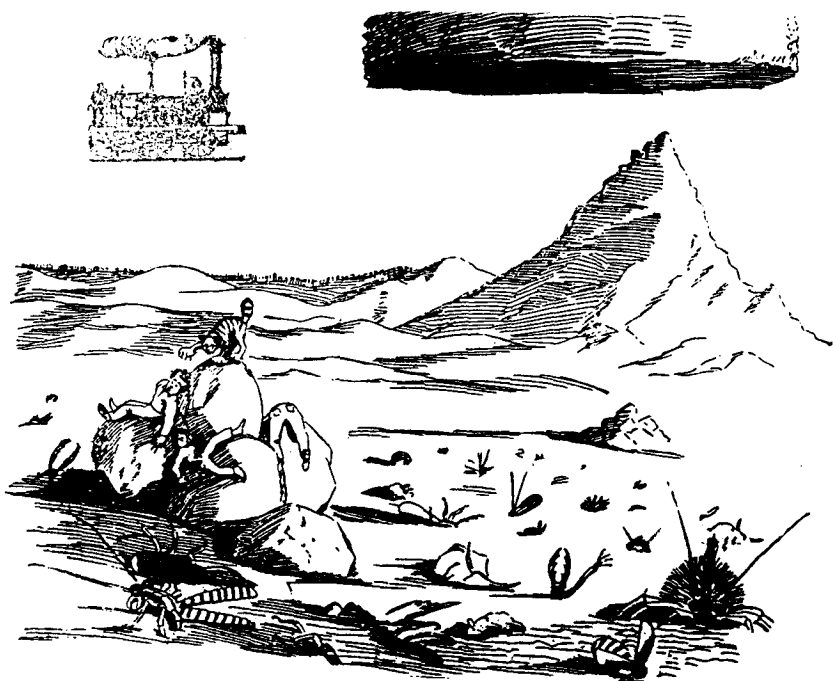


An artist's view of what the Paris Exposition would look like with a floating

Herr Arthur Stentzel of Berlin, Germany also managed to upstage the American airship with a machine which, according to most Texas newspapers, would fly like a bird. As the story was told, it had long been "the aim of the flying machine enthusiast to construct something that would practically be the prototype of a bird. Therein, it has been firmly believed, lies the secret of locomotion through the air." That hypothesis inspired Stentzel, who built a machine with two large wings that "resembles a giant bird more than anything else." The inventor claimed he could use the device to fly through the air for four or five minutes and then alight safely. Since no mortal man could power the machine with brute strength alone, the airship was also fitted with a motor, designed and patented by Stentzel, that was powered by compressed carbolic acid gas.



The Stentzel flying bird. This drawing, done from an actual photograph, was widely circulated in Texas newspapers. Although experts predicted the machine would work, there is no record that it actually flew.



The Dallas Morning News prepared the drawing (top) for the giant bug story. The smaller drawing (above left) was intended to show the relative size of the "monsters." When the hoax was uncovered, the editors quickly added the drawing (above right) to show where the story had originated.

which had been pulled off successfully. The longest such article appeared in the March 30, 1897, edition of the *Topeka Daily Capital*. A professor of mathematics was asked to comment on the possibilities of airships. He replied, "I think that the papers must have been short of copy, and found a good subject to write up and proceeded to make a readable article."

The article went on to remind readers of famous newspaper hoaxes of the past, such as when the *New York Herald* caused a near panic by printing, as a joke, that most of the animals of the New York Zoo had escaped and were roaming the streets.

Then there was the story about the time, in 1890, when Baron Rothschild was supposedly convicted of a crime and sentenced to a date with the guillotine. The Baron, so the story went, offered a reward of one million florins to any man who would substitute for him at the beheading. A group of men formed a coalition and then drew lots. The loser lost his head while his friends split the reward. It was a great story but there wasn't a word of truth in it.

Another tale in the *Daily Capital* story struck a little closer to home. The paper reported: "One of the most notable fakes of recent years was reported by a Dallas, Texas newspaper man at the time of the proposed Fitzsimmons-Corbet fight. He printed a story that the Prince of Wales was coming over for the mill. Only an official denial under the signature of Albert Edward himself stopped the story — not, however, until it had spread over the entire civilized world."

On April 6, 1897, seven days after the Topeka story appeared and less than two weeks after the giant bug fiasco, the staff of the *Dallas Morning News* decided to once again roll the credibility dice when they printed a small story about a man from Denison, Texas who had seen "a brilliantly illuminated airship." The man, who was not identified, had seen the ship while on business at South McAlester up in the Indian Territory. Although no description was given of the large airship, the man said he heard a peculiar "swishing" sound as it passed a quarter of a mile from earth. The story, the first ever about the mysterious airship to appear in a Texas paper, concluded: "The

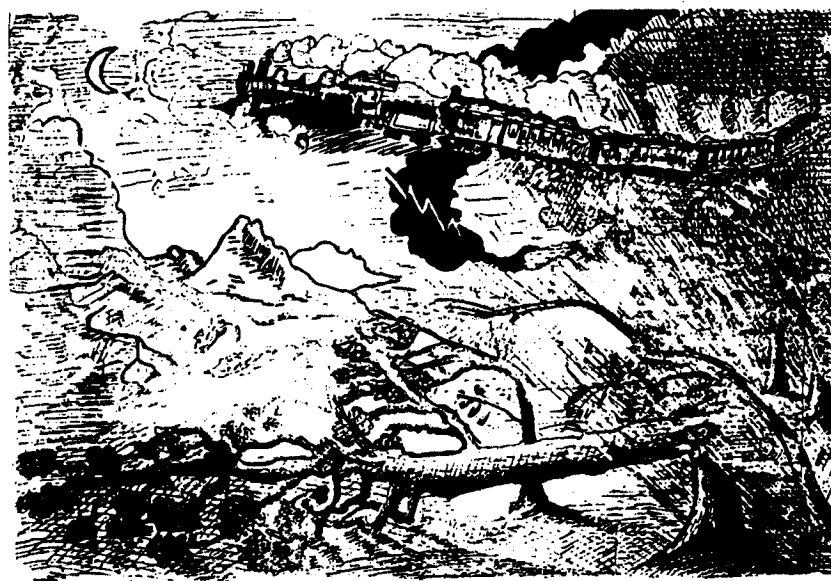
gentleman is a Mason and a K. of P. (Knight of Pythias) and his reputation for truth is beyond question."

