

SOLVING the 1897 AIRSHIP MYSTERY

By Michael Busby

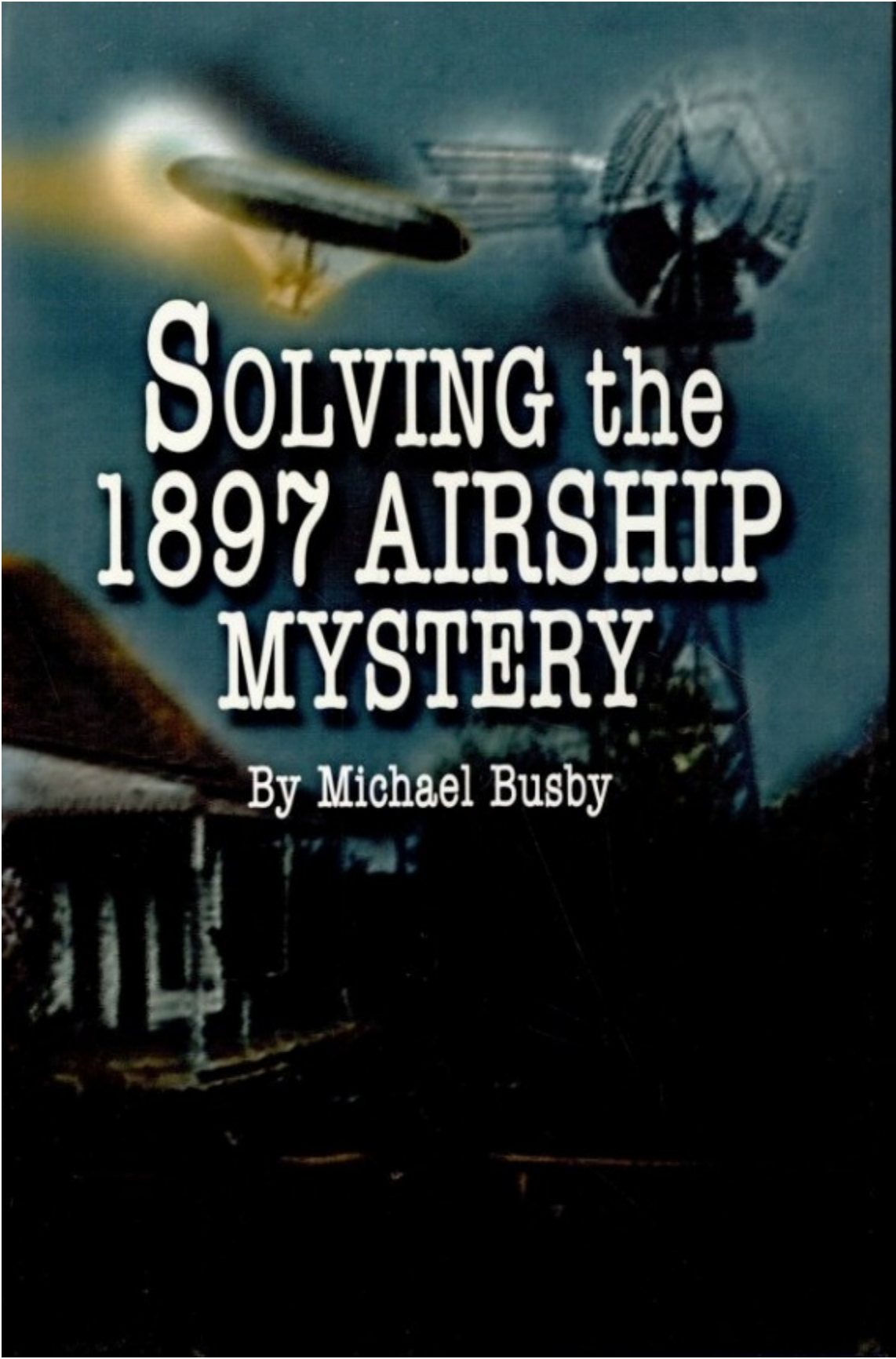
"Mr. Frank Nichols, a prominent farmer living about two miles east of here, and a man of unquestioned veracity, was awakened night before last near the hour of 12 by a whirring noise, similar to that made by machinery. Upon looking out he was startled upon beholding brilliant lights streaming from a ponderous vessel of strange proportions, which rested upon the ground in his corn field."

—*Houston Post*, April 26, 1897

From November 1896 to May 1897, hundreds of newspapers across North America published similar accounts of strange objects in the night skies. Citizens from California to as far east as Michigan reported seeing mysterious "airships" moving high above the earth. Were these puzzling craft driven by visitors from another planet? By hostile foreigners? By American inventors subsidized by private investors, the government, or the military?

Solving the 1897 Airship Mystery represents six years of research and draws on more than 1,200 newspaper stories and other contemporary accounts. Author

(continued on back flap)



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This One



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For a few people who made a difference in my life, thank you for the memories:

For my best friends, Shane, Drew, and Stuart Busby (Plano, Texas), you are the

reason for living;

Ida Velma Busby (St. Jo, TX), a mother's love never dies but lives on in our hearts;

Alethea Busby (Plano, TX), you were the wind beneath my wings;

Willie Busby (Nocona, TX), I ain't heavy, I'm his brother;

Dixie Broom (Bowie, TX), when I saw you standing there;

John and Gail Carlson (Nashua, NH), Semper Fidelis;

Bob Pruden (Decatur, TX), gone but not forgotten;

Don Ingram (Los Angeles, CA), gone but not forgotten;

Sam and Connie Williamson (St. Jo, TX), "With the sun beatindown across the fields I

see, that mule, Ole Sam, and me..., "gone but not forgotten;

Elvin and Mattie Dennis (Gainesville, TX);

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Lee and Helen Brice (St. Jo, TX);

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Old Boston, Texas (I will never forget);

the United States Marine Corps;

and the men who died for me in Vietnam.

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INTRODUCTION

Although there was ample debate concerning the flying machines' origins in 1897, including the supposition that the machines were of extraterrestrial design, all of the 1896-97 newspaper accounts referred to the unidentified flying objects as *airships*. For the sake of continuity, I will continue the convention. The term *UFO* did not achieve widespread popularity until fifty years later.

About six years ago, Jim Hill suggested that a series of books on Texas UFO sightings would constitute an interesting writing project. Since Jim is a publisher (and a friend), I thought the idea possessed some merit. I rushed off to the library to research the documented UFO sightings in Texas and almost immediately came upon the great airship mystery of 1897, including the purported crash of an airship on April 17, 1897, in Aurora, Texas. After uncovering a wealth of period newspaper stories regarding the topic and reading other documented material on the subject, I discovered it was not just a Texas airship mystery but a California, Nevada, Utah, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Louisiana airship mystery also.

The story of the 1897 airship mystery is embedded in thousands of newspaper accounts reporting what happened in the local skies over Western United States beginning in the fall of 1896 and proceeding through the spring of 1897. Initially, in late 1896, coastal areas of the western portion of the country were seized and held spellbound by the reports of numerous and mysterious airship sightings. First California was inundated with reports of airships seen in the night. Soon after the initial California sightings, the odd-looking machines were seen over numerous Western, Central, and Southern states. For a while during 1896 and 1897, people throughout the country west of the Mississippi and from all segments of society rubbernecked the skies every night to get a glimpse of the flying vessels of unknown origin. Occasionally, people reported hearing and glimpsing strange beings working the vessels' machinery.

Were the enigmatic occupants of these vessels the advance party of an extraterrestrial race of beings scouting the country looking for the best site to establish a sinister presence on our planet? Did they map our country and subsequently establish a base at a remote Nevada site later popularized as Area 54? Were the appearance of these strange flying vessels and the purported crash of an airship at Aurora, Texas, a prelude to the alleged events that occurred fifty years later near Roswell, New Mexico? Or, did an epidemic of mass hysteria sweep a good proportion of the country? Were the stories the product of newspaper writers' imaginations? Were the flying machines a secret government project (and was there a subsequent government cover-up)? Intriguing questions for inquiring minds, astounding answers await the interested reader.

In this book, the focus is primarily on the Texas sightings. The reasons for limiting the scope of the book are (1) the amount of material involving all sightings is just too voluminous for a single book, (2) the Aurora crash makes interesting reading, (3) the airshow's grand finale was in Texas, (4) and, for reasons that will become abundantly clear, the Texas sightings include clues that yield answers.

The method I have adopted to present this story consists of a chronological timeline with the actual Texas newspaper accounts presented with the more interesting and pertinent facts in bold italics within the body of each account. If warranted, additional commentary is placed at the end of the account. At the end of each chapter, a map of the chapter sightings is provided to easily visualize the various way points of the airships. Each map includes the applicable sighting information reported—such as time of day or night and direction of travel.

Using the tabulated information, also included at the end of each chapter, I estimate the airships' flight path and offer additional commentary on the nature of the sightings. Drawing upon supplementary newspaper accounts of sightings outside Texas, an amazing story never before told unfolds. The final chapters include supporting documentation, arguments, and conclusions regarding the nature of the airship sightings as supported by the

evidence in the newspaper accounts, historical documentation, and other historical facts.

However, one cannot delve into the Texas sightings without providing some background information on the sightings in the other states. Several very pertinent California accounts are included in this analysis.

Initially, it is difficult to decide where to begin when confronted with an interesting and complicated story such as this one—sort of a chickenand-egg theory (which comes first?). Though the country observed the great airshow in 1897, the 1897 airship mystery may have actually began in 1840's New York and it may have ended in Houston in 1923 with the death of Charles A. A. Dellschau.

SOLVING THE
1897 AIRSHIP MYSTERY

CHAPTER 1

AND THERE SHALL BE SIGNS

The spring of 1897 was a time of great excitement in the United States. Many inventions based upon recent physical science discoveries were making their way onto the marketplace and into the business and home environments. Electric lights were illuminating the world of darkness. Mr. Edison's phonograph was emitting tinny-sounding tunes out the doorway of America. Mark Twain wrote the first book on a typewriter, and now, the amazing machines were finding their way into almost every office and many homes in the country. High-speed passenger-train service made coast-to-coast travel an easy and comfortable three or four day journey. Great, steam-powered ships conquered the oceans. Skyscrapers were conquering the skies and changing the face of American cities. X-rays signaled a new paradigm in medicine. Quantum mechanics and relativity were just a couple of mathematical equations away in our evolving understanding of the universe. Using large, powerful telescopes recently assembled and directed toward the heavens, the world's astronomers were announcing new astronomical discoveries almost everyday, including the discovery of Martian "canals." And Charles H. Dow had just introduced his now-famous Dow (Jones) industrial stock-market averages to the country via the newspaper he edited, the *Wall Street Journal*. Western Indian depredations were finally a nightmare of the past and people slept easy at night knowing they and, especially, their children were reasonably safe in their beds. Automobiles were the newest threat to peace and prosperity, as the horseless carriages honked and careened their way down the mud-caked thoroughfares of America, scaring witless the horses pulling the carriages and wagons. People believed there was no limit to human, and especially American, ingenuity.

However, one frontier had not yielded to American ingenuity. Although great achievements were becoming commonplace on Earth, the heavens remained unconquered. Yet, many people thought it was just a small matter

of time before the problem of aerial navigation would succumb to human invention. Newspapers and magazines devoted numerous columns of print to the subject and the seemingly slow progress in the state of the science. Famous scientists, including Samuel Pierpont Langley, head of the Smithsonian Museum, were vigorously failing to conquer the heavens. However, most people agreed that they, or their children, would live to see humans one day sailing the skies as easily as ships sailed the ocean.

Then suddenly, without any warning, a strange-looking object appeared in the early evening sky over Sacramento, California. On November 17, 1896, between the hours of 6 and 7 P.M., people were startled to see an airship flying slowly across the city, from the northeast to the southwest, at a very low altitude (*Sacramento Evening Bee*, November 18, 1896, p. 1). Dumbfounded, people stood in the streets and gazed at the alien-looking airship with great amazement and some consternation. According to the *Bee* account, hundreds viewed the sight.

For the next seven months, airships were seen fairly often, flying at night over America's cities and towns. Newspapers printed airship stories as they came into their offices from stringers, also known as correspondents, who reported via telegraph from towns, villages, and cities the airship sightings when they occurred in their regions. Also, individuals breathlessly rushed into newspaper offices to tell tales of late-night encounters with strange flying machines. But not all airship stories were printed. In many cases, only after reputable men and women stepped forward with their tales of nocturnal visitors did some newspapers feel safe from public ridicule and begin to print airship stories. Even after publishing these stories, many newspaper publishers and editors remained skeptical of the sightings, evidenced by their editorials on the subject.

The great 1897 airship mystery was the result of numerous sightings of strange flying objects, most often seen at night. What was the cause of the aerial phenomenon? Too much rubbernecking and stargazing? Too much alcohol to drink? Mass hysteria? A widespread newspaper hoax? A great railroad hoax? Aliens from another planet? Aliens from this planet (let's not forget the Hollow Earth believers)? A secret government project? Perhaps, they were exactly what many respectable individuals who gave graphic accounts of firsthand encounters with the weird flying machines and their occupants described them to be.

Although the great airship mystery began in California with the initial Sacramento sighting on November 17, 1896 (followed by numerous sightings over San Francisco and other northern California cities), within weeks, other regions around the country were reporting the presence of the

strange airships. Using the numerous, dated newspaper accounts as a timeline, one can see that the airship sightings follow an easily identifiable path beginning in California, proceeding east to the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan), then changing to a southerly course and traversing Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma before arriving in Texas and Louisiana in April 1897.

All along the course of the airship sightings, the reports of the airships' visitation followed the same general pattern. People saw the airship, or airship(s), at night, sometimes following a straight line, sometimes stopping then starting again then changing course before disappearing over the horizon. The descriptions of the size, shape, and sounds associated with the airship(s) are similar, regardless of the location and date of the sighting.

When the airships arrived in a region, the local newspapers and populace adopted various positions regarding the veracity of the airships' existence. Sometimes witnesses remained silent until some very respectable member of the community came forward with a report of an airship sighting. Then other observers who had kept silent for fear of censure poured out their stories. Some newspapers might print every airship story they received without regard to its truthfulness, while others printed only the airship stories of people it deemed reliable sources. The credibility of the newspaper was at stake and many editors were anxious to ensure it was well protected, while other editors were willing to risk their reputations for circulation gain. And occasionally, a paper would reprint another newspaper's airship story if it was especially interesting.

The airship sightings, documented in more than twelve hundred known U.S. newspaper accounts, began in November 1896 and ended in May 1897. (See appendix B for a list of the known newspapers carrying airship stories.) Today, some people believe the airship mystery was nothing more than the product of fertile imaginations diligently at work in the back offices of newspapers. Occasionally, some newspapers were willing to print hoaxes in order to entertain their readers. So why should we give credence to these stories? Although a few accounts appear to be fake, there are too many firsthand accounts that include the names of reputable witnesses. Such accounts give credibility to the large body of stories. The people reporting the stories were not fictional people or people with histories of mental illness, drug abuse, or perhaps, practical jokester natures, but they were the individuals who formed the foundation of their communities. They were farmers, clerks, train drivers, telegraph operators, newspaper correspondents, business owners, doctors, lawyers, current and former government officials, military officers, engineers, scientists, legislators, and

professors. They were men and women, adults and children, brown, black, white, and all the shades in between.

The great body of airship accounts detail, in report after report, the nocturnal movements of the mysterious airships. However, not all sightings were reported and many reports were not printed. Why? How many thousands of people looked into the sky, saw the airship(s), and never mentioned the sighting to anyone? How many thousands of people notified a newspaper of a sighting, but the account was never printed? How many thousands of correspondent's telegrams were not sent to newspapers and how many unused columns of stories were eventually trashed is anyone's guess. At one point, as the nightly airship sightings became numerous about the Texas skies, the *Dallas Morning News* stated it had over five hundred columns of unpublished material relating to airship sightings. Unfortunately, this large collection of information is now lost to us. But, from the extensive evidence that does remain, we can discern an amazing story never before told in its entirety.

Reliable people reported seeing strange flying machines traveling at "meteor-like speed" through the dark heavens from the fall of 1896 into the spring of 1897. Tales of crashes and little (previously) green (but now burnt black) men—or women, the body seems to have been burnt too bad to recognize the sex—from Mars permeated the news of the day. Stories of airships that could easily outrace the high-speed passenger trains in service and fly three miles high—an unbelievable claim in 1897—were common during this exciting period of American invention.

The claims of the airships' altitude and speed seem especially unbelievable today, given our front-row seat watching the great revolution in technology upon the panoramic screen of American history and, especially, its impact on the science of aviation during the past century. In 1903, the Wright brothers succeeded in flying only a few hundred feet at an altitude not substantially more than rooftop height at a speed of less than fifty miles per hour. It would be many years before any human-made machine could fly two miles high and exceed 100 miles per hour! Yet, the reports from many eyewitnesses in 1897 make such claims concerning the airships!

The light bulb, the phonograph, the telephone, the electrical motor, and the automobile were just a few of the many useful inventions pouring out of creative American minds in the midst of the great Industrial Revolution at the dawn of a new millennium. Were alien visitors offering advice and help to our greatest inventors or to the government? Could the success of the incredible Industrial Revolution be attributed to an alien presence among us? Did aliens provide our government the secret of powered flight? Or, were imaginary airships pouring out of everyone's fertile imaginations?

Some people, including professors and other "learned men," believed the airships were from another world. The descriptions of the craft and their antics seemed to suggest an intelligence far beyond any on Earth.

Supporting such a premise is the claim of a U.S. government signal officer of the recovery of an alien body after a purported crash. The similarity of the government official's account to an alien crash account of another time and place is striking. A U.S. Air Force major serving as base public-information officer made the exact same claim fifty years later at Roswell, New Mexico. Moreover, a published firsthand account of a personal encounter between an earthling and the unearthly visitors gave credence, at the time, to the supposition that the flying machines were from another world.

Several people then (and a few people today) believed the sightings were the result of something greater than a touch of collective madness, a great outpouring of mass hysteria from an easily fooled and stampeded population. According to this explanation, otherwise sane and sharp-eyed individuals, with and without telescopes and field or marine glasses, walked out their doorways, gazed into the heavens, and saw things that were really not there. Although these people could tell the difference between a cow and a horse or a chicken and a pig, they could not tell the difference between a star and a swiftly moving flying machine of suspicious origin—so say the mass hysteria proponents. According to this explanation of the airships' origin, Venus (or Saturn or Mars or any other astronomical feature you care to name) was now accorded the status of a flying vessel. First traveling across the night sky in one direction, perhaps slowing down, then abruptly changing direction, before speeding off and flying over the horizon in a matter of minutes, the fast-moving, low-altitude, blinking-light, mechanical apparitions were confused with slow planetary motion. This explanation for the airships' existence requires one to believe the greater proportion of the American public residing west of the Mississippi River in 1896 and 1897 was overwhelmed by a pandemic of mass hysteria for seven long months.

According to at least one modern explanation of the airship(s)'s origin, their genesis is to be found in the smoke-filled, back rooms of saloons, in

the midst of yarn-filled poker games. Several obviously fake airship stories, whose origins are undoubtedly to be found in the midst of late-night poker games, were printed. However, the fake stories' substance is such that they are easily identified and proved to be phonies. Why did people make up fake stories? Maybe after years of silently treading behind the plow, or standing morosely behind the store counter, some people just wanted to have a little fun and make up a few entertaining stories to amuse the townspeople and the newspaper folks. In any case, the fake stories are easily identified, when viewed within the context of all the airship stories.

When the airship sightings began, there were "wars and rumors of wars," as the United States rattled its sword at Spain over the Cuban war for independence. The gospel was preached around the world. Disease and famine were rampant. The nearness of a new century and the "signs of the times" seemed to signify the end of time to many people. Some people thought the airship sightings were biblical prophecy: "and there shall be signs from the heavens" fulfilled.

Were the airships a visitation from heaven, seeking out and identifying the righteous for deliverance when the end of times would be upon the land? The sum of the days' events added up to one logical conclusion for some people. Religious leaders proclaimed prophecy was realized and the end of time was now upon the land. Attendance at religious meetings and revivals increased in 1897. Churches experienced a surge of new converts—nothing like prophecy realized (as spelled out in Revelation and as evidenced by "winged messengers from heaven") to increase church attendance and revenues.

A few people today believe the airship stories were engineered by the railroads as a hoax for some obscure reason. They claim the number of airship sightings reported by railroad employees and train passengers is evidence that the airships were a hoax initiated and perpetuated by reprobate telegraphers. Such an explanation does not account for the fact that the telegraph and the railroads were the foundations of mass communication in 1897 America. Both the telegraph lines and the airships followed the clearly delineated rail lines from community to community, therefore it should not surprise anyone that railroad employees and train passengers were usually the first to see the airships when they arrived near a community. Since there was a telegrapher in every rail station, news of an airship sighting quickly spread up and down the communities along the railroad line.

What do others say about the airship mystery? A survey of previously published works on this topic, of which there are just a couple, does not produce any book with a valid and believable explanation of the airship sightings. The couple of books (UFO-types) that include a reference to this

topic offer only a mass-hysteria solution, a "great newspaper or railroad hoax" answer, a vague extraterrestrial explanation, or a "you decide" choice. The reader of these books is left with the general impression that the seven-month airship mystery was a great hoax perpetrated by miscreant newspaper reporters in a widespread conspiracy to drum up news, get their names on bylines, and sell more newspapers.

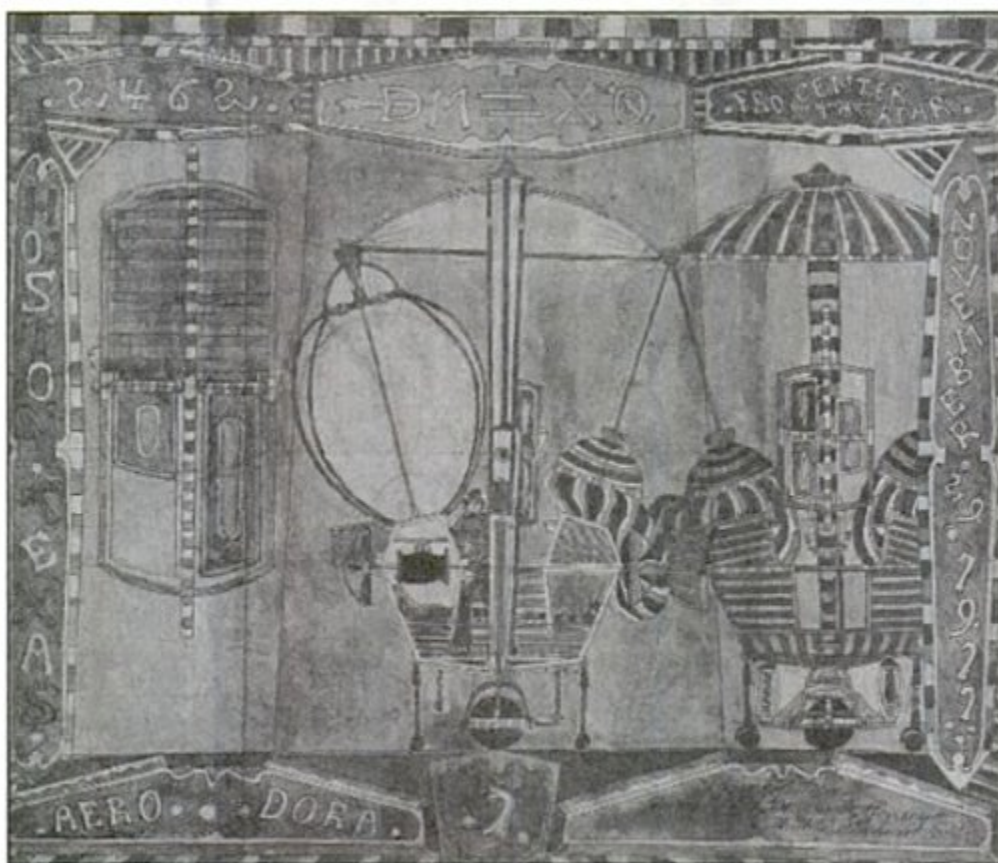
Widely reported in numerous newspapers, the airships were regarded as various manifestations of both natural and supernatural events. Some believed the end of time was near and the ships had come to collect the just. Some believed the airships were visitors from Mars, Jupiter, or any place but Earth. Some believed the airships were a great hoax engineered by either the newspapers or the railroads. But most people at the time believed American ingenuity (perhaps, with some alien assistance?) had solved the problem of aerial navigation, or flight, and the successful inventor(s) would soon step forward, announce their amazing machine(s) to the world, and claim their deserved reward.

If the majority's supposition was correct, why didn't the inventors step forward, publicly announce their success, and celebrate the initiation of a new technological age with the rest of the world? If the airships were of human invention, why wasn't the technology pursued to a logical conclusion, the initiation of mass air transportation, by 1900? These and other questions naturally come to mind as one begins to ponder the newspaper reports of the sightings. Only in reading the story of the great airship mystery will the reader discover the interesting and even amazing answers to these and many other baffling questions.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE ATTIC

In a large Texas town, a lonely figure bends over his worktable in the dim light cast by a single bulb piercing the attic's inky black darkness. Charles A. A. Dellschau laboriously draws his final watercolor at the age of ninety-three. Soon, he will draw no more, as 1923 and his life arrive at the crossroads of their final reckoning. Why has he labored in seclusion for twenty-three years to draw twelve volumes of mixed-media pictographs of flying machines? Flying machines that apparently only he has seen (or imagined)? Why does he describe his creations and the men and women who flew them in short scripts written in a symbolic or coded language? Was Charles Dellschau a victim of alien abduction documenting for posterity the details of his abduction? Or was he a dreamer, an amateur artist?



Aero Dora, Center Front or Rear

1911 work of Delschau (Courtesy the Menil Collection, Houston;
Photographer: Hickey-Robertson, Houston)

In 1899, Dellschau retired as a butcher and began to paint pictures of strange, fantastic-looking airships using mixed media. The colorful works include intricate montages presenting airships as the central theme. The airships, some possessing shiplike decks slung beneath balloon pontoons, are manned by crews of gentlemen. Occasionally, a cat is depicted accompanying the crew. Included in the numerous notebooks, juxtaposed among the airship drawings, are stories of flying that seem impossible for anyone to just make up—only someone who has lived the tale could write about it in such glorious detail.

Among the pages of his notebooks, Dellschau identifies the Sonora Aero Club as the umbrella organization he and the other aeronauts worked for in the 1850s. He also identifies an unknown organization (the NYMZA) as the provider of the financial backing for the design and build of the airships he documented. According to Dellschau, the Sonora Aero Club had over forty members building and flying airships in the early 1850s. Many of these club members, most with Germansounding names, are listed by name in his notebooks.

Why does Dellschau spend the few precious remaining hours of his life filling page after page with interesting drawings and descriptive information of long-ago flights and fatal crashes? And why does he make the cryptic statement that "wonder weavers" will decipher his drawings and coded statements one day and discern "what was true all along"?

Charles August Albert Dellschau was born June 4, 1830, in Brandenburg, Prussia. As a young man, he is said to have had an intense fascination with flight and aerodynamics. Dellschau arrived in the United States from Hamburg, Germany, in 1853. On his immigration record, he incorrectly listed his age as that of twenty-five years old. His occupation is listed as a farmer. Dellschau's letter of citizenship places him in Harris County, Texas, in 1856 and Fort Bend County, Texas, in 1860. Dellschau's whereabouts and profession between 1853 and 1856 are unknown in the historical records. According to his notebooks, he was employed as a draftsman for the Sonora Aero Club during the period of 1853 to 1856.

In 1861, while living in Fort Bend County, Dellschau married Antonia Hilt. By 1865 he and Antonia were living in Richmond, Texas. Antonia soon died, leaving Dellschau a sickly daughter and a healthy older stepdaughter. By 1886 he was living in Houston with his stepdaughter and her husband, Anton Stelzig. When Dellschau retired in 1899, he continued to live in the home of his stepdaughter and her husband, turning the attic of the home into a studio of sorts. Then he began to fill notebooks with over five thousand pictures of flying machines and over two hundred pages of coded text. After he died in 1923, his voluminous works languished in the Houston attic.

In 1963, forty years after Charles A. A. Dellschau died, twelve volumes of illustrated work—characterized as "fantasy flight"—were removed from the attic where he painted in secluded retirement. Found by a helpful nurse who was cleaning out the attic, the material was unceremoniously dumped on the curb to be collected as garbage. A trashman picked up the collection and sold the volumes to a Houston junk dealer, who placed them, covered with a dirty tarp, on the floor of his Washington Avenue junk store. There the works rested for another six years before an art-history student at the University of St. Thomas came across the material. Her patron, the Houston Menil Foundation, bought five volumes for \$500 in 1969. The remaining volumes were purchased by a UFO researcher in 1993, with some of them eventually coming to rest in a New York art gallery.

What do others have to say about Dellschau and his work? The *New York Times* ("A Spiritual Energy in Fanciful Realms," *Art Review*, January 22, 1999) characterized Dellschau's art as "thousands of wonderfully fanciful pictures of Jules Verne-style flying machines." How fanciful were his pictures? Perhaps, they were less fanciful and more realistic than the *New York Times* reviewer could imagine.

When Jules Verne wrote *Five Weeks in a Balloon* in 1863, he was thirty-five years old and Charles Dellschau was thirty-three. While Jules Verne was just starting to write about flying, Charles Dellschau seems, according to his notebooks, to have already been an experienced aviator of some ten years. Was Dellschau a dreamer or was he mad? Was he a victim of alien abduction, or was he, in his own crude way, documenting for posterity UFO sightings of the 1850s? Why didn't Dellschau write his stories in a straightforward and readily understandable manner? And where was Dellschau between 1853 and 1856? The answers to these questions may lie in the amazing story of the great 1897 airship mystery.

CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNING

April 6-April 14,1897

We are now ready to embark on our journey through the newspaper accounts documenting the inexplicable airship sightings of 1897. The accounts are interesting not only for the light they shed on the airship mystery, but also for their humor and quaint insight into the culture of the period.

In this chapter is a discussion of the initial sightings in the Indian Territory and north Texas, focusing on the reliable newspaper accounts. Each newspaper account of a reported sighting is given with important clues and details outlined in bold italics, and corresponding author comments immediately follow the article. Explanatory material, identified by the use of brackets, may be included in the body of the article. There are five airship sightings during this period. Compared to the wealth of airship sightings over the next few weeks, five sightings seem hardly worth mentioning. But, it is readily apparent when viewed in the context of the whole airship story that these initial sightings, perhaps of a single airship, were the forerunners for sightings of a fleet of airships soon to arrive in the Lone Star State. And now, let the participants tell their stories.

Monday

April 5,1897

DENISON MAN'S FIND

He Sees a Brilliantly Illuminated Airship Sailing Northward

South McAlester, I. T., April 5.—A gentleman who came in from Denison *last night* says that at 3 o'clock this morning (April 5), when he was returning to his room he saw a large airship going in a northern direction. It was *brilliantly illuminated*, and was going at the rate, he supposed, of about *fifty miles per hour*. There was a *peculiar swishing sound* to it, and as near as he could judge it was a *quarter of a mile up from the earth*.

His attention was first directed toward the stars by the *peculiar sound from the ship*, or whatever it may be called, and he watched until it passed over the hills to the north.

The gentleman is a Mason and a K of P. and his reputation for truth is beyond question {*Dallas Morning News*, April 6, 1897, p. 4}.

Reporters of the era were fond of identifying events with such terms as "yesterday," "last night," etc., when writing their articles. However, there was no guarantee the editor would include the article in "tomorrow's" edition, especially if the paper was not printed on a daily schedule. Wherever possible, I have identified by date such terms as "last night."

/ . T. is an abbreviation meaning *Indian Territory*. Indian Territory was not admitted into the Union as the state of Oklahoma until 1907. Indian Territory sightings are included in this book, as they were widely reported in Texas newspapers and probably caused many Texas heads to turn skyward with the owner hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious travelers. Since Indian Territory shares a border (delineated primarily by the Red River) with north Texas, it seems reasonable to believe that its close proximity would engender a desire in north Texans to witness the great spectacle of a flying machine in the heavens. And from such sky-gazing came the following numerous Texas reports.

Denison, Texas, is just a couple of miles south of the Red River, and South McAlester is north of Denison. Apparently, this man was traveling from Denison to South McAlester and had just arrived at his destination when he saw the airship. The observer reported that he heard a peculiar swishing sound, which he associated with the airship. The reported speed and altitude, 50 miles per hour and 1/4 mile, would not elicit any unusual comment today—except that the 50-miles-per-hour speed is awfully slow by today's (airplane) measuring stick. But then, anything other than birds flying in the air, regardless of speed or altitude, was cause for great comment in 1897.

Tuesday

April 6, 1897

STRANGE OBJECT SEEN

"And There Shall Be Signs from the Heavens."

Gutherie, I. T., April 7.—About 11 o'clock last night [April 6] the attention of landlord Trumball of the Arlington Hotel was attracted by a dark-looking object moving through the air above the city.

Soon a bright light was seen at the front of the object, which seemed to be thrown in different directions. Mr. Trumball called a number of people, who watched the strange shadow object for a long time, and are confident it is the mysterious airship seen at so many places during the past few weeks.

Its outlines were indistinct, but a light was thrown out from the front, and at times there were flashes of light along the sides. It *moved swiftly backward' and forward, sank almost to the ground* just north of the city, and *then rose straight into the air* at great speed and disappeared in the darkness of the night (*Dallas Morning News*, April 8, 1897, p. 3; *Galveston News*, April 8; *Terrell Times-Star*, April 19, 1897).

Gutherie and South McAlester are about 118 miles apart.

The flashes of light could be sparks from electrical motors or, perhaps, communication signals intended for other airships. Communicating from one location to another using signal lights was a common practice in 1897. Military organizations have used signal lights as far back in history as the Roman empire.

Did you ever see any meteors, comets, or planets move swiftly backward and forward, sink toward the ground, then rise swiftly before speeding off over the horizon? No? I didn't think so. Ever see a helicopter perform such a maneuver? No? Well, obviously you've never served in the United States Marines. Yes? Congratulations, you have passed the United States Marine Corps Advanced-Infantry Training course.

Friday

April 9, 1897

MCKNIGHT'S AIRSHIP

Paris, Texas, April 9.—For several days *The News* has contained specials from different points stating that parties had an airship in the night. A man named McKnight has been working on an airship at *U. S. Marshal Williams' ranch* for some time and it is claimed he has been traveling around by night in his ship. While McKnight will not corroborate the statement, many who are in a position to know say his aerial navigation has at last become a success (*Dallas Morning News*, April 10, 1897, p. 4).

Unfortunately, the 1890s census was destroyed in a fire. Therefore, we cannot officially place a McKnight in or near Paris in the 1890s. However, a Charles McKnight is listed as residing in Sherman in the 1870 federal-population census. (See "Looking for McKnight" section in chapter 20.)

Wednesday

April 14, 1897

THE AIR SHIP AGAIN

Lady and Gentleman See It at Different Localities and Describe It Minutely.

Denton, Denton Co., Tex., April 14.—That Denton is not to be behind the other towns and cities in north Texas is shown by the fact that the mysterious airship, of which so much has been said and written in the past few days, has been seen here by at least two credible persons, one a gentleman, the other a lady, whose *reputation for truthfulness can not be assailed*.

The gentleman who saw the ship says he was standing in his yard watching with the aid of a pair of powerful marine glasses, the stars, when a shadow fell athwart the moon, obscuring it for the moment. The sky being cloudless, he looked up to examine the cause.

"I at first thought it was a meteor," said he, "but upon closer examination discovered the unknown object to be *almost stationary and focusing my glasses on it*, discovered that it was moving slowly in a southeasterly direction. At this slow rate of speed the ship continued its courses for a few minutes and then *with almost a jump started off at a terrific rate* and disappeared in the southeast, *remaining in the range of my vision about twenty minutes*"

When I first ascertained the character of the object it floated about half a mile above the earth and seemed to be about fifty feet long, of a cigar shape with two great mugs thrust out from each side; a broad tail or steering saill behind and a long beak or blade resembling a cut water

on a ship in front. At the point where the beak joined the main body a powerful searchlight threw its rays far into the night ahead beside which even the luminosity of the moon paled. A row of windows along the side gave out smaller lights the source of which must have been stored electricity as there was no smoke, as well as I could see very plainly, coming from the ship, not was there even a sign of a smoke stack. I do not doubt that it was an airship.

The lady above mentioned is a member of the Ariel Society, is one of the most widely read of all the ladies in town and is not one upon whom credulity anything of a hoax-like nature could be imposed. Her description, although much less explicit than the gentleman's as she was unaided by any glasses, tallies almost exactly with the account. When she saw it, the ship was bounding along through space like a balloon.

These two descriptions are better than any of their predecessors, as one of them was with the aid of powerful glasses and both of them are from people widely read and much of their readings, too of a scientific nature (*Dallas Morning News*, April 15, 1897).

The exact date of the above sighting is unknown. The report from the news correspondent is dated April 14; therefore it is given in this chapter. Most likely, the sighting occurred between April 10 and April 13, with April 13 being the most likely date.

The observer's statement that he "discovered the unknown object to be almost stationary" rules out the possibility that the object could be a meteor. He further "discovered that it was moving slowly in a southeasterly direction," which could identify the object as a comet or even a planet. However, since the object "with almost a jump started off at a terrific rate," that rules out any natural phenomena such as planets, stars, comets, etc. The only heavenly bodies known to move with such languid movements and sudden changes of direction are found only in the celestial realm of Hollywood.

"... and focusing my glasses on it" refers to the observer's use of field, or marine, glasses. The description and the details of this sighting are all the more accurate since the eyes had help (in the form of glasses, or binoculars as we call them today).

The gentleman's statement "remaining in the range of my vision about twenty minutes" is consistent with a modern jetliner's speed upon final approach to an airport. If you observe a modern jetliner on final approach, you can determine that it is in your range of vision for about ten minutes. The speed of a jetliner on final approach is about 140 miles per hour. The observed altitude, speed, and time of visibility all correspond with a jetliner traveling around 140 miles per hour. An airship of human design that can fly at a speed of about 140 miles per hour seems incredible for 1897.

Note that the observer pointedly refers to the absence of smoke and smokestacks. Steam was the typical locomotive power of the day. Steam supplied sufficient power to move hundreds of tons of goods and people across miles of rail at speeds in excess of 90 miles per hour. But, steam engines were very heavy and consumed prodigious amounts of water and coal fuel. The absence of smoke and a smokestack rules out steam as the source of the airships' motive power. What methods are left to provide the airships' motive power? We will determine in the next few chapters the methods available to provide sufficient motive power to propel the airships about the Texas sky.

The sightings at this point were sporadic. Since the airships were just appearing over the Texas skies, there seems to be no fake sightings yet. Later, as the sightings become more commonplace, a few tricksters attempt to outwit townspeople by launching small balloons with fires attached to confound the populace and amuse themselves. However, the "fire balloons" were easily identifiable and few people confused them with the light from the real airships.

The initial airship sightings in Indian Territory and north Texas are too few and spread over too many days to gain anything by plotting and analyzing the route of the airship(s). However, the sightings are significant in that the initial stories galvanized people's interests in the airships and more heads were now rubbernecking in the moonlight, hoping to gain at least a glimpse of the aerial wonder. With the attention of the populace now gained by the initial Texas newspaper stories, it seems reasonable to believe more sightings were reported in the following days as more people lifted their eyes skyward for a look.

TABLE 1
Initial Texas Airship Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/5/97	S. McAlester	OK	3:00 A.M.	N	50 mph	1/4 mile	DMN 4/6/97
4/6/97	Guthrie	OK	11:00 P.M.				DMN 4/8/97
4/12/97	Ennis	TX	2:00 P.M.				DMN 4/19/97
4/1/97- 4/14/97	Denton	TX	Night		Terrific rate		DMN 4/15/97

Note: DMN = *Dallas Morning News*

CHAPTER 4

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 1897

There were seven airship sightings on the night of April 14. "Night" is defined as the time between the hours of noon one day and noon the next—that is the convention I have used to plot sightings. The reason for adopting such a convention is the propensity of the airship pilots to begin a nightly sojourn after the dinner hour and to return to their daytime hiding place before the sun rose the next morning. However, the plans of the pilots were sometimes foiled by busted machinery that required them to fly back to the daytime hiding place after daylight. We are interested in plotting the circuit of the airship—that is, its journey from start to finish—in the hope of locating its daytime hiding lair. Hence, the logic for adopting the "noon to noon" definition of a "night." The number of April 14 sightings is sufficient for us to determine the general area of the airship(s)'s daytime hiding place. The story continues.

SIGHTING THE AIRSHIP

A Mysterious Traveler of the Skies Seen at Weatherford, Corsicana and
Cresson

LOOKS LIKE A PASSENGER COACH

Powerful Search Lights Fore and Aft—Has Monstrous Wings That Fan the Breeze.

Weatherford, Tex., April 15—Last night [April 14] at 9 o'clock the airship that has been mentioned in the News from Oklahoma and other points was seen here. It passed over the city in the southwesterly direction and lights *were thrown out from the front resembling the headlight on an engine*. The machine was *seen by many people*, The News Correspondent included (*Dallas Morning News*, April 16, 1897; "Watch for the Airship," *Austin American Statesman*, April 16, 1897).

The identification of the light as "resembling the headlight of an engine" is a very common characteristic of the sightings. In a metropolitan area where the local airport lands big jets, called heavies by their drivers (pilots), one can watch a big jet on final approach in the night sky and see a "light thrown out from the front resembling the headlight of an engine."

A modern jet has two of these lights, called "landing lights," one on each side of the fuselage. The first time this author saw these landing lights (as a very young man), it was a black night and I was somewhat distant from them. I was momentarily puzzled because I could not figure out how automobiles had gained the ability to fly in congested metropolitan areas. Only upon close proximity to the jet did I realize the true nature of the lights. Perhaps, you were also puzzled by your first encounter with the landing lights of a modern jetliner. Imagine how puzzled people who never saw anything previously flying in the air except birds—and an occasional witch (especially if they lived in Massachusetts)—might become.

Today, if you fly on a modern jetliner, you will see the wings flap to some degree, if the jetliner strikes turbulent air. The wings are designed to flex in this manner. Rigid wings will quite easily snap off if the wind turbulence is of any moderate amount. The 1897 airship inventors probably encountered this design issue early on and added flexibility to their ship's wings. This may be the reason people were willing to state the wings "fanned the breeze" or "flapped to give motive power." The flapping was intended to keep the wings intact and had nothing to do with motive power. But the uninitiated, which was everyone, misunderstood the flapping. Still, there may be an additional explanation for "wingflapping," which we will explore in chapters 19 and 20.

But, why were wings necessary, anyway? Well, to provide an aerodynamic force called lift and to provide stability in an atmosphere. Would alien spaceships, presumably manned—or womanned—by beings with intelligence far superior to that of humans (how else could they fly the void of space) fly around the empty air space of planet Earth with pedestrian wings? Well, I don't know, but it seems reasonable to believe any life forms capable of traveling millions, billions, or trillions of miles

through space would have a sufficient understanding of physical systems and, especially, mechanical control systems to design a wingless airship. But, the foregoing is just conjecture. You certainly do not need wings to fly the void of space. Black holes are an entirely different matter (pun intended).

It has been proposed that little green (or pink or blue, etc.) men (and presumably women and children) might live beneath the poles of the earth in the nether regions of the underground, generally in close proximity too and cozy neighbors with the devil. However entertaining such a thought may be for some, if such a place existed, it seems reasonable that modern exploration would have uncovered such a civilization. But, in 1897, some people did believe such a place and people existed. In their minds, the airships' existence was a result of the underground denizens deciding the planet's surface was now worth exploring. In which case, they, the underground dwellers, would probably design airships with wings, since they would be familiar with the surface winds of the planet.

Another possible explanation for the existence of flying machines with wings in 1897 is the transfer of technology from some advanced life form to human minds and hands. A transfer of technology from aliens to humans would be an incremental step function, as the human recipients of such a transfer would not want to be overwhelmed with technology that was incomprehensible. So, it seems reasonable that an alien would advise a human to design something using the technology of the period and incorporating wings, which would represent an intermediate and comprehensible step on the road to conquering the atmosphere and, eventually, outer space. So, how could alien life forms accomplish such a technology transfer without exposing themselves to the public? Perhaps, secret government programs?

The general population was certainly well accustomed to the idea that wings were necessary for flight. The writings of all the great, but unsuccessful, aeronauts of the time, such as Sir Hiram Maxim and Samuel Langley, made pointed reference to the need for wings to fly in an atmosphere. The evidence that wings were necessary for successful flight near Earth was visible outside the kitchen window of anyone who cared to watch the swifts darting around the neighbor's chimney.

An oft-repeated description of the airship includes details of the light as "thrown out from the front" and "resembling the headlight of an engine." Sounds very much like nineteenth-century technology.

Numerous newspaper accounts might refer to an airship sighting as "seen by many people." A few accounts list every witness by their names and their positions in the community. Such a way of listing the witnesses seems to be an attempt to convince doubting editors, and perhaps doubting readers, of the sincerity and truthfulness of the report. And when the list of individuals claiming to see the airship includes many of the community's respected individuals, it is cavalier to dismiss their testimony as anything other than what it is. While two or three individuals in a particular community may successfully hoax the newspaper, it is difficult to imagine hundreds of newspapers and communities being hoaxed by each community's elite.

THE AIRSHIP AGAIN

Corsicana, Tex., April 15—Various and truthful citizens of Corsicana today declare that the airship, which has received not a little mention in the press this week, passed over the city last night [April 14].