Exactly why the *News* selected this one story to break the airship editorial ice is not known. There is also another mystery about this particular dispatch. The story was also published the same day in the *Kansas City Times* which meant it must have traveled over the telegraph wires as a regular dispatch. However, when printed, there were some obvious differences in the stories. The *Times* version clearly identified the Texan from Denison as one James Coughlan, a longtime employee of the Fidelity Insurance Company. If the wire stories were the same, and they almost certainly were, then why did the *Morning News* elect to omit the name of the witness? It is one of those airship editorial decisions that remains a puzzle.

The motive for selecting the South McAlester story to be the first printed in Texas is equally puzzling. Perhaps the fact that the Denison traveler was supposedly the first Texan to see the airship was sufficient incentive to print the story. If that's correct, then why not name the man for credibility? Another explanation might be that the *News* staff recognized that the mysterious aerial wanderer had charted a southbound course and Texas, being south of Indian Territory, might very well be in the flight path. Regardless of the motives and reasons and despite the fact that no other Texas paper picked up the story at the time, the *Dallas Morning News* coverage of the Oklahoma incident meant the shutout of airship stories was finally broken.

There was, however, a difference between printing a story and believing it. Some evidence suggests that the *News* editors, like their counterparts at papers around the state, still believed the airship stories to be a hoax. The day after the Denison man's story ran, the editorial page of the *News* included this little tidbit of information: "It is now explained that the airship which the people of Kansas saw recently was nothing more than a flock of wild geese going north. It is remarkable that the Kansans did not recognize them." Whether this story was presented primarily as dig against airships or against Kansas will never be known, but either way the message was clear, there was no such thing as an airship.

One most unusual newspaper airship story of early April was not actually a story, it was an advertisement accompanied by a strange drawing. The ad was placed in the *Dallas Daily Times Herald* by C. L. Mistrot, a sort of pioneer mass merchandiser in North Texas, and it ran under the headline "That Aerial Train." The picture depicted a flying train, nicknamed Hurricane, sailing through the air in the midst of a storm. The object of the advertisement was to alert potential buyers that Mistrot, the cash merchant, was at the controls of the train that was bringing special bargains to Dallas and Fort Worth.



A drawing of the C. L. Mistrot "Aerial Train" that appeared in the April 5, 1897, issue of the *Dallas Times Herald*.

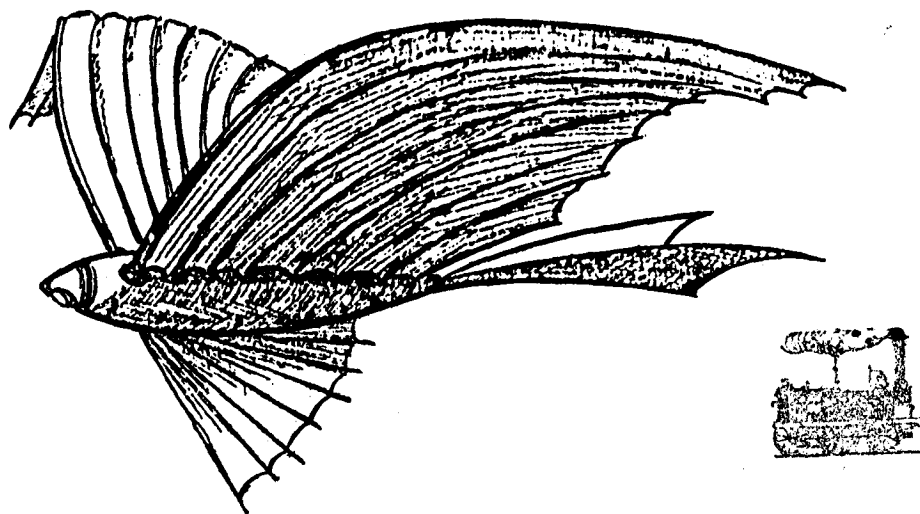
The long story which accompanied the picture was a sort of rambling political statement claiming that the new McKinley administration would bring gloom and doom to Texas by closing the possibility of freedom of trade with the Dingley tariff bill. Mistrot proclaimed that during McKinley's four-year "rule" in America there would be higher prices on just about all kinds of goods but that he would keep his merchandise train above the clouds and continue to provide merchandising at fair prices.

Frost down on West Third Avenue all said they saw it. One witness, who was emphatic about what he had seen, said it was a bright light about the size of a water bucket moving very fast toward the south. A Dr. Wills was equally emphatic that what he saw was certainly not a meteor on the grounds that the light was intermittent, appearing to come and go. Unfortunately, the object, or whatever it was, was too far from the earth for the doctor or any other witness to see anything as to its form or shape.

Approximately thirty minutes later, at about 9 p.m., the airship was seen by many people 100 miles to the northwest at Weatherford. One of the witnesses was a newspaper stringer who sent the story to both the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Austin Daily Statesman* but he failed to include any details or a description. He simply said the airship which had been seen in Oklahoma had made its way to Weatherford.

It is possible the airship skirted Dallas before circling back to Weatherford. On April 17, three days after the fact, Albert Webber, who was said to be a scientist, reported: "On Wednesday night (April 14) my wife saw a peculiar object in the heavens. At first she thought it was an illuminated balloon but soon discovered that it was not balloon-shaped and that it sailed with a motion like that of a bird. It had two great lights and was traveling southward. It wasn't a meteor, it wasn't a balloon, it wasn't a ball of fire — I guess it must have been an airship."

A Mr. Dunlap, night chief operator of the Texas and Pacific Union depot relay office at Cresson, provided a better description. Although he failed to include a time of sighting, Dunlap said the airship, apparently sixty feet long, resembled the top of a passenger coach in shape, long and pointed at the ends, with a powerful searchlight in the front end, and several smaller lights on the sides. It had wings on it, he said, something like that of a bat. Dunlap, who swore he was sober, said, "This is dead straight. I am now convinced that there is something in this airship business, for several prominent citizens of this locality also saw the ship."