It was described by one who is emphatic in the statement that he saw it, as being a *bright light* a long distance from the earth and was moving at *rather a fast speed* across the firmament. It was said to have been seen at about 8:30 o'clock, came from the north and was moving in a southerly direction when first noticed. The light was described as being about the *size of a water bucket* and gradually assumed smaller proportions until it vanished and was not observable to the eye. It *remained visible about ten minutes*. No messages were left behind by the aerial tourists.

The object or whatever it might have been was *viewed by a party of eight or ten persons at the home of Judge Sam H. Frost* on West Third Avenue. *Dr. Wills had his attention called to it* and says that it was *certainly not a meteor*, for the reason that the light was intermittent, appearing to come and go, but that the object was too far from the earth for him to be able to see anything as to its form or shape. The light, he says, was the only visible part of the strange flyer ("Sighting the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 16, 1897).

Water buckets were about eighteen inches across the top. It is somewhat hard to tell the difference between an eighteen-inch light and a star, according to the mass-hysteria advocates, but not to anyone else with an

interest in solving this one-hundred-year-old mystery. To which theory of the airships' origin do you think you might subscribe? Newspaper hoax? Railroad hoax? Mass hysteria? Aliens? God? Government cover-up?

Here is a fun test: wait until it is very dark, take a penlight, turn it on, and hold it about twenty feet to the side of an illuminated automobile headlight. (Let's make this tough—leave the headlight beam on low). Determine, from a distance of about fifty feet, if you can tell the difference between the headlight and the penlight. If you cannot, you must—that is, you absolutely have no choice—subscribe to the mass-hysteria solution, and therefore, you need not read any further. If you can tell the difference, then you are free to continue reading and, ultimately, discern your own solution. For those individuals who are sight-impaired, you may skip this test. For those who are thinking-impaired, you may skip the remainder of the book < Smile. >

The sighting occurred during a party "at the home of Judge Sam H. Frost." If this party was at the home of some wayward drunk, the account would never be published by the paper. Since the party was at the home of a judge, the sighting has credibility. However, notice the article does not actually claim the judge *saw* the airship, only that the sighting occurred at his home.

This sighting was witnessed by "a party of eight or ten persons." Many of the sightings had multiple witnesses. Dr. Wills is willing to state that the light is not a meteor. Although we do not know what kind of doctor Wills was, it seems the fact that he is a doctor lends credence to his identification of the sighting as an airship and not a meteor, comet, planet, star, or "fire balloon." Let us assume he was not a doctor of proctology, therefore lending greater weight to his identification of the aerial phenomenon as an airship. <Smile.>

SEEN NEAR WHITNEY

Hillsboro, Hill Co., Tex. April 17—The publication in The Dallas News yesterday and today relative to the airships that has been seen in different portions of the state has been the sole topic of conversation on the streets and elsewhere in this city today.

Since the reliability of the witnesses that have seen it is unimpeachable many persons now come forward and admit having seen it. John Ford of Whitney, brother-in-law of O. H. Young of this city, president of the county Christian Endeavor, was in the city yesterday and Mr. Young said to The News reporter:

"John Ford was here yesterday and told me that he saw the airship Wednesday night [April 14] as he was returning from Hillsboro to Whitney. He was near Peoria and looking up 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*. He watched it until it completely disappeared. He would not say anything about it for several days because he was *afraid somebody would think* he was trying to get off a gag."

Other parties in various sections of the county report having seen the ship. *Several parties are going to set up here tonight and watch the heavens* for the mysterious visitor that rarely shows itself except at night ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

Focus your attention on the statement "Since the reliability of the witnesses that have seen it is unimpeachable many persons now come forward and admit having seen it." The fear of ridicule for reporting a sighting seemed to lessen as more "reliable" people confessed to having seen the airship. For us to believe all the sightings across the state and even the country were a hoax, we must believe all the "reliable" people were willing to be represented as liars by the newspaper. It is not a likely scenario.

John Ford "saw a black object." Recall the description of the helicopter-like movements in the account "Strange Object Seen" (in chapter three). Is this the original, the first "black helicopter"? Did the government conspiracy to shield us from that which we are too weak to understand begin not at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1952 but much earlier? Much fodder to ponder for the conspiracy buffs among us. But, there are reasonable and believable explanations forthcoming.

In this account we have our first good description of the airship— other than a description of the light. The black object looked very much like a passenger coach—perhaps a train passenger coach. Notice how descriptions of the airship are given in terms of the day's technology. As the number of printed accounts of the sightings grew, more people watched the sky. Airship-watching parties suddenly become fashionable.

SEEN TWICE ABOUT TEXARKANA

Texarkana, Bowie Co. Tex. April 17—The mysterious bright light that has been visible in the heavens for the past fortnight has been seen from this point. Wednesday night [April 14] it was spied by the telegraph operator at Hope, Ark., who claims to have experienced a full ray of the headlight upon himself about 11 o'clock p.m.; that it was zigzagging its courses in a northwesterly direction and was sailing about a mile high; that he plainly discerned the *shape of a large dark object with one light* which he thought could be nothing but an airship.

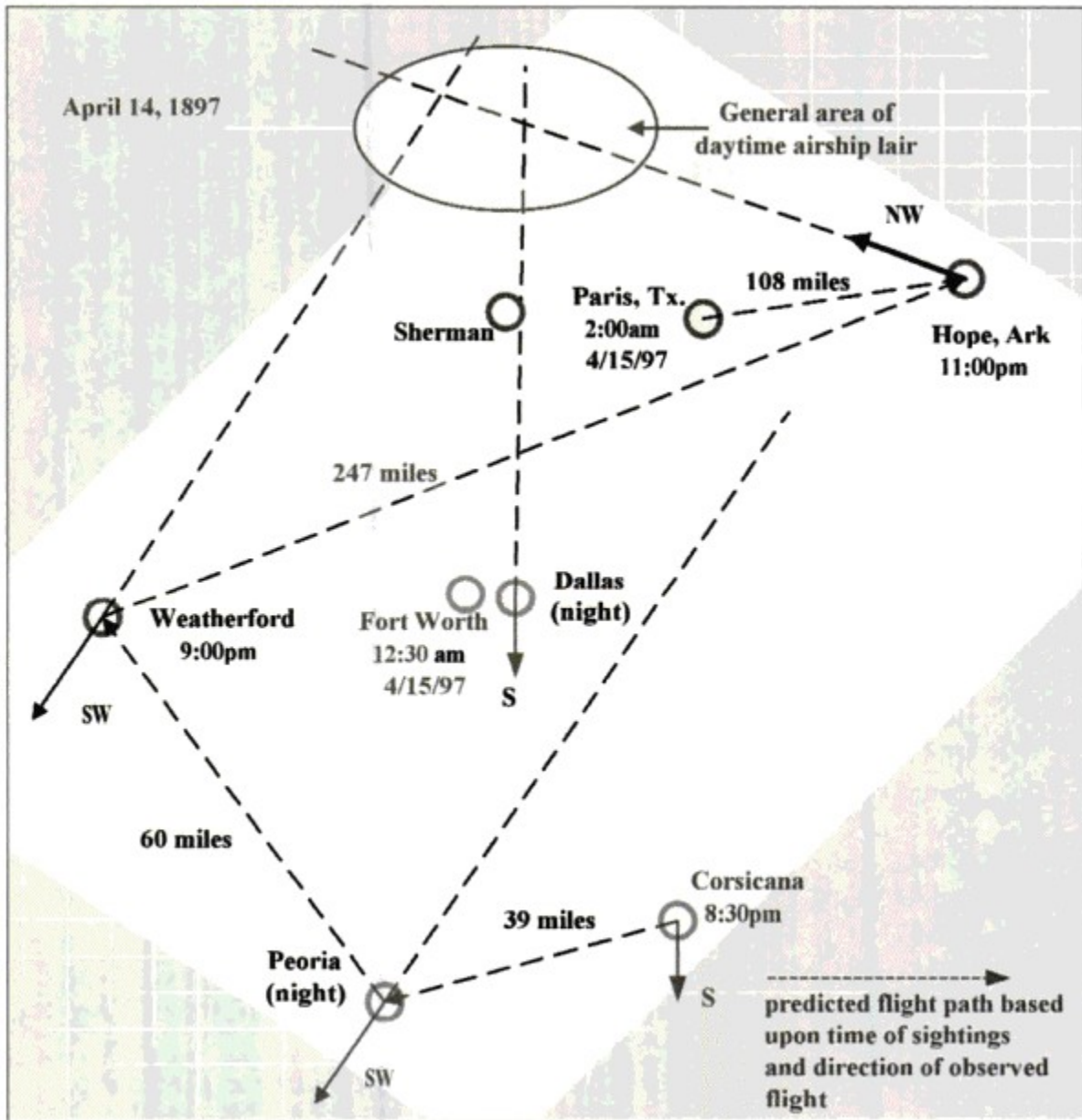
Thursday night [April 15] *many truthful citizens* in Texarkana viewed a light of monster proportions sailing away to the northwest. It was described as too large and too near the earth to be a star ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

Correspondents were sensitive to the need to frame their airship stories in a context that would be believable, else they might become an object of ridicule. "Many truthful citizens" interpreted means a large number of common, everyday, hard-working folks saw the mysterious visitor.

THE SIGHT AT ORANGE.

Orange., Tex., April 19.—Orange was not left out by the airship that has recently enjoyed such wide advertisement. Mrs. Ed. M. Davis, wife of the city marshal, saw a luminous object passing over the western portion of this county last Wednesday night [April 14] which, from the position she occupied, appeared to be a very large comet with bright lights at the fore and a train of paler light several hundred feet long trailing behind. Its course was from the SW to NE and it kept a straight course as long as she watched it. Others saw it, and all agree that it did not descend while they were looking at it. Mrs. Davis has kept her eyes on the papers, expecting to read of an aerolite landing in one of the upper counties ("Airship Spoken," *Galveston Daily News*, April 22, 1897, p. 4).

This is the first and only description of the airship as carrying a "train of paler light several hundred feet long trailing behind." I do not think this is a genuine airship sighting. What Mrs. Davis saw is anyone's guess. Cocaine and morphine were easily available in this era of few written drug laws. Perhaps, she had too much laudanum, a morphinebased medicine, to drink. Or, perhaps, she did see the airship as it was performing some experiment that we do not understand at the moment.



April 14, 1937, sightings

Enough airship sightings occurred on April 14, 1897, to plot their locations and determine the location of the daytime hiding lair. This map shows the localities where the airship was seen on the night of April 14. The thin lines with an arrow on the end depict the direction that the airship was said by the observer to be traveling. If the time of the sighting is given in the newspaper account, it is listed. The approximate distance between localities is shown. Connect the dots and see if you can determine the possible flight path of the airship(s) based upon the stated direction of flight and time of sighting.

The dashed lines represent the supposed flight path of the airship, assuming it traveled in a straight line. Such triangulation methods are used in various disciplines to determine the origination of an event. As an example, triangulating the path of a missile will provide the location of the missile-launch site. From such measures, we can pinpoint the location of the airship(s) daytime hiding lair in the area somewhat north of Sherman. The ability to accurately pinpoint the daytime hiding place of the airship(s) will be the "icing on the cake." Pay attention!

TABLE 2
April 14, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/14/96	Dallas	TX	Night	S			<i>DMN 4/18/97</i>
4/14/97	Corsicana	TX	8:30 P.M.	N to S	Fast speed		<i>DMN 4/16/97</i>
4/14/97	Peoria (between Hillsboro and Whitney)	TX	Night	SW	Very rapid rate		<i>DMN 4/18/97</i>
4/14/97	Weatherford	TX	9:00 P.M.	SW			<i>AAS/DMN 4/16/97</i>
4/14/97	Hope	AR	11:00 P.M.	NW		1 mile	<i>DMN 4/18/97</i>

Note: *DMN = Dallas Morning News*
 AAS = Austin American Statesman

TABLE 3
April 15, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/15/97	Paris	TX	2:00 A.M.	NE to NW			<i>DMN 4/17/97</i>
4/15/97	Fort Worth	TX	12:30 A.M.	SE			<i>DMN 4/17/97</i>

Almost all airship flights originated in the late evening and terminated the following morning. To get a clearer picture of the destinations, when appropriate, the sightings from the following morning are included as a "sub-table." These sightings are clearly identified on the sighting plot.

WIND AND THE FLIGHT OF THE AIRSHIP

From an April 14 sighting, I made the following comments: "The speed of the airship seems to be related to the direction of travel. Notice the time to fly from Corsicana to Weatherford, a distance of roughly 99 miles, is 30 minutes, an incredible 198 miles per hour. Yet, the time to travel from Weatherford, Texas, to Hope, Arkansas, a distance of 247 miles, is 2 hours, a slow 126 miles per hour." Why the difference in speed for each direction? Did the airship begin experiencing some mechanical difficulty, or was it intentionally flying slowly to plot the lay of the land for future reference? Or, maybe it landed in a remote section of the region for some unknown purpose, with a resulting reduced average speed from Weatherford to Hope? What could have happened to yield two greatly differing average velocities? The explanation is wind resistance.

When an airship or airplane is flying into the wind, called a headwind, its speed is reduced proportionally to the speed of the wind. When an airship or airplane is flying away from the wind, called a tailwind, its speed is increased proportionally. Since a mathematician can solve for two unknown quantities (wind speed and airship speed), if there are two equations, we can determine the airship and wind speed from the information we have.

Note: The following two equations give the averages of the two quantities of concern: air speed and wind speed. There is no way we can determine the maximum, or instantaneous, speed for these two quantities given the information available.

$$\text{air speed} + \text{wind speed} = 198 \text{ mph (the headwind equation)}$$

$$\text{air speed} - \text{wind speed} = 126 \text{ mph (the tailwind equation)}$$

If we add the two equations simultaneously, we get:

$$2 * \text{average air speed} = 324 \text{ mph}$$

or

$$\text{average air speed} = 162 \text{ mph}$$

Now, we place the value of the average air speed back into one of the original equations and solve for average wind speed:

air speed + wind speed = 198 mph (original headwind equation)

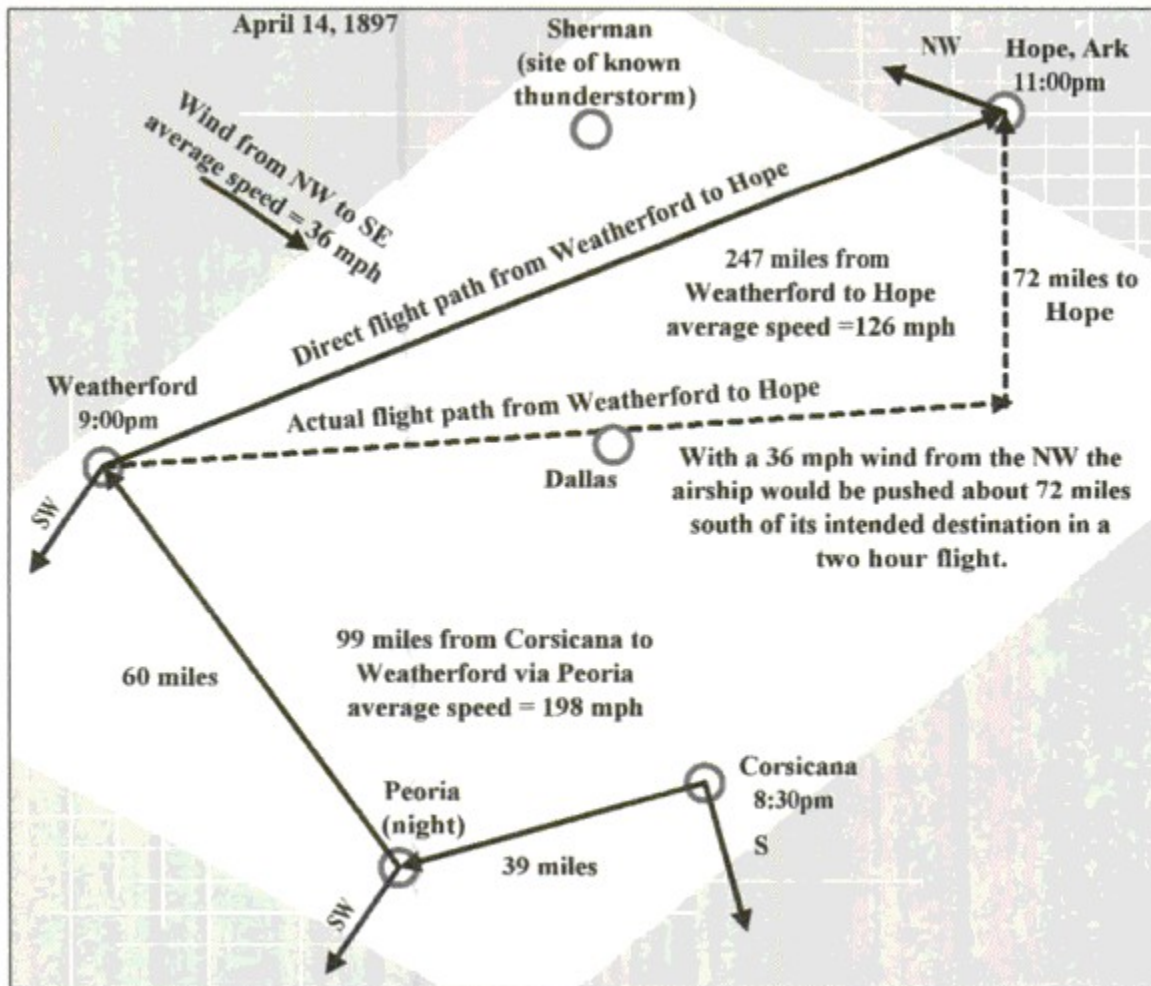
162 mph + wind speed = 198 mph

average wind speed = 36 mph

Substituting the air speed into the original equation for the tailwind also yields an air speed of 36 miles per hour. So, with a great degree of certainty we can predict, using the sighting data we have from the newspaper accounts, the average wind speed was 36 miles per hour on the evening of April 14, 1897. To confirm this prediction, and in some way validate the observations in the newspaper accounts as highly accurate, I researched old newspapers along the line of flight for a weather report for April 14, 1897. I was unsuccessful in finding a definitive account of the wind speed for April 14. I did, however, find a report that on the evening of April 14, a severe thunderstorm passed through Sherman, Texas (*Dallas Morning News*, April 15, 1897, p. 4). Sherman is located just a couple of miles north of the flight path of the airship. Every spring thunderstorm in Texas is accompanied by high winds from the northwest. So, we have at least circumstantial evidence of high winds occurring during the evening in question. But, just how high were the winds?

Continuing to search for evidence of high winds on April 14, I looked through the *Report of the Chief of the Weather Bureau, 1897-1898* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1899). Unfortunately, the Weather Bureau reports were not given by day, but were summarized by month and only for the locations possessing a Weather Bureau station. The closest station to the flight path of the airship was at Abilene, Texas, which is some 50 miles west of the nearest point on the airship's flight path. The Weather Bureau reported that the highest sustained wind for Abilene in the month of April was 36 miles per hour.

Living in the north Texas area for many years, I have weathered numerous spring thunderstorms. The thunderstorms roll out of the northwest and tumble down the Red River valley into the Mississippi valley. If a weatherman predicts the thunderstorm's ascension between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M., he will be right much more than he will be wrong. The severe thunderstorms are always accompanied by high winds. In this age, the sustained wind speed of these tornado-producing storms is around 35 miles per hour, with gusts up to 60 miles an hour a common attribute of the sometimes-lethal storms. It is difficult to imagine the wind habits of these dangerous storms have changed over the last one hundred years. A severe thunderstorm rolling down the valley today will have the same physical characteristics as a thunderstorm one hundred years ago. Additionally, literature from the early days of Texas describing the storms endured by the pioneers is identical to the descriptions of thunderstorms today. Armed with this knowledge of spring thunderstorm behavior and the fact that Sherman experienced a severe thunderstorm on the night in question, and knowing the highest sustained wind in April in the general area was 36 miles per hour, it is entirely reasonable for us to believe that the reported accounts of the airship sightings correspond with the known weather patterns that existed on the night of interest. That is, a northwesterly wind was blowing during the evening of April 14, and the wind impacted the flight of the airship.



Although the northwesterly wind was not a headwind for the Weatherford-Hope leg of the trip, but actually a sidewind, the airship would experience a force proportional (36 miles per hour) to the velocity of the wind pushing it to the southeast, off its intended path. Keeping the math simple, we can estimate that in the two hours the airship was flying to Hope, the northwesterly wind would push the airship about 72 miles southeast of its destination. Seventy-two miles represent about one-third of the distance between Weatherford and Hope. So, the average speed of the airship to get from Weatherford to Hope when calculated on a straight-line path would be reduced accordingly, or about one-third. One-third of 198 mph is 66 miles per hour. Subtract 66 from 198 and we have 132 miles per hour, which is in very close agreement to the calculated speed of 126 miles per hour on a straight-line path between Weatherford and Hope.

Notice that the airship, if experiencing a 36-miles-per-hour wind from the northwest, pushing it off course, would wind up flying over Dallas on its way from Weatherford to Hope. Since the Dallas report of the sighting does not give a time, we cannot say for sure that the airship passed over Dallas on its way to Hope. But, from the analysis, it sure does look like it may have.

A discerning observer may note that if a northwest wind was blowing for all of the time the airship was airborne, then the airship would experience a similar sidewind (Corsicana to Peoria) and even a headwind (Peoria to Weatherford) effect as it traversed the portion of its flight path from Corsicana to Weatherford. If such a case existed, then the average speed between the two legs of the journey would be approximately the same. Since the average speed of the two legs of the path are not the same we are left to conclude the wind was not blowing from the northwest during the first leg of the journey. The explanation, a late-evening spring storm blew in on April 14, 1897, just as spring storms do today.

In the spring in north Texas, the wind usually blows out of the southeast until a cool front moves through from the west-northwest. A cool front can trigger a spring thunderstorm any time of the day or night. Also, spring thunderstorms in north Texas arise during the late evening hours as the

result of the cooling effect from the sun going over the horizon. When this occurs, violent thunderstorms rush in from the westnorthwest with accompanying strong winds.

On April 14, it is possible that the wind was initially from the southeast, giving the airship a good tailwind in the early evening hours, or the wind may have been only very light or even still. As the airship made its way past Weatherford and began the second leg of the journey, a thunderstorm may have rolled into the region and began pushing the airship off course with its strong northwesterly winds.

Finally, another possibility is that the crew of the airship, sometime in the flight between Weatherford and Hope, encountered the thunderstorm and set the airship down on the ground to wait out the storm. This scenario is only likely if the thunderstorm was off in the distance, as an unprotected airship of this design would be blown to pieces sitting unsheltered and unprotected on the ground. The crew, by now, would realize the best chances of surviving the thunderstorm would be to remain aloft and ride the winds. If the airships were truly capable of flying 200 miles per hour then riding out a storm with 50- to 80-miles-per-hour gusts would not present any major difficulty. Of course, getting struck by lightning while aloft would present another set of issues. However, in these spring storms, the wind precedes the storm by such a distance that it is entirely possible for the airship to safely traverse the distance between Weatherford and Hope without encountering any serious threat from lightning.

My personal feeling is the airship was trying to reach its daytime hiding lair near Sherman as it left Weatherford. The spring thunderstorm brewed up about the time it neared Weatherford and blew it off course, causing it to fly over Dallas, a community it preferred to avoid, as it continued to get blown off course in its eastward travel. At night, the crew would only know they had left Texas when they crossed the Red River. Remember this was a time of no radio beacons. Navigation was strictly by visual reference to known ground objects. By the time they could turn the ship to a westerly heading after crossing the Red, sufficient time and distance passed, allowing them to pass near Hope. Hope is about ten miles north of the Red River.

If we seek "proof" of the veracity of these newspaper accounts, we have such "proof" in our hands. On the night of April 14, 1897, one airship, of unknown origin, flew across the night skies of Texas. Mass hysteria and prank calls to the newspaper do not admit of systematic events that yield the type of results just demonstrated by a thorough analysis of the evidence. Such behavior, that is hysteria and pranks, in humankind is random, and any analysis of such behavior yields random, usually nonsensical, results that do not produce reasonable conclusions from the analysis. Only casual systems, that is, systems that are systematic, which have times and events

associated with them, yield the kind of results just demonstrated. One or more people flying a machine around the night sky of Texas represents a casual system. In other words, if it didn't really happen, the above analysis would not yield any meaningful results. But, the analysis did yield meaningful results; therefore it did happen.

But, the great skeptics among us will say, "Yea, right. It was planned all along by the newspapers just to sell more newsprint. The newspaper people conspired to print these stories and made up the dates and times to be 'casual.'" Okay, that may be a valid argument. So, please explain how all the hundreds of newspapers that reported airship sightings across the country in the spring of 1897 (see appendix B for a long list of newspapers known to print airship stories) could conspire to report such sightings and keep their conspiracy secret? Conspiracies of more than one person are difficult to keep secret and are seldom successful. And just how could all of these far-flung newspapers coordinate such a conspiracy? It seems improbable that newspaper editors and reporters conspired to report anything about airships other than what was actually seen and reported in their locale.

CHAPTER 5

THURSDAY, **A**PRIL 15, 1897

There are twelve airship sightings on the night of April 15. As the story continues and the number of sightings increases, the airships' construction is revealed in greater detail. The analysis of the reported sightings for this night lays the foundation for the belief that there is more than one airship flying the skies of Texas. The story continues ...

SEEN AT CRESSON

Fort Worth, Tex. April 15—Night Chief Operator Dunlap of the Texas and Pacific Union depot relay office in this city, hands the News correspondent the following:

The operator at Cresson on the Rio Grande railway claims he has seen the mysterious and much talked of airship. He describes it as *resembling the top of a passenger coach in shape, long and pointed at the ends, with powerful searchlight in the front end, with several smaller ones on the sides*. The ship appeared to the operator to be *about sixty feet in length*, and when first sighted was making a terrific rate of *speed* in a southwestern direction. It had *wings* on it, he said, *something like that of a bat*. After passing the station about two miles he saw the ship *suddenly alter its courses* and turn to the southeast and disappeared within a few minutes behind a cloud. He says this is no optical illusion nor after touch of an extensive jag—but the truth, pure and simple.

Continuing, Mr. Dunlap 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."

Cresson is thirteen miles southwest of Fort Worth ("Sighting the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 16, 1897).

This account gives us greater detail of the airship. The interesting details are highlighted. The passenger-coach reference must be something similar to a train coach and not a stagecoach. The "long and pointed" ends suggest an aerodynamic shape. "... wings on it" is pretty much self-explanatory. Wings are needed for stability in an atmosphere. ". . . suddenly alter its courses" rules out the possibility of it being a comet, planet, or star and implies the airship was maneuverable. Naturally occurring objects do not "suddenly alter their courses" unless they are involved in a collision with another heavenly body. The smaller lights on the side suggest the existence of portholes alongside the body, or coach, of the airship.

The above account is dated April 15. It seems likely that the date of the sighting was that night. The observer is the Cresson telegraph operator who telegraphed the Fort Worth operator the story of his sighting. The statement that the Fort Worth operator handed the correspondent the telegraph from the Cresson operator lends weight to the judgment that the sighting was on the evening of April 15.

A *jag* is a period term meaning "a state of being drunk." People were thought to imagine all manner of nonexistent things when in a drunken state. A comparable situation today might be the suspicion that someone reporting weird things is high on some drug such as cocaine.

A few people, typically ufologists, have read some of the sighting accounts and have reached the conclusion that the whole episode was a great farce initiated and perpetuated by railroad telegraphers. According to their explanation, bored telegraphers sat around in the early morning hours and made up these accounts as a means of having some fun. What these people do not realize is that telegraphers were accountable to their railroad employers for what they transmitted. Logs were kept and reviewed daily. It is really unimaginable that such a widespread conspiracy could be started and maintained for six months by members of such an esteemed profession while sanctioned by their employers. Telegraphers of the day commanded much respect and admiration. A telegrapher was hardly the type of individual to go around making up stories.

El Paso, April 16. (Special.)—The "airship fever" seems to have struck this vicinity. Mr. Robert Hitch and family, living north of town, say they saw a *bright light* in the heavens between 8 and 9 o'clock last night [April 15] and supposed it to be the much talked of airship. The light seemed to be headed for the northwest and was going at a *good rate of speed*. Several others also saw it. *The character and truthfulness of those who claim to have seen the airship are unquestionable* and it is likely, if there is anything in this airship business, the object seen last night was the flying ship {*Bloomington (Illinois) Daily Pantagraph*, April 17, 1897, p. 5).

AT AND NEAR MARSHALL

Marshall, Harrison Co., Tex. April 16, Conductor Virgil Brown and his brakeman James Murphy saw the much described airship at Jewella, La., a station on the Texas and Pacific railway, thirtytwo miles east of here last night [April 15]. There seemed to be a *huge searchlight* that attached to the aerial machine and the light was thrown in several different directions. The speed of the ship was *far faster than a railroad train*. The ship appeared to be going in the direction of Marshall.

Dick Weatherby, a night watchman at the Texas and Pacific railway car shops (in Marshall) said he saw this unusual aerial visitor at 10:30 o'clock last night. *A number of other reputable persons* claims to have had a view of this unknown visitor at about the same time.

Last night the sky was perfectly clear. Many people have provided themselves with powerful glasses and will scan the heavens tonight to get a view of this strange object ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

By now, the reader can see that the "huge searchlight" is a common attribute in many sightings. From now on the phrase will be highlighted only to show the consistency of the descriptions.

Railroad trains of the period could go as fast as 90 miles per hour, but the typical speed of passenger trains was 70 miles per hour. The phrase "far faster than a railroad train" could mean just about any speed. But, let's think about the statement for a moment. Today, if we were to see a car pass us on

the freeway and observe that it was going far faster than the vehicle in which we were riding, its speed might be about double ours. If so, then the airship could have been traveling around 140 to 180 miles per hour.

Although this speed still sounds incredibly fast for anything flying in the skies in 1897, it is still in close agreement with the speed calculated at the end of chapter four, where the airship was seen traveling from Corsicana to Weatherford to Hope.

Chartered by Congress in 1871, the Texas and Pacific Railroad maintained a maintenance facility at Marshall. The maintenance complex was built in 1873.

The citation of "a number of other reputable persons" gives great weight to the story's truthfulness—at least the editor hoped it did. After seeing this phrase or similar ones repeated again and again in the accounts of the airship sightings, a thinking person begins to wonder how many persons who were not reputable saw the airships. Of course, one must have some idea of the number of un reputable people versus the number of people who were considered reputable in any particular community to even begin to guess at the number of those un reputable individuals who might have seen the airship.

Or, maybe, only reputable people's visions were good enough to see the airship. Perhaps, the un reputable were too bleary-eyed from drinking to see much of anything, or they were too hung over to report the sighting the following morning. But, more likely, correspondents just would not write an airship story unless they could believe the individual telling the story.

In that day and age, pretty much like now, such discerning censorship ruled out any stories getting into print based on unreliable individuals' accounts. Too bad, at least they might have made for very entertaining reading. But, I believe we can "take to the bank" the truthfulness of many of the accounts that follow. Editors and newspaper correspondents just had too much to lose—such as their credibility and subsequently their jobs and, perhaps, even their profession—if they printed false accounts of airships. They would ensure the truthfulness of what they printed to the maximum extent practicable and then hedge their bet by editorializing against the existence of the airship. Remember, the age of marginal reporting was not yet upon the land.

As for hoaxes, newspapers of the period did engage in some amount of fake storytelling. Such stories were designed to be represented as factual, yet the yarn was totally fabricated. Usually, such a story was presented to the public in installments. When newspapers engaged in this sort of

serialized storytelling, they typically informed their readers the yarn was a hoax at the end of the final installment. The airship accounts do not fit the mold of a typical newspaper hoax. However, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that any particular story may be a hoax, as there are several known stories, not included in this book and not of Texas origin, that are known to be hoaxes.

Those airship stories known to be false were generated by some member of the community, usually with the help of a friend who supplied corroborating testimony to the truthfulness of the account. The primary reason we know they are false is because the individual or individuals perpetuating the hoax came forward at some later date and admitted to hoaxing the community. A common attribute of these hoaxes was the inclusion of some outrageous claim, such as the abduction of a cow from a farmer's field. Other than the purported speed of the airship, which in some accounts seems outrageous for 1897 America, all airship stories in this book stand the test of reasonable and realistic events unless otherwise identified.

SEEN NEAR HILLSBORO

A Lawyer had a good view and gives a graphic description

Hillsboro, Hill Co., Tex., April 16—Last evening [April 15] *Hon J. Spence Bounds* of this city was called out into the southwestern section of the country near Osceola to write the will of William H. Gathings, an old settler, who is quite sick and is not expected to recover. It was dusk when Mr. Bounds got there and as the will was lengthy with complications in it, it was nearly 9 o'clock when he got through and started home. What occurred on his homeward drive is best related in his own language to the News reporter in the presence of Judge J. M. Hall of the eighteenth judicial district and Hon. W. E. Spell, attorney for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railway. Said Mr. Bounds:

"I want to relate a little thing that I witnessed last night. I had been up to old Uncle Billy Gathings to write his will and was driving homeward thinking of the old man and his useful career and the reward that doubtless awaited him in the good hereafter when I was astonished by a *brilliant flash from an electric search light* which passed directly over my buggy. I want to tell you also that I was almost frightened to death by it for it made the space around me as light as day. My horse was also frightened and came near overturning the buggy. He snorted, reared, and plunged madly trembling meantime like a leaf. My hair stood straight up and I was almost too exercised to pay attention to the horse. Fortunately the light rested on us scarcely a second, but *glided along over the fields* and the country till it was suddenly turned upward toward the heavens. Then following it with my eyes I beheld about 1000 feet above me. I judge a huge black monster from which the light emanated. It was in shape *something like a cigar*, but *underneath there appeared to be a body similar to the body of a ship*, which was attached to the object and from which the light

originated. The search light was presently shut off and a *number incandescent lights flashed around the lower edge of the body* of the vessel or whatever it was. When I first saw it was going *very slowly* in a southerly direction. The lights were soon entirely extinguished and it glided along like a small black cloud in the air. When some miles further south the search light again appeared and guided along the timbers of Aquilla creek and rested on a hill about three miles this side of the town of Aquilla. The vessel or ship steered for the hull and as it approached it all the lights were again extinguished and the ship disappeared from my sight. I think it must have stopped on the hill.

"I never had anything to so thoroughly work me up and I resumed my journey home, considering in my mind the strange adventure of the night. I have read and heard much of the airships, but I never expected to see one. I had never seriously thought of them as possible but in a few minutes I recalled the many stories I have recently seen in the papers about airships and decided that what I had seen was an airship. When I was within a mile of Hillsboro, about an hour later, I saw the same object rise from the locality where it disappeared. It ascended till it looked like a mere dark cloud in the skies when it started in a northeasterly direction and went at a terrific rate of *speed*. It must have gone at the rate of *100 miles an hour or more*. It was headed as near as I can judge toward Dallas or near there. Every few seconds it would send out *brilliant flashes and sparkles* but it traveled most of the time in darkness.

"Now gentlemen, I am not prepared by my profession to believe everything I see and hear, but I saw that object and my horse saw it. It almost made both of us frantic. So there is no denying the fact of its existence. The question is what is it? Man has conquered the ocean, but we are told that the devil is the prince of the air. Again, the scriptures say the devil shall be turned loose for a season. Who knows but what the scripture is being fulfilled right here before our very eye. It is possible I admit for man to get up a flying machine, but still for all that I have seen I feel curious as to what it was and can't help it."

Judge Hall and Mr. Spell were such interested in the narrative. The former commenting on it said:

"There is no end to the invention of man and I place fully as much confidence in what my friend Bounds saw as the accounts I read in the papers about airships everyday."

"Yes," added Mr. Spell, "when Bounds in on the opposite side of a case that I am I think he is the most imaginative man in Texas, but when he descends from the bar and says on his honor as a gentleman that a thing is so I deal very gently with him and always give him the benefit of the doubt" ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

The description "underneath there appeared to be a body similar to the body of a ship" would be a gondola or the coach mentioned in previous accounts.

"Brilliant flashes and sparkles" are evidence of electrical motors in use on the airship. Electrical motors generate a great deal of sparking where the commutator brushes rub against the commutator as it spins around. We typically do not see the sparks they generate today because the sparking has been much reduced due to better-quality materials for commutator brushes and because most electrical motors have that portion of the motor in a tight or sealed portion of the apparatus to prevent accidental fires or explosions.

Explosions and fires from open commutator brushes were an everyday threat and reality in the early days of electrical motors. Today, any electrical motor on an airplane must meet stringent FAA and industry regulations regarding its safety. However, to get an idea of what people might be seeing, except on a much smaller scale, look into the air intake of a hand-held hair dryer while it is running. Don't look too closely, though, as we do

not want you to stick anything in your eyes. You should see some sparking going on. Now imagine such sparking magnified, perhaps a hundred-thousandfold.

This is the first account that places a high number on the speed of the airship. Previous accounts just stated the airship was going "very fast" or "faster than a railroad train," etc. From such comments we will attempt to gauge the speed of the airship. A vehicle that could ascend the skies and fly up, down, forward, and backward does not seem too incredible for 1897 technology. What does seem so incredible is a machine that could fly so fast (100 mile per hour plus) in 1897. The Wright brothers are still six years away from making their first successful flight from Kittyhawk, and Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin is three years away from flying his first 30 miles per hour airship. Could only alien life-forms possess the technology to fly 100 miles per hour? If so, they must be humanoid as Truthful Scully did not remark on any unusual physical features of the crewmember he saw repairing the ship at Hawkins Tank.

SEEN AT PARIS?

An Accurate Description by One Who Observed It Closely

Paris, Tex., April 16.—Several parties claim to have witnessed the flight of the mysterious airship that has attracted so much attention the last few days, as it passed over this city at an early hour yesterday morning [April 15]. The most accurate account is gleamed from Mr. J. A. Black, the night watchman for the Paris oil and cotton company's plant. He said to The News man:

"I was engaged in making my usual rounds at the mill yesterday morning about 2 o'clock when I observed a faint, but *luminous object* in the northeast sky which attracted my attention. It had the appearance of being enveloped in a luminous, hazy cloud. I first thought it to be a meteor of gigantic proportions and its speed appeared equal to such a planetary tramp. As it came nearer this idea was quickly dispelled. I ran to the cabin of a colored man by the name of Jim Smith, just across the road, and awoke him and together we viewed the aerial monster as it approached nearer. From what appeared to be at first a luminous cloud there was now clearly outlined a monster airship. Myself and the negro Smith were held spellbound by the sight. We had a perfect view of the ship for the night was clear and the moon was shining bright at the time. The ship had sails or *wings outstretched on both sides of its cigar-shaped body and on both ends there were large rotating fans projecting from the sails at an angle of about 45 degrees, the one in front being elevated, while the one at the rear was depressed*, somewhat resembling the tail of a bird. We could only gain a faint idea of its accurate size, but think it must have been *200 feet long*, the sails or *wings constituting nine-tenths of the whole*. The *cigar-shaped cabin was apparently suspended in the midst of the sails*, and it was evident

that the fans *were propelled by some power or force located in the cabin*. The *noise of the propelling machinery was plainly heard* as the ship sailed swiftly over us. My dog was with me when it was first discovered, and he set up an unearthly moaning, which he continued until the curious visitor was completely lost to view. The negro was visibly affected, and being naturally superstitious lost no time in falling to his knees and offering up a prayer for the safety of himself and family. The negro even now claims that the airship was none other than the return of Noah's ark with wing-like attachments on its way toward the Mississippi bottoms, its mission being to save the colored folks from the perils of the overflow in that section. I am sure for my part that what I saw was a veritable airship and that it had lights *radiating from the various openings on its sides*, but whether originating from the power of illuminating machinery or not I am unable to say. I would judge that it was traveling at about the *same rate of speed as the passenger trains do in Texas*, although from the time I first observed it in the far northeast sky until it disappeared from view in the northwest, was *not over ten minutes*, I think" Mr. Black says that he is willing to make affidavit as to the truthfulness of the assertions above ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

So far, the descriptions of the airship are pretty consistent, with the length of the airships being the only inconsistent feature in the newspaper reports. Several accounts place the length of the span from wing tip to wing tip as 150 to 200 feet and other accounts judge the length to be 50 or 60 feet. The ship is cigar-shaped with two canvas-covered wings, a rudder, a searchlight, and other lights visible from the side of it.

The account says the wings made up nine-tenths of the whole. The remaining one-tenth is the width of the "cabin . . . suspended in the midst of the sails." That is, the width of the cabin would then be onetenth of 200—or about 20 feet.

"Same speed as the passenger trains," and being in sight "not over ten minutes" place the speed of the airship between 70 miles per hour and 150 miles per hour. High-speed passenger trains of the day traveled the open road between 70 and 90 miles per hour, depending upon the terrain, the condition of the tracks, and the type of service. Probably 100 to 120 miles per hour is a good estimate of the ship's speed and is in close agreement with previous estimates of the airship's speed.

RAILROAD MAN SAW IT

Sherman, Texas. April 16.—W. B. Hellyer, brakeman of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railway in this city, last night [April 15] saw a *dark oval shaped object* apparently *six times its diameter in length* pass across the moon. It moved slowly and apparently toward the southeast. At the hour Mr. Hellyer saw what he thinks may be the airship there was not a cloud in the sky ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

If the diameter is 25 feet, then the length is 150 feet ($6 \times 25 = 150$), still consistent with previous descriptions of the airship's length and width.

SEEN AT FORT WORTH

Ennis, Ellis Co., Tex., April 16.—Conductor W. W. Hanney of the Fort Worth branch, said today that while sitting on his front porch with his wife and mother at Fort Worth last night [April 15] their attention was attracted to a strange object moving over the city. He says it was a *large dark object*, bearing a *bright light in front*, but he did not see any wings or sails. The object was moving in a southwest direction and soon passed out of his sight ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

QUALITY OF LIQUOR INTERFERES.

Waxahachie, Ellis Co., Tex April 16—The people of Waxahachie have been looking skyward today in hopes of getting a glimpse of the much talked of airship. A certain gentleman remarked to the News reporter that the whiskey sold in Waxahachie was very good, and he didn't think any airship would be discovered from this reservation. This remark will not keep many from viewing the skies diligently to night ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

LESS SKEPTICAL NOW

Denton, Denton Co., Tex., April 16—Since other dispatches in the News report the presence of an airship in Texas, other observers here have been bolder thereby report that they too have seen the mysterious vessel, and less doubt is attached to the report from this place in The News yesterday [April 15] relative thereto ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

When a few creditable people confess to viewing some phenomenon, other, perhaps less creditable, people will step forward and admit to witnessing the same event. No one wants to be accused of seeing things that don't exist. However, many of those individuals who feel safe and secure in their worldly positions will quite readily admit to witnessing something unusual, as they do not fear ridicule. Other, less secure individuals, who depend upon the goodwill of their neighbors to survive a less forgiving society, fear ridicule greatly and will not admit to anything out of the ordinary unless the path was previously trod by the fearless and respected. It is to be expected that the number of reported sightings would be few until the newspapers printed accounts of sightings by respected individuals. Then the leak becomes a flood, as we will see.

THE AIRSHIP'S "WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

And now come deponents and make affidavit that the airship has been seen sailing over Texas. The story comes this time from concurrent and cumulative, reliable testimony. It was seen near Weatherford night before last [April 15], sailing over the city, *by a number of persons*, and last, but not least, by The Statesman correspondence, which puts the fact beyond doubt. All these intelligent people can hardly have been deluded and deceived by their optics. If they were not, and if the stories coming from different sections of the country are true that airships are frequently seen during the night. What does it mean?

It must be remembered that this thing has been going on for several months. These ships have been seen at Kansas City, *Leavenworth, Kan., over Oklahoma, and, lately, over Weatherford, Tex.* The sea serpent was for many years considered a myth, or an apparition to the deceived, excited optics of sailors, but it has finally been established upon reliable testimony that sea monsters have been seen and captured. Now is it possible that any man or set of men have invented and

secretly constructed an airship, in which they make voyages through the air at night, and have succeeded in concealing all the facts connected with the airship such a length of time? If the evidence from remote sections of the country is correct and conclusive, then we must take it that some one or some parties of men have invented and are successfully working airships, or that there is some supernatural power that has come to the aid of the mortals and is taking observations along the earth's surface from floating airships. As impossible as it would seem that such an experiment could be successfully concealed from the public, of course it can more readily be believed that these ships are sailed by supernatural crews.

Yet it is not impossible to believe the latter theory. Many Biblical scholars believe that prophecy is about to be fulfilled. They are in doubt only upon the date to begin their calculation, whether at the birth of Christ or at the beginning or ending of His ministry. There is a doubt of about thirty-three years in their calculations, but many of the best scholars in the church believe that it is the only ground of doubt. If that is true, it is time that we begin to look for wonders in the heavens. We have had the fulfillment of prophecy of the extraordinary events that were to take place on earth, floods, famines, earthquakes, wars and rumors of wars, and religious persecutions, one sect murdering another sect wholesale and believing they were doing God's service. We have even had healers coming to see us saying they possessed all the powers of Christ, and claiming substantially that they were Christ. All the predictions of prophecy concerning what would happen on the face of the earth have been verified, and if these airships are supernatural the heavens are about to declare the fulfillment of prophecy.