This drawing of the airship seen at Weatherford, Texas appeared in the April 16, 1897 edition of the Dallas Morning News.

Cresson is located thirteen miles southwest of Fort Worth and to the southeast of Weatherford. Since Dunlap said the ship was headed toward the southeast away from the Fort Worth, Dallas, Weatherford area, it is possible he saw the high flyer on the way to another sighting down in Hill County.

John Ford left Hillsboro that night and headed toward home in Whitney. Near Peoria he looked up and saw a black object that looked very much like a passenger coach going in a southwesterly direction. He described it as "having an immense headlight and as being brilliantly lighted within and as traveling at a very rapid rate." Like the Dallas housewife, Ford's report did not appear in print for several days because he was afraid to say anything for fear people would think he was "trying to get off a gag."

By 2:00 a.m. the airship had sailed back north and was seen near Paris, not far from the Oklahoma border. Mr. J. A. Black, the night watchman for the Paris Oil and Cotton Company's local plant, was out on his early morning rounds with his pet dog when he saw a faint but luminous object in the northeast sky. At first he thought it was a gigantic meteor in a luminous,

Despite the fact that it is a considerable distance between Cisco, Texas and the Ozark Mountains, no one else reported seeing the airship that night.

April 16, 1897

Friday, April 16, 1897 was a banner day for the Texas airship. It was seen by more different people in more locations than at any other time during the adventure. That Friday was also the first time the mystery ship was supposedly seen in the daylight.

At 2:30 p.m. a Texas and Pacific freight train pulled out of Big Sandy, Texas headed for Dallas. The train was making good time and by 3:00 it had passed the town of Hawkins and was nearing Hawkins tank. Suddenly, in a clearing north of the tracks, conductor Joe E. "Truthful" Scully saw the famous airship sitting on the ground with its bow pointing toward the track. The train passed quickly so Scully only got a brief look but he was able to see the pilot making some sort of repairs to the ship. At Hawkins tank, Scully told his story to the telegraph operator who put it out on the wire. By the time "Truthful" reached Dallas, he was on his way to becoming a celebrity.

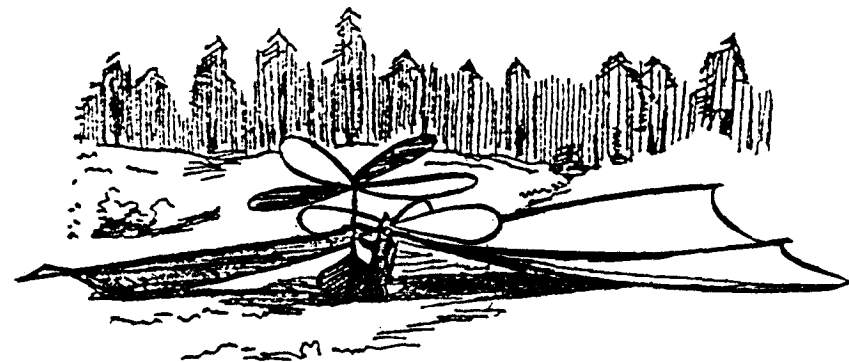
Sometime before nightfall that day, the repairs to the airship were apparently completed, because during the night the mystery ship was seen in numerous locations throughout East and North Central Texas. The first sighting may have been by Cooper Nott and two other gentlemen in Longview. Nott said, "It's no fake. I saw it with these eyes."

From Longview, the airship headed west. Colonel W. A. Robertson of Mississippi was on a train approaching Dallas when he saw a 200-foot-long flying ship sailing over Garland toward the southwest. The colonel quickly stuck his head out a window to try to get a better view, but the flying machine was traveling faster than the train and it quickly disappeared into the night. When asked if the ship was traveling at a high rate of speed, Robertson replied, "Yes, it looked to me like the fellow had an engagement to eat breakfast in the city of Mexico and was afraid he might be late." A reporter asked if it could

possibly have been a meteor. "I guess that when I see a thing I know it," replied the colonel.

According to the *San Antonio Express*, as the ship went west from Garland over the northern part of Dallas, it was seen by hundreds of people. A better description might be that hundreds were watching for it and some actually did see what they believed to be the airship. R. C. Kopisch, who ran the drugstore next to the Oriental Hotel in Dallas, said that he and as many as twenty of the hotel guests saw a bright light attached to something dark and opaque pass over the northern part of the city between 8:00 and 8:30 that night. It passed above the Dallas Brewery and disappeared heading toward the northwest.

Unlike most airship sightings, the druggist's report may actually have been confirmed by a totally independent sighting. About the same time the guests of the Oriental saw the light, a regularly scheduled electric car

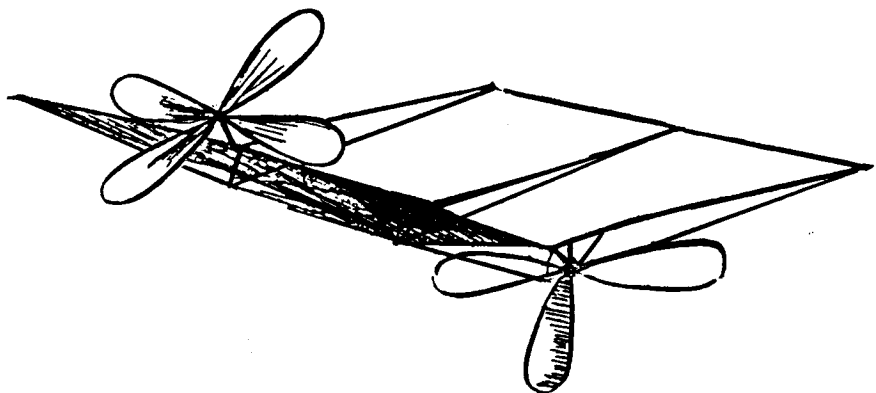


Above is a drawing of the alleged airship that "Truthful" Scully (top) said he saw on the ground near Hawkins tank in East Texas. The drawings, along with pictures on the following page appeared in the April 17, 1897 edition of the *Dallas Morning News*.

was returning to Bonham. At exactly 8:15 conductor John German saw a bright light far to the southwest traveling rapidly toward the northwest. German stopped the car and all the passengers watched the fantastic light with awe and wonder. Oscar Lusk, one of those passengers, had read about the airship, and when he explained the details, everyone became convinced they were seeing history in the making. As the light approached, German could hear a whizzing, whirring sound

but he was unable to make out any specific shape. The object disappeared in the direction of Denton.

Since Bonham is about 70 miles northeast of Dallas, the distance and direction of flight of the light seen by German and the passengers indicate it could have been the same light seen from Dallas, since both lights were heading northwest when first observed. If the Dallas light was seen about 8:00 p.m. and then it made a slight northward turn



Above is the airship Colonel Robertson (top) saw passing over Garland, Texas on the night of April 16, 1897.

after disappearing from the druggist's view, it would have followed the same path as the light seen from south of Bonham.

That possibility may also have an independent confirmation. German said the ship was headed in the direction of Denton but no sighting was made in that town. However, several people in Rhome, which is just a little west of Denton, did say they saw the ship at about 8:30. They said it was about the size of a small passenger coach with a white searchlight in front and five lighted windows on the side. The ship kept going without making a stop as though, one witness speculated, "we were as dead as Rhome of old."

Thirty minutes after passing over Rhome, the airship was supposedly seen in two places at one time, although both of the sightings at 9:00 p.m. that Friday night were secondhand reports and thus may not be reliable. In Dallas, C. W. Middleton said his cook, Mrs. Bina George, saw a bright object a few hundred yards above her head. At first she suspected that it was a cloud of fire, but as it got closer she realized it was a ship-shaped affair that was well lighted and traveled faster than any train of cars she had ever seen. She kept the sighting to herself for a few days until the secret grew too large for her to control and she "fessed up" to her employer.

Col. Robert H. Gaston of the Texas militia also reported a secondhand sighting at precisely the same time. He said that Tom Camp, a hand on the Gaston ranch in Kaufman County saw the airship. According to Camp, the machine resembled a Chinese flying dragon and was a monster breathing red fire through its nostrils. It had a dragon-shaped body and pin-like legs fore and aft that acted as propellers. He watched the object until it grew "as small as the gleam of a hotel clerk's diamond." Throughout the airship adventure, there were many strange descriptions of the airship, but Tom Camp was the only one to claim it resembled a fire-breathing Chinese flying dragon, so there is the strong likelihood that Tom had his vision while hoisting a jug of firewater.

Whether it came from Dallas, Kaufman County, or some other place, the airship was next seen at 9:10 p.m. near Granbury in Hood County, and that sighting was almost the

for a landing. As Smith watched, the vessel docked on the spire of the federal building and he could see some small but decorative apartments and 8 or 10 passengers, several of whom were ladies dressed in handsome Easter costumes. During the three-minute stop, two men emerged from the ship. One descended to the steeple, presumably, Smith decided, to drop off some letters to be mailed. The other man, with a lantern in hand, appeared to be applying oil at the junction of the wings. Being a good husband, Smith immediately called for his wife to wake up and see the marvel. Unfortunately, before she could reach the veranda, the "mysterious pilgrim" had sailed away into the night. There is no record of Mrs. Smith's reaction at having been awakened from a deep sleep to see an airship that wasn't there.

April 18, 1897

Easter Sunday in 1897 was a special day in North Texas. The weather was splendid, the sun was bright and warm, and spirits were high. In the morning the churches were full and in the afternoon the parks were overflowing. When all the eggs had been found, the children turned to flying kites and trying to catch fish; the men tried their hand at baseball and the ladies showed off their Easter finery. The lemonade and beer flowed freely and by all accounts a good time was had by all.

What made that particular day so unique was the fact that it was the only Easter in Texas history where the day's festivities culminated in "airship watching" parties. Since the famous airship had been the prime target of conversation throughout the day, thanks to the extended newspaper coverage, it was only natural that the celebrations should continue on into the night when the nocturnal visitor was known to wander. Some of the parties were semiformal and the guests were invited. Most, however, were informal, impromptu affairs where neighbors gathered in backyards to settle into a comfortable chair and spend the evening staring at the heavens. Undoubtedly the lemonade, and especially the beer, kept right on flowing until well into the night.

Sunday was also another day of strange airship tales. Down in Burleson County, near Caldwell, Texas the pilot of the mysterious airship may have become perturbed. It was reported by "some reliable darkies" that the airship landed in the Brazos river bottom to take on water. While on the ground, two of the aerial sailors captured a colored man who was hoeing cotton nearby and carried him off on the ship, supposedly as punishment because he had the audacity to be working on Easter Sunday. The mechanical dungeon, with its prisoner, then steamed away to the east and was soon out of sight. Unfortunately, the *Morning News* representative who submitted the story for publication was unable to find the witnesses to verify the facts. However, he did point out, "This is and has been a local option town since last summer and the nearest saloon is two miles away."



On April 18, 1897, the *Dallas Morning News* contained an article claiming that most airship patents to date had been of the self-propelled variety somewhat like the device pictured above. The *Morning News* claimed the devices worked well for descent, such as from a hilltop, but lacked much in the way of ascent.



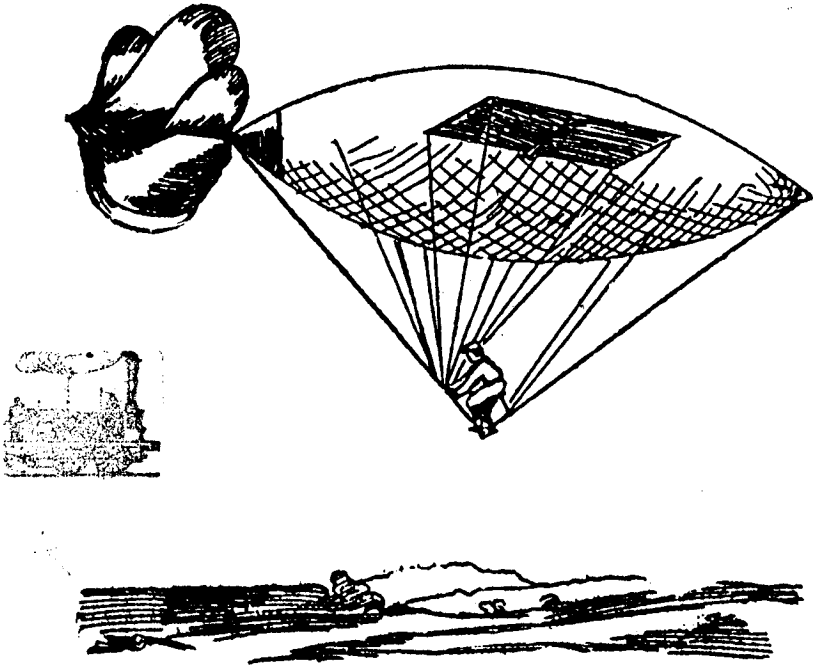
The second C. L. Mistrot advertisement. Despite the claims of the merchant, he was not responsible for the Texas airship.