But, as difficult as it is to believe that these airships have been invented and are operated by men of the earth, *even that is more easily believed than to believe that these ships are manned and sailed by celestial crews* and portend the beginning of another dispensation pointed out by the inspired writers (*Austin American Statesman*, April 17, 1897, p. 4).

". . . and now come deponents and make affidavit" was pretty much the ultimate in attempting to convince someone you were telling the truth. Making affidavits in the glorious age of steam engines was no small matter. Affidavits were taken very seriously and anyone falsely swearing to an affidavit was punished severely by the judicial system. Yet, with the threat of confinement in prison for falsely swearing, people were willing to legally swear they saw this mysterious flying machine.

Preachers, biblical scholars, and their followers tend to look at any unknown and unfamiliar event as originating from or otherwise serving heaven's purpose. This is especially true when a date supposed to be of special significance is near, such as the beginning of a new century or millennium. Today, we can appreciate the latter case, having passed from the twentieth century to the twenty-first century. I do not recall any inexplicable events during the intervening years from 1999 and now that might be interpreted as God or God's messengers collecting the righteous (regardless of the Heaven's Gate cult advocating otherwise). However, the righteous may in fact have been collected. So, perhaps, the Heaven's Gate crowd was right, and that could explain the social decay we perceive in postmodern society. So, if this is the case, I guess you and I will not be seeing much of the real heaven's gate beyond St. Peter and the outside of the pearly portal prior to our departure to other, less agreeable abodes. < Smile.>

As hard as it is to imagine that someone had actually overcome the forces of nature and was merrily flying around the unpopulated skies of Texas at speeds of over 100 miles per hour, it is even harder to imagine God, or God's messengers, flying around in a relatively slow and small airship while identifying or collecting the righteous. For some reason, I imagine God will be just a little more creative if and when the final call comes.

SEEN PLAINLY AT GARLAND

Garland, Tex., April 17—The airship which created so much excitement Thursday night [April 15], was seen in Garland by several among the number being J. N. Floyd, Agent N. B. Newland of the Katy and Mr. Cody. It was reported by them as traveling in a southerly direction at a *surprising velocity* passing a few miles to the west of Garland. Mr. Floyd got a good look at the ship and says he could see *the engineer operating the machine*.

Mr. Newland says the ship was in the *shape of a cigar* and had *two sets of wings on each side and one wing on the rear end*.

These gentlemen are reliable and their accounts of the noted air traveler have created no little excitement in Garland ("High in the Heavens, *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4.

QUESTION SETTLED

Davis, I.T. April 16.- The stories about the famous and much heard-of airship were satisfactorily proven to the people of this vicinity. Last night [April 15] shortly after dark A. M. Mitchner coming from his residence to town saw the strange and mysterious object flying through the air about 500 feet from the ground. It was headed directly west when first seen but changed its courses toward the south and did not come nearer the town than half a mile ("High in the Heavens, *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

OBSERVED AT GREENVILLE

Greenville, Hunt Co., Texas April 17—Several persons say they saw the mysterious aerial visitor the night of *April 15*. It was seen in the northwest, going southward. The sky was clear and bright moon light. The *different colored lights* from the ship could be distinctly noticed from any other lights in the sky ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

OFT SEEN AIR SHIP

Seen at a Point West on the Texas and Pacific.

CAPT. PAT C. BYRNES,

Telegraph Line Repairer,

Examined the Machine and Talked with Its Manager and Crew—
Bound for Cuba to Deal Death to the Spaniards— A Description

Mr. Patrick C. Byrnes, a repairer in the telegraph department of the Texas and Pacific between Fort Worth and Baird, came in from the west last evening, and to a Register reporter told a story which a great many will doubt, and were it not for his reputation as a truthful man, The Register would hardly care to repeat it. Mr. Byrnes has been employed on the Texas and Pacific for the past twenty years, and has always been a truthful and honest employee.

As he told the story, Thursday afternoon and evening [April 15] he was engaged in making some repairs near Putnam station [Putnam is 12 miles west of Cisco], which occupied his time *till it became dark* on account of the *clouds obscuring the moon*, he was unable to proceed with his work, when he turned his attention to supper and a place to sleep. He started toward Cisco on his velocipede, and when near Delmar siding, about seven miles west of Cisco, he saw a light some little distance from the track on the south side. Knowing full well there was no farmhouse in the neighborhood, his curiosity was aroused, and, dismounting from his velocipede he proceeded to investigate.

Imagine, if you can, his surprise when he found that he had stumbled on to the airship which has attracted so much attention and been the occasion of a great deal of speculation of late as to what it really was. A number of men were moving about the ship, or machine, and seemed considerably surprised when Mr. Byrnes appeared. Nevertheless, they were nothing loath to talk when he had explained how he came to be there. Something had gone wrong with the search light of the ship, and not daring to proceed in darkness, the ship had been brought to the ground.

It is cigar-shaped, *about 200 feet long, and fifty feet across at the widest point*, gradually narrowing to a *point at both ends*. Mr. Byrnes was allowed to examine as much as he pleased and all his questions were answered.

At each end of the ship is a large *steel snail-shell device*. This, he was informed, was the apparatus *by which the strange machine was propelled*. Large gasoline engines caused *which ever of these are in use to revolve rapidly*, and to bore into the air, dragging or pulling the ship along at a wonderful rate of speed.

Two more of these devices are attached to each side and near the ends of the ship and are used for steering. When it is desired to turn the ship to the right or left the propeller on that side is set in motion. To raise the machine a like apparatus on top is set in motion.

The craft is *loaded with several tons of dynamite* and is *bound for Cuba*. The *captain said* the Spanish troops are being massed in the cities for transportation to the Philippine Islands, and it is to proceed to sail over these cities and drop dynamite into the camps of the soldiers

and on the transportation ships. It is proposed to destroy the Spanish navy. This will enable filibustering ships to land arms and ammunitions for the Cuban soldiers, who, thus supplied, can easily dispose of such of the Spaniards as escape the dynamite dropped by the airships.

About 1 o'clock Friday morning the search light was in good shape, and the ship started for the *wilds of the Ozark Mountains*, where, the captain informed Mr. Byrnes, *they spend the days*, experimenting at night with the ship.

They expected to sail, or fly, for Cuba by Sunday, and hoped to reach there by Wednesday. When they do Spain is likely to hear something drop (*Fort Worth Register*, April 18, 1897, p. 11).

In 1895 Cuban nationalists, lead by Jose Marti, Antonio Maceo, and Maximo Gomez, rebelled against Spanish rule. In 1896 Spain sent Gen. Valeriano Weyler to Cuba to put down the rebellion. Weyler became known as the Butcher of Havana. He ordered all villagers and farmers to move to concentration camps set up near the cities. Anyone who did not relocate was considered a rebel and fair game for Spanish soldiers. Weyler's troops practiced a scorched-earth policy. (Weyler was a student of Sherman's Civil War tactics.) Weyler relocated over 300,000 Cubans to his concentration camps. It is estimated half of those Cubans who were relocated died in the camps, mainly from yellow fever.

The newspapers of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer ranted about the cruelty of the Spanish soldiers and the abuses of Weyler's policies, stirring American sentiment against Weyler and Spain. (It is interesting to note that Pulitzer and Hearst each owned a major New York daily newspaper, and the rebel leaders' political party, the Cuban Revolutionary Party, was headquartered in New York City.) The rebel leader Jose Marti hated the United States, but that did not stop him from seeking and accepting American financial contributions for the rebellion. With most of the country's newspapers following the New York papers lead and railing against Weyler and Spain, it is unremarkable that people would openly discuss bombing Havana.

I have found no convincing evidence that any airships dynamited Cuba but then I have not looked very hard for any evidence, either. However, I

have found some evidence that the U.S. government was pursuing the idea. This seems remarkable, considering the country was still nine months away from declaring war on Spain.

Captain Byrnes had sufficient time to observe the crewmembers in some detail since he was with the airship from about 7:30 P.M. until 1:00 A.M. In the seventh paragraph, "the captain said" indicates that Captain Byrnes spoke directly to the airship pilot. Since Captain Byrnes does not remark on the pilot's appearance, we can conclude it was not remarkable. That is, the pilot looked American, spoke English, and otherwise looked and behaved in all respects like a member of the human species. We can then conclude the crewmembers were not aliens, unless aliens had assumed the form of human beings.

Captain Byrnes gives us quite an interesting description of the vessel. The steel snail-shell device at each end on the wings, used for propulsion, is reminiscent of how an unfamiliar person might describe a modern-day jet engine—latter-day twentieth-century technology provided by an alien presence in 1897 or earlier?

The stated length of the vessel, 200 feet in this account, agrees with the "Seen at Paris" account and is probably the length from end to end of the "cigar-shaped" portion of the airship. The 50 feet across at the widest dimension probably refers to the length of the wings.

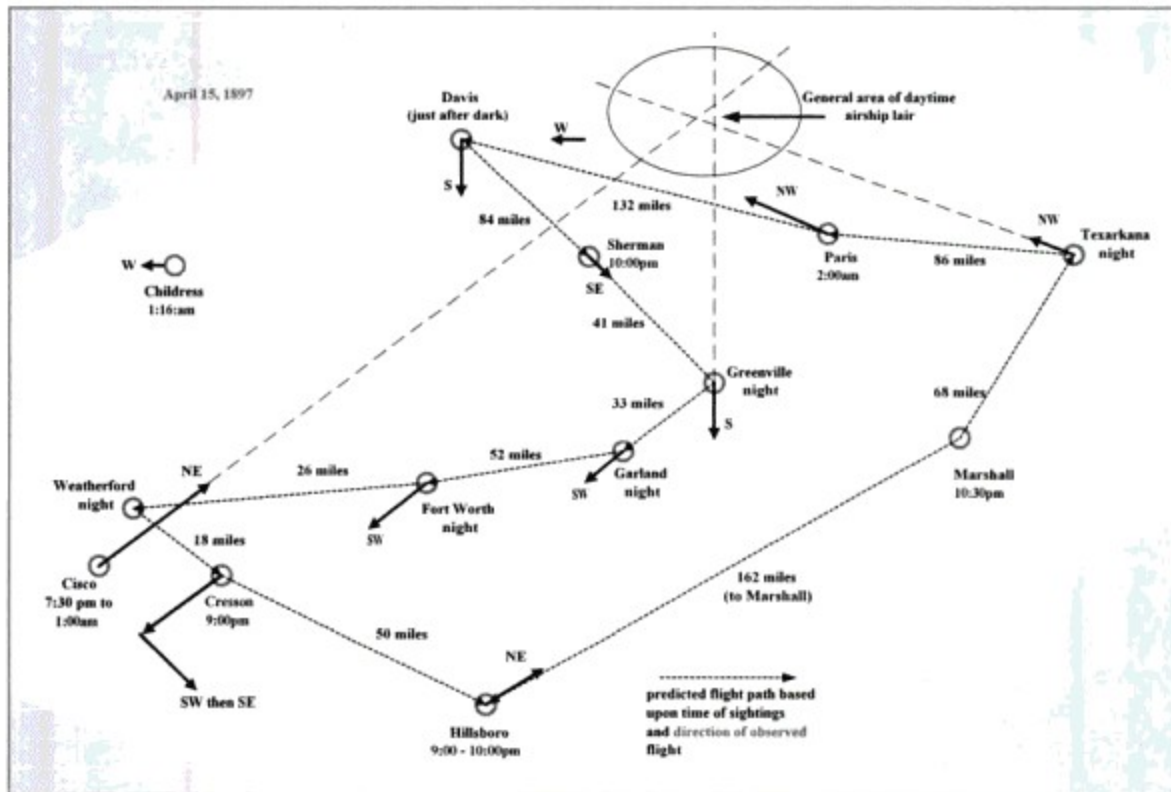
THAT MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIP

Reliable Persons at Garland Declare They Saw It

Garland, Tex., April 17—The airship which created so much excitement Thursday night [April 15], was seen in Garland by several among the number being J. N. Floyd, Agent N. B. Newland of the Katy and Mr. Cody. These gentlemen are reliable and their accounts of the noted air traveler have created no little excitement in Garland. (*Austin Daily Statesman*, April 19, 1897, p. 7, condensed version of the story that appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* and in the *Galveston News*, April 18, 1897).

THE AIRSHIP WAS SEEN

Childress, Texas, April 17. - The much-talked of airship was seen here last night [*April 16*] about 1:16 o'clock Rev. J. W. Smith was the first to discover the curious aerial monster. He thought at first that it was a star shooting, but after watching it a moment or tow, saw that it was not. He then called to his brother-in-law, Mr. Charley Norris, and also called to Mr. Bates and wife, near neighbors, who were up at the time. Charley Norris ran over to his mother's and called out several members of the family, who saw the ship. It soon disappeared, traveling in a westerly direction. Rev. Smith thinks it must have been 2,000 feet high and traveling very fast (*Houston Post*, April 22,1897; and *Terrell Times-Star*, April 30,1897).



April 15, 1897, sightings

The place and time of day of the sightings for April 15 are shown above. There is no scale. El Paso is actually much further west of Cisco than is depicted in the graph. However, the miles between points of interest are shown adjacent to the connecting line between the points. That is, it is 84 miles from Davis to Sherman.

The most logical flight path of an airship, based on the reported time of the sighting and direction of flight, is shown using a dashed line. Although Cisco is only 75 miles west of Weatherford, the path of the airship that passed through Weatherford could not have been the same airship that passed through Cisco because of the timing of the two sightings. The Cisco airship was known to be on the ground (see the "Oft Seen Air Ship" account), while another airship was seen passing through Cresson, Hillsboro, and other East Texas communities. We have two different descriptions of the airship(s)'s length, one of 75 feet and another of 150 to 200 feet. The difference between 75 and 200 feet is sufficiently large to

think the difference is not an error of estimation. So, a likely scenario is the existence of at least two airships.

Was there another ship further west that was sighted in El Paso before flying east and perhaps breaking down near Cisco? To answer that question we must look at the account of Captain Byrnes in "Oft Seen Airship," near Cisco.

The sighting at Cisco was somewhat earlier than 1:00 A.M. According to Captain Byrnes, he first came upon the airship sometime just after dark. Can we determine more accurately what time he first saw the airship? Using an old *American Nautical Almanac*, we can perhaps fix the time of darkness on April 15, 1897.

On April 15 sunset occurred at about 6:31 P.M. and end-of-evening nautical twilight (E.E.N.T.) or darkness was 7:38 P.M. However, since the sky was overcast according to the captain's account, E.E.N.T. would have been earlier, let us say 7:00 P.M.

Captain Byrnes states that he started toward Cisco on his velocipede when it became too dark for him to work. So we are certain the time he started for Cisco was around 7:00 P.M. He had proceeded about 5 miles (12 miles from Putnam to Cisco minus "7 miles west of Cisco at Delmar siding") when he observed the light upon the ground nearby. So, we can be confident that he first saw the airship between 7:00 P.M. and 7:30 P.M.

Since this ship remained upon the ground while undergoing repairs until 1:00 A.M., the ship he saw could not have been the same ship flying around East Texas (seen at Hillsboro between 9:00 and 10:00 P.M.). Nor could it have been the same ship seen in El Paso between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M. We are left to conclude that either some or all of the reports are fake or there were at least *three* airships flying around Texas on April 15. One airship was making the East Texas circuit as depicted on the map, one airship was broken down near Cisco, and the third airship was flying near El Paso. Incredible! Stay tuned for the rest of the story.

TABLE 4
April 15, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/15/97	Davis	OK	Shortly after dark	W then S	500 ft		DMN 4/18/97
4/15/97	El Paso	TX	8-9 P.M.	NW	Good rate		BDP 4/17/97
4/15/97	Hillsboro	TX	9-10 P.M.	S then NE	100 mph +	1,000 ft	DMN 4/17/97
4/15/97-4/16/97	Delmar siding, 7 miles west of Cisco	TX	Thurs. night until 1 A.M. Fri. morning	NE			FWR 4/18/97
4/15/97	Sherman	TX	10:00 P.M.	SE or E	Slowly		DMN 4/17/97
4/15/97	Garland	TX	Night	SW S	Very fast		DMN 4/17/97 DMN 4/18/97
4/15/97	Greenville	TX		S			DMN 4/18/97
4/15/97	Texarkana	TX	Night	NW			DMN 4/18/97
4/15/97	Weatherford	TX	Night				AAS 4/17/97
4/15/97	Cresson (13 miles SW of Fort Worth)	TX	9:00 P.M.	Initially SW then SE	Terrific rate		DMN 4/16/97
4/15/97	Texarkana	TX	Night	NW			DMN 4/18/97

Note: *DMN = Dallas Morning News*
 BDP = Bloomington (Illinois) Daily Pantagraph
 FWR = Fort Worth Register
 AAS = Austin American Statesman

TABLE 5
April 16, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/16/97	Childress	TX	1:16 A.M.	W	Very fast	2,000 ft	HP 4/22/97 TTS 4/23/97

Note: *HP = Houston Post*
 TTS = Terrell Times-Star

CHAPTER 6

FRIDAY, **A**PRIL 16, 1897

There are thirty-four airship sightings reported for the night of April 16. Among the remarkable aspects of the sightings for this night are the clearly delineated flight paths of three different airships. The number of sightings has increased from the previous night (twenty-three sightings). More and more people are rubbernecking the skies to get a glimpse of the strange visitors. The story continues . . .

FLIGHT OF THE AIRSHIP

A Mississippi traveler saw it in the heavens last night [*April 16*]. Mr.
Griffin's Strange Story

He saw the aerial traveler from
the top of the court house—was overjoyed.

Sensation in Railroad Circles
Freight Conductor J. E. Scully caught
a glimpse of the ship and its pilot near Hawkins Tank.

Ghost hunters, quail eaters and high divers and high jumpers have been relegated to the rear and the biggest man in the country today is the pilot of the airship, that mysterious aerial plunger seen in the heavens for the past ten days by sober citizens from the lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The airship was the sole topic of conversation in all circles in this city. From the banker to the bootblack all were interested. "Have you seen the airship" was the question sprung at least 1,000,000 times. A *News* reporter found a good Adventist brother who was positive that the millennium was at hand and that the messenger was coming. "Don't mention my name," he said, "but I had a vision the other night and I am convinced that we are upon the eve of a great upheaval." 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. On his rounds yesterday, a *News* reporter found two men who had actually fastened

their eyes on this "flying Dutchman" of the clouds. One of these parties saw the airship sailing along like a magnificent bird of passage. The other saw the ship resting on the ground, its pilot in his shirt sleeves working like a beaver, making repairs. Mr. M. E. Griffin at the courthouse, saw the ship gliding through space like a thing of life, and "Truthful" Scully, a freight conductor on the Texas and Pacific railroad was the man who witnessed the pilot scrapping the barnacles from the keel of the airship. Mr. Griffin was found at the courthouse yesterday afternoon. Mr. Griffin is a churchy man and has lived in Dallas for many years. He broke the ice himself when The News representative halted. "Well, I saw the airship and I could scarcely believe my own eyes. It was this way. I have been reading the stories of the airship on its travels in The News everyday. At first I regarded it as a huge hoax. Next I saw I was in error because it was *next to impossible for good men all over the country to be deceived*. Says I to myself, 'They are seeing it everywhere. What's the matter with taking a peep from the top of the courthouse, Griffin?' Well I borrowed a powerful glass and climbed to the top of the courthouse. From my position I could sweep the heavens in all directions. I had been there say ten minutes when to my great delight, I saw the airship going in a southeasterly direction with the *velocity of the wind*. It was *shaped like a Mexican cigar*, large in the middle and small at both ends, with *great wings that made it look like an enormous butterfly*. It was brilliantly illuminated *by the rays of two great search lights*. I shall never forget the magnificent spectacle. Finally the airship disappeared in the distance and I very reluctantly descended to earth. And it was a sublime scene."

Mr. Griffin did not weep after this recital but the moisture stood in his eyes. He is positive that the airship has two searchlights and is a swift traveler.

There was a great commotion in railroad circles just after the shadows began to gather last evening [*April 16*]. It was rumored that Freight conductor J. E. Scully and his crew had surprised the airship and its pilot in a lonely spot by the side of the track somewhere in East Texas. A *News* reporter hurried out to the union depot at 8 P.M. and caught the cannon ball when it rolled in from Texarkana. The knight of the punch, good-natured, Conductor Foster was buttonholed before the soles of his patent leathers touched the platform.

"Have you seen the airship?" queried the reporter.

"The devil no," he replied. "I saw the picture in the *News* and read the specials from different places and that's all. See Mahoney. He will be down in the morning. Mahoney is a bird. He sees everything and the chances are that he has seen this airship. He never misses a good thing. See Mahoney," and then the jolly conductor boarded the train and was off.

Across the tracks from the union depot is the dispatchers office. Mr. M. Patton is the dispatcher. He composed that beautiful song, "And the Wind Blew Through His Whiskers," while stationed at St. Joe, Mo. a number of years ago. That is, Mr. Patton was once arraigned before the bar of public opinion on the charge and he entered a plea of guilty.

"Mr. Patton did you notice an airship sailing about in this neighborhood this evening?" asked the representative of *The News*.

"An airship? No, see here, forty men have poked their noses in here and fired that question at me this evening. I am busy. I haven't lost any airship and I am not hauling airships." It's been months since he tasted liquor, and then he whistled "The Wind Blew Through His Whiskers."

"Where is conductor Scully?"

"Scully? You mean Truthful Scully. He is out on the road and is due here in a few minutes. Has Scully seen this airship? Well he's a jolly

good sort who loves the truth for truth's sake and his word is as good as a gold mine. Yes sir, Scully is all right. Sit down and he'll pull in here directly."

It was 10 o'clock when conductor Scully train came to a standstill opposite the office of the dispatcher and that individual rushed in to register introduced the conductor and the scribe and the latter fired away.

"Mr. Scully, it is rumored that you saw the famous airship at a point east of here today *[April 16]*."

"I did."

"Was it sailing or resting?"

"Resting."

"What did it look like?"

"The descriptions *already given in the News*. Its bow was towards us and *its pilot was using a hammer and chisel* as near as I could make out evidently *making slight repairs*."

"Could you furnish a description of the individual in charge of the ship?"

"Well, there is a clearing about midway between Hawkins and Hawkins tank and the airship man had selected this place to make repairs necessary and to be far away from the vulgar eyes of curiosity seekers. There isn't a house anywhere near the spot. The conductor of the ship was 100 yards from the track. He *was tall and spare* and *looked like a scientist or an inventor*. He had that tired far away expression as near as I could ascertain, and he was plugging away for dear life on necessary repairs."

"At what hour did you witness this singular individual and his marvelous airship."

"Well, we left Big Sandy at 2:30 P.M. It was close on to 3:00 o'clock when we reached Hawkins. We were making good time and all at once in the clearing I saw this ship on the ground with its bow towards the track. The airship *has wings* and must be well equipped. Of courses we passed it in a jiffy but I saw all that was necessary to convince me that the airship conductor had selected a quiet spot for resting purposes and repairs. Well, when we got to Hawkins I mentioned the facts of our discovery in the clearing in the woods and it spread like wildfire. I am sorry now that I mentioned it to any one and I wish you would just leave my name out of the papers."

And then the conductor stepped out of the office, swung his lantern a few rounds boarded his train and was off.

Mr. Patton shot an admiring glance at the query-voiced conductor as he sped away and addressing The *News* representative said:

"Truthful Scully knows an airship when he meets one in the woods. I am satisfied that his story is gospel truth. Hawkins is midway between Mineola and Longview. Truthful Scully is a lucky chap. I might have passed that clearing in the woods a hundred times and never laid eyes on an airship. Some men are born lucky. Others are born in Missouri."

Conductor Scully, before his train pulled out for the West, said to a friend: "In my opinion, the airship man has his place well arranged. He is skipping about the United States creating intense excitement. When it gets too warm he'll set sail for Europe. The chances are when I saw him today he was getting ready for an ocean voyage preparatory to making a tour of Europe. The airship is the greatest invention of the age, or my name isn't J. E. Scully."

Col. W. A. Robertson of Mississippi walked into the *News* office last night and in a tone of deep satisfaction remarked:

"I have seen it."

The whole force rushed at Col. Robertson with one bound. "Yes gentlemen," he continued complacently, "I have looked at the airship with my own eyes."

"How big was it?" asked one.

"About *150 or 200 feet long* I suppose."

"Have any lights aboard?"

"Yes sir, and they were *big ones*."

"Which way was she going?"

"Southwest."

"Going *pretty fast*?"

"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."

"Sure it was not a meteor?"

"I guess that when I see a thing I know it."

"It was this way," continued the Mississippian, "I was a passenger on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas southbound train. I was sitting on the east side of the coach looking out of the window. Just after we passed Garland I saw a blaze of light in the sky quite a ways ahead of us. I made up my mind in a second that it was the airship, and I poked my head out of the window to get a good view of it but the thing was moving faster than we were and in about two minutes was lost in the fleecy clouds. I could not distinguish the shape of the aerial traveler, but I saw its search lights as it sped along" ("Flight of the Airship," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897, p. 8).

Note that "quail eaters" were considered an oddity in 1897. People who ate quail are lumped into the same category as "ghost hunters." Our appreciation of what our environment offers us in terms of sustenance is an evolving process. The tasty birds have been a favored delicacy in the state all of my life.

One of the observers in this account is named Truthful Scully. The title of the account includes the name "J. E. Scully," so we can assume "Truthful" is a nickname. We are left in the dark concerning the origin of Scully's nickname. Was he really truthful, or was the nickname chosen to emphasize he was not always truthful? From the information provided in the account, we cannot make any judgment concerning the reason for calling him "Truthful." However, the tone of the account is a trusting tone. Mr. Patton, the dispatcher, goes to some length to acquaint the newspaper correspondent with how truthful Truthful Scully is. Or, maybe the dispatcher was setting the correspondent up. We will never know, but from the tone and Scully's details, which match many other descriptions, I am inclined to believe the account. It certainly has a great ring of truth to it. (*Trivia question:* Did the writers of the popular television show *X-Files* name the female character "Scully" after this real life Scully?)

Could only alien life forms possess the technology to fly 100 miles per hour? If so, they must be "humanoid," as Truthful Scully did not remark on an unusual features of the crew member he saw repairing the ship at Hawkins Tank. This is the first account given where an individual is closely associated with the airship. Truthful Scully saw someone making "slight" repairs to a ship in the clearing near Hawkins Tank. While Truthful Scully does not mention outright that the individual is a human, it is inferred. If the individual did not look human, it seems reasonable that Scully would mention the salient attributes of the nonhuman-appearing creature.

Scully believed the airship to be about 150 feet long. His estimate of the airship's length does not differ dramatically from the airship length given in other accounts. I think the description of this ship marks it as the same ship identified in the "Seen at Paris" account in chapter 5. Remember, the length of the airship in that account was given as 200 feet.

Scully is a conductor. He must concern himself with such mundane day-to-day issues as the number of people on his train. He is not a professional surveyor, so estimating lengths is not his area of expertise. However, he could quite easily compare the length of the airship with the length of one of his coaches and come to a fairly accurate estimate of its length. Could Scully be mistaken about the length? Possibly, but keep in mind that no one

was going about with a measuring rod to physically measure the airship. All the stated lengths are estimates. Therefore, we can comfortably state the length of the airship was between 150 and 200 feet.

Note the fact that this sighting occurs near Hawkins Tank. Do you know what is found at Hawkins Tank? (*Hint:* This is the age of steam.) Have the answer? Water? Of course. Railroads had water tanks strategically placed along the length of the tracks, so a train engine's water reservoir could be replenished regularly. What else is found near railroad tracks? Give up? Telegraph wires carrying electricity. With water and electricity, a scientist in 1897 could produce hydrogen, a lifting gas.

THE AIRSHIP

Sighted Last Night by Two Citizens of Oak Cliff

Prof. Laird of Patton's Seminary in Oak Cliff, states that at about 10 o'clock last night [*April 16*] he saw a coppery *red light* apparently *about a mile high* sailing across the heavens in a southeasterly direction. The light was about *ten minutes in passing* out of the professor's visual range. He avers that attached to the light there was an object which was so dim that he could not discern its shape or outline. Whether this was the airship the professor is not prepared to say, nor does he attempt to account for the phenomenon on any other hypothesis; he merely reports the fact.

Mr. Sam Hurlock, of Oak Cliff, reports that he sat up last night reading the Duke of Argyle's interesting brochure on the difficulties to be overcome in order to make levitation as simple a matter as gravitation, and stepped out in the yard to get a breath of fresh air before retiring. The subject he had been reading about, or something else caused him to take a survey of the heavens when he saw a light, evidently the same described by Prof. Laird. Mr. Hurlock says there was a dim object to which the *red light appeared to be attached*. He has no doubt that this is what so many other persons have been seeing for the last several nights and reporting as an airship, which, for all he knows to the contrary, it may be {*Dallas Times Herald*, April 17, 1897, p. 1).

This is the latest of several accounts that mention the airship was "ten minutes in passing across the heavens." Meteors never take such a long time to pass across the night skies. Planets and stars never take such a short time to pass across the Texas sky. Comets usually take much longer than ten

minutes. So, what these people are seeing are not naturally occurring phenomena but something man-made or alien-made.

Unfortunately, we do not know in what discipline Professor Laird was trained. However, the fact that he is a professor should lend some weight to the idea he saw an airship and not a planet passing through the atmosphere. Let's hope he was not a professor of basket weaving.

Regarding the "coppery red light," note that nitrogen gas gives off red- and green-colored "lights" under certain conditions. For what purpose nitrogen might be used in an airship escapes me, but the fact is noted for others to contemplate.

THE AIRSHIP

It Passes Over Dallas and Is Seen by Several—Preachers Theories

Dallas, Texas, April 16.,—Special. It may have been an optical illusion, but Dallas to-night is wavering between science and revelations over the airship. It passed north of this city tonight [*April 16*] at 8 o'clock going East to West and was witnessed by hundreds; including such men as Judge A. T Watte, formerly of the High Court and Dr. R. C. Kopesh, who describe it as being only about 300 feet from the ground and in appearance *similar to the airship seen in different parts of the country*. Preachers say it is from the other world and is the advent courier of the second coming of Christ. They say if it was an earthly device, it would be *seen by day as well as night* (*San Antonio Express*, April 17, p. 2).

Judges and doctors were coming forth with admissions of seeing the, by now, familiar airship. Respectable, creditable people were now willing to admit to having observed the airship, which fueled the willingness of other people to come forth with similar admissions.

The fact that the airship is seen only at night causes some people to attach a significant meaning to the ship's presence in the atmosphere. However, I cannot imagine God coming to collect the righteous in such a slow and small vessel, unless there were just a few righteous left among us. The date of interest to biblical scholars, the new millennium, or 1900, was still three years off. But, perhaps, in that earlier time there were so many righteous, it was going to take three years to pick them all up. The reluctance of the airship to be seen in the daytime does have a special meaning, but the preachers misunderstood the significance, which will be discussed in the final chapters.

Since the following account is long, pertinent comments have been italicized in brackets and are included within the body.

HIGH IN THE HEAVENS

SAILED THE AERIAL TRAVELERS ACCORDING TO
STATEMENTS OF SEVERAL WITNESSES

PROF. LAIRD OF OAKCLIFF

SAW IT A MILE HIGH ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE TRINITY
RIVER

HOW IT LOOKED LAST NIGHT

Messrs. Williamson and Ventas Given a Free Show— The Views of
John L. Ward

The story of "Truthful" Scully of Fort Worth, clinched by the thrilling tale unfolded to a *News* reporter by Col. Robertson of Mississippi, contained in the *News* of yesterday, created a great sensation in scientific, political, and aerial navigation circles. The airship was the sole topic of conversation, the talk of the town, yesterday. Mr. William J. Shed, who is a crony of "Truthful" Scully, said to a news reporter:

"I believe it. Mr. Scully would not utter an untruth. The Mississippi colonel is not on my visiting list, but no Mississippian was ever known to mistake a shooting star for a full rigged airship with a searchlight in front and a torchlight in the rear. The evidence is conclusive."

John L. Ward of Fort Worth, ex-manager of the Panthers, was seen yesterday morning at the Windsor. He said: "I read the story of the airship at Hawkins Tank and was deeply impressed with it. Joe Scully is a friend of mine—a citizen of Fort Worth. We are proud of him. Hundreds have seen the airship in the heavens. Joe saw it on the ground. I believe in omens—good and bad. The Scully incident is a good one. Today McCloskey's Haughty Hibernians will be numbed by the Fort Worth Invincibles and McCloskey will weep." [*The Haughty Hibernians and Fort Worth Invincibles were baseball teams.*]

Col. Robert H. Gaston of the Texas militia read The News story of yesterday morning and at once hunted up a representative of the paper. "Tom Camp is just in from the Gaston ranch in Kaufman county," he said, "and Tom saw the airship. He had been on a hunt and was very successful. About 9 o'clock Friday night *[April 16]* he saw a peculiar object overhead. It resembled a Chinese flying dragon in appearance and was a monster breathing red fire through its nostrils. Its body was dragon shaped *[same as cigar shaped?]* and its fore legs and hind legs were pin shaped, its legs were the propellers, he thought. This dragon airship was brilliantly lighted and swifter than the Empire State Express. It was going south, Tom said. He watched the singular object until it grew as small as the gleam of a hotel clerk's diamond. Finally it disappeared altogether, and Tom made a bee line for the house, almost overpowered by the weird scene he had witnessed in the heavens. I think myself that the problem of aerial navigation has been solved. *[Tom Camp seems to give a very graphic description of the airship, but in terms of a Chinese dragon, for effect I suppose. I do not know what to make of the statement "breathing red fire from its nose." I discount this account as either a fake or an exaggeration.]*

It was rumored about the streets that Hon. A. T Watts had caught a glimpse of the airship in the heavens on Friday night *[April 16]*. A News reporter visited his office. "*It is a mistake,*" he said, "but I have a theory. I firmly believe that the forty-three Greeks in Texas have clubbed together, purchased an aerial war ship from Edison or some other fellow and are experimenting before starting for Europe. They want to be sure that they are safe before they set sail. I am not interested in aerial navigation. This afternoon I must attend the ball game at the park and am studying up on the new rules and curves. The Defenseless, not the Defenders should win out, don't you think?"

Mrs. Bina George is a colored cook in the home of Mr. C. W. Middleton. She saw the airship Friday night. Yesterday morning she told the story to Mr. Middleton. That gentleman said to a News

reporter yesterday: "Bina is truthful and intelligent. At 9 o'clock Friday night she was gazing into the heavens and *saw a bright object a few hundred yards* above her head. At first she suspected that it was a cloud of fire but it wasn't. It was a ship *shaped affair, well lighted* and traveled *faster than any train* of cars Bina ever saw. She said it was headed in a northeasterly direction and that she watched the ship until it was out of sight. She kept it to herself until this morning, as she did not care to be joked about it. Finally the secret grew too large for her to control and she fessed up."

Hon. Ed C. Smith, the populist leader was standing by. His face brightened. *"The airship is manned by McKinley's advance agent of prosperity,"* said Mr. Smith. "He has been due in these parts since last November and perhaps the president has employed an aerial messenger to scatter broadcast the glad tidings."

[The McKinley referred to here is Pres. William McKinley of the United States. Some folks foolishly attempted to capitalize on the airship sightings and further their own personal agendas by making what are now obviously incredulous claims. Does attempted political gain at the expense of credibility sound familiar in today's political arena?]

This was a frost and the scientists dispersed. Messrs. William J. Smith and Albert Webber were found at room 13, the Gaston building. Mr. Smith is familiar with all phases of aerial navigation, it is said, and *agrees with the Scientific American that the problem has been solved.* *[I cannot find issues of "Scientific American" for this time period to ascertain the nature of the aerial navigation solution]* At 1 o'clock this morning on Lamar street I met an individual who appeared to be unduly excited. I stopped and questioned him. He pointed skyward and said:

"It has just passed by."

"What has passed foolish man?"

"The airship," he replied.

"I did not ask him his name or his street number, but he certainly acted like a man who seen something. Aerial navigation is an easy thing now. We have compressed air and electricity. Airships are sure to come. In fact, according to the *News* correspondents the ships are here. The *Scientific American* concedes this much." [Scientific American was a much-respected publication in 1897.]

Mr. Smith subsided and Mr. Webber began. "On Wednesday night 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 sailed like 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."

Ex-Alderman Patrick O'Keefe who is deeply versed in aerial navigation topics and astronomical lore was found playing the horses. "Have I seen the airship? I have not. I don't drink and I never come downtown after dark."

Prof. James A. Laird of the Patton Seminary, Oak Cliff, it is reported, saw the airship plunging about Friday night. His description of it *tallies in the main* with the bird's-eye view of it obtained by "Truthful" Scully, in the vicinity of Hawkins tank, except Mr. Scully saw it on the ground with its *wings folded* and Prof. Laird saw it in the sky skimming along like a swallow homeward bound after a hard days flying. It was a *mile high* and going in a southeasterly direction when Prof. Laird first discovered it in the heavens. One A. M. Bruner traced its flight across the state in the following verses:

There's a wild, weird something,
that sails in the air,
with wings like the Plasa bird.
You'll see since April third.

The people of Elgin declare it has eyes
as red as the sun in the fall.
Two Evanston lovers (who always are wise)
declare it has no eyes at all.

The wise ones at Rockford have seen it arise
like a cloud from the West and they tell
How the mayor and the
council with wide open eyes
Stood breathless as bound with a spell.

It races with the engine that hauls the first mail
Down the Burlington track yesterday
the engineer stared with his deathly pale
Watched the thing vanish away.

At Althon perched high on the "Plaza" hill
Last night there was seen a huge form
It screamed like a panther with
voice strange and shrill
That rose high above the wild storm

Its headed for Washington now I am told,
And I doubt not, like dashes of a churn;
It will hasten reports of affairs growing cold,
Awaiting the Dingley bill turn.

And then let us hope it will take a deep breath,
And sail out to Cuba and Greece,
To Frighten the Spaniards
and Turks half to death,
Establishing honorable peace.

We need such a fool, with a nest full of eggs,
To hatch out a brood that will fly,
And cause lawless people to take to their legs
When they catch the strange
bird's warning cry.

Hundreds watched for the reappearance of the airship last night. They argued that it isn't far from the Scully *dry docks* [*an attempt at humor*] near Hawkins to Dallas and that most likely the pilot might fire up his boilers [*A figure of speech used in railroad circles, meaning "to get underway."* There are numerous accounts that discount the use of steam and steam boilers in the airship.] and sail this way in order to ascertain the fate of the Haughty Hibernians on the opening today of the Texas league games. It panned out just as they surmised. The pilot of the airship is a fan, for his ship was seen hovering over Dallas last night perhaps signaling to manager McCloskey [*a fanciful liberty taken by the correspondent regarding the popular Dallas baseball team manager*]. Mr. S. J. Williams, who clerks in a McKinney Avenue drug store, is positive that he saw the airship. In addition to the two searchlights the pilot displayed colored lights last night [*April 17*]. It is not known whether they were danger signals or tips to McCloskey's

men to keep off the grass. Mr. Williams says that the airship sailed away in full view going in a southeasterly direction. Later a gentleman named Vantes on a Fairland car in North Dallas saw the airship according to advices received at a late hour last night. Not only Mr. Vantes, but his fellow passengers were given a free show. They glued their eyes on the queer ship with its fantastic lights and never once batted an eyebrow until the aerial visitor had disappeared behind a dark cloud in the northern sky. "There are others," but *News* representatives failed to locate them owing to the lateness of the hour the news was received at this office ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

"Truthful" Scully never mentioned any "folded" wings. This statement must have been taken at liberty or was an assumption made by the editor or correspondent to make an allusion to the characteristics of birds—spread wings in flight, folded wings on ground. Or there may be another explanation, yet to be discovered.

The latter part of this account is a mix of fact and the writer's allegorical allusions to various topical issues, such as the win/loss record of the local baseball team in the phrase "perhaps signaling to manager McCloskey"

SEVERAL SEE IT AT BONHAM

Bonham, Fannin Co., Tex. April 17—The mysterious airship passed over the northern part of this city last night [April 16] at 8:15.

John German, night watchman on the electric line was returning to the city on his regular run. The car had slowed up as it was rounding the sharp curve just beyond Russle Heights when Mr. German noticed a light moving rapidly from the southeast toward the northwest. At first he thought it was a shooting star and called the attention of several young men in the car to the phenomenon. All parties peered to the front of the car and seeing that the light *lingered longer than any shooting star they had ever seen* they brought the car to a standstill and all alighted to the ground in order to get a better view of the wonderful sight. The *moving light approached rapidly* and as it passed north of them the light streamed out brightly looking *as large as the bottom of a half-bushel measure* piercing the dark ether with the *brilliancy of the headlight of a railroad engine*. Mr. German had not read of the mysterious airship and was gazing upon it with wonder and awe. He could hear a *whizzing, whirling* sound as it passed. It looked like it was about a quarter of a mile high. For about four minutes they watched the wondering sight, when it disappeared in the southwest going toward Denton.

Mr. Oscar Lusk was the only one in the crowd who had read of the wonderful airship, and he explained all he had read about it in *The News* and the mystery was cleared up satisfactorily to all, everyone agreeing that it was the wonderful aerial navigator. Messrs. Oscar Lusk, Will Pope and Sherwood Sports were present with Mr. German and will vouch for the truthfulness of this statement ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

SEEN AT CLEBURNE

Cleburne, Johnson Co. Tex. April 17.—The much advertised airship seen by so many was seen here last night [*April 16*] by two gentlemen of undoubted integrity.

Mr. O. M. Duncan while returning from a moonlight picnic saw it and described it as others have done and says it had *two white lights in front and a green light in the rear*, which later, it is said, indicates in railroad circles that no other train immediately follows. In other words, Mr. Duncan understood it to mean in street parlance that it was "the only turtle in the tank."

Mr. J. F. Wade was the other gentleman who saw the aerial monster and he says it was scudding along just above the tops of houses and going at only a *moderate rate of speed*. Mr. Wade was returning to his room from uptown and says that he had not touched a drop of anything except water during the evening. Mr. Duncan can make the above statement as to imbibing and says he surely saw it.

Both gentlemen say it was going in a southwesterly direction. Mr. Wade says that it was so low that he could *see one of the passengers* and as it sped by the passenger gave him the *go ahead sign that brakeman give on the railroad* ("High in the Heaven," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

The "green light" and "go ahead sign that brakeman give on the railroad" are interesting observations that will be discussed in the last chapters.

Signal lights were commonly used on the railroads to inform trains of the presence of other trains. Such signaling was especially useful for safety considerations on single-track roads. Elsewhere, the green light is seen on the sides of the airship and a red light is seen on the rear.

SEEN AT TIOGA

Tioga, Grayson Co., Tex., April 17—James Daugherty, a young farmer living near town saw the airship at 11:30 last night [*April 16*]. His description tallies with that of others who have seen it. He said it made a *whirring sound* and *passed rapidly* to the southwest. Jim is a truthful boy, and as the town affords nothing stronger to drink than mineral water, he evidently saw the ship. ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

The "whirring sound" is intriguing. What could possibly make a whirring sound? In all my experiences, the only devices I have ever heard "whir" were many-bladed propellers. Propellers containing numerous blades, say six or eight, make a peculiar "whirring" sound. Could the airships have been propeller driven?

ANOTHER MAN SAW IT

Denison, Tex., April 17—Jack Farley was in Fort Worth last night *[April 16]* and swears by all that is good and holy that he saw the airship sailing over the town. It was a way up in the west and had a *big headlight*. It looked like a *big bird with its wings out stretched* and attracted a great deal of attention ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

EXCITEMENT AT MANSFIELD

Mansfield, Tex. April 17—(To The News). Great excitement prevails here. An airship or something of the kind made its appearance above the city about 9:45 o'clock last night [*April 16*]. When first seen it was about *500 feet high but dipped down within 300 feet of the earth, then suddenly arose high and darted off*'in a southeasterly direction. It appeared about as large as a box car, main part of the vessel *cigar shaped with wings or sails* extended on either side. Front end of vessel had a light something *like the headlight* of an engine while the *side lights were green with bright red light in the rear*. This airship was viewed by Capt. J. H. Wright, C. P. Witherspoon, W. H. Howard and many others. W. O. Rivers, telegraph operator ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

An observer stated in a previous account that a green light was seen at the rear. I think the green light in that account was really on the side, as stated in this and other accounts. But, what is the significance of green and red lights in unoccupied 1897 American air space? A discussion of the significance will be found in the final chapters.

TWO GENTLEMEN VIEW IT

Ladonia, Tex., April 17—There seems to be no more doubt in the minds of some regarding the airship. Attorney E. M. Rowland says this morning that about 9 o'clock [*April 16*], having had to go for the doctor for his child, as he left his home he noticed a strange object far upon and at a great distance in the southeast. It seemed to be surrounded by a dim, misty light, but as it approached the light became brighter. It was *moving very rapidly* in a southwest direction and lowering somewhat as it progressed. When it reached a point nearly overhead one could readily see the light *shining out of the cabin windows*. The headlight was *very bright*, leaving the impression that it was made by electricity. The wings *were huge in appearance*; the *sides were oval* like a large bay window; it had a *long sail like tail* and disappeared very rapidly in a southwest direction.

Col. R. N. Burt, assistant cashier of the Weldon National Bank of this place, it is said by a reliable person, also saw this ship last night [*April 16*] about the same time Mr. Rowland saw it, having been aroused by some unusual noise in his poultry yards. His description varies very little from that of others, only that it seemed much larger to him, as he says that it seemed to be about 500 feet long, the wings *being enormous and looking like huge sails* and the lights *on both the bow and the stern being of a dazzling brightness*. It seemed to hover *for a short space of time over the city and then rise and go rapidly* in a southwest direction.