Mistrot continued his attack on the McKinley administration by claiming that he and Dingley were forging in congress "the thorns that will spare no one." He also predicted that the people of New York, Boston, and New England would benefit from the new legislation while the people of Texas suffered. But there was a white knight flying to the rescue in an aerial machine. The ad concluded: "The tariff laws, which will enhance the values of clothing and other wearing apparel, as well as goods outside of our lines, fully 50 per cent, will soon be enacted by our present Congress, but the crown which they are decking with

April 28, 1897

April 28, 1897, was a good day for airship watching in the state capital of Austin. Several people said they saw the ship but the best report came from Mr. Otto F. Porsch, said to be "an intelligent and wholly reliable gentleman living at the corner of Colorado and Second streets and doing a grain and feed business at 402 East Sixth Street. When asked to comment on what he had seen, Porsch replied: "I was aroused from my sleep by my dog barking and growling, and I went to a window and looked out. It was very cloudy and dark, and I saw the glare of a big light on the clouds. I thought a large fire was in progress and hastily put on my clothes and went out into the yard to see where it was. As I opened the door to go out, my young dog, greatly scared at something, pushed by me and went into the house. My old dog stayed in the yard, and I noticed he was barking at something overhead, and I looked up and saw a great light slowly moving over the Salge Hotel. It was coming from the southeast and moved in a northwesterly direction. It appeared to me to be about 300 or 400 feet above the hotel, and it traveled very slow, the light be so blinding that I could not see the shape of the vehicle or whatever it was carrying. I watched it carefully, and after it had gone some distance and had passed me, I could see the shape of the rear end of the vessel, and it appeared to be in this shape." Mr. Porsch arranged his hands in a V shape, somewhat like the tail of a fish. "It was still moving very slowly," he continued, "but as I watched I saw a movement on each side of it like a bird flapping its wings, and its speed was at once greatly increased, and I watched it until it disappeared, which was not long after it began to increase its speed. It was drizzling a little, and it rained pretty hard after the light disappeared."

When asked, Porsch said no, he did not see any colored lights, only the one large one that was "very blinding." As to when the ship was seen, he said he immediately went back into the house and looked at his watch which showed exactly fifteen minutes after 4:00 a.m.



An artist's conception of Professor A. W. Barnard's aerial machine that was displayed at the Nashville Centennial. The drawing was widely circulated in Texas newspapers at a time when editors were proclaiming the Texas airship to be a hoax.

George continued on to Lake Charles, Louisiana where he took time to write a long detailed letter to his friend Dr. D. H. Tucker in Harlem, Texas. George Dunlap provided wonderful details of his adventure and included some drawings of the actual machine.

After mailing the letter, Dunlap continued his journey. Somewhere near Grenada, Mississippi, he stopped to assist in the rescue of some livestock that had become trapped by raging flood waters. During the rescue attempt, Dunlap lost his footing and slipped beneath the murky waters. The voice of a potentially valuable airship witness was silenced forever, but his letter survived and it was sent to the *Dallas Morning News* for

publication. Why the *Morning News* was selected and why the editors chose to reopen the airship adventure are both unsolved mysteries. For whatever reason, the *Morning News* officially closed the airship case by printing this last intriguing story. It was perhaps fitting that the editors did not include any editorial comment, because throughout the airship adventure, not one editor commented on any of the alleged close encounters with the mystery ship.

During the airship adventure, there were serious questions raised as to what was being seen and who was responsible. A lot of newspaper space was devoted to those questions. Fortunately, some additional space was reserved for some airship fun, which was fitting since no one really knew if they were dealing with a fake or an actual high flyer. Apparently there was some unwritten law in 1897 that required papers to make a little fun out of something that could not be proved just in case that something turned out to be a joke. When it came to airship tales, the Texas papers did not break that law.

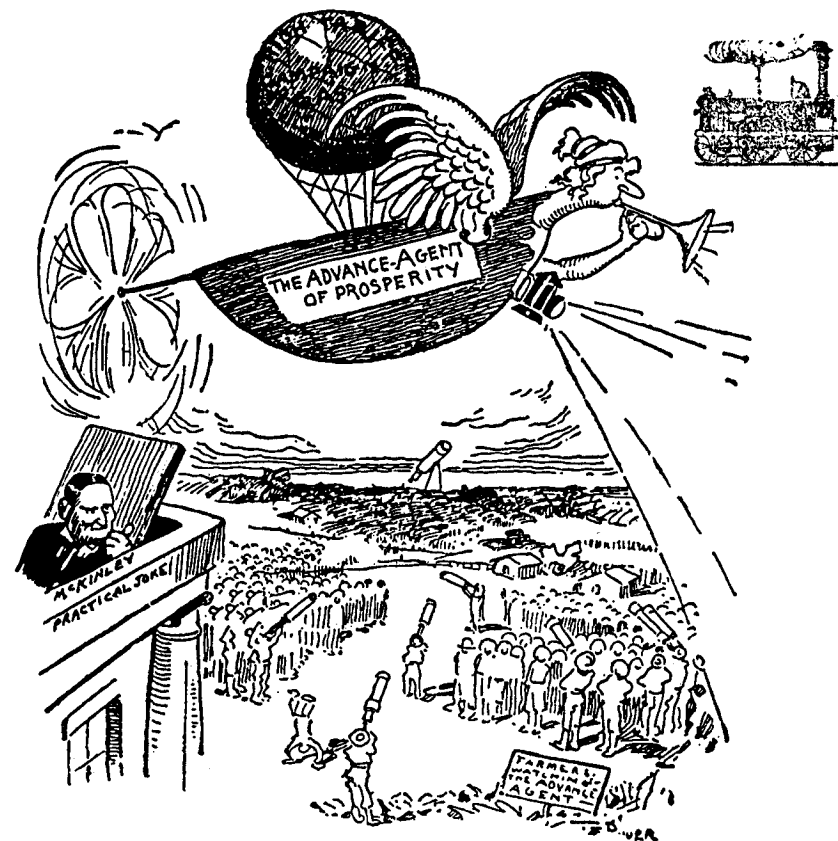
and consumers of America to escape the oppression of the Dingley bill by sailing far over the custom-houses."

The *Houston Post* also did not ignore either the political aspect or the Dingley bill. In fact, the *Post* would win the prize for best airship political cartoon with a drawing that depicted a humorous flying machine labeled, "The Advance-Agent of Prosperity." The cartoon, which proclaimed the airship as a practical joke of President McKinley, was accompanied by a poem reprinted from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

As a part of its San Jacinto Day edition for 1897, the *Austin Daily Statesman* included a clever report that both poked fun at the airship and at the state legislature which was dragging its feet on enacting legislation called for at the earlier state convention in Fort Worth. The report was part of a speech given by Colonel Dink Botts to a group of his friends.

In his talk, the colonel gave an account of an airship sighting by the manager of the Driskill Hotel in Austin. Supposedly, the manager of the hotel, a man named Shadbolt, had been on the roof taking down some washing from a clothesline when the airship appeared and a voice called out asking if the town was Austin. When a surprised Shadbolt replied in the affirmative, someone dropped a note attached to a brick and the ship sailed off into the night. The note, which was wrapped in a newspaper that smelled of stale fish, stated that the ship was en route to China but would return in October next, by which time the writer hoped the Texas legislature would have passed all the blooming platform demands formulated at Fort Worth.

Although most members of the Texas legislative branch avoided any implication that they had seen the airship, Representative Hill of Travis County was an exception. He was more than happy to tell his tale to a group of friends gathered on the capitol steps. He said that on May 1, while he was visiting in the Hyde Park section of Austin, the airship appeared. The captain, who communicated in ancient Greek, said the ship was part of a Greek squadron on duty in the United States and his ship, *Eureka*, the flagship, was on an inspection tour of Texas. Hill described the ship in some detail and then explained the entire crew consisted of "a captain, two lieutenants, two



The Secret of the Airship Disclosed.

There's been a lot of lying done
Of late out in the West,
And some one's had a heap of fun
Out of a merry jest

He's spread reports from everywhere
About a ship that flies
Like all possessed throughout the air
And skips off through the skies.

Now I would not exaggerate,
'Tis wicked so to do.
But one thing I'd asseverate
That I know to be true;
The airship was, in verity,

(Pray do not look askance),
That Agent of Prosperity
That travels in Advance.

I says it "was," for now, alas!
'Tis fallen in the dust;
The bag above it, filled with gas,
By some mischance did bust;
And Hanna and McKinley dig
Each other on the sly.
And grin while thinking of the big
Explosion in the sky.

Post-Dispatch - N. A. J.

Airship "political" cartoon and accompanying poem which appeared in the April 25, 1897 edition of the *Houston Post*.

mention it to anyone in Texas. Either that or the story was one that Texas newspaper editors chose to ignore.

Since the *Dallas Morning News* assumed the lead in airship reporting, it naturally was the early leader in whiskey related stories. Even before the airship was sighted in Texas, the *Morning News* said of Kansas airships: "The sails of the Kansas airship seemed to have been made of 'three sheets in the wind.'" and "A Kansas City man who saw the airship said it 'looked to him about as big as a beer glass.' It is inferred from this that the airship is a schooner." At about the time the airship was winging its way to Texas, the *Morning News* reported: "The friends of a Dallas man have warned the saloons against selling him any more liquor. He has been seeing airships."

There was considerable speculation that the quality of liquor had something to do with the airship. As one story pointed out, "the man who sees a snake today may behold an airship tomorrow." Another airship editorial claimed, "Men of the world pronounced it a raw joke and a few crusty old chaps intimated that the quality of whiskey sold in the small towns was enough to make the average toper see anything from a boa constrictor to a full rigged ship in the heavens." In Ennis, Texas a Dr. E. Sturat, said to be an acknowledged authority in metaphysics, gave it as his opinion that the whole airship affair was due to "hypnotism and bad whiskey."

The *Dallas Daily Times Herald* wasn't far behind the *News*. As to the validity of airships, the *Herald* claimed, "Some are utterly skeptic and suggest that it is a new fad with those people who are unfortunate enough to 'see things.' Formerly their minds conjured up blue monkeys, Nile-like saurians and other creeping things equally disagreeable for the mind to dwell upon long at a time. They suggest that having exhausted the catalog of things that creep, they have by some mental somersault invaded the realm of flying things, and hence the airship." The *Herald* editor also commented on the alcohol situation. "Seeing the airship," the editor wrote, "is becoming quite an industry. It is even being witnessed by the inhabitants of towns that have been 'dry' these many years."