Mr. Burt seems to think it strange that any one would doubt the reality of the airship. He is a gentleman who is unimpeachable and his word not to be doubted, is a strict member of the Baptist church and a

leader in the Loyal League ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

The consistency of the airship's description is the same in this account as in previous accounts.

LADY THINKS SHE SAW IT

Forney, Kaufman Co., Tex., April 17—Mrs. G. W. Vbiers, wife of Charlie Voiers, states that she is of the opinion she viewed the airship last night [*April 16*]. It was too far off to discern its shape, but the lights were plainly visible ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

**STRANGE AND STARTLING . A "WHAT IS IT!"
SERENELY SAILING OVER THE BLESSED LONE STAR
STATE**

WILL BE SIGNS AND WONDERS

A Big Airship or Something Else Seen in the Heavens at Various
North Texas Points Keep a Watch Out Here

Of late strange sights have been witnessed in the heavens and some days ago The *Statesman* contained a dispatch saying that an airship or something of that sort had been seen sailing over Oklahoma.

Now the mysterious aerial craft has been seen at various points in Texas and from all accounts it is a fast sailor.

Friday night [April 16] at Sherman, Mr. W. S. Rellyer, cashier of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, saw a mysterious *oval shaped object of large proportions* pass over the moon.

On the same night, Conductor W. M. Honney of Fort Worth, his wife and mother, saw a strange object pass over the city.

On the same night [April 16] Hon. J. S. Bourdo of Hillsboro, on his way to visit a sick friend, had an experience he will not forget soon.

He was jogging along quietly when suddenly his horse whirled around and came near overturning the buggy. There was a *brilliant light* as if coming *from an arc light*. This light, he says, rested on him less than a minute and then he saw it gliding over a field near by. It then turned upward and he watched it until he says it must have been 1,000 feet up in the air. The light appeared to him to be the *headlight* of some kind of a ship. While he watched the light went out and small ones such as incandescent lights, *appeared all around the body* of the vessel, or whatever it was. The strange craft sailed along in a southerly direction and while Mr. Bounds watched it all the lights were extinguished and then it disappeared.

On the same night [*April 16 or early April 15 A.M.*] about 2 o'clock J. A. Black of Paris, Tex. night watchman at the Paris Oil and Cotton company's plant observed a faint but luminous body in the northeast heavens. It looked at first like a luminous cloud but as it drew nearer he saw it was some huge monster. He hurried over to the cabin of a negro named Jim Smith and woke him up and when Jim caught sight of the heavenly visitor his wool promptly straightened out and Jim went to praying. Mr. Black watched the object carefully, and to a *Dallas News* reporter he said its body was *shaped something like a cigar* and appeared to be *200 feet long*. It carried sails *and attachments* that looked *like great fans*. It finally disappeared going in the direction of the Mississippi River. Mr. Black's dog was with him when he first discovered the monster and he was greatly agitated and moaned until the thing disappeared.

On the same night [*April 16*] Conductor Virgil Brown and his brakeman on the Texas and Pacific Railroad saw the curious monster near Jewella, La. about thirty miles east of Marshall. It appeared to have a *search light attached* to it that threw out rays in several directions. It appeared to be going in the direction of Marshall and traveled *faster than his train*.

On the same night [*April 16*] at Marshall, Marshal Dick Weatherly, night watchman at the Pacific Railroad shops, saw the monster pass over.

From Jewella to Hillsboro is some 300 or 400 miles, [actually it is about 200 air miles] and the ship being seen at both places only a few hours apart shows it is a traveler.

Whence is it? What is it and whither is it going, anyhow?

Are we living in the days when strange sights are to appear in the heavens (*Austin American Statesman*, April 18, 1897, p. 7)?

SEEN AT RHOME

Special to The Register

Rhome, Tex., April 17.—H.A. Hambright, B. Hambright, A.J. Jones, Nute Rivers, Elmer Helm and numerous other creditable witnesses inform The Register man that they saw an airship pass over Rhome last evening [*April 16*] about 8:30 o'clock. It is alleged that it was running westward at an estimated velocity of *about 150 miles per hour*. It was visible about five minutes. It was about the *size of a small passenger coach*. A *white search light* in front, and had *five lighted windows on the side*. It was apparently very near the earth, though it didn't halt at Rhome, but kept its occidental courses, as though we were as dead as Rome of old.

To consider this in the most normal light of deliberation it seems at first absurd, but in face of the testimony of the above witnesses it is entitled to credence (*Fort Worth Register*, April 18, 1897, p. 1).

C. G. WILLIAMS SAW IT.

It Was on the Ground and He Interviewed the Captain.

Greenville, Hunt Co., Tex., April 17.- (To The News.)—I have surely seen the airship. I saw it last night [*April 16*] about 12 o'clock. I was walking across a field two miles south of town. I was in a meditative mood, and suddenly I was aroused by a *brilliant light* in front of me. I was dazzled by the light and frightened almost out of my

senses. I should have left the place at once but my legs refused to move.

As soon as I could recover a little I noticed that the lights had gone out and by the light of the moon I saw an *immense cigar shaped vessel* resting on the ground in front of me. I saw *three men walk out of the vessel*. Two of them went to work about the rigging of the ship. The other called to me and asked if I would mail some letters for him. This gave me courage to approach and talk to him. Having been at one time connected with a daily paper and by mere reporting instinct I took out my pencil and paper. Seeing this the strange visitor said:

"See here, young man, don't give this thing away *We are experimenting with this vessel*. So far it is a success. We expect to *revolutionize travel and transportation*. We have seen a few copies of the daily newspapers and are very much amused and entertained at the accounts of the appearance of our ship. If you will promise on the square not to reveal what I tell you I will give you a little history of our adventures.

"At a little town in the interior of New York state I have worked for many years on my ship. About two weeks ago I started accompanied by these two assistants to make a trial trip. We started in the night to avoid being seen. Everything worked so well that I decided to keep going, and I soon found myself passing over the state of Indiana. (There are hundreds of newspaper accounts of the airship being seen over the Midwest, but publishing constraints prevent the inclusion of those accounts in this book.)"

"We stopped in a secluded spot near a small railway station. I went into the town and procured a daily paper, which gave an account of my ship being seen. Since that time we have been passing from place to place at a rapid rate of speed. Occasionally we stopped near a town to get the newspapers. I am going home in a few days to improve my ship. I find some improvement necessary to perfect it. This trip has been most satisfactory. You will hear from me again in a short while and then it will not be vague reports, but a full description of the modern wonder, the airship."

I had a good opportunity to look at the exterior of the monster while its occupant was talking. It is much the shape of a cigar. The main body appeared to be about 30 feet long. Great wing shaped fans spread out on either side. At the front end was a large wheel much like the side wheel on a steamboat but made of very light material [aluminum?]. At the end was a fan-like projection like the tail of a fish. The whole was about 75 feet long. I asked my visitor to explain the ship, how it was propelled, etc. He simply replied:

"Electricity. Within are electrical machines, which furnish the motive power and the lights. When once in motion the wind operating on the large wheel in front like a windmill, keeps the ship in motion and but little electricity is needed. Now, young man, I can't tell you

any more. Just wait and you will learn all about it. If you will mail these letters and not disclose the names and address and keep this all quiet for awhile, and will give me your name I will return soon and take you with me on a trip to Mexico and South America."

I promised not to give him away. He and his assistants went inside, there was a *flash of light, a sizzling noise*, the monster rose gracefully and flew away in a northeast direction.

I am honor bound not to disclose the names and post office address of the letters. I deposited them in the Greenville post office that night.

When my visitor returns and I leave with him for Mexico and South America I will write the News regularly.

It is a grand invention, and I am fully convinced that in a short while we shall *discard slow railroad trains and ocean steamers*. C. G. Williams (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897; *Galveston Daily News*, April 18, 1897)

This is an entertaining interview with the supposed inventor of the airship. The account gives many interesting details concerning what the ship is, where it came from, and the purpose of the crew. Of particular interest is the statement that motive power is supplied by electric motors. More on this subject will be discussed in the final chapters.

This account identifies the inventor as coming from "a little town in the interior of New York state." This important statement is also explored and discussed in the latter chapters.

The description of the airship in this account differs dramatically from other accounts in regards to its size. All other accounts offering such a detail describes the length of the airship as being between 150 and 200 feet long, while this one gives 75 feet. The differing amount, being too great to be dismissed as ineffectual guessing, points to the existence of more than one airship.

IN TEXAS

The strange craft seen at many points in North and East Texas Friday night [April 16] has thrown those parts of the state into a whirl of excitement.

Col. R. N. Burt, cashier of the National Bank of Ladonia, Texas, saw the craft, or whatever it is, last Friday night. His description varies very little from that of others, only that it appeared much larger to him, as he says that it seemed to be *about 300 feet long*. Its wings *being enormous* and looking *like huge sails*. It seemed to hover for a short time over the city and then *rise and go rapidly* in a southwesterly direction.

At Farmersville, Texas Friday night [April 16], as reported in the Dallas News [see note below], about 9 o'clock a dim light was seen in the northwest, apparently slowly to the south or southwest. When first seen it did not look larger than an ordinary 50-cent piece. Those watching it soon discovered that the objective was approaching the city. It traveled at the rate of *sixty or eighty miles an hour*. Some thought it to be a cloudless tornado, and those who had storm houses lost no time in getting into them, while the more unfortunate waited and watched the result of the approach of the queer object. In a very short time *fully two-thirds of the citizens of the city* out looking at what they then supposed to be a large planet or meteor approaching the earth. In a few moments, in fact, in less time than one can tell it, the queer thing was almost hanging over the city. City Marshal Brown was in the western part of the city making his rounds before going home and says the ship or balloon passed over him about 200 feet from the ground. Mr. Brown says he could see two men in the ship and

something resembling a large Newfoundland dog. Mr. Brown says he was close enough *to hear them talking* but could not understand one word of their language.

Mr. Walter L. Norwood, an undertaker at Galveston, had a professional call about 3 o'clock Saturday morning [April 17], and he says he and his driver, Bob Tevis, saw the airship. He said to a Galveston News reporter:

"The moon was shining brightly, and we could see almost as plainly as in daylight. There was not a cloud in the sky. When we were out on the beach not far from our destination I happened to look up and saw the thing. It moved to the eastward down the beach, following the line of the beach as closely as one would do in a driving buggy. We stopped and watched it. When down about the end of the island it turned and followed the bay front until about Tremont street, when it turned and went south out over the gulf, disappearing in the distance."

It was pointed at both ends, according to Mr. Norwood's description, and the headlight was directly in front. It looked like a great big bird, with wings *flapping regularly*, and it traveled swiftly ("The Heavenly mystery," *Austin American Statesman*, April 20, 1897, p. 3).

The *Dallas Morning News* did not report the Farmersville sighting as occurring on Friday night [April 16] but as happening "last night" [April 17?]. (See the account titled "At Farmersville," in chapter 7. The *Austin American Statesman* account of Marshal Brown's sighting gives a date of April 16. Since the *Austin American Statesman* specifically mentions "Friday night," which is unambiguous, I am inclined to believe that publication's date of the sighting, or April 16.

Mr. Brown was "close enough to hear them talking" when they flew over him at an altitude of about 200 feet. The crew must have been shouting to each other over the whirling and whizzing of their machinery.

The image of a dog accompanying those on the airship as a member of the crew certainly fits in with the image of the late-nineteenth-century rich playboys out for a lark.

Regarding the "wings flapping regularly": recall the previous comments concerning why wings are designed to "flap." But also take into consideration the previous account, which comments about the "folded wings." Later, we document the factual existence of an airship designed by Marcellus McGary that is propelled by wing-flapping.

Col. R. N. Burt denies, in a letter to the editor, having seen the airship. Apparently, someone gave a false report to the newspaper of him having seen the airship. His denial follows:

HE DID NOT SEETHE SHIP.

Ladonia, Fannin Co., Tex. April 18.—(To The News)—Will you do me the kindness to say through your columns that the gentleman who informed you that I had seen the so-called "air ship" was certainly very much off his base, and did me quite an injustice when he said that I was among the number who had seen it. If such thing is in existence to-day I confess that I would be glad to see it, but so far have seen nothing of the kind, and have never made any such statement to anyone. I know your informant and really think that he did this as a joke, but in justice to myself think that he did very wrong. R.N. Burt ("Airship Tales?" *Dallas Morning News*, April 20, 1897)

Did newspaper correspondents deliberately make up stories about the airship just to fill column space? This vignette demonstrates that people and

newspapers would own up when they were mistaken about an airship report. Not every individual or news correspondent was looking for glory and column space. This is an extremely important point. The basis for this whole story concerns the credibility of the reporters, newspapers, and people who poured out their stories to the reporters. It is also intriguing that Colonel Burt is from Ladonia, a place important to the airship story (as we shall see).

STATESMAN'S MYSTERY MAN.

The mystery man of The Statesman heard yesterday that Mr. R. H. Cousins had caught a glimpse of the mysterious ship Friday night [April 16], and Mr. Cousins was seen about it.

"No, I saw no ship," he said, "I stepped out into my yard and my attention was attracted by a moving light, which appeared to be some distance above the earth not far from the residence of Mr. J. W. Graham. I at first thought it was a meteor, but I soon discovered it *moved too slow for a meteor*. The light was not very large. I think, possibly, I watched it as it moved and it passed over and down in the direction of Shoal Creek. I saw no dark object nor anything but the light, and at the time thought nothing about it."

The story, as reported, was that Mr. Cousins had seen a large ship-like shape with the light attached to it.

To The Statesman's gang last night the mystery man, to the utter consternation of the boys, gave it as his unalterable opinion that there was something in this airship business.

"Where there's so much smoke there must be some fire," he said. "So many reports, from so many different points, can not be fabrications. People may say what they will, but there's something in it."

The gang was visibly moved.

"It is my opinion," continued the mystery man, "that the airship, so-called, is nothing more nor less than a reconnoitering aerial war car from war like Mars, investigating the conditions of the United States to see what reinforcements we'll need when the country is invaded by the allied armies of Europe, the Mars soldiers having no confidence whatever in the American jingoes as real fighters."

"With these soldiers of Mars cavorting around over our heads, do you think there is any danger to us of the earth?" asked the gang in concert.

"I most emphatically do. Last Thursday night one of their aerial boats exploded and scraps of steel and pieces of electric wire were found on a school house, the roof of which workmen were repairing. *[The airship explosion referenced here occurred in Michigan and was widely reported in that states newspapers.]* They heard an explosion during the night and just before it took place the aerial vehicle was seen sailing through the air. There is great danger in venturing out these nights. What if one of these fellows from Mars should tumble out and fall on you?"

The city editor and telegraph man were profoundly impressed and last night they slept under a table in the editorial rooms ("The Heavenly *mystery*," *Austin American Statesman*, April 20, 1897, p. 3).

This article is a tongue-in-cheek account with a lighthearted look at the airship mystery. However, the explosion mentioned in the article was reported in numerous Illinois and Michigan newspapers. Here is the account of the explosion as it appeared in a Detroit newspaper.

WENT TO SMASH

Airship Said to be Scattered Over Kalamazoo County

Callsburg, Mich., April 13—If reports from Pavillion Township are true, then the much talked of airship was not only a reality but is now a thing of the past.

George W. Somers and William Chadburn, old soldiers, claim to have seen the airship on Sunday evening [April 11] when they remained up until a late hour, in attendance upon a sick horse. The descriptions given by the patriots are somewhat at variance but agree in the assertion that the apparition was illuminated at both ends and plowed through space with wonderful rapidity. They had scarcely time for the above observation when a *dull explosion was heard* and the object disappeared. They declare the report to have been like that of *heavy ordinance* and to have been immediately succeeded by a distant sound of *projectiles flying* through the air.

Wondering neatly, they proceeded to the house where they passed an excited and sleepless night. While these two men are the only ones who claim to have witnessed the phenomenon there are many corroborating circumstances, as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace say they heard the explosion distinctly, but thought it was thunder. But the discoveries of the morning were sufficient to establish the veracity of the two actual observers (the two old soldiers). In one place, two miles from Scotts, there was found *part*

of some electric appliance. At another point, a *propeller blade* of some very light material [*aluminum?*] was found, in a partially fused condition.

Three men engaged in shingling a barn in Comstock Township affirm that, upon resuming work on the morning following the occurrence, they found their completed work *strewn with minute fragments* which had in some instances penetrated the shingles and entered the boards beneath.

Whatever may be the theories, there is scarcely a doubt that the aerial stranger is gone forever and that its origin and the experiences of its crew are to remain forever a mystery (*Detroit Evening News*, April 13, 1897, p. 4).

This account has a good ring of truth to it. Old soldiers, who were probably of Civil War vintage, would know the sound of "distant ordnance" and "projectiles flying through the air." The shrapnel found buried in the building's roofing shingles is consistent with an explosion and the sound of flying projectiles.

The physical evidence of "part of some electric appliance" and "a propeller blade" agrees with the description of the airship given by Mr. Williams in the account "C. G. Williams Saw It." You may recall in that account the airship captain informed Mr. Williams that it was powered by electrical motors.

I believe this to be only a minor accident, not the catastrophic and lifetaking tragedy portrayed by the editor in the last paragraph of the account. There are no other accounts of any additional wreckage found anywhere in the vicinity of the explosion. And there are no reports of any bodies found nearby. If shrapnel was buried in the shingles, then there is a good chance the crew members suffered some injuries in the explosion. A survey of hospital records, if any still exist, in the vicinity of the explosion may yield fruitful information concerning the names of the crew.

LADONIANS SEE IT.

Ladonia, Fannin Co., Tex April 18.—The airship seen here night before last [*April 16 or early morning April 17*] was the occasion of several parties keeping watch last night.

Col. R N. Burt, his wife and son-in-law, John Fulgham, saw a large light appear in the southwest and come nearly overhead and then take a westerly course, but it was so bright that they could not see what accompanied the light. [*See Colonel Burt's earlier denial of this story —"He Did Not See the Ship."*]

A. B. Ewing, also as he was going home from his store, says he was startled by a *strange buzzing noise overhead*. Looking up he saw what seemed to him to be a mammoth alligator with wings outstretched and when nearly overhead the lights went out and only a glimmer could be seen all along the side of the long body. It came from the northeast and changed its courses while he looked, and went in a northwesterly direction. He says the object must have been nearly *three miles high* (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5) {*Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

A BANK CASHIER SEES IT

Granbury, Hood, Co., Tex., April 17.—(To The News.) Newt Gresham last night [*April 16*] at 9:10 o'clock, while drilling the Riddle Rifles, discovered that mysterious flying jenny of which we have heard so much. Newt is a very warsome young man being a populist, but he could not stand the sight of the air machine so he ordered the company to open fire on the object, which it did, and the whole town was soon aroused. Every back yard was filled with spectators and still the animal hung quietly in the sky over the city.

The opinions of various responsible parties are:

Hon. Lee Riddle said, "Its an airship run by electricity."

Frank Gaston said: "It is a cloud of some mysterious substance with phosphorescent properties."

Newt Gresham, captain of the Riddle Rifles and editor of the Hood County Truth, says it was a huge fish with wings, but the general opinion is that it is an airship, which I think it is, having had a better opportunity to observe it than the majority. It disappeared quickly southward over Comanche peak."

I think the above might be of interest to News readers and you may publish same with my name affixed (E. B. Hilburn, *Dallas Morning News*, April 19,1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19,1897).

With most of the male population of Texas over the age of twelve armed, it is remarkable that there were no serious casualties as a result of people popping away at the strange objects in the night sky. If an explanation is required for the appearance of the airship only during the night, this is perhaps one of the best—to keep from getting killed by the marksmanship of the testosterone-totin', gun-slingin' portion of the populace. Daytime flying would have immensely encouraged a great deal more of the same incorrigible behavior on the part of anyone owning or otherwise possessing a pistol or rifle and one or more bullets.

SEEN AT MANOR

Austin, Tex., April 18.—Mr. John Eva, a well known business man at Manor, twelve miles east of here, says he saw the mysterious aerial ship that has created a commotion all over north Texas. His little girl first discovered it and called him out and he saw it as it passed over the town going south, carrying a large headlight (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897; *San Antonio Express*, April 19, 1897).

THE MYSTERIOUS BALLOON THE STRANGE MYSTERIOUS CRAFT PASSED OVER MANOR LAST FRIDAY NIGHT.

IT IS A WAR BALLOON F'ROM SPAIN

So Says The mystery Man of the Statesman Force More About the
Craft From North Texas Points.

Mr. John Eva, formerly a clerk in the furniture store of the late Mr. Boak, and well known in town, was in the city yesterday from Manor, where he is now living.

He told, while here, of seeing the aerial monster that has thrown all north Texas into a state of intense excitement. His little daughter happened to go out into the yard Friday night [*April 16*] and, noticing a strange light in the heavens, she ran back into the house and notified

her father. Mr. Eva hurried into the yard and saw the mysterious craft as it sailed over Manor and disappeared.

It was also reported in town last afternoon that persons out on the state drill grounds saw the ghostly airship Friday night.

The Dallas News of yesterday contained many telegrams from north Texas points confirming the stories of the strange visitor.

It looked to one man in the Indian Territory as if it was *about 500 feet long*.

It was at Cleburne, Garland, Tioga, Texarkana, Newland, and many other Texas points Friday night. One of the mysteries about it is that no one has seen it in the day time.

All persons who have had a good view of it gave about the same description, and all testify as to its carrying a large light, and a few say at times it has many.

One man reported to the Dallas News says it was only about 200 feet above him moving slowly, and he saw three men aboard and something he said he took for a large Newfoundland dog. He could hear the men talking, but could not understand what they said. From the tone of voice he *took them to be Spaniards or Mexicans*.

At one place in north Texas Friday night the whole population turned out to see the monster, and about half of them took to their storm cellars believing it a cyclone that was about to hurl itself upon them.

This whole matter was solemnly referred to the Statesman's "mystery man" last night and he gave it his unqualified and unbiased opinion that the man who heard the conversation of the two men on the craft and took them to be Spaniards was correct in his suspicions.

"It is nothing more," said the mystery man, "than a Spanish aerial war balloon sailing over Texas to find out the strength of the militia, and incidentally to see if there are any populists." "You see," continued the mystery man, "the aerial telegraph and telephones carried on the craft have conveyed to its officers the arrangements made in the legislature on the ice and other bills, and the aforesaid officers have become confused and bewildered, and that accounts for their being seen at so many different places. I'm satisfied, too, that if they get a sight of the old brass cannon in the capital yard they will die of sheer astonishment and will never reach home."

The explanation of the mystery man greatly stayed the fears of the city editor and telegraph man, and last night they screwed up courage enough to venture out and go home to bed at their usual bed time, which is along in the wee small hours.

The telegraph man, who is very loquacious, asked many questions about the mysterious visitor, while endeavoring to conceal his dread and fear. Both he and the city editor went home last night with their hats hard down over their eyes and never once did they look heavenward (*Austin American Statesman*, April 19, 1897, p. 8).

The 500-foot-long estimate of the airship's length seems to be an exaggeration, as all other reliable estimates place the length at 150 to 200 feet. Or, could this be another ship entirely?

This account is a summary of previous accounts reported by the *Dallas Morning News*. It is interesting that the account of the sighting involving the Newfoundland dog did not mention anything about how the men on board the airship sounded, other than that their words were indistinguishable. The *Statesman* prints that the observer said, "From the tone of voice he took them to be Spaniards or Mexicans." Yet, in the *Dallas Morning News* account ("In Texas"), no such statement is made. Also, in all previous first-hand encounters between an individual and the airship crew, no mention is made of their accents, language, or nationality. One cannot help but believe the crew members were indistinguishable from other Americans in language, dress, and manner. I wonder about this portion of this account and suspect it to be an embellishment to satisfy Austin readers. Yet another possible explanation lies in the function of the individual crew members and/or the ultimate objective of the airships. In another account ("Was Aboard an Airship," chapter 9), the airship's cook was identified as a Mexican. Also, many people thought the airships were going to be used to bomb Havana, a belief that fueled rumors that the airship crews were either Mexican or Spaniard.

WAS SEEN IN FARMERSVILLE

Farmersville, Texas, April 17.—(Special.) The airship was seen here last night [April 16] at 9 o'clock. City Marshall Brown was in the western part of the city making his rounds before going home and says the ship or balloon passed over him about 200 feet of the ground. Brown says he could see two men in the ship [*A condensed version of the story that appeared in the Dallas Morning News and the Galveston News, April 18, 1897*] (*Austin Daily Statesman*, April 19, 1897, p. 7).

AIRSHIP TALES?

A Number of Dallas Citizens Are Their Authors

Cooper Nott returned from Longview yesterday. He said to a News reporter: At Longview on Friday night [April 16], "I saw the airship. It's no fake. I saw it with these eyes. Charlie Foster, the station agent at Longview, and Col. Thomas Kingsley were eyewitnesses and will corroborate what I have said."

Joseph A. McMurray of Mineola was in the city yesterday. "This airship business is a fake," he said. "Why Tom Breen, our new postmaster, sleeps with one eye open and he has not caught a glimpse of this airship. I don't take any stock in the stories published . Neither does Tom Breen."

Maurice Kahn, clerk of the police court, is authority for the statement that Messrs. William Noll, Jr., B. O. Marshall and A. Nussbaumer claim to have seen the airship *on the ground* about nine miles west of Dallas Sunday afternoon [April 18] about 2 o'clock while out hunting. They will, he says, make affidavit to this if necessary.

Manton Carrick and a number of friends sent up three small balloons lashed together with lanterns attached from the corner of Olive and Live Oak streets last night. The balloon floated over North Dallas. The boys paraded the streets in that section of the city yelling at the top of their voices, "There's the airship!" All the inhabitants turned out and viewed the fights in the sky with exclamations of wonder.

At 9 o'clock last night Mr. J. W. Bruit phoned The News from the corner of Allen and Juliet streets: "I've seen the airship. It was out near the McKinney Avenue schoolhouse and going toward Oak Cliff. I was in my buggy and whipped up my horse in a vain effort to get closer to it. It was *very bulky*."

An hour later George Saunderson, fireman at the waterworks, phoned The News as follows: "The airship passed over us ten minutes ago. I got a good look at the ship. It has *three large windows* and was

making very fast time" ("Airship Tales?" *Dallas Morning News*, April 20, 1897).

MONSTROUS VARMIT

Richmond, Fort Bend Co., Tex., April 19.—An old negro man named Mose Fletcher, living near Stafford, was in town to-day and from his description of what he termed a "monstrous varmint" it is believed he has seen the airship. He says that about 10 o'clock last Friday night [*April 16*] he had occasion to go out to his horse lot to quiet a great commotion among the stock and he saw a "varmint" about 100 yards in the air going southwest. He says it shone like a firefly and he became so terrified he ran to the house. When he came out with his wife it was gone. Mose is an innocent and illiterate old negro and appears to be very earnest in what he says ("The Latest Airship Jokes," *Galveston News*, April 20, 1897).

WAXAHACHIE KEPT AWAKE

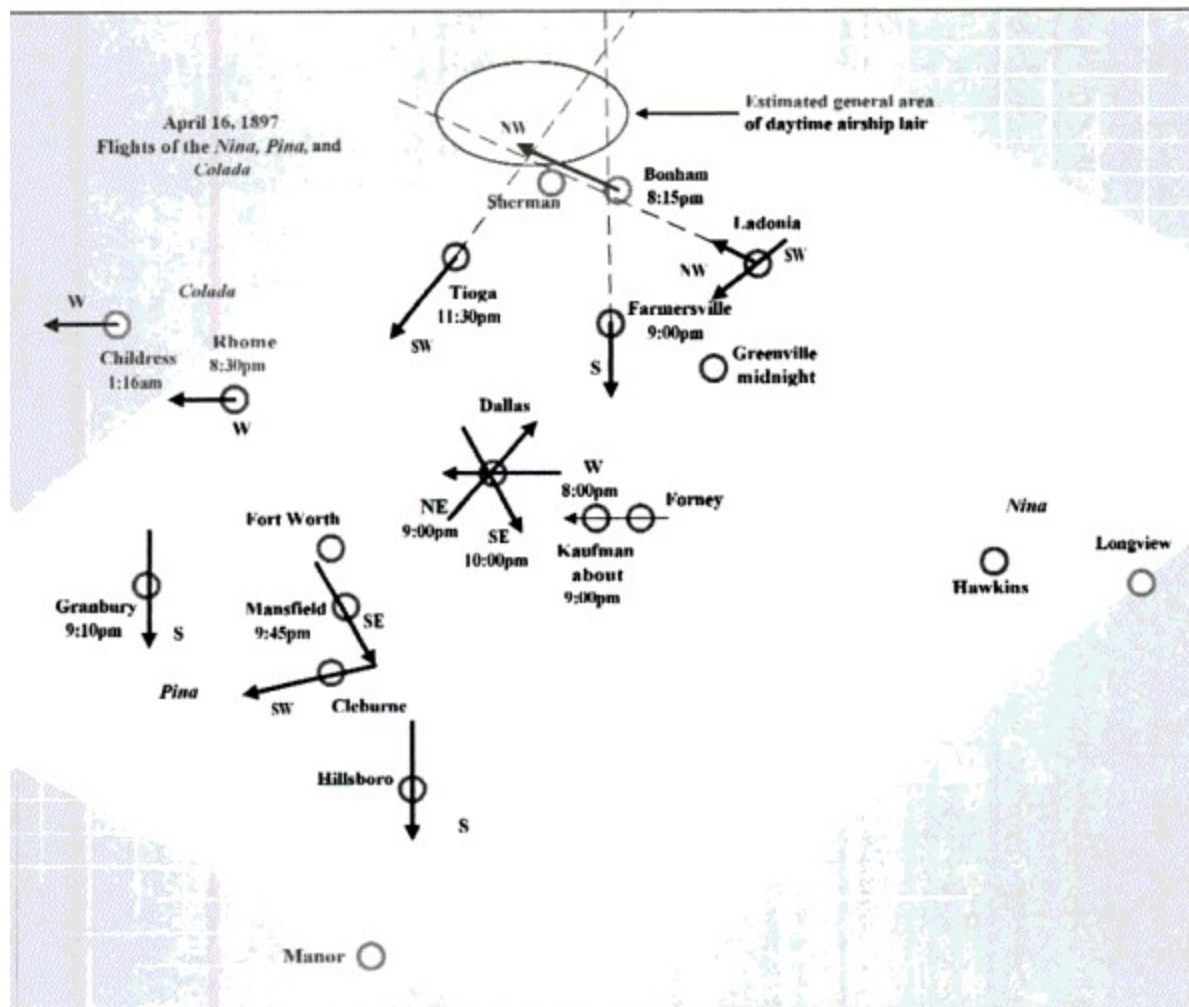
Waxahachie, Ellis Co., Tex., April 17.—Many people sat up the major part of last night [April 16] looking for the airship. At 12 o'clock possibly half of the vigilant committee retired for the night. At 1 o'clock a few more dropped off, and at 3 the number had dwindled down to a few faithful who were kept up through faith in the truthfulness of the airship reports in the Dallas News.

This morning The News reporter made a grand round hoping that at least one man could be found who would testify to the reality of the flying will o' the wisp, which has been defying gravity and causing the wreckage of a certain clause in the ten commandments, but there was not one who had seen anything bigger than a hat or larger than a snake, with residence at Waxahachie. At a certain hotel there was a man who gave his name as W. H. Patterson, who said he had discovered the battle ship while on watch with Mr. John Phillips of Waxahachie; in fact, he said he would give Mr. Phillips as reference, and he was certain that Mr. Phillips never told a lie in his life.

It was about 1 o'clock [April 17] when the battleship came along; the whole earth was ruminated with a star-like brightness. The battle ship seemed to be about 400 feet from the ground and was going toward Dallas. *The machinery seemed to be worked by a woman who was running a patent resembling a sewing machine. [This is the first account given of a woman on board the airship.]* When the sails were at a certain angle a searchlight shot its light in the direction of the hotel and caused the observers to flee. Mr. Patterson says it may be funny to look at this strange aerial monster at a long distance but that a degree of uneasiness overtakes one when the thing comes at close range. He

thinks his satanic majesty or Beelzebub has something to do with this traveler in the lower stratum of ether ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

The most remarkable attributes of the graph of the April 16 sightings are the three times the ship(s) was seen in Dallas. One sighting occurred at 8 P.M., another at 9, and still another at 10. Airships were seen at Kaufman (9:00 P.M.), Granbury (9:10 P.M.), and Farmersville (9:00 P.M.) at about the same time. Since the distance between these communities rules out the possibility of all three towns viewing the same airship, we are left to conclude there were three airships flying about the skies on the night of April 16. Or, all of the stories are fake.



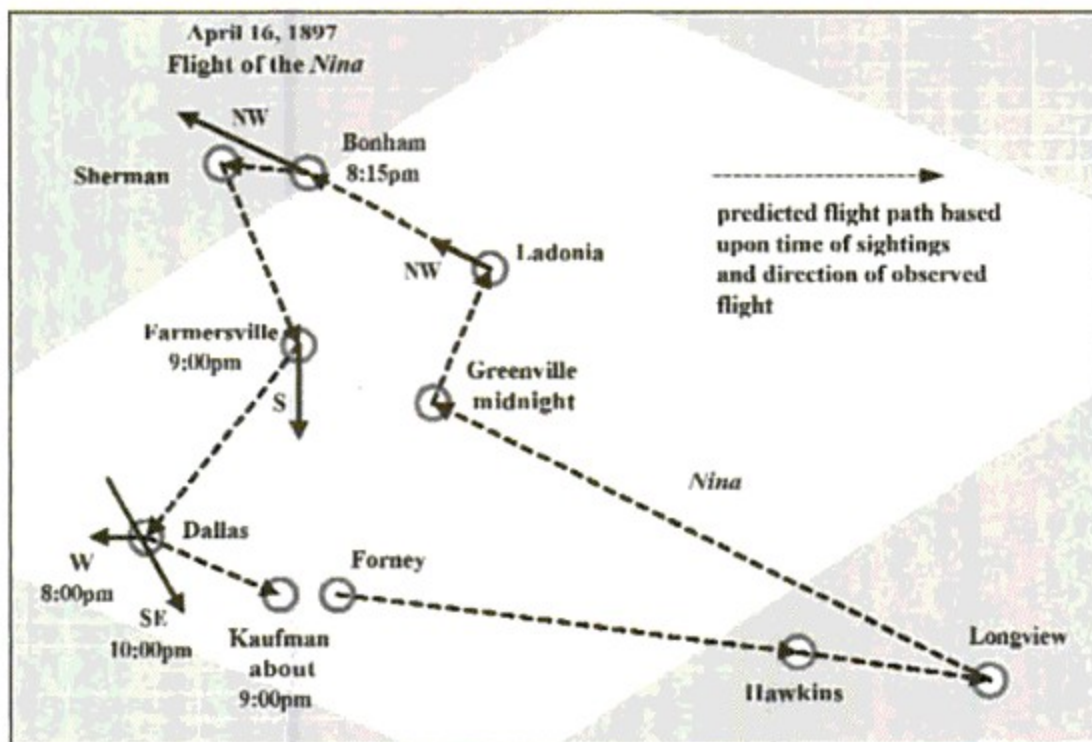
April 16, 1897, sightings

The three-airship hypothesis seems reasonable. Remember the previous chapter and the conclusion that three airships were about on the night of the April 15? The sightings on the sixteenth confirm the threeship hypothesis. Looks like the crews were having some fun by flying over, or buzzing, Dallas at one-hour intervals—shows a certain sense of humor.

The three ships seem to have merrily flown through Dallas, then they made their way back to their daytime lair north of Sherman. Then two ships, probably the first two that passed over Dallas (8 and 9 P.M.), seem to have taken off for new destinations. One appears to have headed west, which accounts for the late-night Tioga and Childress sightings and the other seems to have headed east, which accounts for the late-night Greenville sighting. The fact that an airship was seen after midnight near Beaumont (1 A.M. on April 17) and Galveston (3 A.M. on April 17) reinforces the supposition that an airship passed over Greenville at midnight, traveling eastward toward Beaumont.

I have arbitrarily named these three ships the *Nina*, *Pina*, and *Colada*.

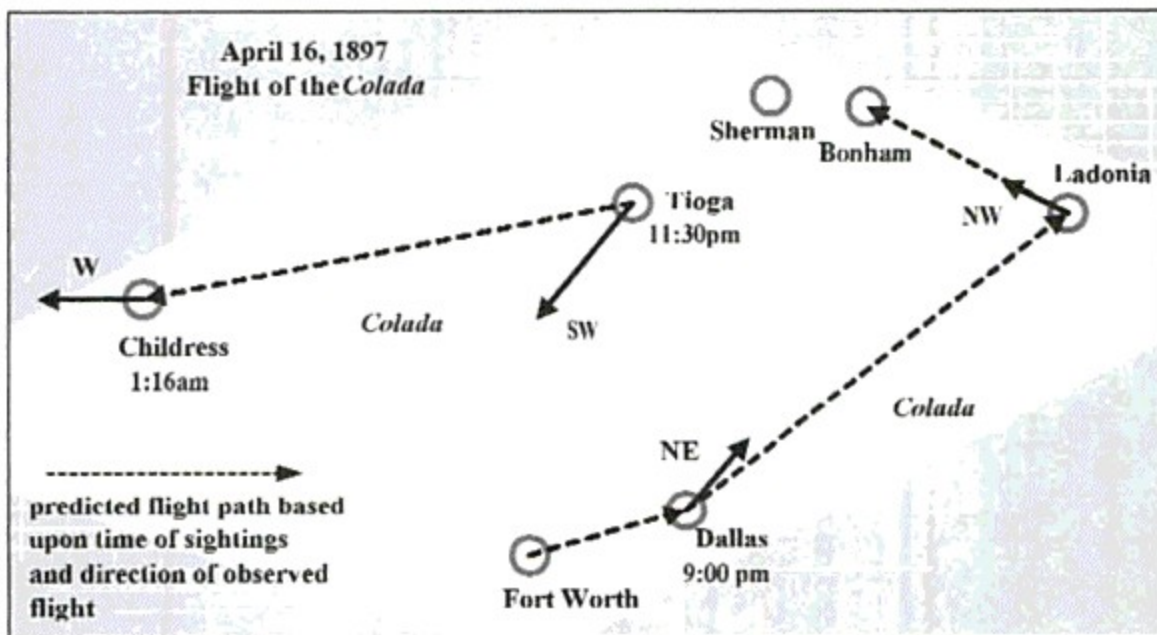
The next three figures plot the individual travels of the three airships on the night of April 16.



Flight of the *Nina*



Flight of the *Pina*



Flight of the *Colada*

Note the area where the flights originate and terminate—an area somewhere just north of Ladonia. Ladonia is a small community near Red River, a little southwest of Paris, Texas. Later, we will investigate the possibility that the airships were based in this area while flying in Texas.

TABLE 6
April 16, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/16/97	Hawkins Tank	TX			At rest		DMN 4/17/97
4/16/97	Dallas	TX	8:00 P.M.- 8:30 P.M.	E to W		300 ft	SAE 4/17/97
4/16/97	Bonham	TX	8:15 P.M.	SE to NW (toward Denton)	¼ mile		DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Rhome	TX	8:30 P.M.	W	150 mph		FWR 4/18/97
4/16/96	Gaston Ranch (near Kaufman)	TX	9:00 P.M. (about)	S			DMN 4/18/97
4/16/96	Dallas	TX	9:00 P.M.	NE	Faster than any train of cars		DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Farmersville	TX	9:00 P.M.	SW	60-80 mph	200 ft	AAS 4/20/97 ADS 4/19/97
4/16/97	Granbury	TX	9:10 P.M.	S			DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/16/97	Mansfield	TX	9:45 P.M.	SE		300 ft	DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Oak Cliff	TX	10:00 P.M.	SE		1 mile	DTH 4/17/97
4/16/97	Tioga (Grayson County)	TX	11:30 P.M.	SW	Rapidly		DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97- 4/17/97	Greenville	TX	Midnight	NE			DMN 4/19/97 GDN 4/18/97
4/15/97 or 4/16/97	Hawkins	TX					DMN 4/17/97
4/16/97	Oak Cliff	TX					DTH 4/17/97
4/16/97	Sherman	TX	Night				AAS 4/18/97
4/16/97	Fort Worth	TX	Night				AAS 4/18/97
4/16/97	Hillsboro	TX	Night	S		1,000 ft	AAS 4/18/97
4/16/97	Fort Worth	TX	Night	In the west			DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Ladonia	TX	Night	SW	Rapidly		DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Forney	TX	Night				DMN 4/18/97
4/16/97	Cleburne	TX	Night	SW	Moderate		DMN 4/18/97
4/16/96	Dallas	TX	Night	SE		1 mile	DMN 4/18/97 ADS 4/19/97

TABLE 6 (continued)
April 16, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/16/97	Longview	TX	Night				<i>DMN 4/20/97</i>
4/16/97	Manor	TX	Night	S			<i>DMN 4/19/97</i> <i>GN 4/19/97</i> <i>SAE 4/19/97</i>
4/16/97	Dallas	TX	Night	SE	Velocity of the wind		<i>DMN 4/17/97</i>
4/16/97	Marshall	TX	10:30 P.M.				<i>DMN 4/17/97</i>
4/16/97	Jewella (near Shreveport)	LA		W	Faster than a train		<i>DMN 4/17/97</i>
4/16/97	Dallas	TX	10:00 P.M.	SE			<i>DTH 4/17/97</i>
4/16/97	Garland	TX	Night				<i>AAS 4/19/97</i>
4/16/97	Texarkana	TX	Night				<i>AAS 4/19/97</i>
4/16/97	Newland	TX	Night				<i>AAS 4/19/97</i>
4/16/97	Richmond	TX	10:00 P.M.	SW		100 yds	<i>GDN 4/20/97</i>

Note: *DMN = Dallas Morning News*
 GN = Galveston News
 SAE = San Antonio Express
 DTH = Dallas Times Herald
 AAS = Austin American Statesman
 GDN = Galveston Daily News

TABLE 7
April 17, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/17/97	Waxahachie	TX	1:00 A.M.	N			<i>DMN 4/18/97</i>
4/17/97	Ladonia	TX	3:00 A.M.	SW		3 miles	<i>DMN 4/19/97</i> <i>GN 4/19/97</i>

CHAPTER 7

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 1897

There are seventeen sightings reported for the night of April 17. This night is remarkable in the airship story because in the early morning of April 18 an airship experiencing mechanical difficulties reportedly crashed and burned in a small town a few miles west of Fort Worth.

"Snapshots" was a *Dallas Morning News* column containing editorials. It was sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, and sometimes just cranky. It was the nineteenth-century equivalent of *60 Minutes*' irascible Andy Rooney. And the story continues.

SNAPSHOTS

One may ascertain his own opinion of airships, but he may find it necessary to keep them to himself, because even the ladies have been seeing them. *[I cannot imagine the social implications of such a statement. Does this mean that women of the era were believed to see all manner of nonexistent things? In any case, the statement does indicate an editor who didn't believe the airship stories.]*

An Arkansas preacher believes that the airship recently seen in the northwest is the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony, and that the third angel is now pouring out his vial upon the rivers and mountains of waters.

There is a man in Atchison who declares that the airship cook dropped a potato on his head. *[This statement seems reasonable. Several individuals who examined airships at close quarters reported the existence of a galley and a cook.]*

A Kansas man proposes to take time by the forelock. He announces that he will run for the legislature on a platform to regulate the air courses of that state.

From the number of airships that have been discovered it would seem that the airship factories have been running on full time for a number of years *[Recall the proposition stated in the previous chapters of at least three airships flying about the night skies of Texas in April 1897. There may be more truth to this statement than the editor realized. We will investigate this issue in the final chapters.]* ("Snapshots," *Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 1897).

AT FARMERSVILLE

Men Seen in it and Heard Singing 'Nearer My God to Thee.'

Farmersville, Collin Co. Tex, April 18—(To The News)—Last night (*April 17—see AAS account in chapter 6*) about 9 o'clock a dim light was seen in the northwest, apparently moving slowly to the south or southwest. When first seen it did not look larger than an ordinary 50 cent silver piece. Those watching the queer light soon discovered that the object was approaching the city traveling at the rate of *60 to 80 miles an hour*. Some thought it to be a cloudless tornado and those who had storm houses lost no time in getting into them, while the more unfortunate waited and watched the results of the approach of the queer object. In a very short time fully two-thirds of the citizens were out looking at what they then supposed to be a large planet or meteor approaching the earth. In a very few moments—in fact, in less time than one can tell it—the queer thing was almost hanging over the city.

City Marshal Brown was in the western part of the city making his rounds before going home and says the ship, or balloon, or whatever it was passed over him and about 200 feet off the ground. Brown says he could see *two men in the ship and something resembling a large Newfoundland dog*. Mr. Brown says he was close enough to hear them talk but *could not understand one word of their language*. He is of the notion they are Spaniards. He thinks *Spain has sent several of these airships into the United States* with none but trusted officers of the Spanish government to make a survey of the country, so in case the United States should declare war against Spain the latter nation would know every weak seaport station in the United States and Spain would know just where to land her army and attack our weak points.

Another eyewitness Mr. Hildreth, says he saw *three men in the ship* and that he heard them singing 'Nearer My God to Thee' and that they were distributing temperance tracts. R. Porter ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

This is the second Texas account that mentions a Spanish connection. This is an important issue and will be discussed in the final chapters.