When the airship was reported over Oklahoma in early April, the *Dallas Morning News* ran this cartoon over the caption: "AN AIRSHIP SEEN IN OKLAHOMA." The implication that the airship was seen by someone "on

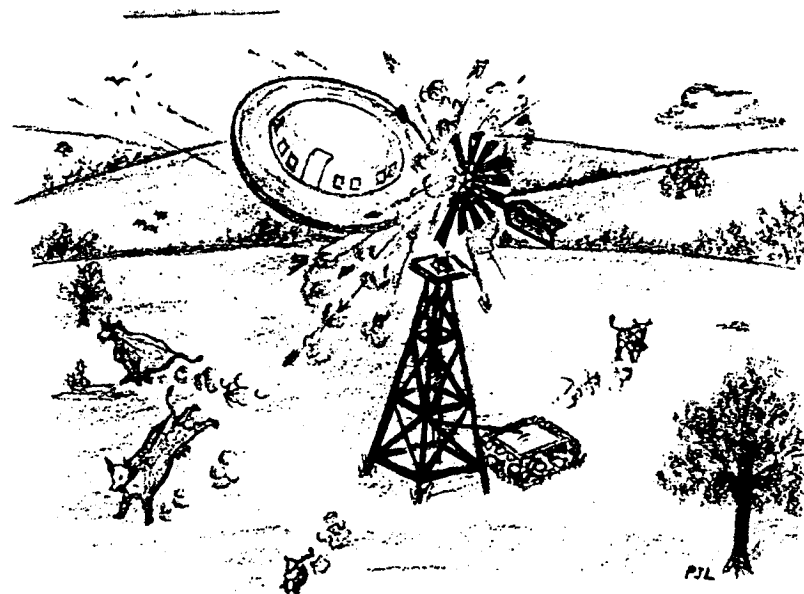
"as does the reality of plain talk, and you have to be careful how you mix them. Both are too important to be abused."

One of the leading Aurora skeptics was historian Betty Pegues of Newark, Texas which is "just down the road a piece" from Aurora. When the Wise County Historical Survey Committee decided to do an updated history of the county in 1975, Mrs. Pegues was selected to write the brief history of Aurora and she included a thorough examination of the spaceman tale which she considered a "beautiful piece of fiction."

Mrs. Pegues pointed out that in 1897 Aurora was something less than a thriving community. The failure of the railroad to come to town coupled with a severe problem from boll weevils and a devastating epidemic of spotted fever had brought the struggling community to its knees. She quoted another writer who had said "not even a Martian would be caught dead in Aurora in 1897" and reported that many people believed Haydon's concocted story was an effort to revive interest in the town.

In her article, Mrs. Pegues contended that the facts of Proctor not having a windmill, Weems not being an astronomer, and the cemetery association having no record of a man from Mars being buried locally were the three things that stood out to refute Haydon's story. She reiterated that Cates had not mentioned the story and added that Harold R. Bost had omitted any reference to the tale in his "Saga of Aurora."

As further evidence, Mrs. Pegues included quotes from oldtimers who had been living in Aurora in 1897. According to her story, Shaw Ford said the tale was a "bunch of bunk" and Oscar Lowry claimed it was a hoax. Mrs. Pegues, like Porterfield, also interviewed Robbie Hanson and quoted her as saying, "It is a hoax. I was in school that day and nothing happened." In fairness to the Aurora legend, it should be noted that Mrs. Hanson's memory may not have been totally accurate. According to the original Haydon story, the airship appeared about 6:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning when no one was in school.



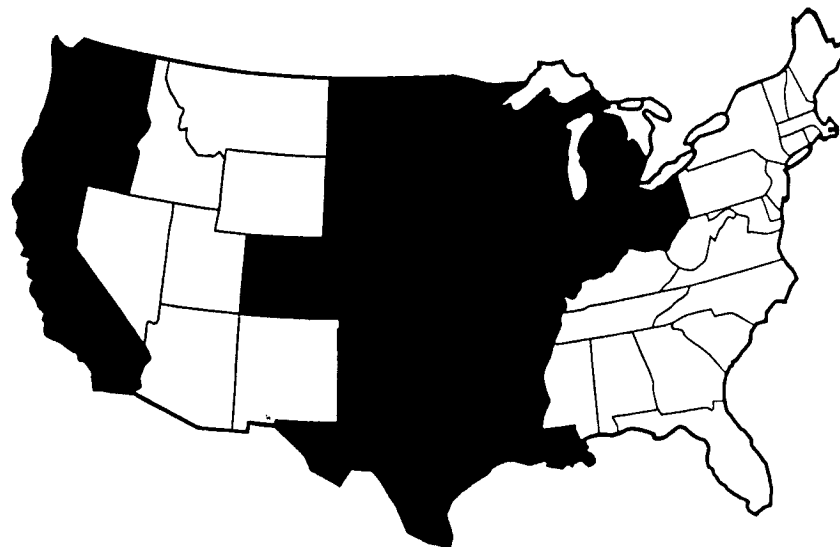
An artist's conception of the crash at Aurora that appeared in the Wise County History. Although the picture shows the craft shaped like a flying saucer, it was described at the time as being cigar-shaped. Drawn by Mrs. Peggy Jenkins Logan. Used with permission from Mrs. Rosalie Gregg, Chairman, Wise County Historical Commission.

There was one point of controversy brought out by Mrs. Pegues. Bill Case had claimed that he had Mary Evans saying on tape that she remembered the crash incident. Mrs. Pegues countered by reporting that Mary Evans had gone on record saying she didn't know anything about the crash until it came up in the spring of 1973. "I could have told them a story about the spaceship falling at Aurora," Mrs. Evans was quoted as saying, "but it wouldn't have been true. Sooner or later they would have caught me in a lie." Mrs. Pegues left no doubt that she also believed the tale to be a total lie.

The Aurora story, which had garnered so much national and international attention, slipped quietly out of the headlines. Bill Case, a true champion of the cause, passed away early in 1974 and no one stepped forward to take up the baton and carry on the hunt. The MUFON investigative team had reached a dead

APPENDIX A

Maps

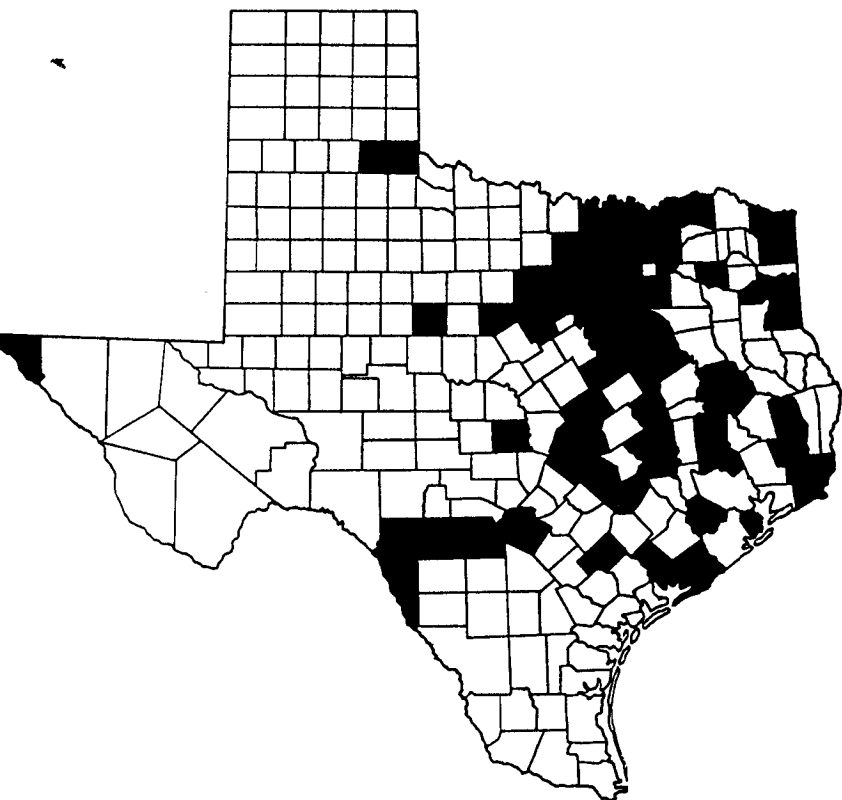


This map shows the states where the airship was seen in 1896-1897. There were a few reports from other states but they were so isolated and suspect that they were omitted.



APPENDIX B

The Log of the Airship



This map shows the counties where the airship was reported in Texas. The sighting in El Paso is included although the circumstances are highly suspect.

<i>Date Seen</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Time Seen</i>	<i>Paper Printed</i>	<i>Date</i>
4-12	Ennis	Ellis	night	DMN	4-19
4-13	Denton	Denton	night	DMN	4-15
4-14	Weatherford	Parker	9 p.m.	DMN	4-16
4-14	Corsicana	Navarro	8:30 p.m.	DMN	4-16
4-14	Cresson	Hood	night	DMN	4-16
4-14	Dallas	Dallas	night	DMN	4-18
4-14	Peoria	Hill	night	DMN	4-18
4-14	Orange	Orange	night	GDN	4-22
4-14	Beaumont	Jefferson	10 p.m.	NOP	4-25
4-15	Dallas	Dallas	night	DMN	4-17
4-15	Marshall	Harrison	10:30 p.m.	DMN	4-17
4-15	Hillsboro	Hill	9 p.m.	DMN	4-17
4-15	El Paso	El Paso	8-9 p.m.	ILL	4-17
4-15	Paris	Lamar	2 a.m.	DMN	4-17
4-15	Sherman	Grayson	night	DMN	4-17
4-15	Fort Worth	Tarrant	night	DMN	4-17
4-15	Texarkana	Bowie	night	DMN	4-18
4-15	Garland	Dallas	night	DMN	4-18
4-15	Greenville	Hunt	night	DMN	4-18
4-15	near Cisco	Eastland	night	FWR	4-18
4-16	Hawkins	Wood	3 p.m.	DMN	4-17
4-16	Garland	Dallas	evening	DMN	4-17
4-16	Oak Cliff	Dallas	10 p.m.	DTH	4-17
4-16	Dallas	Dallas	8 p.m.	SAE	4-17
4-16	ranch	Kaufman	9 p.m.	DMN	4-18
4-16	Dallas	Dallas	9 p.m.	DMN	4-18
4-16	Bonham	Fannin	8:15 p.m.	DMN	4-18
4-16	Cleburne	Johnson	night	DMN	4-18
4-16	Tioga	Grayson	11:30 p.m.	DMN	4-18
4-16	Fort Worth	Tarrant	night	DMN	4-18
4-16	Mansfield	Tarrant	9:45 p.m.	DMN	4-18
4-16	Forney	Kaufman	night	DMN	4-18
4-16	Rhome	Wise	8:30 p.m.	FWR	4-18

age drawing of the "Airship"—a black, stubby, torpedo, furnished with the large fabric wings described by Attorney Collins. Even a tale by a San Rafael hunter was entertained concerning the alleged discovery by him of an airship machine hop on Bolinas Ridge some months earlier. The call actually began to believe it was closing in on the story of the century.

The *San Francisco Examiner* had the young William Randolph Hearst (a coming name in sensational journalism) as editor-in-chief, but Hearst had left the West Coast some months before and was then in New York at the helm of the *Journal-American*, a failing daily he had recently purchased and was now rebuilding in a fierce circulation battle with the other metropolitan papers. Even though well occupied with the *Journal-American*, Hearst kept close control over the *Examiner's* editorial policies, constantly urging more pictures and bigger type. One would have expected the *Examiner* to have played up the sensational aspects; yet, the comment in its columns on the California mystery light was of a light-hearted nature mixed with considerable straightforward news reporting. In fact, the *Examiner* didn't even mention the airship business until November 23rd. The *Examiner* even corrected the facts on the Oakland airship sightings as reported by the call. In a story under the peculiar multi-headings common to the newspapers of the time: "Queer Things You See When," "A Mysterious Wanderer of the Skies Perplexes People," "The Sea Serpent Has Drawn in His Horns and His Nose is Out of Joint," the *Examiner* quoted Superintendent Tiffany of the Piedmont Electric road on the aerial "bark." Tiffany said:

I made a thorough investigation today of the story told by some of our men of an alleged airship seen floating over Saint Mary's College...so far as I could learn from our men, none of them saw anything but a light. I had a long talk with Selby Yost and he admitted that he saw nothing but a moving light in the air. The airship proposition was, I found, not considered for a moment.

The talented *Examiner* cartoonist, James Swinnerton, then went to work and had a field day with the airship subject at the expense of the true believers.

The call, involved in a circulation struggle with the Hearst paper, expressed a conviction that the *Examiner's* negative outlook was simply due to the fact that they had been scooped by their cross-town rival.

The November 24th issue of the call carried charges by attorney Collins that: "...a *Chronicle* reporter had misrepresented him [claiming] that he had actually seen the airship and was processing a patent for it." Furthermore, Collins