Unfortunately the reporter does not say how they were distributing temperance tracts. Were they just tossing them overboard as they flew over communities, or did they land and hand them out on street corners? I suspect the temperance tracts and "Nearer My God to Thee" to be fabrications in an attempt to further the personal agenda of one Mr. Hildreth. There are no other existing accounts that place the crew members of the airships in such a religious situation.

This account is also mentioned in chapter 6 in the *Austin American Statesman* account titled "In Texas." The *Dallas Morning News* did not report the Farmersville sighting as "Friday night," April 16, but as "last night," April 17. The *Austin American Statesman* account of Marshal Brown's sighting gives a date of April 16. (See the account titled "At Farmersville," in chapter 6.) Since *the Austin American Statesman* specifically mentions "Friday night," which is unambiguous, I am inclined to believe the *Austin American Statesman's* date, or April 16. The *Dallas Morning News* correspondent may have written the article on April 17, giving "last night" as the correct day of the sighting, but the correspondent delayed sending the telegram to the *Dallas Morning News* until April 18.

SEEN AT BEAUMONT

Beaumont, Jefferson Co., Tex., April 17—R.E. Draugham, who is night watchman at the Texas Tram and Lumber company's planer says that this morning [*April 17*] at 1:00 he saw something which he took to be the much-talked-of airship. The object was a globular shaped thing a little dark with a bright light the size of a star in one end. It came from the southeast and went toward the northwest slowly, but was very high in the air ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

THE AIRSHIP.

A Texas Rabbi Says He Has Seen It and Describes the Wonder

There is a man in New Orleans who has seen the airship and conversed with one of the occupants. He is Rabbi A. Levy, of Beaumont, Tex., and his clerical position entitles him to credence.

Dr. Levy was seen by a Picayune man last night at the residence of Mrs. G. Levy, No. 48 St. Peter Street, where he is stopping, having come to this city to attend the wedding of Mrs. Levy's daughter this afternoon, the young lady being his niece.

"You can take my word for it," said he, "that the airship is no myth. I had heard a good deal about it, but placed little reliance in the stories that were circulated, and doubted until the moment I saw it. It was about ten days ago [*April 15 or, perhaps, April 17—the April 17 date agrees with other accounts placing an airship in this vicinity on this date*] on a farm about two miles from Beaumont, which is my home. About 10 o'clock that night the *whole country around was aroused by the report that the airship had been seen and that it had alighted on a farm nearby*. My curiosity was aroused and I went to see it. I learned that they had stopped to *lay in fresh supply of water*. It was dark as pitch then, and I could see very little except the outlines of the ship. It was about *150 feet long*, the body being shaped something like the hustles used in an ordinary sewing machine. On either side were *immense wings, about 100 feet long*. It seemed to be *made of some light material*, what I could not say. *I spoke to one of the men when he went into the farmer's house, and shook hands with him. It is run by electricity*, but how it is supplied I do not know. Yes; I did hear him say where it was built, but I can't remember the name of the place, or the name of the inventor. *He said that they had been traveling a great*

deal, and were testing the machine. I was so dumbfounded that I could not frame an intelligent question to ask, so you see I can give you but very meager details. One thing I do know, and that is that an airship is an accomplished fact, *for I have seen it*, and many of my friends have seen it flying in the air. It went to Dallas, Austin, Fort Worth and hovered all around Texas for some time." Dr. Levy will return to his home in a day or two" (*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 25, 1897, p. 7).

The rabbi's eyewitness statement is consistent with many other airship accounts. "Laying in water" seems to be a sufficiently valid reason for coming to the surface and alighting. Notice this account of a face-to-face encounter with the crew member does not mention any difficulty in communication. If we assume the rabbi spoke English (seems reasonable in 1897 Texas), then the crew member he conversed with must have spoken English also. However, the previous account of Marshal Brown states that he thought they spoke Spanish. This account does not specifically mention any language barriers. The possible existence of a Spanish connection is a very important factor in the airship story.

Note that Rabbi Levy stated the crew member told him the airship was powered by electricity. A discussion of possible sources of motive power is presented in the final chapters. Levy's general description, including the length, is consistent with previous reports.

THE AIRSHIP

Views Expressed Concerning the Aerial Monster.

AS SEEN BY VARIOUS PERSONS.

A Druggist Who Saw It Tells of His Experience Sighted by a
Watchman at the Hour of Going to Press. Motto the words of that
plaintive foreign air

Have you seen the airship? This is the question that was heard most frequently on the streets Saturday and was made the theme of the street corner humorist almost to the exclusion of the Cuban war, Count McCloskey's base runners, and the latest gossip about the flood in Louisiana.

Staid citizens who have never been known to get within shooting distance of a saloon would stop each other and refer ambiguously to the eccentric appearance that has been keeping the people from one seaboard to the other guessing for the past weeks and causing eyes of thousands of others to bulge out with astonishment while watching it "scorching" down the firmament like Mr. John Hay's "Prairie Bell," (an exceptionally fast railroad passenger service) "with its furnace crammed with resin and pine."

Such a phenomenon certainly offers a happy theme for the lovers of conjecture, and about as many theories have been expressed about the uncanny monster as it has been times seen. There is no question but what it has usurped, temporarily at least, the place of the sea serpent, that misguided monster which every right minded proprietor of a summer hotel would sign a season's contract with to disport itself exclusively for the gratification of his guests on the white sea sands. At present, there is great doubt as to whether or not it is a rakish practical craft skimming the sky for ulterior purposes of gain, either of preempting choice portions of the earth not yet claimed or annexing some Cherokee strip in Mars. Some think it is a product of the craft of man unmingled with guile.

"I wonder why it always flies in the night time," remarked one Dallas man Saturday.

"Why, it's a fly-by-night company, to be sure," remarked a friend.

This is a facetious view—one indulged in seriously by quite a number of level headed citizens, however. 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.

This aerial vessel seems to have adopted its motto the words of that plaintive foreign air once so popular on these shores: "Just Tell Them

That You Saw Me, "and there was nothing else to mention.

Perhaps it is the long lost Pleiad vainly endeavoring after all these years to get back home and take its place in society. Again, it may be the successful culmination of some aerial invention which a jealous European power is anxious to secure a copy right on and takes this means of testing where no prying neighbor can break in and steal the patent safety break device. It may be an aerial navigator from Mars, a sort of devil-may-care Ulysses with a desire to go west and survey new patches of ether [*The general concept of the universe in the late 1800s was one of it being immersed in an ether-like substance, albeit invisible. This is a reference to alien beings exploring the universe.*] In fact, there is no end to the amount of conjecture that might be indulged in.

Plain, unaesthetic folks think it may be the work of some patent pill producer, or baking powder magnate, who seeks to startle the American people by a great hoax, knowing that he who boometh his own judiciously, prospereth not a little.

But there are people who have seen it. Why, dear me, of courses there are. Right here in Dallas, too.

Druggist R. C. Kopisch, whose store is next to the Oriental Hotel, has a vivid impression that he saw it. The impression was all that remained with Mr. Kopisch when he talked with a Times Herald reporter yesterday. He referred to the spectacular appearance very modestly.

Said he: "I don't know what it was I saw, but last night [*April 17*] between 8 and 8:30, and while I was in my store, my attention, as well as that of some 15 or 20 others, was drawn to something that might be likened to the headlight of a trolley car that hovered far over in the west and moved swiftly in a northwesterly direction. It had no particular shape to it as far as I could see, but there was a sort of hazy darkness back of the light that seemed almost opaque.

"The phenomenon, as I said, attracted quite a crowd on the corner, including, a number of guests of the hotel. We watched it till it disappeared toward the north."

"Right in the direction of the brewery, eh?" inquired the scribe.

"Yes, so it was," said Mr. Kopisch, as if he bethought himself of something.

The reporter turned away. His faith in the airship was shaken.

It was veraciously reported that Judge A. T. Watts witnessed the frisky airship disporting itself in the heavens in the full glare of publicity and the moon, but a call at his office developed the fact that he was at the ball game, and two calls later still failed to find him.

Later developments leading to the identification and ownership of the aerial craft are awaited with interest, and further communications of witnesses of its impetuous passage through the stilly night will make good Sunday reading.

Later—Just as the Times Herald was going to press the following was handed in for publication.

The mysterious airship which has created so much excitement throughout the country and furnished two or three columns of news to our daily papers the past week, was just *sighted passing over the city by the firemen of No. 4 Engine company on watch*. Its approach was preceded by a blinding flash of light, and a dim shadow was cast as it passed over the city hall from the northeast. It was so high that accurate description of its dimensions was impossible. Its speed was very great, with a strong search light in front. Smaller lights resembling the windows of a lighted passenger coach in the night were seen at the side. No wings were discernable, nor any noise heard. It

being so far away. It *appeared to be more than one hundred feet long*, and was propelled by some powerful force ("The Watchman," *Dallas Times Herald*, April 18, 1897).

AIRSHIP SEEN IN GALVESTON

Walter L. Norwood, An Undertaker Viewed it Early Yesterday Morning

Walter L. Norwood, an undertaker, and Bob Tevis, his driver, saw the airship yesterday morning *[April 17]* over the city of Galveston. Mr. Norwood was sitting on the bench in front of J. Levy & Bro.'s stables and Mr. Levy announced to a News man that he had seen the airship. After some badinage he protested his innocence of attempting a joke.

"No, this is no joke. I am telling you the truth. I was called out to Thirty-ninth and R about 3 o'clock this morning. A negro out there had died and we were called to prepare him for burial.

"The moon was shining brightly, and we could see almost as plainly as in daylight. There was not a cloud in the sky. When we were out on the beach not far from our destination. I happened to look up, and see the thing. It moved to the eastward down the beach, following the line of the beach as closely as one would do in driving a buggy. We stopped and watched it. When down about the end of the island it turned and followed the bay front until about Tremont street, when it turned again, crossed over the town and went south and over the gulf, disappearing in the distance.

"Did it look anything like the picture in The News yesterday morning"

"It was not so pointed at the ends as that. The picture shows the headlight as being directed more toward the earth, while in reality it is directly in front, for when it was over us we could see no light at all. *It looked like a great big bird. The wings flapped regularly* and it appeared to go swiftly."

"How far up was it?"

"Oh, I could, not tell exactly, especially at night, but I judge it was about four times as high as one of those telephone poles." The poles are 60 feet in height. Further than this he could give no details. Mr. Tevis was, like his wife, "examined separately and apart," and he told the same story [*What the reporter means is that each witness—Mr. Tevis and Mr. Norwood—was questioned separately.*] (*Galveston News*, April 18, 1897).

Scientists had pretty much ruled out wing-flapping as a means of successfully elevating humans above the last layer of the earth's crust several years previous to the date of these sightings. However, wing-flapping could contribute to motive power if some other means were incorporated to provide the prerequisite lift. Recall an earlier discussion from chapter 4 about how the wings of modern-day jets "flap" to some degree as a means of preventing them from snapping off in turbulent winds. Typical flapping does not add to the motive power of the airship but keeps the wings intact in turbulence.

However, many airship/airplane inventors in the 1800s were mesmerized by the almost magical flapping of birds' wings. For many, no matter how hard they tried to break the habit, they could not refrain from adding at least a little wing-flapping to their machine's design. So, it is entirely possible that at least one airship was designed to do some flapping in order to contribute to the motive force. (See the account of Marcellus McGary and his successful wing-flapping airship in chapter 20.)

A JUDGE SEES IT

The Curious Effect of Chambers Creek Water.

Waxahachie, Ellis Co., Tex., April 18.—The News reporter has had an interview with Judge Love of this city concerning the mysterious airship, which has been puzzling the minds of many Texans. A rumor having gained currency that it had been seen by him, The News reporter called at his office in quest of further information. Judge Love said:

"Mr. Beatty and myself were on a fishing tour of Chambers creek near the mouth of Great House ranch yesterday [April 17]. The wind was in the north and we were having very little success. About 5:30 or 6 o'clock in the afternoon, we decided to go further down the creek. About 600 yards from the mouth of Great House ranch Mr. Beatty was slightly in advance, and I heard him say, "My God, what is that?" When I struggled through the underneath to him he pointed to the left and there in a ravine, was a group of *five peculiarly dressed men*, and resting on the bank by them was a *queer looking machine*, which from the sketches and descriptions heretofore published in The News, we *decided must be the airship*. The men were taking their ease—stretched out full length on some furs—and they were smoking pipes. We, with some trepidation, advanced upon them; when they saw us they appeared somewhat disconcerted, but one of them in *fairly good English* called to us 'Come and join us.' We advanced and after mutual introductions had taken place, I asked if that was the famous airship. The man who had first called to us, and who appeared to be the leader of the party, said, 'That is *one of the airships* [The actual number of airships is one of the central themes of this story, and the fact that the speaker says, "one of the airships" implies that there are more. How

many more? Two? Three? Five? Or maybe nine?]; would you like to examine it?

"The vessel or airship is *thirty-two feet long* and in the center is *fourteen feet wide*, sloping gradual toward each end *like a Mexican cigar*. It has *three pairs of wings*, each is like the wings of a bird. They are ribbed fore and aft, and are covered so that the *stream of air can have its full lifting capacity (much as a modern airplane gets its lift from the stream of air passing over the wings)* somewhat after the manner of the wings of the kite sent up by Lamson in Rigsby Park The airship contained machinery by which the wings can be worked or flapped *very rapidly* and by *means of a lever* the ship can be *turned to any direction or made to ascend or descent* at will of the helmsman. The ship is fitted for the accommodation of its crew, containing bunks, cooking department, gasoline stove and other conveniences. We were told by the aerial navigators that the airship was capable of a *speed of 250 miles an hour*, but that its *normal rate of speed was from 125 to 150 miles an hour*.

On evincing a desire to hear whence they came and how long they had been navigating the air, their leader produced pipes and a sack of excellent tobacco and asked us to make ourselves comfortable while he proceeded to enlighten us.

[The following story is a fanciful yarn designed to throw off any other inventors attempting to determine the location of their home and possibly attempt to copy their design. The inventors did not want anyone snooping around the location of their shop for fear their secrets might become public knowledge. So, an embellished story of a hidden continent masks where they really came from and provides for entertaining reading. These guys had a good sense of humor. People were willing to buy into this story in 1897 in part because Jules Verne had popularized the existence of an underground world deep in the bowels of the earth in one of his many books—Journey to the Center of the Earth.]

"'We,' he said, 'live in the regions of the north pole. Contrary to the general belief, there is a large body of land beyond the polar area, containing about 250 square miles of territory. The first time this land was visited by human beings, so far as we know, was when the ten tribes of Israel found their way there after the captivity and dispersion of the Jews. According to tradition they were attempting to cross Bearing Straits and were carried by a floating ice berg and landed on the shores of north pole land. The climate there, while at that time cold, was prevented from being uninhabitable by the influence of the gulf stream, which after flowing for hundreds of miles many fathoms under the surface of the sea in that region, came to the surface and flows entirely around the continent of north pole. You wonder how I speak English? Well: the polar expedition of Sir Hugh Willoughby in 1553, who with his crew, was supposed to have been lost, as a matter of fact, succeeded in reaching north pole land. The ship had been so wrecked and broken up by the voyage that Sir Willoughby and his crew were unwilling to risk a return trip, therefore they remained at north pole land. In the early part of 1846 Sir John Franklin's crew reached north pole land. Sir John having died near what is now called Lady Franklin bay. Sir John's crew remained as to return was impossible, the ship being crushed between two ice bergs 100 miles from north pole land to which they went in boats. In addition to the foregoing, various parties in the United States and Europe have from time to time reached this land in a hopeless condition.'

"How do you manage to live?"

'Well, we have a splendid country now. You know how buildings are heated by steam. Well we have pipes through which steam is conveyed all over the inhabitable part of the country and the soil is kept at such a temperature that we can produce all the fruits of the temperate zone and some of the fruits of the tropics. The country is lighted by electricity during the six months night. We have no timber and no coals. Water, as you know is composed of two parts of hydrogen and

one part oxygen. The oxygen burns very rapidly, giving off great heat. Now by means of a chemical process, we take an ice berg, separate the hydrogen from the oxygen (*the chemical process for separating hydrogen and oxygen was known at this time, but it was a very expensive procedure to produce oxygen in any quantity*) and use the later for fuel and lights. For lack of timber we can not build ships or trains therefore we were led to the invention of the airship. We have been using the airships in the north pole land for many years for local travel, but not until recently have we made the experiment of taking such trips as the one we are now on.

'On the 1st day of January the Historical Society of North Pole Land decided to send out a number of airships throughout the United States and Europe. Twenty airships were ordered built expressly for the purpose with a capacity of five men each. On the 1st day of March, 1897, ten of these ships were started to Europe and ten to America. There are ten ships in the United States. We have guns and fishing tackle and the speed which we go enables us to take any game we can sight. By agreement the ten ships in the United States will meet in Nashville, Tenn. to attend the Centennial Exposition on June 18 and 19 and the ships will be on exhibition for those two days free of charge. *[An inventor did notify the exposition that he would display and fly an airship there. More will be discussed concerning the exposition in the final chapters.]* About 100 miles north of here we had to descend and saw one of your trains go by. They are very curious things, but go so slow. Now we must be going.'"

Judge Love continued:

"We then shook hands with the crew and they stepped into their ship, rose in the air and started toward Waco. The description of the ship I have given you is a very meager one but you can all go to the Nashville exposition June 18 and 19 and see for yourselves" (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

This account of the encounter between the good judge and the airship crew probably is true. The judge's description of the airship and the crewmen match certain elements of other accounts (not yet introduced).

The crew seems to delight in misleading the innocent and unwary. Remember these events occurred during a period of intense scientific investigation and invention. One newspaper article claims that every town in America had its aeroplane inventor at work on solving the problem of

"aerial navigation." While the claim is undoubtedly exaggerated, it is probably true that many large towns, and not just a few small ones, also had their crackpot inventors feverishly at work on the problem. So, secrecy was the best policy, if you wanted to capitalize on your efforts.

Stealing ideas and even inventions was a common practice then as it is now. The story of the invention of the television and the lifelong bitter feud between two well-known rival inventors is an interesting account of the intense competitiveness between inventors. The invention of the telephone is another case of a prolific 1800s attempt to steal a profitable invention. Alexander Graham Bell had to defend himself against 600plus claims of patent infringement after he publicly introduced the telephone. Amazingly, one of the prominent characters in this story, yet to be introduced, was party to a lawsuit against Bell for patent infringement.

Inventors carried out their experiments in secrecy. When anyone put them to the test, querying them about their inventions and progress, the inventors so pigeonholed—most likely, but not always—offered a tale that was intended to confuse and mislead the competition. Disinformation is not an invention of the post-World War II superpowers. Countries and people were misleading each other with false and partially true stories long before the United States was settled.

The story of North Pole Land sending out airships to explore the world is certainly entertaining but we know there is no such place as described by the airship crew member. Or, is there?

SEEN OVER SAVOY.

Savoy, Fannin Co. Tex. April 18.—Last night [*April 17*] between 8:30 and 9 o'clock, J. J. Gallaher, druggist; E. F. Chester, station agent, and J. J. Pritchett, dry goods merchant, while on their way to the lodge, had their attention attracted to a *bright light* in the northern horizon. The flight was at a considerable distance and was traveling in a northwest direction. It is supposed to be the same phenomenon that was seen by a number of persons in Bonham.

These parties are reliable men. They say the light remained in sight *too long for a meteor*, as they watched it for almost ten minutes. They are unable to account for it unless it was the muchtalked-of airship (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

COL. PEOPLES SEES IT.

He Observed It With a Field Glass in the Afternoon.

Cameron, Milam Co., Tex., April 18.—The great aerial monster now flying over the country has been seen in Milam County.

Col. Tom Peoples, who owns one of the largest farms in the county, came in this afternoon and reported the substance of the following story:

Mr. Peoples says that yesterday [April 17] about 2 p.m. he was sitting on the front gallery of his convict quarters watching with his field glasses the convicts at work a mile or two off, when he noticed a dark shadow cover the forty convicts plowing in that gang. It was a bright and perfect day, without a cloud, he was astonished that the horses and men should be under a cloud. He at once began to look for the cause when, with his glass, he caught sight of a huge body coming at a fearful speed from the northwest, and between the sun and the convicts, thereby casting a dark shadow over them. The monster had the appearance of the pictures of the great whaleback ships of which much has been written, with *great wings both fore and aft*, with *great fins beneath and on the sides*. The noise of its approach was not great but *it produced a humming sound [electric motors, maybe?]*, which he thinks was *caused by the machinery that propelled it*.

The principal upon which the great unknown flyer seemed to operate was that of a great plane and the same movement as that observed in the flight and movement of the buzzard as it floated rapidly and without seeming effort and it *seemed to take very little power*, although it was of monstrous proportions. The visitor, he thinks, *must have come from another planet* and is on a tour of observation, for it came very low and almost stopped near the large artificial lake on his ranch.

Col. Peoples says that when the ship made this stop there was a great commotion aboard it and *many apparent signals were given with strange-colored banners or flags*. [Perhaps the signals were how the ships communicated with each other? Was the ship in trouble or

experiencing some kind of difficulty?] Strange streamers or streaks of peculiar, dazzling white lights seemed to shoot up to the sky from aboard this strange craft. *[The sparks from the commutator brushes from the electrical motors?]* After this stop, for the first time, it seemed to require every effort of power to get the machine in motion. *(This indicates the airship was experiencing some type of difficulty.)* After many rapid revolutions of the great wings *[the fan or propeller blades]*, rudders or fins and more *humming sound of machinery*, the great and startling ship shot rapidly upward and the last he saw of it, it was going southwest. There was much alarm among the convicts and guards, some thinking that the evil days had drawn nigh, some that their day of deliverance had come.

This is a strange story but it was given in good faith to the News reporter and is vouched for by all the men on Col. Peoples plantation (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897; *San Antonio Express*, April 20, 1897).

THE GREAT AERIAL WANDERER

IT IS EITHER A REALITY OR ANANIAS AND SAPPHIBA WERE
MERE AMATEURS

Found on the ground at Greenville and Stephenville, and Exploded at
Decatur.

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

"I have found it."

"Found what?"

"Found the airship The Dallas News has been talking about. Its no joke. I discovered the ship *on the ground* early this morning [April 17]. It was in charge of two men, one an engineer and the other a pilot. They had been compelled to come to the ground to make repairs on the machinery. I at once came to Stephenville and reported my find.

I got a large number of our citizens, who at once proceeded to the spot to view the aerial monster. Among those who viewed the wonderful machine were: Col. James U. Vincent, Eugene Moore of the Stephenville Empire, Mr. Charles Bassell of the Stephenville Journal, Judge W. W. Moore, Senator L. N. Frank, Mr. M. F. Martin, Dr. S. D. Naylor, Judge Thomas B. King, Mr. J. C. George, Dr. M. Day, J. H. Cage, S. Frank, W. P. Orr, mayor of the city, James Collins, Mr. Lee Young, Dr. R. S. Cameron, Dr. J. H. Stewart, A. M. Borders, S. C. Buck, Hon. J. T. Daniel, ex-District Attorney, Hon. J. W. Karker, District Attorney, Otho S. Houston and Hon. J. S. Straughan, district judge, and *many other of our prominent citizens. [I cannot imagine all of these distinguished community leaders subscribing to such a deception as a fake story.]*"The airship is very much as reported by the News heretofore.

It consists of a *cigar shaped body about sixty feet in length*, to which is attached *two immense aeroplanes*, and the motive power is an *immense -wheel at each end, in appearance much like a metallic windmill*. It is *driven by an immense electric engine, which derives its power from storage batteries*. The crew consisted, as stated, of two men who gave their names as *S. E. Tillman and A. E. Dolbar*. They report they have been making an experimental trip to comply with a contract with certain capitalists of New York, who are backing them. They are confident they have achieved a great success and that in a short time the navigation of the air will be an assured fact. They refused to have their machine critically inspected and refused to talk further as to their plans for the future. They rapidly made the necessary repairs, boarded the ship and bidding adieu to the astonished crowd assembled, the ship rose gently into the air and sailed off in a southwesterly direction.

If you don't believe me, just ask any one of these men who saw it. And say, I want to tell the News about it. This is one time old Erath is ahead—the first place the airship has been seen to light. And say, what you reckon is going to happen when dynamiters get to riding in airships and dropping bombs down on folks and cities? Is this world ready for airships?"

Without an answer, Mr. McIlhenny went forth to tell the news (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

Dolbar is misspelled in this account. The actual spelling is *Dolbear*.

The previous descriptions of the airship's length place it around 150 feet and the width about 50 feet. The reported length here of about 60 feet is significantly different from the previous estimates. Was the observer

incompetent at guessing lengths or is there another explanation? Maybe this was a different airship.

Note the identification of the storage batteries as the source of electricity. Motive power is again identified as electrical motors fed by storage batteries. Dolbear and Tillman were university professors with a professional interest in electricity and batteries. (See "Looking for Prof. Amos E. Dolbear" and "Looking for Prof. (Captain) Samuel E. Tillman" sections in chapter 20.)

Amos E. Dolbear was a professor at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. He was a close confidant and friend of Moses Farmer who, between 1864 and 1868, perfected a thermoelectric battery and in 1868 constructed the largest one ever built for the deposition of copper upon steel to produce the American-compound telegraph wire. During the years of 1860 to 1863, Moses Farmer developed alloys of aluminum with copper and other metals. In September 1859, Moses Farmer discovered the law of the what is now called self-exciting dynamo and, between that time and 1866, built the first dynamo machine, "an invention which," says Prof. A. E. Dolbear, "has made possible all the electrical industries of today."

Capt. Samuel Escue Tillman was a professor of chemistry at West Point Military Academy from December 23, 1880, until his appointment as the academy's superintendent in 1917. Professor Tillman authored the textbook *Elementary Lessons in Heat; and Essential Principles of Chemistry*.

No doubt, Professor Tillman and Professor Dolbear, through their interest in electrical engineering and chemistry, knew each other and possibly assisted in the design of the "Fargo battery" used in the airship. The identification of these two men, considering their professions (closely associated with an electrically powered machine) is sensible.

Only one person comes to mind when the term "New York capitalist" is mentioned in the same passage as "airships": William Randolph Hearst. Little Willy owned the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *New York Herald* in 1896. At the time, his head office was in New York. Not only did he have sufficient resources to fund airship research and construction, but he also was the only capitalist in a position to know both the East Coast and West Coast participants. Did I mention East Coast and West Coast airship participants? I am getting ahead of the story. Also, he would enjoy an immediate personal benefit from any airship success. Such a machine would reduce his New York-San Francisco commute considerably.

A WINDMILL DEMOLISHES IT.

Aurora, Wise Co., Tex., April 17.—(To The News) -About 6 o'clock this morning [April 17] the early risers of Aurora were astonished at the sudden appearance of the airship which has been sailing through the country.

It was traveling due north, and much nearer the earth than ever before. Evidently some of the machinery was out of order, for it was making a speed of only ten or twelve miles an hour and gradually

settling toward the earth. It sailed 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 on board, and while his *remains are badly disfigured, enough of the original has been picked up* to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world. Mr. T.J. Weems, the United States Signal Service officer at this place gave it as his opinion that he was a native of the planet Mars. (Many people quickly dismiss this account because of the claim that an alien body was recovered. But, why would a government official, probably with no long-term ties to the community, lie about the recovery of a body? Was this a gaffe by a United States official, similar to another famous incident at Roswell, New Mexico, fifty years later?]

Papers found on his person—evidently the record of his travels—are written in some unknown hieroglyphics, and cannot be deciphered. The ship was too badly wrecked to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminum and silver, and it must have weighed several tons. (See chapter 20 for a discussion on lifting power of gas and airship weight.)

The town is full of people to-day who are viewing the wreck and gathering specimens of the strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon to-morrow. S. E. Hayden (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

If the Aurora sighting and crash occurred in the absence of any other airship sighting in the area then it would be much easier to consign the account to the heap of known hoaxes. However, there were numerous airship sightings—more than thirty were reported in the North Texas region, including Rhome and Tioga—the evening before the crash. Rhome and Tioga are close by Aurora. Two airship sightings were made at 3:00 A.M. on the morning of the crash, one in Dallas and one in Ladonia. Also, another sighting of an airship said to be experiencing mechanical difficulties, occurred in Stephenville at some early, indeterminate hour

before the crash. With so many reported airship sightings nearby, one cannot summarily dismiss the Aurora account.

One of the sightings near Aurora is of particular interest. An airship was seen near Stephenville early on the morning, but before 6:00 A.M., of the crash. The airship was observed on the ground experiencing mechanical problems by many distinguished citizens shortly prior to the Aurora crash. The airship was previously observed on the ground only when it was experiencing mechanical difficulties or the crew needed to replenish their water supply. Stephenville is sixty-eight miles south of Aurora. You may recall the account states the airship was traveling north when it passed over the town.

After leaving Stephenville, the airship reportedly headed southwest, but may have turned north shortly after leaving Stephenville (due to continuing mechanical difficulties), toward its daytime lair, somewhere near Sherman. Either the pilot intentionally headed southwest from Stephenville to confound anyone attempting to trace their daytime hideout or he was headed for a southerly destination by plan but the ship's mechanical difficulties caused him to come about after leaving Stephenville. I prefer to think he initially went southwest but was compelled to turn around due to continuing mechanical difficulties. In any case, the northward direction of the airship as seen by Aurora inhabitants is generally consistent with the probable location of the airship's daytime operations base, which I place somewhere northeast of Aurora and near the Texas-Oklahoma border.

If my supposition is correct, that the pilot was trying to get to his daytime hideout, why was he flying over Aurora if he came from Stephenville? If the daytime hideout was north and east of Sherman, as I predict, he could have taken a more direct approach by going more northeast from Stephenville. It seems reasonable to think that a pilot on a ship experiencing difficulties would want to go in as direct a line as possible to home base. In that case, a ship in Stephenville would not fly over Aurora. But let's look a little closer at the issue.

A plausible explanation for the airship's presence over Aurora the morning of the crash is that the pilot, after leaving Stephenville, did not want to fly over the large cities of Fort Worth and Dallas in the daytime. Remember, the airships avoided flying in the daylight for several good

reasons. Flying over metropolitan areas in full daylight offered the guntotin' citizens an opportunity to "puncture the air department" of both the airship and the airmen with their shootin' irons. The only accounts of daytime sightings occurred when an airship was on the ground undergoing repairs and then it was only seen by relatively few people. By going north from Stephenville, the pilot of the crippled airship avoided the Fort Worth-Dallas metropolitan area. By adopting such an evasive tactic, the airship needed to fly over small towns only. It is unknown what effect the sight of an airship would cause in 1897 if seen in the daytime over a large city, but it is conceivable such a sight would cause great alarm, even panic, and would result in serious injury to many people. Remember that many people were thinking the airship was from Mars. Many others thought it was God's messenger come to collect the righteous. And many people would gleefully take potshots at the beast, if given such an opportunity. I think that in the selection of the route taken from Stephenville the pilot was exercising prudence by attempting to avoid such calamities.

It is safe to assume that an airship may crash as the result of mechanical difficulties. Experience in this century certainly confirms the possibility. So, if the airships' existence was factual, the probability of an actual crash at Aurora cannot be ruled out. The only significant issue with the reality of a crash is the statement by the United States Signal Service officer that the recovered body, in his opinion, was from Mars. Well, maybe so, but I prefer to think that the recovered body pieces were more likely the burnt-beyond-recognition remains of a human.

Why would a United States government official make such a seemingly outrageous (by today's standards) claim? Large telescopes, sufficiently powerful enough to see great detail of the planet's surface, had recently been focused on Mars. The earthly observers were delighted to see great canals stretching across parts of the water-challenged planet. These canals were evidence the learned community used to proclaim the presence of intelligent life on Mars.

At the time, there was much newspaper space devoted to the exciting discovery of Martian canals. It was supposed by many that life on Mars, if capable of creating great canals for presumably irrigation purposes, might also have sufficient intelligence to develop vehicles capable of interplanetary travel. The conviction that life existed on Mars became so fixed in the American psyche that thousands of people would be stampeded years later in 1937, when Orson Welles performed the H. G. Wells classic, *The War of the Worlds* on radio.

If the credible newspapers and monthly journals reported the airships were from Mars, then any reasonable person would assume the unidentifiable remains must naturally be of Martian origin. So, considering the historical background, it does not seem unreasonable for a government official to assume to be true what he had been reading in the newspapers all along.

The strange metal recovered at the crash site is probably aluminum. Aluminum was not in general use at that time and was not familiar to most people, especially farmers. Only in 1886 did we discover how to smelt aluminum in any large quantity. Aurora was a farming community and farmers were very familiar with steel and iron, as these two metals were used for all manner of farming and household needs. However, it is likely that they would not be familiar with aluminum. The metal would seem strange. Modern-day UFO researchers have searched the good Judge Proctor's farm and claim to have found pieces of aluminum in the immediate vicinity where the old windmill was located. I visited the site in 2001 and found nothing of interest regarding this story.

The papers with "hieroglyphics" sound too much like the coded notebooks of Dellschau, who recorded secrets concerning the Sonora Aero Club in his notebooks using a code known only to him and perhaps any accomplices he may have had. It would prove most fruitful to compare these papers to Dellschau's notebooks and determine the points of similarity. Where are these papers from the Aurora crash currently reposing?

It seems the pilot was buried rather hurriedly in an unmarked grave in the Aurora community cemetery. The fact that the town did not display the "Martian body" for the world to see lends suspicion to the claim that the airship crashed. Also, the recovery of the "weird" papers reinforces the belief the crash claim was false. Many people then (and now) came to conclude that Aurora was falsely claiming the crash to get unwarranted attention for its community. Why? Because, some argued, the railroad had passed Aurora by, therefore ensuring a bleak future for the community. As the argument went, the townspeople wanted to capitalize financially on the publicity such a claim would gain for the town. To use this argument to reject the airship crash claim seems preposterous. Any benefit derived from the publicity of an (false) alien spaceship crash would be fleeting, not necessarily positive, and then the townspeople would suffer the scorn of the rest of the nation. Such a publicity stunt is not very foresighted. For such a claim to hold together for any length of time, the community as a whole

would have to agree upon the circumstances of the claim. I cannot imagine the community agreeing to do so.

What if the reporter took it upon himself to write a fake story? One modern writer, Daniel Cohen (*The Great Airship Mystery: A UFO of the 1890s*), claims all the airship stories were fake. He bases his conclusion upon the untenable precept that many newspapers of the period regularly engaged in printed hoaxes as a means of increasing circulation and amusing the audience. He provides some examples of newspaper hoaxes to support his argument. What he never states is that the hoaxes mentioned in his book were singular in their conception and publication. The typical newspaper hoax of the period was carried by one newspaper, usually in a serialized fashion. Upon publication of the final installment, the newspaper would confess to the fabrication of the story. No newspaper ever confessed to printing an airship story as a hoax, although several people admitted later that they fabricated airship stories to see if they could fool the newspaper. These stories involved sightings in other states and are patently false as the circumstances involved are totally out of harmony with the nature of other well-documented sightings.

In any case, if the reporter went out on a limb and wrote the Aurora story without any evidence of an actual crash, I imagine the city fathers (and mothers) would raise a storm of protest the following day. No such remonstrance by the good people of Aurora was ever documented.

Modern-day UFO enthusiasts have attempted to get permission from Aurora authorities to let them dig up the area in the community cemetery where the body of the pilot is supposedly buried in an unmarked grave. Aurora has refused, adding fuel to the suspicion that crash was fake. "What does Aurora have to hide," is the cry of the enthusiasts. "Nothing," I say. I am not inclined to believe we need to dig up cemeteries to prove this or that. I think, if we evaluate the pieces of the puzzle, they are sufficient for us to arrive at reasonable, logical, and rational conclusions. In so doing, we cannot but believe an airship crashed on that long-ago morning, killing the unfortunate pilot and burning his body beyond recognition. The pilot, in all likelihood, was a "Martian" only if he called "Mars, Some State, USA" his home.

The airship is now an established fact. Too many reputable accounts have come to the populace's attention to ignore their existence. If three airships were flying about the Texas skies in April 1897, we know from the experience of the past fifty years that sooner or later, one of those airships will crash. Probably sooner, as these airships were the first of their kind, prototypes using technologies far inferior to the modern jetliner. Yet, even with advanced technology, today we, unfortunately, periodically have jetliners falling out of the sky. So, is it unreasonable to believe one of these airships crashed, and the place just happened to be Aurora? It is not.

Perhaps the most significant evidence we now have of the veracity of an Aurora crash is the list of witnesses who gave testimony to seeing the airship on the ground "early in the morning" when it was experiencing mechanical difficulties in Stephenville. The distinguished list includes a colonel, a railroad executive, a newspaper man, two judges, a senator, four doctors, the mayor of Stephenville, a district attorney, an ex-district attorney, a district judge, and "other prominent citizens." While we may be somewhat cynical today (and probably for good cause) and strongly suspect

all "prominent" citizens, capable of lying if it is in their interest, it is hardly imaginable that such a list of characters would conspire to lie about seeing an airship on the ground and undergoing repairs. A subsequent crash seems entirely possible and even likely if the mechanical difficulties were severe and/or the winds were high on that April morning.

At this point, a thinking person may ask, "Who were the two men seen with the airship at Stephenville?" Also, why were parts of only one body found? In the final chapters, we pursue these leads. The results of the investigation will astound you.

SKEPTICS AND BELIEVERS

Ennis, Ellis Co., Tex., April 18.—The excitement incident to the published reports of the wonderful airship is growing more and more intense and various opinions are being expressed. One man was heard to say to-day that the whole matter is an advertising scheme. Dr. E. Stuart, an acknowledged authority in metaphysics, gives it as his opinion that the whole affair is due to hypnotism and bad whiskey, and J. M. Chapman thinks it is purely sensational fiction. But the people are not all skeptical. Some believe the question of aerial navigation has been solved and others who are close students of the Bible are apprehensive that the end of time is drawing near and that the strange visitations are heavenly inspectors going about to judge the world. A deeply pious lady said to-day that one would see lights, some would dream and some see visitors, we would hear of wars and rumors of war and lastly that whenever the gospel shall have been preached to all nations then the end will come.

"This," she said, "has almost come. Every nation except Tibet has had the gospel and messengers are trying to go there. When that is done the fullness of time will have come and the Lord will most likely appear in his second coming."

It is rumored to-day that Mr. C. W. Beale of this city, a very sober and circumspect gentleman, saw the mysterious vehicle last night [April 17] and Mr. F. D. Hahnsbeen, night operator at the Central office says he saw it.

City Recorder J. W. Craig says he saw the ship at noon last Monday [April 12], but as there had then been no excitement over it he let it pass with only mentioning it casually. He says that he and Charlie Pippenmere were looking at the moon and a star at noon and a dark object passed across his vision which as he now recalls it suits very much to the description given of the air vessel (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19,1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19,1897).

SEEN AT WEST

West, McLennan Co., Tex., April 18.—(To The News.)— People here have been on the alert for the famous airship. It was seen by Prof. Hickman of this place about 10:30 o'clock last night *[April 17]* moving in a southeast courses. His description of the thing was very minute. It seemed to be whaleback in body with batlike wings, windows with lights inside with a powerful headlight in front. It was not over 500 feet above the ground, but *ascended rapidly* until almost out of sight. It had *almost meteorlike speed*. *[Does he mean to imply it was fast or should we take the statement literally? I think he just meant the speed of the airship was fast.]*

It was also seen by Thomas Franklin and others living near this place. This settles the matter of the fact of the airship in this place. James Griffin (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

HAS A MUSIC CREW

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

However, a gentleman named Walter Williams, who camped with his wagon on a high hill about two miles east on the Hillsboro and Mount Calm road, and who slept on the extreme summit of the hill, says he heard and saw wonderful things that were not on the program. He came to town this morning and The News reporter ran across him at the city watering trough as he was watering his team. The reporter, observing that he appeared perplexed about something, halted and entered into a conversation with him, and soon learned the cause of his perplexity. An account of this man and his strange experience is best related in his own words. Said he:

My name is Walter Williams. I am a farmer and live in Anderson County near Montalba, a small country village. I am on my way overland to Hardeman County where I have land interests. Last night *[April 17]* I stayed east of here on a high hill. I stopped my wagon and team at the foot of the hill, where I fed my team. After supper I strolled about a little for relaxation and eventually got to the summit of the hill. The night was an ideal one with no clouds visible anywhere. The moon was cleverly up and the view from the hill eminently beautiful and impressive. The city of Hillsboro lay off in the valley to the west in all its picturesqueness, while beyond it the shadow of the cross timbers showed darkly against the horizon. The timbered creek above and below me and the clear sky above, from which a few stars blinked sleepily, added to the happiness of the occasion. Moved by impulse I took off my hat in adoration to the hand that had fashioned the hills and spread the valley there. The place was so lonely and quiet I decided to spend the night there, and got my blankets and spread them on the ground with nothing but the blue canopy above me.

I soon drifted away into the land of slumber. After awhile I was awakened by the sound of music. I lay on my pallet with my eyes closed and listened to it. Softer, sweeter music was never heard. Its melody coursed through my veins and penetrated my very soul. Presently I was sufficiently awake to remember where I was and it struck me as very strange that I should hear music at that place and time. I opened my eyes and looked around me. I could see no one, and the music very strangely seemed to be in the air overhead. I sprang to my feet and could not see anything. It must have been midnight or past, for the moon had climbed high up the heavens, and its silver rays filled the earth with their radiance. I felt as if I was in a spirit land listening to the weird music of spirits. It was like the music of an organ with flageolet, violin, flute and cornet accompanying it. At times it seemed very near and then floated away almost beyond the range of hearing, but always returning sweeter and more devotional than before. Look as I would I could see nothing of the invisible musicians, and it is natural that I should have felt somewhat superstitious about it. Yet I

was not as disturbed as one would suppose by it. I know or felt reasonably certain that no human agency produced the music, still it did not terrify me. The tune was 'Coronation,' and while it was soft and low, it seemed to penetrate the entire universe. The very air seemed to thrill from it. The stars in the distance, dim and indistinct, appeared to feel its vibration. After awhile the music ceased and I noticed a commotion in the milky way almost overhead. It seemed as if millions of stars moved by a sudden impulse, had started revolving about each other in what appeared to be a space ten feet in diameter. They revolved around faster and faster, occasionally throwing off stars which darted into the void and disappeared. This lasted for scarcely a minute, when the disorder ceased. In the center of the circle was plainly outlined a cross of stars adorned with a crown of thorns. This presently faded and left the milkyway in its natural state. Just as it faded I plainly heard from myriad of tongues the refrain, "Peace on Earth, good will toward men." I fancied I could see in the far heavens flashing in the moon light the silver tips of angel wings. The song died away and everything grew silent. After that I could not sleep until nearly day when I fell into a soft slumber. I am at a loss to account for it. It could not have been a dream. It was too vivid, and I can not account for it. While it is possible that Easter tide may have had something to do with it, I am not prepared to say that it did. I relate it as it occurred to me, and as a Christian that I saw what I saw. If you doubt it I refer you to any one at Montalba, Tex. who will tell you I am at least regarded as truthful."

When the reporter recovered from the strangeness of the adventure, Mr. Williams was some distance down the street (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

I am inclined to believe Mr. Williams went to sleep under the influence of a dose of either morphine or cocaine. This account sounds like the fanciful dream of a person under the influence. Both drugs, easily obtainable in 1897, were commonly used, and abused, for various reasons. During the Vietnam War, my abdomen was cut open and was not closed for ten days due to gangrene. During this time, and the subsequent twenty days following the stitching, I was given a shot of morphine every four hours. I can recall, to this day, the feeling of the morphine high. Music playing through a stereo system and in my head (without benefit of a stereo system) sounded much the same and much like the account given here by Mr. Williams. He probably experienced a similar drug-induced "stereo" and that is probably why he hurriedly departed down the street after reciting his account to the newspaper man—he did not want to be questioned too closely on the matter. Or, this is one of those fake newspaper stories. The name of the road, Mount Calm, given the nature of the story —Mr. Williams was asleep—seems just a little too cute. But then again, there really is a Mount Calm road between Hillsboro and Waco and the airship crew were fond of playing music on occasion.

SEEN IN THE TERRITORY

Padl, I. T. April 17—(To The News.)—Until tonight [*April 17*] the airship has been regarded as a fake by our people. There is, however, no unbeliever now. At 8:35 p.m., just as the north-bound passenger train No. 12 pulled into the station, the ship was seen traveling in a southern courses, moving at the rate of about *fortyfive or fifty miles an hour*. It looked to be from *75 to 100 feet in length*, carried what seemed to be a headlight not unlike those used on a locomotive, and was some quarter of a mile from the earth.

Attention was first called to the presence of the strange sight by Engineer Girard of the train. Those who saw the ship at this place were Conductor Jack Conlisk and Engineer Girard of the train, Dr. Tucker; Dr. McBride, G. D. Thompson, Mr. Nesbit, and this correspondent, besides the passengers on the train. There is no doubt it was seen by the good people of Paul's Valley as it was traveling in that directions. R. M. Tate (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19,1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19,1897).

This is the second account that places the length of the airship at 75 feet. The length of this airship marks it as the shorter of the three ships going about the countryside of Texas. The other two airships were 150200 feet long.

AIRSHIP LINE

Bonham, Fannin Co., Tex. April 17.—(To The News)— Bonham capitalists will in a few days apply for a charter for the Bonham, Ivanhoe, and Lamasco Airship Transportation Company. They will at once inaugurate a double daily passenger ship to transport all merchandise to Ivanhoe and Lamasco, and returning will load with corn, which will be brought to Bonham and loaded on railroad cars for shipment to different parts of the state and for export.

For a distance of about five miles in the Ivanhoe country the air does not contain sufficient buoyancy to float the ships. They expect to overcome this difficulty by either bridging or tunneling. The stockholders, backed by the local newspaper, have all the necessary material on the ground to carry out the enterprise except the bridge and ships. As this will be the first all air line in the state, I thought I would bring it to your attention. Respectfully, Julius (not Jules) Verne (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19,1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19,1897).

This is obviously a humorous attempt to trivialize all the previously reported accounts of airship sightings.

SEEN AT WORTHAM

Wortham, Freestone Co., Tex, April 18—Captain John A. Lilly, a prominent and reliable citizen of this place, a Mexican War veteran, claims he saw the mysterious airship last night [*April 17*] at 9:30. He says it was *going straight up*. The captain is noted for his truthfulness (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

AIRSHIP

Seen By Fort Worth People Last Night

SAID TO HAVE LANDED IN THE CITY PARK

A Stephenville Editor Saw It and Tried to Interview the Man Who was Navigating the Aerial Wonder.

Fort Worth, April 19—At last the aerial wonder causing so much comment all over the country has been seen in Fort Worth; at least there are some good citizens who declare they witnessed its appearance last night.

L. E. James says he saw it land in the city park last night [*April 17*], when a man at least seven feet tall [*exaggeration ?*] alighted from it and appeared to be fastening some ropes after which he boarded it again when it swiftly arose and soon disappeared from view.

J. E. Johnson at the Natatorium says he saw it plainly last night passing over the city.

Word comes from Stephenville that the editor of a paper there saw it near the earth and tried to interview the man conducting it and was informed that he had not time to talk.

Leading astronomers agree that what all have been calling an airship is nothing but a star in the constellation Orion and is so near the horizon that the axial movement of the earth makes it appear that the star is rapidly moving. This is all there is to the airship except where practical jokers have sent up balloons (*Dallas Times Herald*, April 20, 1897).

Many of the accounts speak of direct contact with the airship crews and also of seeing the airship as it glides overhead at various altitudes, changing direction, speeding up and slowing down, etc—hardly the same movement one expects from a twinkling star seen on the horizon. The astronomers do not advance any argument to buttress their illfounded conclusion that everyone is seeing stars "near the horizon." If they left the seclusion of their observatories at night and peered into the sky with naked eyes, they may have discovered the truth for themselves.

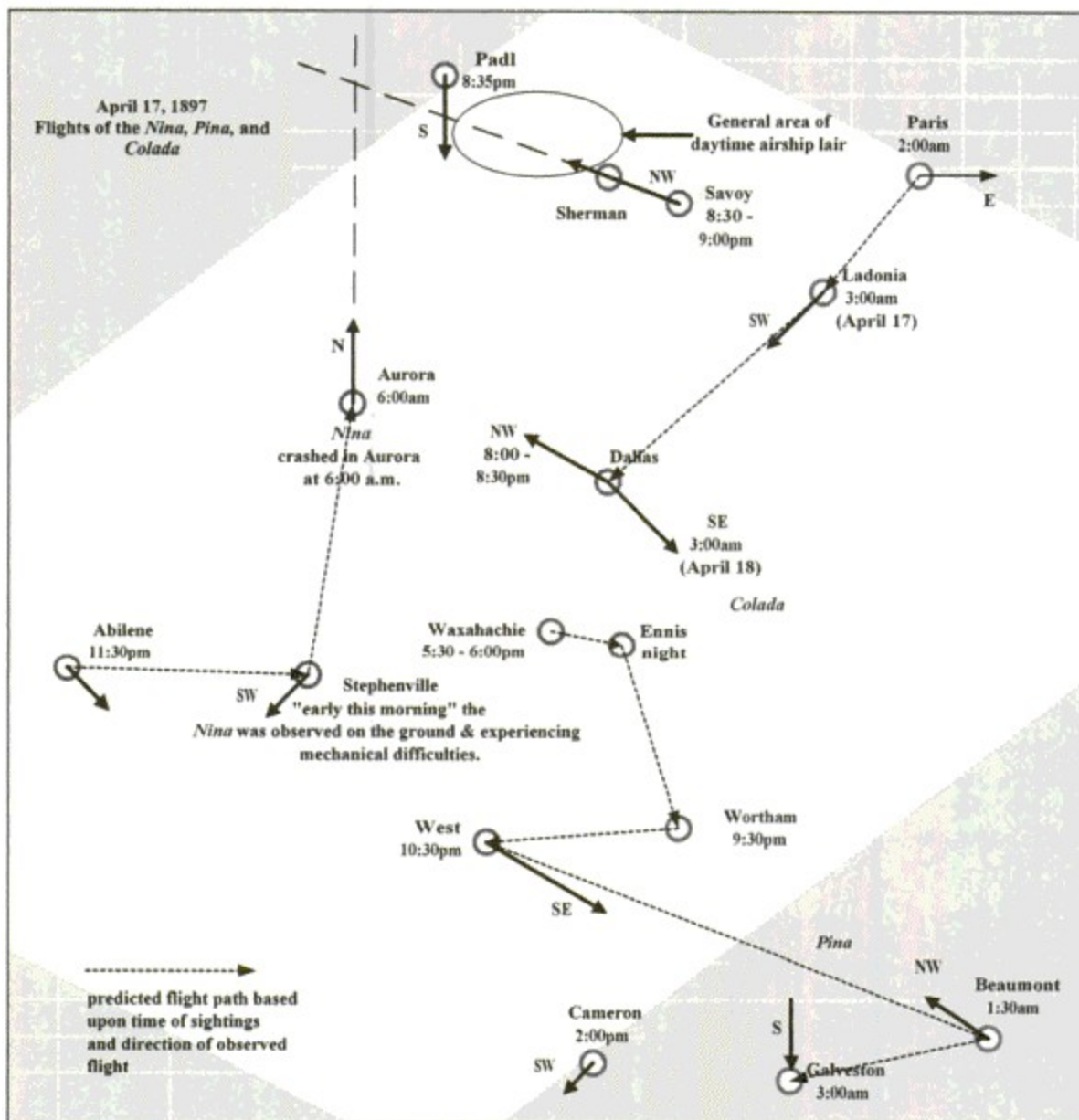
Actually, when you read the great body of newspaper accounts from other states, documenting the travels of the airships before they arrived in Texas, you realize the term "leading astronomers" refers to people far removed from the places of the sightings. How did secluded and faraway "leading astronomers" know what Texans were seeing? I suppose when they looked up in the sky inside or outside their observatories, many miles from Texas, all they saw were planets, stars, etc. It should come as no surprise that such experts would debunk the existence of airships.

AIRSHIP HERE!

Abilene's Attractions Were To Great for the New vessel to Stay Away.

Saturday's Reporter registered a big kick because no one in the up-to-date town of Abilene had seen the airship, and our people came bravely to the rescue. At 11:30 Saturday night [April 17] two of our watchmen saw the monster bird hovering over the city, its passengers evidently taking an observation. The gentlemen were enabled to see that it corresponded largely with descriptions given at other places, only it was somewhat larger, its *length being about 700feet*. Windows on the side next to the observers were brilliantly lighted and *faint strains of music* were heard as if from a powerful orchestra. Evidently the passengers were engaged in a pleasant hop, and enjoying themselves to in a highly satisfactory manner. After a few minutes the aerial party started off in a southwesterly direction, and went at a *terrific speed*, but just before it faded from sight it turned to the southeast, and was almost immediately out of sight. No doubt the mysterious visitor will come again, as the attractions of this country by moon light are so great that the passengers will want to see it again. Tonight Mr. Ed Harris and others will keep a sharp lookout, and when they see it will get a more accurate description (*Abilene Reporter*, April 20, 1897, p. 2).

The previous descriptions typically refer to the length as 150 to 200 feet, although some accounts mention an airship 75 feet long. Two previous accounts estimate the length at 500 feet and now this account states the length was 700 feet. What were the actual lengths? I believe two airships were in the 150-to 200-foot range and one was in the 75-foot range. I think the 500- and 700-foot estimates are gross overestimates of the ISO- to 200-foot airships, or maybe there was a fourth, much larger, airship. But, we can only account for three in the Texas sightings.



April 17, 1897, sightings

The scattered sightings of the airships on the night of April 17 indicate that a search for the crashed airship was underway in the direction of Galveston and Beaumont. The two remaining airships roamed the countryside on the night of the seventeenth looking for the tardy airship that did not return the previous night. Unknown to the other crews, the missing ship had crashed that morning in Aurora. The other crews would not read about the fateful crash in the newspaper until April 19. The pattern of sightings indicates a systematic search of the region between Beaumont and San Antonio. It seems reasonable that the other two ships would continue searching until they read of the crash in the paper.

MR. SMITH'S AIRSHIP.

This One Carried 10 or 12 passengers, Wearing Easter Bonnets.

Mr. L. G. Smith, steward at the Hermitage Hospital, at 3 o'clock Sunday morning [April 18] saw the mysterious airship. He said he was on the upper veranda looking south when he discovered an immense shadow falling across town. This was followed by brilliant streams of light, which came from a rapidly approaching object of oblong shape, coursing also downward and from the east. The velocity was lessened and suddenly the vessel rested upon the spire of the federal building. From his position Mr. Smith could see through the windows *small but decorative apartments*, and was sure that *8 or 10 passengers* were aboard. Several were *ladies dressed in handsome Easter costumes*. The stop occupied about three minutes. Two men came to the outside. One descended to the steeple, presumably to drop a letter, while the other, with lanterns in hand, *appeared to be applying oil* at the junction of the wings.

Mr. Smith states that he hastily aroused his wife, but before she could reach him the mysterious pilgrim was away, going toward the

south, leaving in its journey Oak Cliff, immediately to the left
(*Houston Post*, April 22,1897; *Terrell Times-Star*, April 30,1897).

Several accounts in which the pilot or captain of the airship is interviewed by the observer give the crew and passenger capacity as ten people, and another account gives the capacity as twenty. Note the different numbers given in the headline and the body of the account for the amount of passengers, a curious transposition of the facts.

TABLE 8
April 17, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/17/97	Beaumont	TX	1:00 A.M.	SE to NW	Slowly	Very high	DMN 4/18/97
4/17/97	Paris	TX	2:00 A.M.	E			AAS 4/18/97
4/17/97	Galveston	TX	3:00 A.M.	S	Swiftly	Approx. 250 ft	GN 4/18/97
4/17/97	Stephenville	TX	Early morning	SW			DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Aurora	TX	6:00 A.M.	N	10-12 mph		DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Cameron (Milam County)	TX	2:00 P.M.	SW	Fearful speed	Very low	DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97 SAE 4/20/97
4/17/97	Waxahachie	TX	5:30-6 P.M.		At rest	On the ground	DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Dallas	TX	8-8:30 P.M.	NW	Moved swiftly		DTH 4/18/97
4/17/97	Padl (north of Paul's Valley)	OK	8:35 P.M.	S	45-50 mph	¼ mile	DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Savoy (Fannin County)	TX	8:30-9 P.M.	NW			DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Wortham (Freestone County)	TX	9:30 P.M.	Straight up			DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97	West (McLennan County)	TX	10:30 P.M.	SE	Almost meteorlike speed	Not over 500 ft	DMN 4/19/97 GN 4/19/97
4/17/97 (see 4/18/97 below)	Dallas	TX	Night	SE			DMN 4/18/97
4/17/97	Ennis	TX	Night				DMN 4/19/97
4/17/97	Abilene	TX	11:30 P.M.	SW then SE			AR 4/20/97
"about 10 days ago"	near Beaumont	TX	10:00 P.M.		On the ground		NODP 4/25/97

Note: *DMN = Dallas Morning News* *DTH = Dallas Times Herald*
 AAS = Austin American Statesman *AR = Abilene Reporter*
 GN = Galveston News *NODP = New Orleans Daily Picayune*
 SAE = San Antonio Express

TABLE 9
April 18, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/18/97	Dallas	TX	3:00 A.M.	SE			DMN 4/20/97 DTH 4/20/97

CHAPTER 8

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 1897

There are nine reported sightings for the night of April 18. The sporadic sightings imply the airships were searching for something—perhaps, the airship that crashed and burned in Aurora? We continue with their stories.

Editorial comment: At last the lights of the mysterious airship have been seen in Texas. It would be a mistake to suppose that Texas has no reputable citizens after dark (*Houston Post*, April 18, 1897).

Editorial comment: The airship epidemic is spreading, but it is believed that the purity of the San Antonio brewery products serves as an effectual quarantine (*San Antonio Express*, April 18, 1897, p. 12).

The social fad now in swell Kansas society is the airship party ("Snapshots," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897).

CAUSING TALK

Denton, Denton Co., Tex April 17—The airship reports of which have appeared in the news from this and so many other points is causing a great deal of talk here although many still prefer to believe that it is a *gigantic hoax* [*It would take quite a large conspiracy among many disparate people from diverse professions and widespread regions to perpetuate such a gigantic hoax*] ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

It would take quite a large conspiracy among many disparate people from diverse professions and widespread regions to perpetuate such a "gigantic" hoax. I don't think so.

TRUTHFUL' SCULLY CORROBORATED

Fort Worth, Tex. April 17 -'Truthful'Joe Scully of the Texas and Pacific force is in this city from his run. All day he had been asked concerning the airship. Seen by a News man tonight, he said:

"I did not think that The News reporter was going to quote me at Dallas, but he told the truth. On the dead, I saw that ship, and if a man says I ever took a drink or did not see that ship, just give me his name and I will give him my attention. People don't think these things are coming but they are and one of them is already here. I saw it."

Superintendent Leroy Trice of the road, so Scully says, has admitted to him privately that he had also seen it. Scully says:

"Trice told me to say nothing about this matter, just like I told The News man at Dallas, and of course, I told him I would not. Now this ain't for publication."

Col. Gaston Meslier of the Texas and Pacific here from Dallas said today:

"When I used to live in Alabama some years ago I heard of airships but I never dreamed that such things existed until such men as Trice, Scully, and Dunlap, told of their seeing them. I never go behind the returns in matters of this kind. *Their accredidness* [sic] *is on a par with that of election returns*" ("High in the Heavens, *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

Well, maybe Colonel Meslier should have "gone behind the (election) returns" if he thought the stories were "on a par with that of election returns." Too many dead people are known to have voted in this century for us to believe election returns are anything but suspect. [Dead people in Chicago are notorious for removing themselves from their dark abodes and attending to that most basic of all human freedoms. Must be the Chicago water.]

SENTIMENT AT ENNIS

Ennis, Ellis Co., Tex April 17—People here are deeply interested in the published accounts of the airship as seen and reported from various points. Some are imposed to treat the matter as a huge sensational joke, while others believe that it is a reality ("High in the Heavens," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1897, p. 4).

AERIAL NAVIGATION

The New York Mail and Express says "no matter what may be finally discovered as to the 'airship' recently reported by several credible citizens in the various states, yet there is reason to believe that the day is not far distant when aerial navigation will be one of the solved problems." It will be remembered that a little over a year ago the great American inventor, Mr. Hiram Maxim constructed in England an airship under very favorable conditions. With a mechanical genius to suggest the details, a corps of skilled workmen to carry out the plans, plenty of capital to obtain the best materials, and an absolutely perfect workshop provided with tools and instruments of precision and accuracy, the most wonderful airship of its type was completed and tried. This type was the aero-plane, the adjustable planes having a superb arrangement. For every two pounds of weight of engine and sailor, a horsepower was produced. The two large propeller wheels gave speed and direction to the ship. The only question which seemed to him not exactly solved was that of equilibrium. A trial was made but an accident happened which prevented a perfect test. But up to this time, so far as known, Mr. Maxim has not produced the "flying machine."

And so it has been with all the experiments, there is always "some little thing" lacking for successful operation. The largest number of patents issued for these machines has been after the artificial bird type, which consists of a waist belt having connected thereto bat-like wings, a brace extending from the belt upward to the neck of the operator and carrying a transverse yoke, which is grasped and vibrated to assist in flapping the wings. The machines operate successfully for descent from even high altitudes, but are failures for ascending and directing purposes.

About four years ago a very elaborate airship was patented by a Chicago inventor, being similar in shape to a steam ship, with state rooms, galleries, etc., lighted by electricity and propelled by firing explosive cartridges by electric current from the stern of the boat. It has not however proven a success.

Although failures have down to date been the story, much progress has been made in this line since the days of Montgolfier, Cavello, Blanchard, and others, who had similar experiences with the people in France and Portugal who looked upon balloons and their navigators with great superstition.

Dr. Depaw says a fortune of millions awaits the man who can and who possibly will soon solve the problem that will permit a transportation business without requirements of rights of way, bridges, trackage, etc. If there is any young gentleman sailing around Texas and other states, he might apply to the Doctor without further delay (*Dallas Times Herald*, April 18, 1897).

AT ATLANTA

Atlanta, Texas, April 19.—There was excitement here to-day, caused by a visitation last night [*April 18*] by the mysterious airship. It was first seen by Jim Nelson, a farmer, living one and a half miles west of here. He had walked out into his yard just after midnight, when his attention was attracted by a peculiar noise, and looking up he discovered the mysterious aerial traveler. It seemed to be *descending straight* to the earth with *great rapidity* and Mr. Nelson's hair stood on end with fright, as he mistook it for a meteor and momentarily expected it to strike the earth, explode and blow himself, his family and earthly possessions into eternity. But when within two or three hundred feet of the earth it paused for an instant, coming to a *sudden stop*, almost like a heavy weight falling till it reached the end of a rope restraining it, then it moved off at a *rate of speed* about equal to that of an *ordinary passenger train*, in the direction of the 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 courses. 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 Bangos, Dr. Connerly, Chesa Meyers, Tom Swint, Doc Hogan, Paul Dunkin, R. T. Cops and Mr. Huffmaster, night operator, all are reported to have seen the ship, and verify the statement and description given by Booths and Wicks.

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 a trial trip (Appeared under the main headline "Seen at Belton," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897).

When first seen by Jim Nelson there were "only faint gleams of red, green and blue lights, but just after starting off horizontally it shot out a glaring gleam of white light, which was directed towards the earth in front of the airship at an angle of about 45 degrees, and lighted a circle about 30 feet in diameter as bright or brighter than the noonday sun." *[The Post adlibbed: This great light and its wonderful power is supposed to have been a search light.]*

While passing over the city the speed of the airship was from five to fifteen miles per hour. It showed up just before reaching the business part of the city, and in passing over this portion 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 can not be questioned. It is impossible to give all opinions, *but one that seems to be worthy of consideration is that this airship is the property of a gang of cracksmen, who by the aid of the searchlight and X-Rays, under the managements 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* (Appeared under the main headline, "Seen at Belton," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897; and *Terrell Times Star*, April 30, 1897).

This is the first account that mentions blue lights associated with the airships.

There are no accounts of bank robbers getting away in an airship, nor is there any corroborating evidence to support the supposition that the airship crewmen were robbers and the airship was their getaway vehicle. The editor or correspondent of this account is daydreaming about the crews' motives.

A FILIBUSTERING EXPEDITION

Hearne, Robertson Co., Tex., April 18. Hearne has had a visitation from the mysterious airship, and to such an extent were the remarkable workings revealed that those privileged to view this mechanical wonder pronounce the nocturnal navigator no longer a mystery. The News man interviewed a prominent young druggist this morning, who beyond a doubt has seen the machine, whose purposes he plainly explains. Its description is a clear counterpart of those already given in The News. His vision was at 2 o'clock this morning [April 18] at very close range, the ship being barely above the treetops. By the uncertain electric light he was enabled to decipher *a number of Spanish words* painted on the bow or fore end of the monster, and while not fully understanding the meaning, he is sure the aerial ship is equipping a filibustering expedition to Cuba ("The Mysterious Airship," *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

The Spanish connection again. Unfortunately, the Spanish words are not given in this or any other known account. There is a reasonable explanation for a Spanish connection. A discussion of the issue is presented in the final chapters.

LANDED ON THE BRAZOS

Caldwell, Tex., April 19,.—There has been much agitation and discussion here for the last few days concerning the airship. It is said that some reliable darkies in the Brazos bottom saw it yesterday afternoon [*April 18*]. It showed up and settled down on the banks of the river and took a supply of water. Two of the sailors captured a colored man who was hoeing cotton near by and carried him off on the ship because he was working on Sunday. It steamed away to the east and was soon out of sight. The News man can not verify this, as he can not spend the time necessary to find the parties who saw it. Some have been watching here hoping to get a glimpse of the aerial monster, but it has not yet come in sight of Caldwell. This is and has been a local option town since last summer and the nearest saloon is two miles away ("The Latest Airship Jokes," *Galveston News*, April 20, 1897).

I don't know what to make of this account, other than it is a false report given by an individual who does not like to see people working on Sundays, possibly a religious fanatic. The individual is hoping to frighten those people who do work on Sundays into limiting their Sabbath activities.

HE HAS A SOLUTION

Alvin, Brazoria Co., Tex., April 19.—Major Buck thinks he has *solved the airship problem*. Yesterday [April 18] he saw a large vulture or buzzard with streamers hanging to his tail, to which he thinks a light had been attached. The heavens are closely watched by the credulous for a glimpse of the mysterious visitor ("The Latest Airship Jokes," *Galveston News*, April 20, 1897).

I grew up in the wilds of north-central Texas along Red River. From an early age I observed vultures, or buzzards, as they are known, going to roost at sunset. They do not fly about after dusk but go perch on the highest fixed object they can find in their hunting range. Perhaps, someone captured this particular bird, tied a lantern to its tail, then set it loose after dark, I suppose in its haste to remove itself from its human tormentor, it would rise to some height and fly straight away to its roost or other high promontory. For the unwary, such a sight might be mistaken for an airship sailing away in the night. But, it is not possible for the "airship mystery" to be solved with the explanation that all the bright and colored lights were buzzards with lights or fires attached to their tails. However, as the sightings continued day after day, there were more than one or two attempts to fool the population with some manner of fake airship. The fakes were usually readily identifiable as such. Read on to discover how readily identifiable, and sometimes dangerous, faked airships were.

THAT AIR SHIP

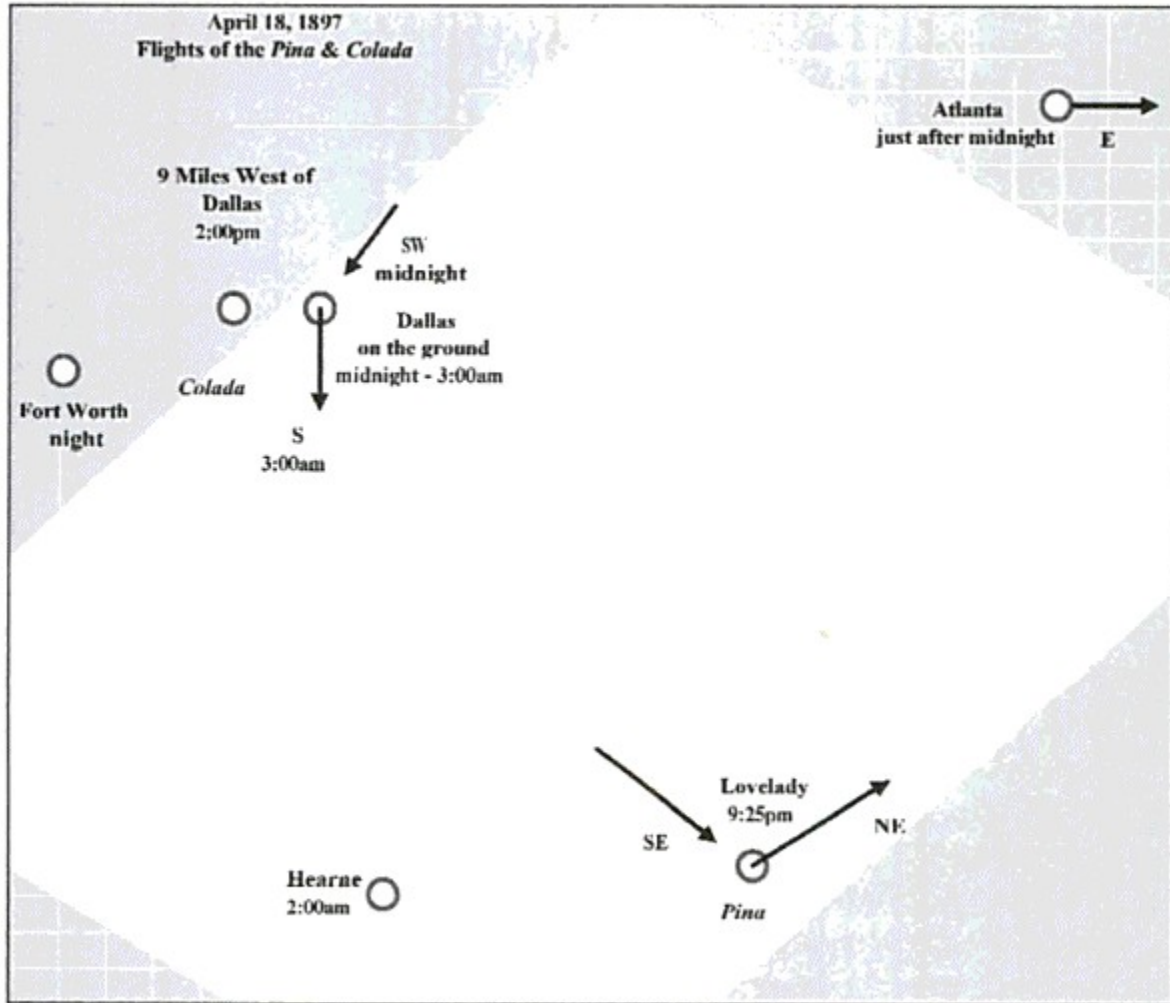
Passed Over Bryan Sunday Night, Going North.

Bryan, Texas, April 19.—The mysterious airship of which so much has been said of late, passed over Bryan last night [*April 18*] A number of people declare they saw it. It was going north ("That Airship," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897).

EATS PEACHES AND SMOKES HAVANAS

Lovelady, Texas, April 19.—J. H. Johnson, bookkeeper for the firm Malner & Monday of this town, at 9:25 last night [*April 18*] saw an object which must have been the much talked off airship. He says it was 250 feet above the trees and when first seen in the northwest it was traveling at a very rapid rate in a southeasterly direction and descending gradually. After crossing the International and Great Northern tracks about one-quarter of a mile north of town it quickly veered to the NE and rose rapidly to a great elevation, passing out of sight behind the clouds in a few minutes. He was so dazed by the sight that he is unable to give accurate details of its appearance, but says that it looked like a dragon fly in shape except that the wings were wide and curved instead of straight and narrow. A long cone-shaped attachment swung underneath and extended about two-thirds of the length of the machine, whose total length must have been *150 to 200 feet*. One *green light* was visible when the object first came into sight, but after its courses change to the NE no lights were seen. *An object resembling a man was seen in the lower attachment and could be plainly seen moving about*. About the time the machine passed over the railroad track the rattle of tin was heard, and Mr. Johnson, in company with Mr. W. J. McGwire, proceeded to the spot, and, after considerable search, found onehalf gallon peach can branded J. TV. Lusk and an empty cigar box ("Airship Spoken," *Galveston Daily News*, April 22, 1897, p. 4).

The estimated length of 150 to 200 feet is still consistent with previous accounts. Since the airship was approaching from the northwest, the green light was on the starboard, or right, side of the airship.



April 18, 1897, sightings

TABLE 10
April 18, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/18/97	Atlanta	TX	Just after midnight	E	Ordinary passenger train	200-300 ft	HP 4/22/97 TTS 4/30/97
4/18/97	Hearne	TX	2:00 A.M.			Barely above treetops	GN 4/19/97
4/18/97	Dallas	TX	Midnight-3:00 A.M.	From NE			DTH 4/18/97
4/18/97	Oak Cliff	TX	3:00 A.M.	S			HP 4/22/97 TTS 4/30/97
4/18/97	Lovelady	TX	9:25 P.M.	NW-SE then NE	Very rapid rate	250 ft above treetops	GDN 4/22/97
4/18/97	Fort Worth	TX	Night			Landed in city park	DTH 4/20/97
4/18/97	Grapevine Prairie	TX	2:00 P.M.	SE			DTH/DMN 4/20/97
4/18/97	Bryan	TX	Night	N			HP 4/22/97

Note: *HP = Houston Post*
 TTS = Terrell Times-Star
 GN = Galveston News
 DTH = Dallas Times Herald
 GDN = Galveston Daily News
 DMN = Dallas Morning News

TABLE 11
April 19, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/19/97	Galveston	TX	5:20 A.M.				GDN 4/20/97

The airship sightings on April 18, 1897, are sporadic and are clustered around two regions: Dallas and Lovelady. However, placing a bestfit line between the reported sightings results in the graph shown. Were the *Pina* and the *Colada* still searching for their missing sister ship?

CHAPTER 9

MONDAY, **A**PRIL 19, 1897

There are seventeen reported airship sightings for the night of April 19, including the first reported Louisiana sighting. The airships seem to expand their search area as they look for their missing sister ship. The Louisiana sighting is of particular interest because the identity of two airship players seems to be confirmed. The Louisiana newspaper article is included with the Texas sightings for the interest we have in the crew. The story continues

. . .

SNAPSHOTS

Airships are being seen even by citizens of prohibition towns. *[The separation between alcoholics, drunks, and other imbibers and airship observers was important to the credibility of the reports in the mind of many teetotalers in the pre-Prohibition days of 1897. Would we believe the UFO stories of hardcore drug addicts, junkies, drug dealers, social cocaine users, and marijuana smokers today? Probably not, but if a doctor, judge, or senator confessed to alien abduction, we might tend to give the reported incident at least the benefit of the doubt.]*

Fancy the disappointment of a man, who seeing an airship fall, flies to the spot and so lifting it up finds it to be a pair of exploded bloomers. *[What an entertaining thought!]*

The airship mystery of Kankakee seems now to be thoroughly understood. The dark object floating in the air fell down and the hundreds who rushed to see found a pair of huge bloomers.

If the McKinley cabinet is to be increased by the addition of a Secretary of the Atmosphere, some good Kansas man ought to be appointed.

The New Jersey airship was found to be a mosquito with foxfire on his neck.

THE AERIAL FLEET

We know that this is fishing time;
That snakes have come to threaten man;
That dreamers have begun to rhyme;
That Ananias lives again;
For signs and wonders fill the sky;
And airships through the heaven fly
(*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897).

The previous account consists of entertaining airship tales and poetic descriptions of air travel. The newspapers capitalized on the most newsworthy event of the time. The above tidbits are the editor's way of having a little fun with the subject.

A HOME-MADE ONE.

Plano, Collin Co. Tex., April 18.—The much talked of airship fell in Plano at 8:30 o'clock tonight and almost caused the destruction of Piano's large two-story public school building. It was first observed by Harris Wyatt coming from the southwest, and fell on the south gable of the schoolhouse building. Some parties who saw the big light on the roof of the building alarmed the citizens by shooting off firearms and with the cry "Fire. The School House is on fire." which brought out the whole town and emptied the churches of their congregations within a few minutes, but it all proved to be a dangerous hoax. In the shape of a large "turkey buzzard" with a bail of cotton twine saturated with turpentine tied to one of the bird's legs. The bird had alighted on the roof of the school building and from a distance it looked as if the south end of the roof was on fire, which was viewed by hundreds of persons, who were unable to do anything on account of the extreme height of

the building. In a few minutes after the people gathered around the school building the bail of cotton burned itself loose from the bird's leg and rolled off the roof to the ground where the ball of cotton burned brightly for several minutes. The bird flew off the roof as soon as it was relieved of its warm burden. Piano has witnessed all the airships she wants to, and would prefer that they would pass some other way, if they all prove as dangerous as this one did tonight (*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897, p. 5; *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

This is another entertaining airship tale for the audience's amusement. Faking an airship was not without its hazards. Burning down the school for the sake of a little excitement suggests the reivers did not think their plan out very thoroughly.

"Say, you people all know Shadbolt, manager of the Driskil, and are acquainted with his reputation for veracity. The fact that he is in the category with George Washington in this line, inclines me to take stock in these airship yams that are at present flooding the country. Shad asserts that while on the roof of the hotel last Monday night *[April 19]* engaged in taking clothes off the line, he was astonished first by a peculiar shrilling noise, followed immediately by a biff, bang, whiz, and a current of cold air that chilled him to the marrow. Dodging behind a chimney pot, he saw coming towards him a frightfully constructed cigar-shaped balloon, or something of that character. His heart was in his throat for a moment, but swallowing it with an effort, he sang out: 'ship ahoy!' A voice replied: 'Howdy! Is this Austin?' 'You're bloody right,' yelled Shad, whereupon the main guy on the flying monster called out: 'Stand by you lubbers, and let go that freight!' Something struck the roof, and the startled manager says as the thing went out of sight there was a man sitting cross-legged on the quarter deck, working a concertina and grinding out the music of 'Me 'art is true to Poll.' In the bundle which smelled of stale fish and a few decayed things of that kind, was a note stating 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."

"Now Shadbolt will not deny his fondness for potted cheese and a bleeding glass of 'alf and alf', but he says neither of these appetizers had the slightest connection with his experience on the roof. He's got the note, and the brick that came with it, and will take pleasure in showing it to his friends" (From a speech given April 20 by Col. Dink Botts to a group of his friends, *Austin Daily Statesman*, April 21, 1897).

This is another entertaining airship tale for the audience's amusement. This is obviously a fake story.

"THE AIRSHIP"

The airship that has been mystifying the public for the last month has turned out to be a veritable ship of air, made with timber (*possible*), propelled by steam (*not likely*) and controlled by human hands. It has been *seen upon the ground while being repaired* and alerter has been dropped by it in which its inventors claim that they have solved the problem of transportation in the air and also asserting that they have been voyaging all over the country and that it moves through the air at the rate of 150 miles an hour.

We suppose the inventors have taken this means of advertising their invention by exciting the curiosity of the public by sailing over cities at night and throwing out a strong flash light. This is, after all, the *most feasible solution of the mysterious vessel*, and if it is true—as it is *highly probable* it is, too many people have seen it to leave any further doubt—it will be the crowning mechanical conquest of the century. It seems to be managed with such ease as to give promise of immediate utility and we may conclude that before many years the "airship" will be quite as common a mode of travel as the electric cars [*goodforesight*). The latter dawned on us quite gradually and we were all prepared to believe in it, but this has been sprung upon us almost in

a night, exciting the greatest curiosity, and is destined just as suddenly to become practical.

What tremendous possibility the successful working of the airship opens up to us. It will be an additional extermination of distance and it will draw continents together as the railroad locomotives drew cities together [*wonderful foresight*]. It will oblivate all the dangers of ocean transportation and laugh at storms. [*Well, we have discovered that to be pretty much untrue*]. It will ensure safety in penetrating and exploring savage countries. [*Yes, they did*]. It may be the means of discovering the north pole and other continents (*very perceptive*). It will make war so dreadful that armies will be disbanded (*We wish. Airships just made war on civilians and children more socially acceptable.*) and ocean navies will be superseded by the commerce of the air. [*But, what about the supertanker and cheap gasoline?*]. There is no telling the extent of the great possibilities. [*Spaceflight and man walking on the moon*]. It will be a "nine days" wonder and then settle down into a practical fact (*Austin American Statesman*, April 19, 1897, p. 4).

The above article is loaded with perception and foresight. The author seems to take some delight in imagining what the world will be like when air transportation becomes a reality. It is interesting to read this article with the hindsight we have and compare it with our attempts to predict the future. No one in 1897 could foresee the great impact of automobiles and especially the petroleum industry on twentieth-century America. While many welcomed the chance to dismount from the bony backs of horses and take up a comfortable but occasionally jarring seat on a horseless carriage, few people really thought the multipurpose horse would become just an expensive family pet within thirty years. Prognosticators beware; who knows what lurks behind the next turn of the history page? Great editorial!

There is a great similarity between our viewpoint of space travel and the 1897 generation's viewpoint of air travel. They knew the problem of "aerial navigation" was going to be solved eventually. They just did not have a good fix on the date on which such a solution was going to spring forth. Today, we seem to be in a similar circumstance, as it is a common belief that we will soon solve the problem of "interplanetary navigation." I wonder if the first twenty years of the twenty-first century will be as fruitful for us as the first twenty years of the twentieth century were in yielding up solutions to the "aerial navigation" problem.

THE AIRSHIP

How the Phenomenon is Explained by different Classes.

NO TROUBLE TO ACCOUNT F'OR IT

Scientific American Announces Four Flying machines About Ready to be Launched.

Everything else is giving the right of way to the airship, and the newspapers having nothing in particular to write about are giving the strange craft all the space it wants.

All the papers quote some of their very best and most veracious citizens as averring that they have seen the ship. Many men in Dallas say they have seen the strange craft.

Sober, matter-of-fact people who can not gainsay the testimony of their neighbors, resort to the handy solution of saying it is a brand of cigarettes, the Nashville exposition, or a new snuff or fresh chewing gum, and that the explanation will be duly forthcoming by the advertisers who are sending up small balloons with lanterns attached.

Others, who are looking for a sign, say that the people, weary of being tied down to a dull materialism for so many generations, are beginning to look away from old forms and traditions that no longer satisfy with a yearning for something better and more suited to their

condition [Have we not heard this one before? Seems to be a common lament by certain segments of society in each generation.], and that they are seeing queer things. In fact, they can see whatever they are looking for. The French Academy has recently conducted some experiments which have demonstrated the fact that a person capable of concentrating his mind with great power on an object can throw that object on a sensitized plate where it is photographed. *[As I recall, this "parlor trick" was determined to be a hoax.]* It is on this principle that many persons can see whatever they wish to see in the embers, in the moon, the clouds or in the clear sky. The faculty of clairvoyance is developed by gazing fixedly into a glass of clear water until pictures and views of the unseen world are reflected from the mind into the water.

Another class of persons of a scientific turn say that it is about time for the problem of aerial navigation to be solved, and that they would not be surprised at any time to behold a genuine airship. A recent edition of the Scientific American stated that four different inventors in different parts of the country, each working under his own conception of the principle involved in flying, were about ready to launch their boats. So that each class of thinkers has its own explanation of the real or alleged phenomenon, and if thought is creative as some believe it to be, the concentration of the whole country on the airship ought to create one.

Whether there is or is not a ship wandering through the heavens, with or without rudder and compass, there is very little doubt that innumerable balloons with lights attached are being sent up nightly [to] sail over the country and that these balloons are being sighted and reported for the real or alleged airship.

Since the papers have been printing matters about nocturnal air navigation it is said that work has been resumed on all the flying machines in the country. There is hardly a town of any importance in America but has one or more men who have at one time or another attempted to construct a flying machine. *In Dallas alone it is said that work is progressing on four flying machines.* Scientists are agreed that the humble bee and a few other insects fly practically without wings, as their flight can in no wise be accounted for by their rudimentary excuse for wings. The humble bee thus adds a vexatious complication to the flying problem.

Many persons poke shallow fun at the phenomenon. They say it is the heirship to the Edwards estate; that the jim-jams have quit serpents and creeping things and shifted to that part of the menagerie represented by the followers of the air.

Whatever else there is about the matter, the whole country is stirred up over the phenomenon.

The Rocky Mountain News, of Denver, prints the following:

Yesterday afternoon people living on Seventeenth Street were startled by the discovery of a tiny paper parachute floating down from the heavens. It was made of tissue paper and thread and attached to it was a folded piece of paper. It reached the street near the Equitable building and was captured by some passerby. The folded paper attached was discovered to be a note, written with a lead pencil in a straggling hand, and read as follows: "This is dropped out in the hope that some one will find the note. We are in an airship, but are lost."

In their extreme agitation, the writers evidently forgot to sign their names. Upon deciphering the note, many people began to search the heavens with their eyes for the runaway airship. A small boy, who was first to see the fluttering parachute, announced that he saw something away up in the air a few minutes before. He thought it was a bird, but it was large and there was a stream of smoke behind it.

Word was sent to Captain Glassford of the signal service, and if he can discover anything that looks like a runaway airship floating around anywhere in the vicinity, he will dispatch Sergeant Baldwin with the big balloon from the fort in chase and if possible rescue the travelers who are lost.

The fact that a lost airship was roving over the city caused something of a sensation; and the parachute that brought the news, together with the note it contained, was brought to the news office {*Dallas Times Herald*, April 19,1897).

The note mentioned in this account is most likely a fake. It was not signed and the supposed airship from whence it came was nowhere to be seen. Only the boy who saw the parachute come down in the afternoon claims to have seen the airship. Denver was a good-sized town in 1897, and if an airship passed over the mile-high city in the bright light of the afternoon, others must have seen it. Yet, no one else made such a claim. I think someone was having a little fun.

THAT MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIP

Philadelphia Inquirer.

For some time past there have occasionally come stories of the appearance of an airship in widely separated parts of the western country. The first announcement of this character came from California, and since then the mysterious object is said to have been seen in Kansas City, Omaha and other cities. The stories were of the most circumstantial character; the truth of them was vouched for by persons of intelligence, whose veracity on other matters coming within their observation would not have been questioned, and all of them were agreed as to the particulars of what they saw and offered independent and corroborative testimony. In some instances it was simply claimed that what appeared to be the brilliant headlight or something in the sky had been seen, while other observers were confident that they saw the vessel and gave a description of its outlines and movement. Of course, there were many people who were incredulous as to the story and made it the subject of good-natured raillery.

The fact that the object was always seen by night was used as an argument against its existence; whereas, if some man has actually succeeded in perfecting an aerial contrivance, the most natural thing for him to do at first would be to test it after darkness had fallen, and secure secrecy for himself. And now comes the story that the directors of the transMississippi exposition to be held at Omaha have received a communication from a man who declares that he has invented an airship and that he will disclose his identity and come to the front if the directors will guarantee him 570,000 square feet of space. He declares that the ship will carry twenty people to a height of from 10,000 to 20,000 feet.

Because an airship such as that which he has described has never been constructed, it would be foolish to state that it never can be. In a story which is now appearing in a magazine the hero, who lived in this city during the revolutionary war, and who is supposed to have written the story years afterward, tells how difficult it was to reach Bryan Mawr from Philadelphia at the time that the army of Washington was in the neighborhood, and then speaks of the ease with which the trip could be made at the time of writing by a swift stage coach. This same man, although compelled to acknowledge that better means of travel had come, would never have believed in express trains, in steam ships and telegraphs. And as we, who know that they have come, are equally skeptical as to the accomplishment of aerial travel. One hundred years ago it would never have been dreamed that the land could be navigated as it is today and yet some people ridiculed the idea that the air could ever be navigated and look upon the idea as the dream of the visionary or the fool.

One by one the forces of nature are now rendering themselves to man what were once looked upon as miracles are now acknowledged to be simply the result of an acquaintance with and a mastery of natural laws, and, therefore, there is nothing that prevents invention and study that should be laughed at. The eyes of the people who claim

to have seen an airship may have seen them; the man who claims to have invented it may be a charlatan; but the world will yet, if we may judge from the marvelous progress of science and invention, see a contrivance of this character, while the people who laugh at the thought will acknowledge the simplicity of the vessel and wonder why it was not constructed a century earlier ("The Mysterious Airship," *Galveston News*, April 19, 1897).

What a great article. The Omaha exposition was important, and during this great event, an airship inventor did pilot an airship over a defined course with some degree of success. However, he was not party to any of the missions plowing through the Texas skies.

SEEN AT BELTON

Belton, Texas, April 20.—Last night [*April 19*] 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 this wonder spoke as they passed, but could not be understood on account of the velocity.

Belton people have been skeptical heretofore, but they now believe.

The race was so swift that no proper estimate could be formed as to dimensions; however, *about ten persons were distinctly seen* ("Seen at Belton," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897; *Terrell Times-Star*, April 30, 1897).

I wonder if the ten persons mentioned in this account included the financial backers of the airship project? It seems likely that any number of crewmen larger than the minimum number required to fly the airship would include the men who paid the bills.

Coming from the southwest implies it was going in a northeast direction.

AIRSHIP SPOKEN

Beltonites Felt the Breath of the Aerial Machine.

Belton, Bell Co., Tex., April 20.—The numerous accounts and reports appearing in the News for some time past regarding the airship have excited the curiosity of the people of this place to such an extent that last night [*April 19*] quite a number of responsible people of this place "laid for it," and at 11:30 o'clock, to their surprise and astonishment, she passed over Peay's Hotel, dipping low. Had she not passed to the left, the "New Surprise Show Tent," just in front of the hotel, would have been completely demolished. The passengers spoke, but the velocity was so great that no one could understand. The ladies, however, declared they recognized the voice and features of Shrader, the divine healer. From here the ship rose and was lost to view. The people here have been inclined to doubt the veracity of the existence of this aerial freak, but now, without a dissenting opinion, it is an actuality. It seemed to have reversed its former courses, traveling from southwest to northeast at great velocity (This story under the main headline "Airship Spoken" appeared in the Galveston Daily News, April 22, 1897, page 4)

AT LONGVIEW

Longview, Texas, April 20,—Last night [*April 19*] about 9:30, the Post correspondent and family on returning from church saw the socalled 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 zenith and rapidly transferred the heavens in an easterly direction ("Seen at Belton," *Houston Post*, April 22,1897; *Terrell Times-Star*, April 30,1897).

AT GROSEBECK

Grosebeck, Texas, April 20,—Mr. B. F. Johnson saw the mysterious airship last night [*April 19*], as did several of his neighbors ("Seen at Belton," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897; *Terrell Times-Star*, April 30, 1897).

HE SAW THE LIGHT

Alderman Haynes last night [April 19] informed the Statesman "mystery man" that he saw the strange light referred to in another column, seen by Mr. Cousins. Mr. Haynes says he stepped into the yard and suddenly he was blinded by a flash of light and then he saw a moving light that looked to him as if it were traveling over the capitol. He called Mrs. Haynes and the children, and all watched the strange light as it moved rather slowly in a westerly direction and disappeared (*Austin American Statesman*, April 20, 1897, p. 3).

SURE ENOUGH AIRSHIP

Lighted on East Mountain at Mineral Wells this A.M.

STATEMENT MADE BY THE CREW

Problems of Aerial Navigation Solved. Passing Glimpses of the
Strange Visitant Explained

Seeing the airship is becoming quite an industry. It is even being witnessed by the inhabitants of towns that have been "dry" these many years.

The stories told range from the above Ben Adhem style of narrative to fin de siecle romances that suggest the inspiration of a gifted scientific genius a la Ignatius Donely.

The airy visitant continues to hover on unwearied pinions in the blue arch of night, keeping good people out of their beds in the expectant hope that they may catch a glimpse of its patent headlight. It should be observed that the airship is a respecter of the city ordinances, as no accounts are mentioned where it is seen with its "lamp" out. This gentle dig at the local wheel men who scoot frantically about the streets in a lampless condition. Why someone hasn't taken a shot at the "thing" still remains a question. It is strange that some matter of fact scientist not troubled with any scruples hasn't drawn a bead on it like the man in Coleridge's maritime narrative, whose investigations took this practical form.

A number of young men and boys who have been "funny" all their lives have taken advantage of the amount of free advertising given the

aerial traveler by sending up toy balloons in order to widen the area of the airship's activity. It also promotes a Christian feeling among those people who, after descending knowingly upon its midnight beauties, are told by the parties to the hoax that they were only staring at a little balloon lit up by a cheap candle.

The airship is still a popular theme in the city and suburbs, and particularly in the country where the untutored agriculturist instead of manning the plow is sitting up late at nights watching the airship plow the heavens.

Airship parties are quite a fad in Oak Cliff now among the young lady collegians, it is said, ever since a popular educator in that favored suburb looked aloft and beheld the airship with all sails set exchanging winks with the "man in the moon."

But seriously enough, many citizens whose veracity is monumental have gazed at the bird of passage and then confided their impressions of it to the hypnotic editor.

Said Mr. Thomas Work, whose experience with plain drunks and peace disturbances (not airships) in the city court qualifies him to speak with some weight:

"The airship was sighted by my children and a large number of residents on Routh Street last night about 7 o'clock. It was scudding along right merrily with all sails set; seemed to be going in the direction of the hospital. I expect it had a quiet tip that Dr. Armstrong was at his office. Oh, yes; It was an airship all right. There was a filmy *red light* about the thing peculiarly uncanny and it was going at a *great rate of speed*."

James Williamson, the well known contractor of West Dallas, told city Judge Curtis Smith this morning just before the regular police

court festivities that he'd "seen it."

"Seen what?" said the city judge.

"Why, the airship, to be sure," said Mr. Williamson reproachfully.

"It passed my homelike a house afire about 9 o'clock last night [*April 19*]. It had a dark, piratical cut and chased through the ether at the rate of about 200 miles an hour. So swiftly did it move that the eye was unable to follow it in its flight."

"Yes; it was no funeral procession, I expect." said Judge Smith absently.

Alf Nussbaumer, B. O Marshall and William Boll, Jr., were hunting on Grapevine prairie nine miles west of Dallas Sunday afternoon when the airship discovered itself to these nimrods. Neither Mr. Marshall nor Mr. Nussbaumer could be found at their usual places of business to-day.

Mr. Boll was seen, however, and asked to describe his sensations, which he did only regretting that Mr. Nussbauer, who was much affected by the sight, was not present to tell about it.

We had just sat down to dinner." said he, "and were meditating upon the number of Easter hats we missed seeing by not going to church. Suddenly casting up our eyes, we beheld a long cylindrical body moving with fearful velocity through a nearly cloudless sky. It's general appearance was white. We could plainly discern two wings, one at each side, which looked like those of a great bird. The contrivance was, I should judge, sixty feet long and there was a wheel behind. Save the wings, which moved with a rapidity that was uncanny, we could discern no signs of life about it. It was going toward the southeast and we watched it till it disappeared.

"Now, this is no joke. We had no drinkables of any kind for dinner and we are all willing to make affidavit that it happened just as I tell you. Mr. Nussbaumer, I understand, is going to commit the impression of it to writing."

Even more circumstantial accounts of the "ship" are given below:

Col. W. C. Wolf, living on Wolf Trail in North Dallas, states that at 7:45 o'clock last night, he, his two sons and about a dozen of his neighbors, saw a bright headlight pass over that quarter of the city with a whirring whizzing noise, and disappear in a northwesterly direction. He says he could see nothing but the light, which appeared to be fully a mile high.

Mr. Jeff Hightower, head man in D. H. Howard's New York store in Mineral Wells is in the city to-day. He says that at 4 o'clock this morning [April 20] the *airship landed on East Mountain*, and that a number of citizens of the Wells went up and talked to the man and inspected the ship from the outside. They were not permitted to enter the craft. The ship is shaped like a cigar, eighty feet long, with a paddle wheel at each end and on each side. The crew informed the citizens that they had sold the invention to a New York syndicate for big money provided they first made a trip from New York to Liverpool with it, and that before tackling the Atlantic they would make three or four successful trips between New York and San Francisco. They said they were having a lot of trouble holding the craft in a straight course, and their experiments to overcome this trouble were detaining them in the south west. The crew promised the citizens they would return and hover over the town at 10 o'clock to-night, which is the occasion of the opening of the Crazy Well. Mr. Hightower, whose name ought to make him an authority in matters of this kind, says there is no joke or jolly about the ship, that the best people in Mineral Wells saw the craft and conversed with the crew (*Dallas Times Herald*, April 20, 1897).

THE LATEST AIRSHIP JOKES

Hanging Around Galveston

Tom Moore a young man who draws the thirst-slaking soda from a fountain at Schott's, announced yesterday morning [*April 19*] that the airship was passing over the city. Charles Schott, night clerk at the store, was on the rear upper gallery.

"I saw a big, white object for a minute," said Mr. Schott last night, 'but I was unable to follow it in its flight, because my vision was obstructed by the buildings. It appeared to be passing above the Tribune building, and when I first saw it the front end was a little beyond the alley, and the rear end almost where the entrance to the stair way is located, so I judge it to be about 75 feet long. It appeared to roll over slowly, and was pretty well up in the air. It was moving south. It was just at 8:30 this morning.

Moore says he could hear a buzzing noise as it passed along.

A boy in Schott's last night said he overheard a party of gentlemen, some of whom he knows by sight, on K and Twenty-first street, say that they saw the airship during the day. Sergeant Jack Pither, they say, called their attention to it, but when asked about it last night, Pither denied having seen any airship ("The Latest Airship Jokes," *Galveston News*, April 20, 1897).

AIRSHIP SEEN IN BRYAN

The Crowning Marvel of the Nineteenth Century.

SEEN HERE LAST NIGHT.

Three Brave Young Men and What They Saw

Three well known and reliable young men of this city had perhaps the strangest experience last night [*April 19*] that has come athwar t [*sic*] the history of any trio of human beings, exclusive of miracles, since the world began. They are none other than Messrs. J. C. Minkert, Dr. Chas. Edge and Dick Jones, three young professional men in whose truth and veracity most any one in the city has the utmost confidence.

As given to an Eagle reporter at a very late hour last night, these young men's experience may be briefly told as follows:

Mr. Minkert was awakened from peaceful slumber sometime after midnight by a bad case of toothache and immediately dressed and sought a dentist. In the utmost distress, he was proceeding to Dr. Edge's dental office, when he met Mr. Jones, returning at a rather late hour from some consultation on legal matters with a brother lawyer. Joining Mr. Minkert, together they sought the dentist. The latter was found and relief soon given the sufferer. And now began the strange experience which was related to the writer by one of the party. Mr. Jones discovered a bright light through the open window, and speaking of it, the attention of the three was directed to a strange object approaching through the heavens, from a southern direction. Watching with breathless surprise and interest, the celestial object was now seen approaching rapidly, while apparently getting lower. Now it was near enough to detect that it was a large body with apparently two lights, one at each end of a long, ship-like object. The light in front was extremely bright and dazzling. Coming approximately within a mile or two of town, the body hovered and apparently swung a great searchlight around and then moved off eastward, so it seemed, and stopped, remaining still for at least ten minutes, while the most brilliant light they ever saw flashed repeatedly in various directions. The observer thinks it was directly over the A&M College. The object was now so far from them that not much could be seen of it except the two lights. Then all at once a fluttering motion was faintly discerned, and the strange apparition began to fly up into the heavens, and move northward. It now began to be more plainly seen. Plainer and plainer it became, until at last almost stopping again, half mile south of town, it showed what its true nature is. *A long cigar-shaped body, with many windows and openings through which pale lights streamed forth, with great wings protruding from each side, and an immense fanshaped rear projection.* This formidable dragon-looking celestial vision hovered over the city, then presently moved slowly away toward the eastern suburbs. This movement effected the wonderful apparition out of sight

of our three nocturnal sightseers, (who looked from a southern window). For many moments, not a word had been spoken, Jones now turned to the others with a white face and eyes as large as saucers, while Dr. Edge caught his breath and said:

"Well, I'll be ...

Minkert said he would too, and a consultation resulted in a quiet march to the other side, for a better view.

Outside, again the aerial monster loomed up, now almost stationary, and slowly descended to earth. Down it went, below the houses and tree tops, and out of sight, except for its lights brightening up the surrounding atmosphere.

One behind another, our young adventurers began a silent march toward the strange visitor. Jones led, the dentist came next with his forceps in hand, while Minkert brought up the rear. Over the hill and out of town they went, and discovered, in the Claude Mitchell pasture, what at first seemed a great ocean vessel sitting on dry land, a hundred miles from deep water—with great wing like sails folded up, an immense tail, a great wing or rudder underneath, but not touching ground, the vessel being supported upon great pillars projecting down from its sides. Streaming from many windows was a pale light, while the great light in front was turned off. Around the cigar-shaped body of the ship extended a deck or platform, and walking about on this were discerned numerous people, while inside and up among the sails, workmen were busy making repairs.

One young man realized they were in the presence of the famous airship, and longed for J. W. Leigh to see it, so he could have a tale to tell sure enough.

The question of drawing near or retreating was discussed.

Dr. Edge remembered that he had left his door open. Jones thought it was time for him to retire, as he seldom keeps late hours, while Minkert feared he would catch cold in his jaw. So they hesitated. But they circled around, and gradually got nearer. Presently, without warning, the searchlight flashed out like lightning, and they were caught. Blinded by its brilliance, they fell over each other into a mud hole, and crawling out found themselves "taken in" by a *small squad of foreigners*, and dragged up to the monster of the upper regions. They really found no cause for fear, however, and now began to see sights indeed. A man who could talk English was summoned from the cabin and came out to talk and exchange neighborhood news, as it were, and do the honors of the ship.

They now found that a party of English *millionaires and French scientists had built this strange craft and three more like it*, and were taking a cruise around the world, having kept the secret of their enterprise for the novelty of the thing. The *motive power of the machine was electricity*, of course, and the search light was a 20,000 candle power electric light. Taken aboard, they were being shown the sights when Jones asked with considerable anxiety how long they were scheduled to stop in Bryan.

"We are now ready to move," said the engineer.

Then a wild scramble for the outside was made by the Bryan delegation, but the aerial navigators were not ready for them to go. Besides inventors and electricians, there were professors of more occult sciences on board. Prof. Sven Boydgollybros was summoned and with a wave of the hand, they were put to sleep. They were told to open their eyes and watch the proceedings. The button was pressed; the *fifty thousand horse power engine [impossible in 1897]* began to work; the great wings began to stir; the crew of pilots grappled their steering apparatus; the familiar scenes of earth faded from view, one of the boys swallowed a Taylor & Cox drink check as he caught his breath after looking out, the ship was pointing toward the north star and was bidding farewell to earth and things earthly when the professor of hypnosis snapped his fingers, sounding like a gunshot in a graveyard. Then the spell changed, and the boys turned and looked at the crowd. They were sitting by a table in the Kandy Kitchen [*Bryan headquarters for airship news*] while a party of Bryan amateur hypnotists were laughing at them, and the Flying Dutchman of the skies sailed on (*Bryan (Texas) Daily Eagle*, April 20, 1897, p. 4).

The above account is obviously one of a fake sighting. Seems like everyone was starting to have some fun with the airship news, even hypnotists.

A PHENOMENAL STAR

Texarkana, Bowie County, Tex., April 20.—The belated population of Texarkana were greatly excited last night [*April 19*] over the appearance in the heavens of a star of magnificent brightness. To a fixed gaze it had the appearance of vacillating in its proportions and some of the lookers-on swore that they could see it move from place to place. The star threw a bright light the color of an arc-electric, and at times it dazzled the sight in like manner. It was a scene beautiful to behold and was admired for hours by many (*Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1897, p. 7).

The airships were not known for taking hours to proceed from horizon to horizon. It may be that the above sighting was actually the planet Venus.

INSPECTED THE AIR SHIP

Beaumont Man Saw The mystery at Close Range Conversed With The
travelers. Says it Is propelled by Four Big Wings, Electricity Being the
Power Used

Beaumont , Texas, April 20.—Mr. J. R. Ligon, local agent for the Magnolia brewery of Houston, this afternoon informs the Post correspondent that the airship visited Beaumont Monday night [April 19], and that he not only saw the flying machine, but he had a chance to inspect it from the outside and conversed with one of the men who was traveling in it. "I and my son Charley drove home at 11 o'clock Monday night," said Mr. Ligon, "and were unhitching the horse when we saw lights in the Johnson pasture, a few hundred yards distance. We went there to investigate and discovered four men moving around a large dark object, and when I hailed them they answered and asked if they could get some water. I told them that they could. They came to my house, each bringing two baskets, and after filling them, started to return. I accosted one of the men and he told me his name was Wilson and that he and his companions were traveling in a flying machine. They were returning from a trip out on the gulf and were now headed toward Iowa where the airship was built."

Mr. Ligon says he accompanied the men to the ship, and describes it as being *130 feet long and 20 feet wide. It was propelled by four large wings, two on either side, and steered by propellers attached to the bow and stem, electricity being the power used. The hull of the ship is made of steel and contains apartments into which compressed air is pumped when the ship is in action. The ship carries a water ballast that is pumped to the bow when it is desired to bring the vessel to the*

earth and to the stern when the course is skyward. Mr. Ligon says the workings of the ship were thus described to him by the man Wilson, who also stated that this ship was only one of five that had been built in a quiet Iowa village (Houston Daily Post, April 21, 1897, p. 7; Bastrop [Louisiana] Advisor, April 24, 1897, p. 6).

The airship crew member states that their ship is one of five built. Incredible as one successful flying machine in 1897 seems, news of five is just astounding. Could five have actually been built? We will explore the possibility in the final chapters.

So far, this account and several others are the only evidence that any airships were built in a "quite Iowa village." Was Mr. Wilson lying about the origins of the airships in the attempt to thwart possible claim jumpers? Perhaps Mr. Wilson did build his airship in a quiet Iowa village. To learn more about this Iowa village, you must read on.

Rice, Texas, April 19.—This morning [*April 19*] at 7:00 o'clock what is supposed to be the "airship" touring in the South was seen at this place, moving in an easterly direction at a very rapid rate. Several citizens of this place viewed it with perplexed curiosity.

It was only in sight a few moments and disappeared as quickly as it came ("That Airship," *Houston Post*, April 22, 1897).

WAS ABOARD AN AIRSHIP

THE FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE MODERN INVENTION TO
BE PUBLISHED SAN FRANCISCO—New York

Travel to be Revolutionized Within Two Years Speed at 1,000 Miles In
Eight Hours.

Richmond, Fort Bend Co., Tex. May 7.—To The News : The tragic death by the flood near Grenada, Miss., last Tuesday of the writer of the following letter has induced its recipient to allow The News to publish it. The gentleman to whom it was written is Dr. D. H. Tucker, physician at the state farm in this county, and is a man of unimpeachable character and, unquestioned veracity, and he pronounces the author of the letter a man of like reputation. He and the doctor were college mates and he was a young man of scientific turn of mind and had devoted considerable time to the study of physics and similar branches, and had at one time been engaged as draughtsman on the Panama Canal. Here is the letter:

Lake Charles, La., April 20, 1897.—Dr. D. H. Tucker, Harlem, Tex.
—My Dear Friend: Since receiving your last letter, which reached me at Mobile, I have had a most wonderful experience. This is a day and generation of wonders. It is said that there is nothing new under the sun. I doubt this statement and am ready to affirm that Noah's ark was an object of small interest to his antediluvian conferees compared to the wonderful ship I have just had the pleasure of seeing.

I have known that for years the scientific world has been on the quiver for the perfection of the airship ; that experiments were in progress, but that nothing satisfactory could be obtained of the practical working of any of the machines, even from the ever alert and truthful Scientific American. But the thing is a fact! I assure you of this, for I have seen the airship, have spoken to the people on board, have been on board of her, and was enabled to make a sketch of her, which I send you. Of course, many of the details are necessarily lacking in it and I have had to depend more or less as to measurements to my memory, but rough as it is, it is comparatively accurate. But to begin at the beginning.

Yesterday about noon [*April 19*], while driving across country in a leisurely trot my eye encountered almost directly ahead a large object at a high elevation. It was so unlike anything I had ever seen that my gaze was instantly riveted upon it. It approached *at a very rapid rate*, and from the apparent size of a flour barrel, it rapidly developed into a ponderous affair, the sight of which was startling to say the least of it. When about one-half mile from me it emitted an unearthly whistle, which terrified my horses so that I was forced to jump to their heads.

While struggling with them I was thrown down and they broke and ran. When I rose, there, about 100 feet from me was a huge something, settling rapidly, but easily to the ground, and a man was preparing to

descend a rope ladder. The sight at first was so startling and the struggle with my team had so unnerved me that it was several seconds before I could even estimate the size or distance the strange affair. As soon as I recovered my sense I instantly realized that it was the much talked of airship, which I, in common with nearly every one else, had set down as the creation of fancy and imagination.

As soon as the vessel's rope about reached the ground the man came down the ladder, followed by another, both of whom came up to where I was standing and began to inquire if I were hurt and to apologize for the damage they had caused. I was so dazed that I could hardly speak at first, but I lost all interest in my team and assured them that I was not hurt, and then began to ask them questions. It was decidedly gratifying to find that they *were plain, every-day Americans like myself*, and they were gentlemanly. They invited me to inspect their ship, as if it were an ordinary affair, and you can rest assured I did not wait for a second invitation, *but climbed the ladder or gangway or whatever else it is called, that hung over the side.*

Now, let me assure you that I am not drawing on my imagination, but I am giving you facts, as strange as they may seem, and I as write I read in a late Galveston News that others have seen this ship, but always in the night time and in so many different places that it seems a piece of fiction, whereas I saw it in the broad, open light of day and spent over an hour talking with the inventor and owner.

As I reached the deck I was introduced to a *Mr. Walters, who held the position of engineer. The two men who met me on the ground were Mr. Wilson, the owner, and Mr. Scott Warren, his friend.* They also had a Mexican or Spaniard, who did the cooking, I suppose. We went into what might be termed the cabin, where we sat down a few minutes. *This was a room probably 14 feet long by 8 feet wide.* It was fitted up very prettily, something on the order of a smoking room on a Pullman sleeper. It had three reclining chairs screwed to the floor and cushioned seats on the sides and ends. Around a post in the center was a table with several field glasses and books in a bracket above it.

There were a number of incandescent lamps about the walls and hanging from the ceiling, and I immediately concluded that the motive

power of the ship was electricity and so expressed myself to Mr. Wilson. He said this was not the case, but that it was propelled and *sustained by a gas which had the property of great compressibility under a slight pressure and a correspondingly great power of expansion*. That he had invented a machine or rather engine that once started worked automatically and that one had only to attend to the governor which regulated the speed. I was not prepared wholly to accept this explanation and intimated as much in my expression of astonishment, but I was convinced of it when he showed me the apparatus *for generating the gas* and the engine for utilizing it.

Not being a practical mechanic I can not enter into details of this engine's construction, but this much I was able to understand: *That there was a receiver made of aluminum (and of this metal the engine and everything connected with the ship so far as I saw was constructed), from which pipes passed to what appeared to me to be a square box, at each end of which was a cylinder with an exhaust chamber, in which worked a piston attached to a very singularly constructed driving wheel like the sprocket of a bicycle, except that there were four wheels, one within the other, and these Mr. Wilson called the accumulators.* There were two sets of such wheels with a combined velocity surpassing anything heretofore constructed. *By the peculiar arrangement of the wheel within a wheel the balance of the centripetal and centrifugal forces was preserved in the presence of 65,000 revolutions a minute; that is, the velocity of revolutions in these wheels would equal 65,000 revolutions of an ordinary wheel ten feet in diameter in one minute if such a thing were possible.*

My mouth, as well as my eyes, opened wide at this statement, but I presume the truth was told. I asked what the highest attainable rate of speed might be. Mr. Wilson said that he did not know exactly, but that he had covered something over *1000 miles in eight hours* and the indicator or "speed dial," as he called it, only registered 72 per cent of what he believed was the maximum speed of the ship. Though he admitted that the dial might not be accurate and the possible speed might be more or less,

I was naturally curious to know by what means he generated sufficient gas to answer the purpose of a long voyage, but he smiled and said, *"quite a number of people would like to know the same thing probably. This is his secret* and to test the practicality of which he is now traveling back and forth. He said that he had discovered it two years ago after years of experimenting, and I judged from remarks dropped occasionally that his companion, Mr. Warren, had furnished the capital for the experiment. Mr. Wilson said, however, that the

source of his gas supply was the air which is passed through a condenser containing certain chemicals which posses the function of eliminating therefrom a gas known only to him. He did not know the chemical formula, he said, or whether it was simple or compound. All the machinery seemed very simple and did not occupy a greater space than 6 feet in length by 4 feet in width.

To elevate or depress the ship while flying through the air a small wheel at the stern of the boat is operated. This wheel was something like that in a ship's pilot house, but instead of having spokes there was an arrangement of magnets connected with wires to storage batteries. By passing the current over the wire of the wheel the operator was able to overcome gravity thus elevating the ship. By passing the current in the opposite direction and under the wire the weight of the ship was increased and could sink like a shot to the earth, and by passing the currents in opposite directions at the same time the vessel would remain horizontal at any distance from the earth. What I thought was the anchor was simply the ladder which hung over the side.

While I was on board it had a gentle swaying motion which I imagine if much greater would produce seasickness. At the time we were not more than ten feet above the ground. The interior arrangement of the vessel is very neat and comfortable though not expensively luxurious. The kitchen is a very small cubby almost identically like that of a buffet car. The berths are narrow but comfortable looking.

To attempt to describe the ship in detail would be futile, as the whole thing was so suddenly sprung upon me that I was dazed. Mr. Wilson told me that currents of wind had little effect upon them, as by pressing a button at the wheel he could rise above or below antagonistic wind or storms. *He said that he had never been higher than 2,000 feet*, as it affected the crew disagreeably, but that, as he had only been experimenting with his ship *for about two weeks* he did not yet know which would be the most desirable or comfortable height at which to travel.

He showed me the mechanical means by which the ship was propelled. *At one end was a propeller* (working on a shaft connected

with the sprocket wheels) such as those on a tug boat, except that the *blades of this ship's propeller were enormous, being ten feet in length.* What I thought were sails were *canvas wings used in steering* but Mr. Wilson stated that he was at work on a contrivance that would obviate the necessity of using sails. The length of the ship was *75 feet by 25 feet.*

Mr. Wilson said that the pantry was easily supplied with provisions at any time as he had only to drop down near a town and make his purchases. As to the cost of the concern, I could not ascertain as neither man seemed inclined to talk about that part of it, but Mr. Warren said that it was *low enough to warrant the building three of them as experiments*. Each one was essentially different in some of the details and comparisons were being made as to the relative merits of each. They refused to state what point they started from or to give any information concerning their business, except as I have stated. *They had a number of different newspapers containing accounts of the ship and they referred to them laughingly. Some of them, Mr. Warren said, were correct, but many of them were untrue.*

On account of the pleasanter climate most of their journeys had been through Texas and Mexico. *They did not know where the other ships were, but supposed they were in Mexico or Lower California and Arizona.* They laughed heartily over some of the accounts of their being seen at so many different places at the same time, and gave as a reason for not alighting at or near a city that they did not want to be subjected to the annoyances, and I inferred that they had not yet secured all of their patents. *As a reason for traveling almost entirely by night Mr. Wilson stated that it was because they had not yet become accustomed to being in such dizzy heights, and they feared to see the distance below them.* They are not aeronauts and do not claim to possess the nerves or coolness of that class of people.

I learned that Mr. Wilson (though I doubt if that is his correct name) *formerly lived in Fort Worth*, but I do not remember to have ever seen him. He is apparently a young man and has the typical face of a genius or an inventor. *He said that inside two years their method of locomotion would be in general use throughout the world.*

These ships, he said, had been *built according to plans at different places* and had been *put together at Mr. Warren's place*, but he did not say where that was. At night a small but powerful search light was used to flash ahead or below. It was mounted on the forward deck, and near it was the air whistle which frightened my horses. This latter arrangement had just been gotten in working order and this was its first trial, and I must say it is the most diabolical arrangement I ever heard or saw.

The inventor said that as soon as he could demonstrate satisfactorily the practicability of economically and safely operating his ships he and some capitalists would construct a line of ships to be operated between New York and San Francisco and other points, and that it would not take long for the people to overcome their natural timidity in trusting their lives in such crafts. So far they had met with *but one slight accident [the Kalamazoo, Michigan, explosion?]*, and that was to one of the sails or steering apparatus shortly after setting out on their journey. It amounted to very little, however, and only made it difficult to steer properly.

They offered to take me up to an elevation so that I could see if my team was in sight, but I respectfully but firmly declined and told them goodbye, after promising that I would not make my observations immediately public. As soon as I reach Memphis, however, I shall write my experience up for the press, and I think I can set at rest all the mooted question as to the existence of a real airship. I can say positively and emphatically that there is at least one, and it is a real practical, tangible reality, and though in time to come I will no doubt see much of them I can never again be effected as I was yesterday noon.

I have told several people here of my experience, but as they treat it as a Munchausenism I have not made any particular effort to convince them of its truth, but I assure you that every word I have written is absolutely correct.

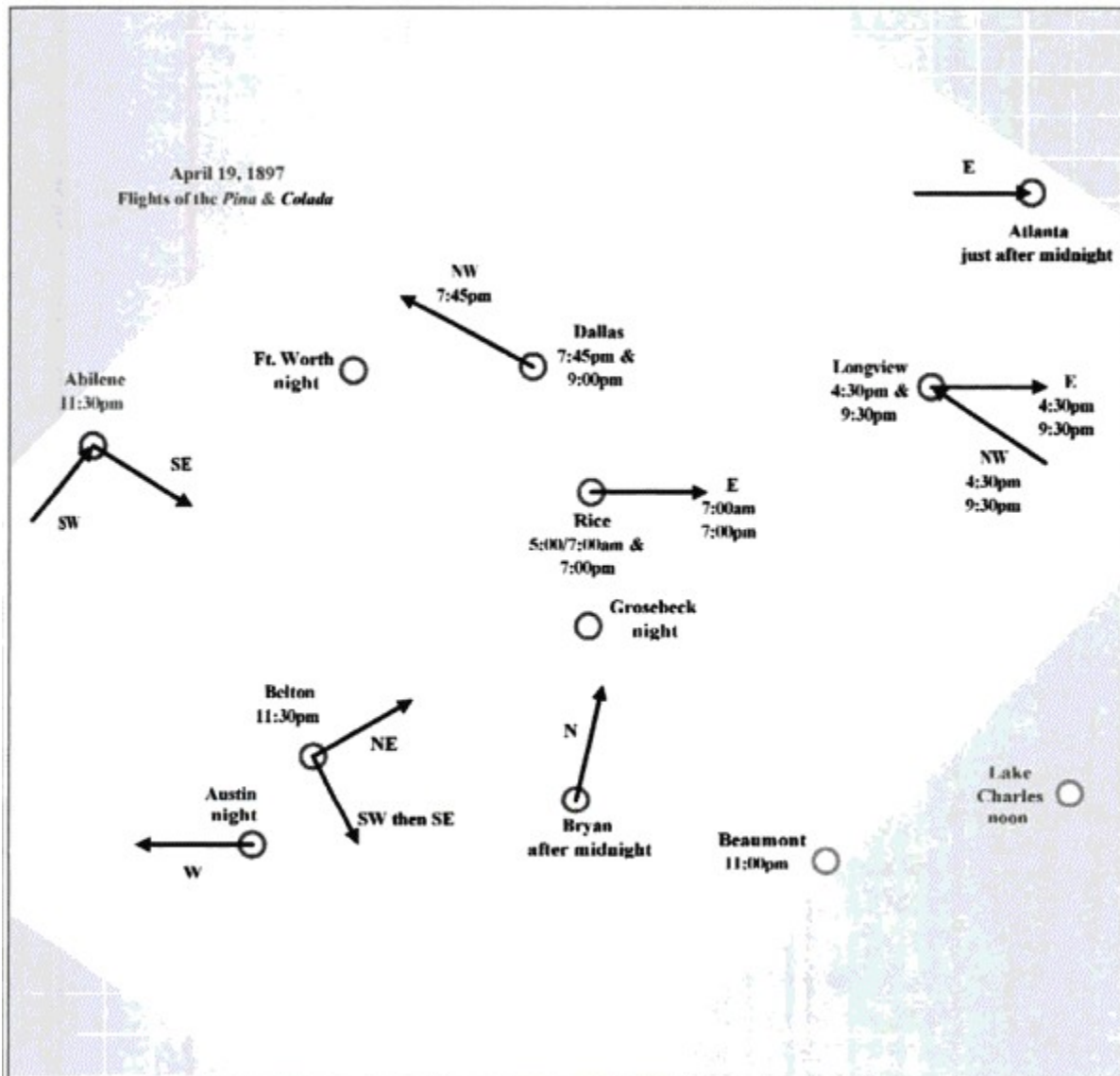
One week after writing the above the author was drowned while attempting to save some livestock near Grenada, Miss., and Dr. Tucker has given me permission to use the letter for The News. With a few trifling corrections in the language it is given as it was written. Geo. Dunlop (*Dallas Morning News*, May 16, 1897)

See chapter 22 for an account of the Michigan explosion.

This is a remarkable account of a close encounter between a local person and the airship and its occupants. It has a great ring of truth to it and appears in all respects to be legitimate. It is perhaps the best description of the airship we have. Although I think the crew made a few false claims (to lead the unwary astray and protect their invention), the account in general is very accurate. Note the claim that three airships were manufactured, with two differing lengths of about 150 feet long and about 75 feet long.

The crew of this airship apparently did not know where the other two airships are. So, the Aurora crash, which occurred on the morning of April 17, was still unknown to them. Since newspapers did not print anything about the Aurora crash until April 19, their statement concerning the number of airships and their whereabouts is reasonable.

This supposition is in agreement with the flight paths of the two vessels that appeared to be searching for something on the night of April 17. Also, the statement that the other two ships might be in Arizona or southern California gives added weight to the sightings that occurred in Childress and El Paso, as the airships apparently were far ranging—with the Southwestern region of the country well within their territory.



April 19, 1897, sightings

TABLE 12
April 19, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/19/97	Rice	TX	5:00/ 7:00 A.M.	E	Rapid rate		HP 4/22/97
4/19/97	Longview	TX	4:30 P.M.	NW then E	Swiftly		AAS 4/20/97
4/19/97	Rice	TX	7:00 P.M.	E			HP 4/22/97
4/19/97	Dallas	TX	7:45 P.M.	NW		1 mile	DTH 4/20/97
4/19/97	Dallas	TX	9:00 P.M.		200 mph		DTH 4/20/97
4/19/97	Longview	TX	9:30 P.M.	NW then E		Swiftly	HP 4/22/97 TTS 4/30/97
4/19/97	Beaumont	TX	11:00 P.M.			On the ground	HDP/HP 4/21/97 BA 4/24/97
4/19/97	Belton	TX	11:30 P.M.	NE	Immense velocity		HP 4/22/97 TTS 4/30/97
4/19/97	Abilene	TX	11:30 P.M.	SW then SE	Terrific speed		
4/19/97	Belton & Bell County	TX	11:30 P.M.	SW-NE	Great velocity		GDN 4/22/97
4/19/97	Atlanta	TX	Just after midnight	E	Ordinary passenger train	200- 300 ft	HP 4/22/97
4/19/97	Groesbeck	TX	Night				TTS 4/20/97 HP 4/22/97
4/19/97	Austin	TX	Night	W	Rather slowly		AAS 4/20/97
4/19/97	Dallas, Oak Cliff	TX			Very fast time		DMN 4/20/97
4/19/97	Fort Worth	TX	Night				DTH 4/20/97
4/19/97	Lake Charles	LA	Noon		Rapid rate	1/2 mile and on the ground	DMN 5/16/97

Note: Dallas sightings on April 19 may be fake, as a "fire balloon" was reported over the city that same night.

HP = Houston Post

AAS = Austin American Statesman

DTH = Dallas Times Herald

TTS = Terrell Times-Star

HDP = Houston Daily Post

BA = Bastrop (Louisiana) Advertiser

GDN = Galveston Daily News

DMN = Dallas Morning News

CHAPTER₁₀

TUESDAY, **A**PRIL 20, 1897

There were four reported sightings on the night of April 20. One may wonder why there were so few Texas sightings on this particular night. Airships were seen in Louisiana and Colorado on this same night, so maybe those in the airship fleet found themselves widely dispersed as they looked for their missing sister ship. And the story continues . . .

THE HEAVENLY MYSTERY

Possible soldiers From War-Like Mars Out On A Terrestrial Reconnoiter

THE SHIP CARRIES COLORED LIGHTS

An Astronomical Theory Anent the Mysterious Stranger as Seen in Chicago— The Celestial Craft the Talk of the Town.

The great and mysterious aerial vessel that has thrown north Texas and many parts of the country into a state of excitement and commotion, was first seen sailing over Kansas, but the stories about it did not excite much attention.

Since then, however, the mysterious stranger has been seen in many parts of the country, and Friday night last refutable citizens in scores of Texas towns had a view of the aerial vehicle.

It has traveled over Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Arkansas, Louisiana and other states, and everywhere has excited greater curiosity and in some places provoked consternation.

On Friday night, April 9, the strange light skirted over the northern border of Chicago and could be seen, according to the numerous reports of residents in that neighborhood. A great crowd gathered at the corner of Milwaukee and Oakley avenues and gazed at the object, trying to figure out to their satisfaction what it might be. It was an "airship" for lack of a better name to designate it by, but most were skeptical about the identity of the "manifestation." It was said the object looked very much like a balloon but the "red light" was plainly discernable. Many of the people mounted the roofs in the

neighborhood and all the field glasses in the vicinity were called into play. Among those who reported seeing the lights were Max Christianson, 1552 Milwaukee Avenue; Joseph Starveitch, 1480 Milwaukee Avenue; George Nicholson, 1480 Milwaukee Avenue; L. Wickert, clerk in Keats Drug Store, 1480 Milwaukee Avenue.

It passed over Chicago, going eastward, and disappeared about 12:45. It carried a strange green light, which was seen by thousands of people.

Professor G. W. Hough of Dearborn observatory, Northwestern University, took an interest in the "airship rumors" and advanced the opinion that the strange light was caused by the effect of the atmosphere on the star Alpha Orionus, "which is of the first magnitude and is in the constellation Orion. It rises early in the evening and its course across the heavens is about the same as that of the moon. In Chicago it is first visible about 7 o'clock this time of the year. It reaches the zenith he says, about the time when the mysterious phenomenon described as an "airship" was seen that night. The professor says the star is unusually bright in a clear atmosphere and appears to be close to the earth. The star gradually disappears during the evening and as it grows dimmer the defect of the atmosphere causes it apparently to change color.

On the same night that thousands of people in Chicago saw the "airship," red, white, and green lights high in the heavens warned the citizens of Evanston that the Kansas airship was sailing over that suburb. The lights were first observed by Robert Lowen, a jewelry clerk, living at 1926 Sherman Avenue. It was a few minutes after 8 o'clock, and hundreds of Evanston people saw the light.

On the same night at Lake Mills, Wis. at 9 o'clock, it was seen by many people. It was visible about ten minutes and then disappeared behind some trees.

At Wausau, Wis., on the same night, what was supposed to be an airship was seen passing over that city about 10:00 o'clock. *Lights could be distinguished* from a dark object far up in the heavens, which had the appearance of being *shaped like an egg*. It was viewed there by at least fifty persons.

On the same night a large number of people in Solon Is., saw the mysterious visitor, and on the same night operators of the Western Union Telegraph company and others. It appeared to be about 500 feet above the ground. The outlines were distinctly visible against the sky. The ship gave out *two bright lights* of an electric glow.

At Mount Carroll, hundreds of people, about 8:30 o'clock saw the strange visitor. It came from the northeast, and when opposite Carroll *changed its course* and went due west at a *most terrific speed*. It appeared to be *oblong in shape* and carried a *red light*. In length it appeared to be about 10 feet long and some two or three feet high. Many people saw it in various parts of the city ("The Heavenly Mystery," *Austin American Statesman*, April 20, 1897, p. 3).

This account may be the genesis of the doubting "leading astronomers" mentioned in a previous article. Oblong shapes, bright lights, colored lights, terrific speeds, and changing courses do not sound like stationary stars in the firmament. Nor does this sound like meteors, comets, or any other naturally occurring cosmic event. Sounds just like an airship, such as might be seen today on final approach to a large metropolitan airport.

SOMETHING MORE ABOUT AIRSHIP

Engineer John Smith has returned from Yoakum

A Statesman reporter has had a talk with him, and he referred to the airship, about which he has dreamed some, but not seen. Mr. Smith has been down on the Rio Grande, and he says at almost every Mexican house you see a white cross. It is either on top of the house, on the door, or somewhere about it. "A priest went through that part of the country some time ago," said Mr. Smith, "and he told the Mexicans that the time was at hand for the devil to appear as some great monster, and that the only protection against him was a white cross, and promptly the cross went up." Mr. Smith said he had no confidence in the airship business, but it was seen, all the same, in Louisiana, Tuesday night [*April 20*], at Natchitoches.

The newspaper account says about 1:30 that night, as a gay crowd were returning from a reception given by Company I at the Armory Hall, they were treated to a strange sight, coming from the western heavens. That spectacle consisted of a massive airship, the first story being of balloon shape, and the under car being of conical or cigar form.

When first seen it seemed but a faintly animated spark, which, as it came nearer, gradually grew brighter. After a few moments its entire form was clearly perceptible, and developed a structure of strange proportions. It seems to have been illuminated with a fluctuating light, which ranged from brilliancy to semi-darkness. Its destination appeared to be northerly, and it gave indications, from its courses, of coming from Texas. It was evidentially a machine of unique invention, as *its movement was of an undulatory character and bore striking resemblance to the movement of some huge bird*. It was visible, though about 1,000 feet high, nearly half an hour, and was a rare curiosity to those who had the good fortune to witness the phenomenon.

The remarkable fact in connection with its visitation was that, as its course neared the city, the light that illuminated it became suddenly low, and did not again rise until the city was left in the darkness (*Austin American Statesman*, April 23, 1897, p. 3).

In a previous account, the pilot states they are having trouble keeping the ship in level flight, which may account for the undulatory motion observed. But, recall previous accounts where the observer stated the wings flapped to give motive power. Did at least one airship propel itself forward with a bit of wing-flapping? The issue is explored in the latter chapters.

AN OPERATOR SAW IT.

Sabinal, Uvalde Co., Tex., April 20.—The famous airship which has been putting in appearances in various parts of the country was seen directly over this place at 2 o'clock last night [*April 20*] by Charles McGar, night operator of the Southern Pacific company. Mr. McGar is a highly responsible gentleman and no one doubts his statement of the matter. He says that the ship was not more than 300 feet above the earth and traveling in a westerly direction. His description of the

nocturnal flyer tallies with the one in the [*Dallas Morning*] News, save that its bottom much resembles the keel of a steam boat. Its passage through the air was accompanied by a strange whirring sound, not unlike the buzzing of an electric battery (*Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 8).

THE AIRSHIP IN WEST TEXAS LANDED IN THE TOWN OF UVALDE, SHERIFF BAYLOR INTERVIEWED THE MEN

IT STARTED FROM GOSHEN, NEW YORK AND IS ON A
TRIAL TRIP NAVIGATOR WILSON LEFT A MESSAGE FOR HIS
FRIEND AKERS

Uvalde, Tex., April 22.—That Uvalde has been visited by the famous airship that has created so much excitement in Texas the past week or more, there is no room to doubt. The airship was sighted by Sheriff H. W. Baylor about 10 o'clock Tuesday evening [*April 20*]. Mr. Baylor's attention was first attracted by a bright light and the sound of strange voices in the alley back of his residence. He went out to investigate and was surprised to find there the airship and *crew of three men*. They stated they were on a trial run and did not wish their presence known to the people of the town. One of the men, who gave his name as *Wilson*, and place of residence as *Goshen, N.Y.*, inquired for *Captain C. C. Akers, former sheriff of Zavalla County*, who he understood lived in this section. He said he had met *Captain Akers in Fort Worth in 1877* and liked him very much, and would be much pleased to meet him again. *When told that Captain Akers was at Eagle Pass* in the custom service, but often visited this place, he asked to be remembered to the captain on the occasion of his next visit.

After procuring water at the hydrant in Mr. Baylor's yard, the men boarded the ship, its great wings and fins were set in motion and it sped away northward in the direction of San Angelo.

Mr. Baylor is thoroughly reliable and his statement is undoubtedly true. His description of the ship does not differ materially from that given by Mr. J. R. Ligon of Beaumont and the gentlemen who saw it at Greenville.

County Clerk Henry J. Bowles also claims to have seen the airship as it passed up Getty Street north of the Baylor residence ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

If all these accounts are a great hoax perpetuated by the newspapers, railroads, telegraphers, or any other entity, it seems unlikely they would be able to persuade a sheriff to lie for the sake of selling a few papers or having some fun. It seems much more reasonable to believe Sheriff Baylor did meet the airship crew members.

Sheriff Baylor's account offers considerable new and important information about the airship and its inventor. We now have a name, Wilson, and another place, Goshen, New York, associated with the creation of an airship. The airships' origins are becoming less of a mystery. The connection between Wilson, Goshen, and other airship crew members will interest us later. It is obvious there were at least two airships about the night of April 20.

THE AIRSHIP

One Man Saw It In New Orleans Last Night

At 12:30 o'clock this morning Camp street in the vicinity of the newspaper's office was roused by an unearthly yell of "There it is!" and as quick as a flash the man who saw it disappeared up a stairway, and the racket as he jumped four steps at a time could be heard a block away. He had seen the airship, so he told his colleagues on the papers, and instantly every window in both offices was filled by the newspaper men and printers, all searching the heavens for the wonder, while the fortunate young man who saw it tried to describe it. He seemed very much excited, but he managed to say that he saw it going in a northwesterly direction, and it was about fifty or sixty feet long. It had a powerful searchlight which played around. As he described what he had seen everybody craned their necks and looked and looked, but they looked in vain, for there was nothing to be seen but the blue ether of night dotted here and there with a twinkling star, which some startled their companion by saying it was the searchlight of the aerial wonder. As the moments flew by, and nobody saw anything which could by any possibility be distorted into an airship, the laugh began to grow on the man who said he saw it. He denied the soft impeachments which were cast at his veracity by his co-workers, but it was hard to convince them. His general reputation for truth and veracity is such however, that his friends cannot help but believe that he saw something and as the airship was seen in the vicinity of Natchitoches yesterday, it is not unlikely that it may have come in this direction, the navigators bent on a little fun at the expense of the people of New Orleans.

A young man connected with the Picayune claimed to have seen the airship here on April 1, but all he saw was the searchlight, as it was dark at the time. It was generally treated as an April fool joke, but the subsequent excitement caused by the alleged appearance of the strange craft in other cities leads to the belief that there may be some truth in it.

The two supposed navigators of the airship, Dolbear and Tillman, as they gave their name to the people of Stephenville, Tex., were supposed to have been in the city last night. Their names were registered at one of the hotels, but it was in all likelihood a hoax, as cards sent to their room failed to get any response {*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 21, 1897, p. 9).

The reason this sighting is so important is the proximity of two individuals identified in the April 17 Stephenville, Texas, sighting ("The Great Aerial Wanderer," chapter 7). This account claims Tillman and Dolbear were registered in a New Orleans hotel on April 20. Unfortunately, the name of the hotel is not specified in the article. The account spells Dolbear's name correctly, not "Dolbar," as it is spelled in the Stephenville article. The reporter says, "their names were registered at the hotel." The fact that the newspaperman reported his name correctly implies Dolbear really was registered in the hotel. Else, the reporter most likely would have used the spelling in the Stephenville article (Dolbar). Also, if someone was playing a hoax, it seems reasonable that the name in the hotel register would have been spelled the same as it was in the Stephenville account. However, attempts by interested parties (newspaper reporters) to contact the two men at the hotel were fruitless. But, if Tillman and Dolbear were seeking to avoid publicity, they certainly would not have entertained reporters in their rooms.

Since the airship was spotted over Lake Charles at noon on April 19 and in Natchitoches (see the following account), we can guess that Tillman and Dolbear stopped in New Orleans for an evening of rest and relaxation then

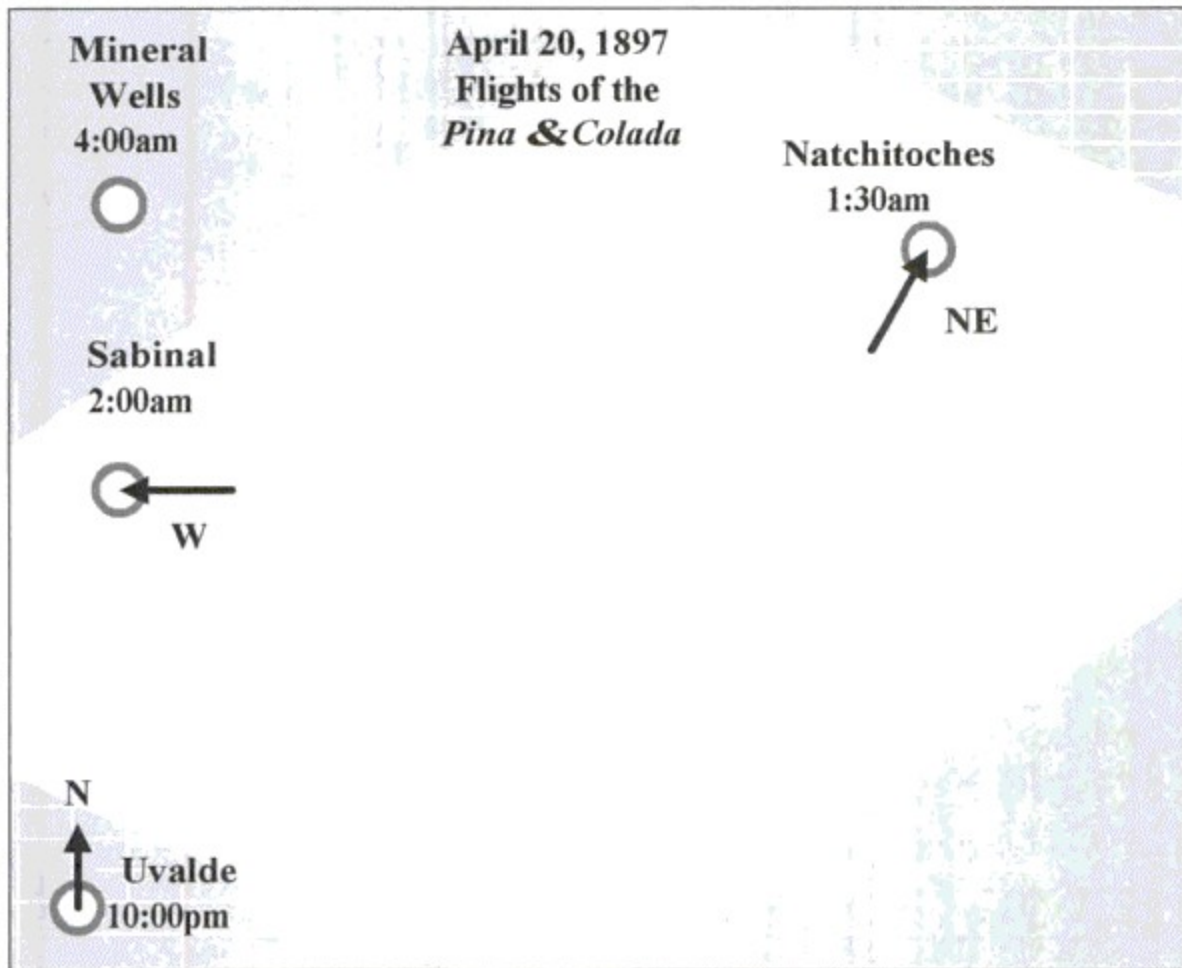
left in the wee hours of the twentieth. One can easily imagine the two men enjoying a luxurious meal and bath after days of eating sandwiches and sweating in the close, hot quarters of the small airship. This seems the most likely scenario because the Lake Charles sighting was the first airship sighting in Louisiana and the Natchitoches sighting was after the New Orleans sighting.

THE FLYING MACHINE SEEN BY THE PEOPLE OF NATCHITOCHES

Natchitoches, La. April 20 - Last night at about 1:30 o'clock as a gay crowd was returning from a reception given by Company I at the Armory Hall, they were treated to a strange sight, coming from the western heavens. That spectacle consisted of a massive airship, the first story being of balloon shape, and the under car of conical or cigar form. When first seen it appeared but a fairly animated spark, which, as it came nearer, gradually grew brighter. After a few moments its entire form was clearly perceptible, and developed a structure of strange proportions. It seemed to have been illuminated with a fluctuating light, which ranged from brilliancy to semi-darkness. Its destination appeared to be northerly, and it gave indications, from its course, as coming from Texas. It was evidently a machine of unique invention, as its movement was of an undulatory character, and bore a striking resemblance, to the movement of some huge bird. It was visible, though about a thousand feet high, for nearly half an hour, and was a rare curiosity to those who had the good fortune to witness the phenomenon. The remarkable fact in connection with its visitation was that, as its course neared the city, the light that illuminated it became suddenly low, and did not again rise until the city was left in the darkness {*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 21, 1897, p. 6).

It is interesting to note that the reporter believed the airship came from Texas. According to the account, the airship came from the "western heavens," a direction that indicates the airship might have come from Texas. A more logical explanation is the airship came from New Orleans (see the previous account) and turned toward the east as it approached Natchitoches. The New Orleans account reports the airship left the city headed northwest. Natchitoches is northwest of New Orleans. If the airship navigator intended to pass over Natchitoches, he very well could have missed the intended target to the west, requiring an eastern course correction as he approached the town. Keep in mind "visual flight rules" were the only flight rules of the

day. In the dense eastern pine forest, communities were not easily visible from the air at night during the period of gas streetlights.



April 20, 1897, sightings

TABLE 13
April 20, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/20/97	Sabinal (Uvalde County)	TX	2:00 A.M.	W		300 ft	<i>GDN 4/24/97</i>
4/20/97	Mineral Wells	TX	4:00 A.M.				<i>DTH 4/20/97</i>
4/20/97	Uvalde	TX	10:00 P.M.	N		On the ground	<i>GDN 4/24/97</i>
4/20/97	Natchitoches	LA	1:30 A.M.	NE	1,000 ft		<i>AAS/ADS 4/23/97</i>

Note: *GDN = Galveston Daily News*
DTH = Dallas Times Herald
AAS = Austin American Statesman

TABLE 14
April 21, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/21/97	New Orleans	LA	12:30 A.M.	NW			<i>NODP 4/21/97</i>

Note: *NODP = New Orleans Daily Picayune*

CHAPTER 11

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 1897

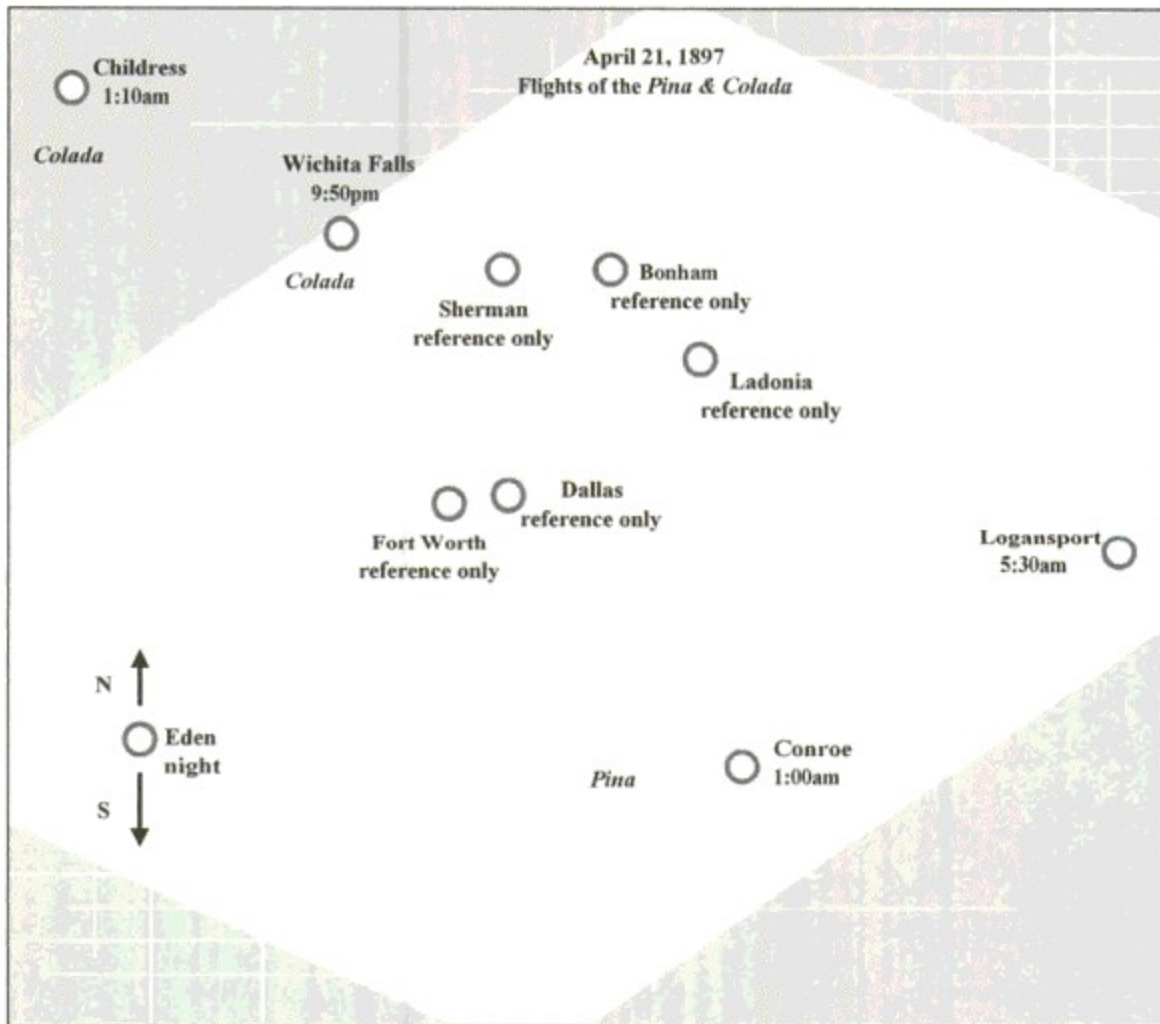
Continuing the pattern of the past two nights, the night of April 21 features few sightings. The few sightings reported are confined to the far-eastern and northern portions of Texas, implying two airships are roaming the state this night. Let us continue . . .

WHAT AN EDITOR SAW.

Eden, Jackson Co., Tex., April 23.- Frank Dickson, editor of the Progress comes to the front and avows without qualification that he saw *two airships* pass over the southern part of the town night before last [April 21]. The distant rumbling first attracted his attention, but he thought that it was possibly the noise from a steamer navigating the Navidad River, but looking up he soon discovered *the two monsters poised in the air, about 200 yards apart, communicating with each other by means of red and green lights*. The outlines of the aerial navigators, says Dickson, were substantially the same as heretofore described in the News. He says: All this transpired in the space of five minutes, and when they started off *one went north* and the *other south*, and were out of sight before I could recover my presence of mind and call my nearest neighbor, Colonel O. Rigg, to witness the strange apparition ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

We have an eyewitness who saw two airships communicating with each other with red and green lights. How can anyone say the observer must have mistaken the scene for a couple of twinkling stars? This is pretty solid evidence of the three-airship hypothesis presented earlier. Two are present near Eden, perhaps becoming desperate in the search to find their missing

sister ship while she lies crumpled and burned in Judge Proctor's Aurora pasture.



April 21, 1897, sightings

TABLE 15
April 21, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/21/97	Wichita Falls	TX	9:50 P.M.				<i>FWR</i> 4/23/97
4/21/97	Eden (Jackson County)	TX	Night	#1 > N #2 > S			<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97

Note: *FWR* = *Fort Worth Register*
 GDN = *Galveston Daily News*

TABLE 16
April 22, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/22/97	Conroe	TX	1:00 A.M.			On the ground	<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97
4/22/97	Childress	TX	1:10 A.M.				<i>FWR</i> 4/23/97
4/22/97	Brenham	TX	4:00 A.M.	S			<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97

CHAPTER₁₂

THURSDAY, **A**PRIL 22, 1897

There are seven reported sightings for April 22 and three for early the following morning. The sightings are closer together than those of the previous three nights, implying that the two airships ranging over the state are in close communication with each other. The story continues ...

SAW THE AIRSHIP

A Brenhamite Describes His Experience With the Aerial Bird.

Brenham, Tex., April 22.—The airship passed over Brenham about 4 o'clock [*April 22*] going south just as the cook started the fire in the galley and began preparing the morning meal for its passengers. [*The writer of this article does not really know if the airship cook was busy or not. He is alluding to the time of the morning the airship was observed.*] Among those who saw it here was Mr. John R. Pennington.

He says it was pretty high and he could not clearly distinguish all of its features, but it was like several of the published descriptions. He heard a *roaring sound* like the approach of a cyclone or a hundred buzzards sailing with set wings and looking up he saw the lights and hulk of the ship and heard a noise on board like the *rattling of glassware*.

He was out at his horse lot and hastened to the house to awaken the family that they might see the ship, but before they could be awakened and get to the front gallery it had vanished in the distance, and this was not surprising considering the apparent speed at which it was sailing.

There are people here that could tell airship stories all day and the public would scarcely pause to hear them, much less to give the story more than a passing thought, but Mr. John Pennington is a man of unquestioned and unquestionable integrity and not in the habit of

talking to hear himself talk (*Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 8).

AT CONROE

Conroe, Montgomery Co., Tex., April 23.—Our little city all agog today over the report of a most remarkable incident that occurred last night at the hotel.

Prof. G. L. Witherspoon, proprietor of that hostelry, Major Dan D. Donahue, auditor of the Texas, Louisiana and Eastern Railroad, Colonel A. H. Traylor, tax collector, and John Wahrengerger, merchant, were engaged until 1 o'clock in a social game of domino's, when they were disturbed by a call from *three strangers* who said they were *from San Francisco, Cal.* They were most reliable gentlemen and made no hesitancy in stating they were *traveling in an airship from San Francisco en route to Cuba, via El Paso, Conroe and New Orleans.*

They had left the ship at *Williams ranch* near town and walked in to get supper by way of a change.

Major Donahue says that he feels like he has interviewed natives of the moon, as heretofore he has scoffed at the idea of an airship, and he and his friends on last night gracefully declined an invitation to inspect the wonderful aerial traveling machine, but when less than an hour after his midnight visitors had taken their leave, he saw the ship rise majestically from the earth, illuminated by brilliant electric lights, and plow its way through space, his skepticism vanished, and the strange reality of an airship was stamped on his senses and vision.

Major Donahue is one of the most popular citizens and in the main a quiet and most unassuming gentleman, and his statements, especially when corroborated by the evidence of such gentlemen as Messrs. Witherspoon, Traylor and Wahrengerger, are accepted as gospel truth. They say that the ship must have been *thirty feet wide and 50 feet long*. They watched it until it looked like a bright star just above the earth's horizon, and the major declares he was sober ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

The airship's length is consistently given as 75 or 150 to 200 feet in previous accounts. This observer now places the length at 50 feet. Is he wrong or is there some other explanation? I suspect this is the 75-foot ship the observer saw, and he underestimated the length due to the darkness of night and the distance between himself and the airship. However, there is another explanation, which is explored later.

Recall in the "McKnight's Airship" account in chapter 3, "A man named McKnight has been working on an airship at *U. S. Marshal Williams' ranch* for some time ..." Conroe, Texas, is located near the site of the Texas state prison system at Huntsville, Texas. It is possible that the Williams ranch referred to in this account is owned by the same U.S. Marshal Williams identified in the "McKnight's Airship" account. The Marshal Williams identified in that account also owned a ranch near Paris, Texas. Marshal Williams was U.S. Marshal for the Eastern District of Texas. The eastern district encompassed Houston and points further west and north, including Conroe and Huntsville. The eastern district extended north to the Red River, east to the Arkansas and Louisiana borders, and west to Paris, Texas. In 1897 there was no federal prison system. There was one federal prison used almost exclusively for military offenders at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Most federal prisoners were held in state penitentiaries. As Huntsville was the site of the state prison system, and Houston was the site of the largest city in his district, it is likely that U.S. Marshal Williams spent a considerable amount of time in the Huntsville-Houston area. It is reasonable to think Williams owned property near his primary place of employment. We will investigate this U.S. Marshal Williams and his connection to airships in chapter 20.

In previous accounts Iowa was identified as the location where five airships were built and Goshen, New York, was identified as the origin of a fellow named Wilson who was crewing an airship. Now, California is identified in this account as the origin of the three-member crew and, by implication, the origin of the airship. To a casual reader, such seemingly differing accounts smack of a hoax. However, we are not casual readers but are attempting at a penetrating analysis of the totality of the stories. The

apparent discrepancies in the origins of the airships are explained in the final chapters.

THE AERIAL VISITOR AT FLATONIA

Flatonia, Fayette Co., Tex., April 23.- The airship has been seen in this vicinity. Albert Mach, a reputable Bohemian farmer living about three miles south of Flatonia, saw it last night *[April 22]* about 10 o'clock. Mach had never heard or read of airships , therefore his statement may be considered reliable. He says the ship passed almost directly over him and was about 100 feet above the earth. It was going in a southeasterly direction and he could plainly distinguish a sound like the *rapid whirring of wings*. *[Rather than wings, this could have been the sound of fan blades spinning around]* He saw *different colored lights flashing from the machine (the red and green signaling lights and perhaps the white sparks from the electrical motors)* and as it passed from view it cast a bright striate of light from the bow of the ship in a slanting direction toward the town.

Mach was very frightened and ran in the house to call his wife but before she reached him the ship had disappeared from view.

The airship has been looked upon as a hoax here by nearly everybody but renewed interest has been awakened by its appearance in this locality ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

SEEN AT HUNTSVILLE

Huntsville, Walker Co., Tex April 23.- Last night [*April 22*] about 11 o'clock, while Mr. Isacc N. Adickee, one of the most prominent social figures of this city, was returning home from a call on his best girl, he had a glimpse of the much talked of airship. He says it came from a northwesterly direction and moved at a very rapid rate and passed over the outskirts of Huntsville, ascending as it neared the hills. It was not in sight over *ten minutes* from the time he first saw it. Its appearance tallied very much with former descriptions appearing in the News, being *cigar-shaped* and having *wings*, and also throwing out the usual *bright light*. No one here doubts that Mr. Adickee has really seen the airship and especially the young ladies, as they certainly have the utmost confidence in his veracity ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

SUPPLIES FOR AIRSHIP

A Rockland Man Helped the Aerial Navigators Purchased Chisel
and Lubricating Oil for " ," the Man with the Mysterious Machine

Rockland, Texas, April 23.—Mr. John Smith, living near this place, reports that last night [*April 22*] about 11:00 o'clock, after having retired, he heard his dogs barking furiously together with a *whirring noise*. He went to the dogs 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 fifty 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 to investigate. As soon as the ship, or whatever it might be, alighted, the lights went out. The night was bright enough for a man to be distinguished several yards, and when within about thirty yards of the ship he was met by an ordinary mortal, who requested him to lay his gun aside, as no harm was intended. Whereupon the following conversation ensued:

Mr. Smith inquired: "Who are you and what do you want?"

"Never mind about my name; *call it Smith*. I want some lubricating oil and a couple of cold chisels if you can get them, and some bluestone. I suppose the sawmill hard by has the two former articles and the telegraph operator the bluestone. Here is a tendollar bill, take it and get up these articles and keep the change for your trouble."

Mr. Smith said: "What have you got down there? Let me go and see it."

He who wanted to be called Smith said: "No, we can not permit you to approach any nearer, but do as we request you and your kindness will be appreciated, and we will call on you some future day and reciprocate your kindness by taking you on a trip."

Mr. Smith went and procured the oil and cold chisels, but could not get the bluestone. They had no change and Mr. Smith tendered them the ten-dollar bill, but was refused.

The man shook hands with him and thanked him cordially and asked that he not follow him to the vessel. As he left Mr. Smith called to him and asked him where he was from and where he was going. He replied "from anywhere, but we will be in Greece day after tomorrow."

He got on board, then there was again the *whirling noise*, and the thing was gone, as Mr. Smith expressed it, like a shot out of a gun. Mr. Smith is perfectly reliable (*Houston Post*, April 25, 1897, p. 13).

"Never mind about my name; call it Smith" is electrifying. (Read the *San Francisco Call* [p. 1, November 25, 1896] interview with a California inventor named Smith in chapter 19.) Dr. C. A. Smith of San Francisco said he would fly around the continent in the spring of 1897 in a machine fitting this exact description. (See Smith's patent application for an airship, also fitting the description of the airship seen at Rockland, in appendix A.)

I think the statement that the airship would be in Greece "day after tomorrow" was a flippant retort. In all encounters with airship crew members, they typically attempted to keep private personal information about themselves and technical secrets about their airships. However, keeping in mind Dr. C. A. Smith's claim as detailed in the San Francisco Call account, perhaps, he really intended to traverse the Atlantic and visit the Mediterranean region. Someone in Greece may investigate local newspaper reports and determine if any airships were reportedly seen around Greece on or about April 24, 1897.

THAT AIRSHIP

Farmer Near Josserand Conversed With the Crew

Josserand, Texas, April 24.—Considerable excitement prevails at this writing in the usually quiet village of Josserand, caused by a visit of the noted airship, which has been seen at so many different points of late.

Mr. Frank Nichols, a prominent farmer living about two miles east of here, and a man of unquestioned veracity, was awakened night before last [*April 22*] near the hour of 12 by a *whirring noise*, similar to that made by machinery. Upon looking out he was startled upon beholding *brilliant lights* streaming from a *ponderous vessel of strange proportions*, which rested upon the ground in his corn field.

Having read the dispatches published in The Post of the noted aerial navigators, the truth at once flashed over him that he was one of the fortunate ones and with all the bravery of Priam at the siege of Troy Mr. Nichols started out to investigate.

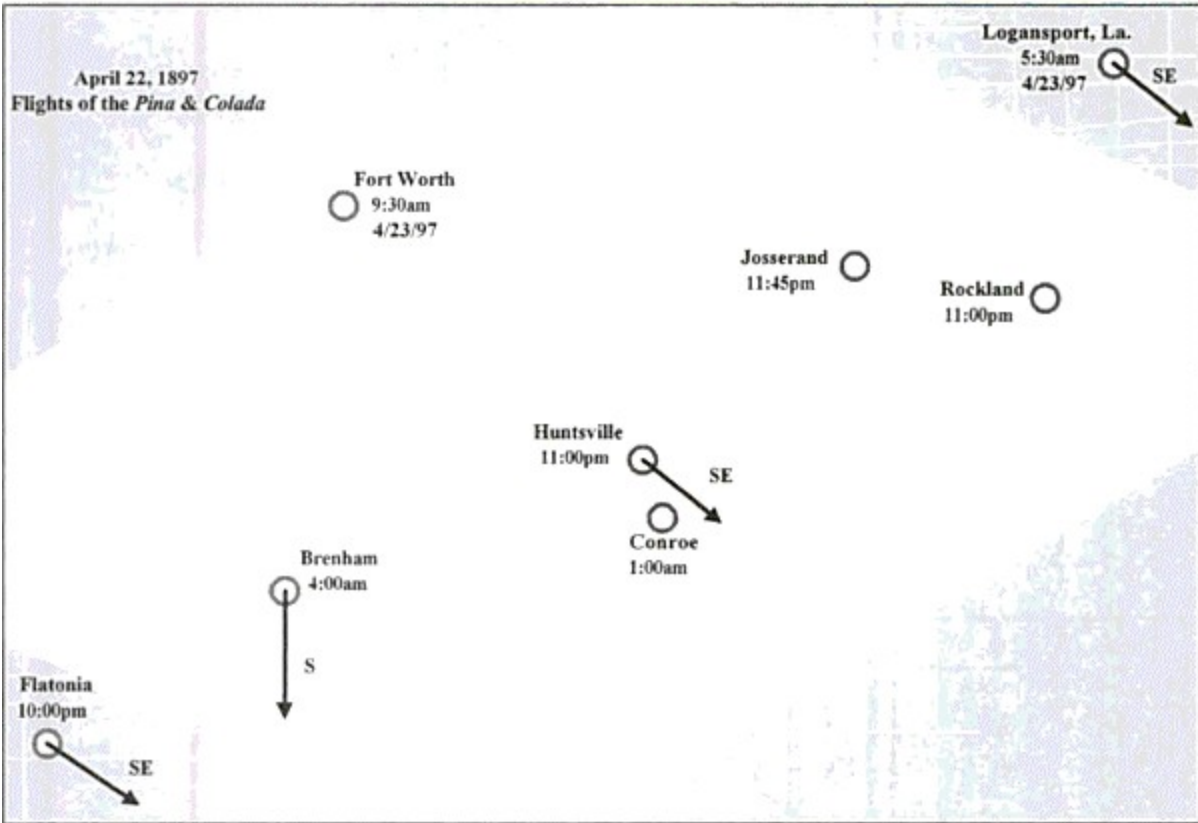
Before reaching the strange midnight visitor he was accosted by *two men with buckets*, who asked permission to draw water from his well. Thinking he might be entertaining heavenly visitants instead of earthly mortals permission was readily granted.

Mr. Nichols was kindly invited to accompany them to the ship. He conversed freely with the crew, composed of *six or eight individuals* about the ship. The machinery was so complicated that in his short interview he could gain no knowledge of its workings. However, one of the crew told him the problem of aerial navigation had been solved. The ship or car is built from a *newly discovered material that has the property of self sustenance in the air (other than some type of gas, there is no physical property that admits of "self sustenance in the air")* and the motive power is highly condensed electricity. [*"Highly condensed" electricity can only mean batteries.*]

He was informed *that five of these ships were built at a small town in Iowa*. Soon the invention will be given to the public. An immense stock company is now being formed and within the next year the machine will be in general use.

Mr. Nichols lives at Jossierand, Trinity County, Texas, and will convince any credulous one by showing the place where the ship rested (*Houston Post*, April 26, 1897).

Mr. Nichols' description of the airship tallies with previous ones. This is the third account that gives a small town in Iowa as the place of the airships' origination. Was this airship one of five build in a quite Iowa village? The answer, given in the final chapters, will astound you. For now, we must let the story continue to develop.



April 22, 1897, sightings

TABLE 17
April 22, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/22/97	Flatonia (Fayette County)	TX	10:00 P.M.	SE		100 ft	<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97
4/22/97	Huntsville	TX	11:00 P.M.	SE	Rapid rate		<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97
4/22/97	Rockland	TX	11:00 P.M.			On the ground	<i>HP</i> 4/25/97
4/22/97	Josserand (Trinity County)	TX	11:45 P.M.			On the ground	<i>HP</i> 4/26/97

Note: *GDN* = *Galveston Daily News*
 HP = *Houston Post*

TABLE 18
April 23, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/23/97	Conroe	TX	1:00 A.M.				<i>HP</i> 4/26/97
4/23/97	Logansport	LA	5:30 A.M.	SE			<i>GDN</i> 4/24/97
4/23/97	Fort Worth	TX	9:30 A.M.			On the ground	<i>FWR</i> 4/24/97

Note: *FWR* = *Fort Worth Register*

CHAPTER₁₃

FRIDAY, **A**PRIL 23, 1897

There are six reported sightings for the night of April 23. The two airships are still in close contact with each other, as evidenced by the nearness of the sightings. Also, this is the first night since the crash at Aurora that airships appeared near their daytime base of operations, implying their far-ranging excursions in search for the missing airship is over. Let's continue.

THAT AIRSHIP

Said to Have Broken Down and at Kountze for Repairs

Kountze, Texas, April 24,—The much talked of airship visited Kountze last night [*April 23*]. It was first seen by Captain H. A. Hooks and A. W. Hodges, who are both responsible men. In descending it *punctured the "air department"* and will have to stay over several days for repairs.

Any one wishing to see it may do so by coming to Kountze any time before Monday night, as it will take until then to get it in flying order.

The ship is fifty feet in length and about twenty feet wide; shaped somewhat like a cigar. There are two men on board her. *They gave their name as Wilson and Jackson. They will move north after Monday (Houston Post, April 25, 1897; Terrell Times-Star, April 30, 1897).*

This is the second account we have encountered so far that gives a length of 50 feet. Was the airship 50, 75, or 150 feet long? Could this estimate be off by some 25 feet? It is hard to argue the estimate is off by 25 feet, as the witness saw the airship on the ground and apparently had ample opportunity to gauge the length. So, in keeping with the threeairship (flying-around-Texas) hypothesis, was each airship a different length? We will investigate this issue in the latter chapters.

SEEN AT LOGANSFORT

Logansport, La., April 23.—The much talked of airship passed over Logansport this morning [*April 23*] at 5:30 o'clock. W. F. Miller, W. H. Graham and J. C. Morse were up early doing some menial work for Chicago Lumber and Coal Company when they saw a large airship coming from the southwest and pass at the rate of 100 miles an hour. It must have been 1,000 feet high. The three men are all reliable men. They are true believers in the airship, now. J.W. Norman ("The Airship in West Texas," *Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1897, p. 3).

THAT AIRSHIP.

Seen At Logansport

Logansport, La., April 23.- The airship which has been soaring around the country for some time passed over Logansport this morning [*April 23*] at 5:30 o'clock. W. H. Miller, W.C. Graham and J. C. Morse were up early doing some special work for the Chicago Lumber Company when they saw a large object approaching from the south at a rapid rate. It was at a height of about 1500 feet and was moving at a very fast rate. The above men are the foreman and two workers for the Chicago Lumber Company and are reliable men (*Houston Post*, April 24, 1897, p. 4).

THE AIRSHIP

Mr. Woodford Brooks Declares He Saw It—His Account of It.

Mr. Woodford Brooks, secretary and treasurer of the Polytechnic Street Railway, is the latest Fort Worth man to report having seen the famous airship, and he relates the circumstances with such seriousness and accuracy as to leave no doubt in the listener's mind that he tells facts.

Yesterday morning [April 23] about 9:30 o'clock, while riding on a street car past the city park, Mr. Brooks saw the strange aerial visitor *resting on the ground* out in the *park near the river*. Accompanied by the motorman, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Brooks went into the park for a closer inspection of the ship, but was met some distance from the vessel by the captain who *gave his name as Randall*. Mr. Brooks had a short interview with the captain, who said that the destination of himself and crew, which was *composed of twelve men*, was the city of Mexico. Mr. Brooks inquired of the captain if he did not think thirteen an unlucky number to make the trip, when that gentleman laughingly replied that they were all protected by wearing Mexican opals.

Mr. Brooks declared that the ship is a splendidly equipped machine propelled by *electricity*, which is supplied by a *large storage battery*. It appears that the captain and crew mistook the water works plant near the park for an electrical plant, and had descended from their great distance above the earth for the purpose of *procuring a supply of electricity for their ship*. Upon learning their mistake they decided to utilize what they had left in making the trip to San Antonio, and soon sailed away.

Mr. Brooks telephoned The Register office last night (April 23] that he had just received a telegram from Captain Randall, who stated that the ship and crew had arrived in San Antonio safely and would leave at once for the city of Mexico, where they expected to arrive in two days at least. They expect to return by the way of Fort Worth in about a week (*Fort Worth Register*, April 24, 1897, p. 5).

If the motive power was storage batteries for at least one of the airships, as claimed in this and many other reports, then some means of renewing the battery charge had to be procured. This account has a great ring of truth to it as it explains how an airship crew could easily renew the battery charge while traversing the countryside.

Although Mr. Brooks claimed Captain Randall telegraphed his arrival in San Antonio, there is no known sighting in or around San Antonio for the night of April 23 or the early morning of the twentyfourth. Either the airship was not seen in transit between Fort Worth and San Antonio, newspapers did not consider any in-transit sightings significant enough to print, or Mr. Brooks was lying about the airship's destination and about the receipt of a telegram.

Mr. Brooks stated he saw the airship at 9:30 A.M. It took off for San Antonio shortly after Mr. Brooks came upon it. Since the airship was traversing the countryside in the daylight hours, it seems reasonable to assume someone along the flight path would have noticed it. I am concerned about the truthfulness of this account, as the airship pilots have firmly established a consistent habit of avoiding daytime flying. Yet, for Mr. Brooks to receive a telegram from Captain Randall "last night," the captain had to fly to San Antonio in the daylight.

Captain Randall and his relationship to the other airship members is of interest to us. We will see if we can connect him to any of the other airship characters in chapter 20.

THE AIRSHIP

Several parties in the city declare they saw the famous *cigar shaped airship* pass over Gainesville last Friday night [April 23] about 11:30 o'clock. The noise made by its approach resembled the *rush of wind which precedes a storm*. The ship hovered above the city looking like a huge monster roaring through the air. It sailed in a circle and finally dropped alongside of S. Zacharias' big dry goods store where it remained about forty minutes, when it rose gracefully into the night and sailed due north. It is surmised the goods Mr. Zacharias is offering so wonderfully cheap at his special sale this week were freighted through New York by the airship {*Gainesville Daily Heaperian*, April 25, 1897, p. 2).

The tone of this account smacks of heresy. In no other account does any airship alight near a store for the avowed purpose of unloading freighted goods. S. Zacharias is trying to get some free publicity for his store.

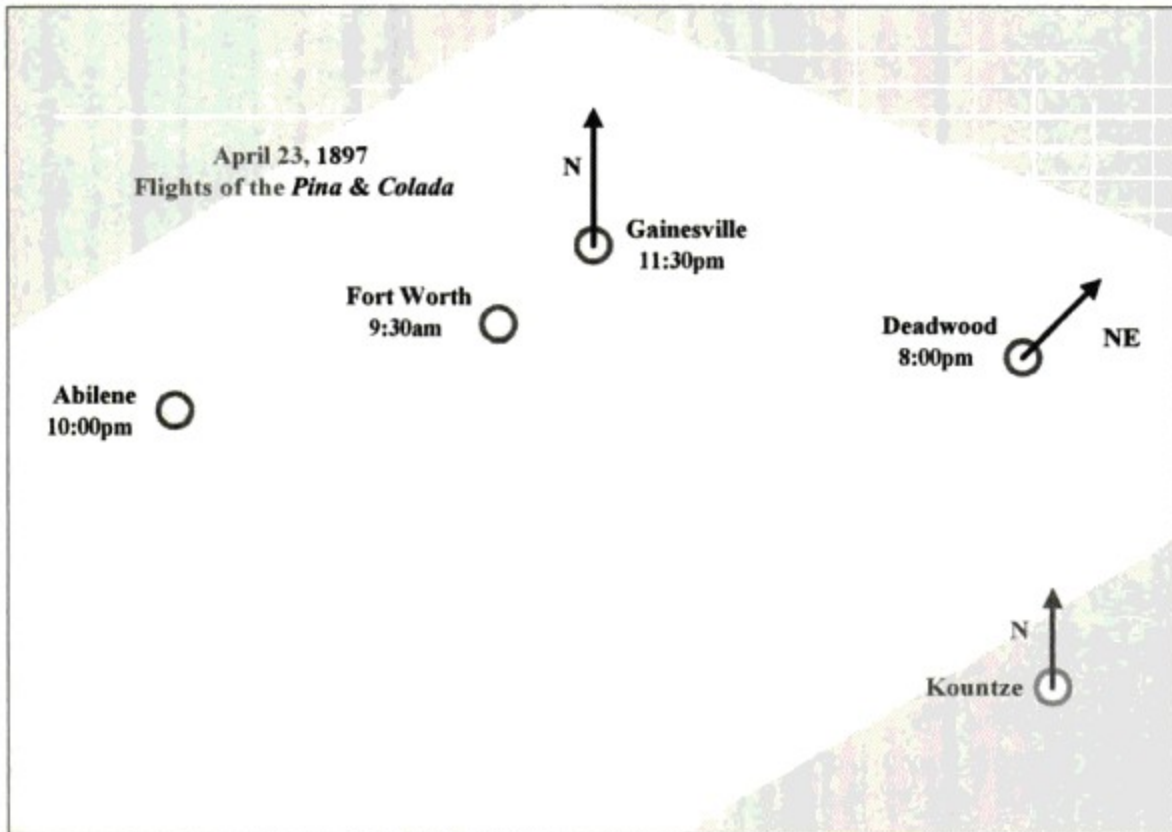
THE AIRSHIP

Seen by a Thoroughly Reliable and Well Known Citizen (To the Times.)

Deadwood, Tex., April 24, 1897.—Seeing so much here of late in reference to the airship has put me on the look out for several days and nights, and my vigilance, much to my surprise, was rewarded on Friday night last, *April 23*. I was out about 8 o'clock in my Bermuda and clover pasture about 200 yards from my house, looking after some of my fine stock that seemed to be very much alarmed at something unusual, they running and snorting like regular broncos. On arrival in the neighborhood of where my stock were, I saw a very bright and varied light some 300 feet from the earth, coming from SW and headed NE. On its near approach to my surprise a *vast search light*, turning night into day, was cast down upon the immediate locality where I was standing. I recognized the airship as has been usually described so often, and began saluting the aerial travelers at the top of my voice. Much to my surprise, I received in reply a message dropped near me in a beer bottle bearing the trade mark of Anheuser Busch, put up at St. Louis. Enclosed in the bottle was the message stating that this was the ship recently landed near Beaumont, Tex., and was *one of five having covered nearly the whole of the northwest, and was now bound for St. Louis*.

It was seen by a number of my neighbors, who will testify to the same, and as to my veracity in this neighborhood, where I have lived for the last forty years. Some very amusing scenes took place on sight of the ship. Many took it to be the coming judgment day. Within the past twelve months there have been many converts to the holiness faith in this community, and some of them claim that this is but a forerunner of nightly evidence that will soon come to the doubting Christians who still linger in benighted darkness of the old-time teachings of

Christianity. Let us hear from the next. Very respectfully, H. L.
Lagrome, Deadwood, Panola County Tex (*Shreveport Times*, April 29,
1897, p. 6).



April 23, 1897, sightings

TABLE 19
April 23, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/23/97	Logansport	LA	5:30 A.M.	SE			GDN 4/24/97
4/23/97	Fort Worth	TX	9:30 A.M.			On the ground	FWR 4/24/97
4/23/97	Deadwood (Panola County)	TX	8:00 P.M.	SW-NE		300 ft	ST
4/23/97	Gainesville	TX	11:30 P.M.	N			GDH 4/25/97
4/23/97	Kountze	TX	Night	N		On the ground	HP 4/25/97
4/23/97	Merkel	TX	10:00 P.M.				HP 4/28/97

Note: GDN = *Galveston Daily News*
FWR = *Fort Worth Register*
ST = *Shreveport Times*
GDH = *Gainesville Daily Heaperian*
HP = *Houston Post*

CHAPTER₁₄

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1897

There are five reported airship sightings for the night of April 24. All but one of the airship sightings are on the far-southern side of the state. One sighting is in the far-eastern part of Texas. It appears the two airships have separated and are combing new territory. Included in this chapter is Sheriff Akers' response to the chapter 10 newspaper article ("The Airship in West Texas Landed in the Town of Uvalde, Sheriff Baylor Interviewed the Men") about his acquaintance with one of the airships' inventors, a Mr. Wilson of Goshen, New York. Let us continue.

Editorial comment: For sale, 500 columns of unused airship manuscripts; will make splendid fuel ; apply at this office (*Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 1897; *Galveston News*).

THE AIRSHIP AT EAGLE PASS

Sheriff Dowe Interviews Its passengers Mexicans Much Wrought Up
by the Alighting of the ship on the Banks of the Rio Grande.

A Description

Eagle Pass, Tex., April 25.—Eagle Pass, though away out on the Mexican border, and a little slow on up-to-date civilization cannot be out done when it comes to real sound knowledge and alert county officials. The learned folks of the border have been watching with interest the various accounts of the airship seen at so many different places simultaneously and the various descriptions of it, and had come to the conclusion that there was a *whole fleet of airships*, else the whole thing was a huge joke perpetuated upon a defenseless public by the heartless newspaper fraternity.

To-day, however, all is changed. The whole border is in a state of excitement. The Mexican element is in a frenzy. Crowds of Aztec descendants are gathered on different corners discussing a strange occurrence of last night [April 24]. While the majority spend the hours on their knees begging to be saved, others expostulate and interpret the "vision" as an evil omen or a "good spirit" according to their own superior knowledge.

The Express reporters attention was attracted and he immediately went in quest of Sheriff R. W. Dowe, whom he found in a great state of excitement, relating his experiences to a group of substantial citizens. The reporter waited till the sheriff gained his equilibrium and got the following account of the cause of the commotion.

"Last night about 12 o'clock some Mexicans came running to my house and told me that a very strange thing of some kind had come down from above and stopped on the bank of the Rio Grande just below Fort Duncan. I went at once to the place and found an airship and *three men on board*. They were *just from Uvalde* and claimed that they have solved the problem of traveling by air. They are going from here to the Devil's River country to locate a herd of buffalo that was seen over there some time ago by Mr. Duval West and some hunters from Galveston. The men are all well known in West Texas, but do not care to have their identity known to the public just yet. *One of the men inquired for Capt. C. C. Akers of this place*, but was told Mr. Akers was over the river counting some sheep that Mr. Schrimpf is getting ready to ship to market. They filled their canteens with water from the Rio Grande and flew off. They invited me to accompany them, but district court being in session I could not accept.

Mr. Dowe says it was so dark he could not see the vessel so as to describe it, but he saw the men board it and fly away (*San Antonio*

Express, April 27,1897).

The crew member's statement that they were just from Uvalde is very exciting, for, in fact, there is a report in chapter 10 from Uvalde (entitled "The Airship in West Texas") that states the airship landed and inquired after Captain Akers there. In that account the county sheriff advised the crew member that Captain Akers was in Eagle Pass, employed in the customs service. Seems like our crew member, perhaps the pilot and or inventor himself, decided to travel to Eagle Pass and search out the good captain.

The following article is included in this chapter because it is Sheriff Akers' (also known as Captain Akers) response to the newspapers concerning his knowledge of the alleged inventor, Mr. Wilson.

AIRSHIP INVENTOR WILSON WAS OF A MECHANICAL TURN OF MIND AND FORMALLY LIVED IN FORT WORTH REMEMBERED BY HIS FRIEND

Who says he promised to startle the world with his aerial invention

Eagle Pass, Tex. April 27. *Noting that on the airship said to have been seen by Sheriff Baylor in Uvalde, was a man who gave his name as Wilson, I can say that while living in Fort Worth in '76 and '77I was well acquainted with a man by the name of Wilson from New York state and was on very friendly terms with him.* He was of a mechanical turn of mind and was working on aerial navigation and something that would astonish the world. He was a finely educated man, then about 24 years of age, and seemed to have money with which to prosecute his investigations, devoting his whole time to them. From conversations we had while in Fort Worth, I think that *Mr. Wilson*, having succeeded in constructing a practical airship, would probably hunt me up to show me that he was not so wild in his claims as I then supposed.

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

During a month past the daily papers all over the country have printed columns in reference to the airship and the supposed solution of the aerial navigation problem. News correspondents in different

portions of Texas have contributed their quote to this class of interesting reading, much of it unquestionably pure fiction, and numerous accounts showing no trace of [?] between the lines. It is needless to say that a great deal of the airship matter offered The News was not published.

Last Friday The News published an airship story from its correspondent in Uvalde in which it was stated that one of the crew of the ship gave his name as Wilson and inquired after a former acquaintance, captain C. C. Akers, former sheriff of Zavalla County, now connected with the customs service in Eagle Pass. The News immediately addressed Captain Akers enclosing the Uvalde account of the airship and requested him to let the public know through The News what he knew about Mr. Wilson. The above dispatch is his answer. The Uvalde item which called it out is as follows: (See the Galveston News, April 24) (*Galveston Daily News*, April 28, 1897).

The Uvalde and Eagle Pass accounts and Captain Akers' letter to the paper are three incredible pieces of the airship puzzle. Mr. Wilson's former acquaintance states in his letter his belief that Mr. Wilson, whom he knew twenty-one years ago to be working on an airship, has succeeded in perfecting a practical airship. Captain Akers also confirms the home of Mr. Wilson as New York state. Was there a New York-Texas, Wilson-Akers connection? The answer may "rock your airship," but other information must be developed before the answer is forthcoming.

THE AIRSHIP IN SAN ANTONIO PASSED OVER THE CITY EARLY YESTERDAY MORNING

Its Brilliant Lights Were Seen By Scores of People History and
Voyage of This Aerial Mystery

The airship that has been seen in Texas for the past several days has reached San Antonio, or rather passed over San Antonio between 12 and 1 o'clock yesterday morning [*April 25*].

The first impression that this monster mystery of the skies made on those who saw it was that it was some new comet moving slowly and close to the earth in the northwestern horizon. The course that the bright object took was from northwest almost due east, and then south, passing over the city apparently about two miles east of city hall.

The sky was heavily clouded and not a star visible. This brought out all the stronger the keen white light of the airship headlight, together with the shimmer that the strong illumination cast about it. It prevented, however, anything like a view of the structure itself, but as the strange object wheeled about and came nearer a dozen or more dim lights, among them a cluster of green lights on the side of the ship toward the city, and another immense cluster of red lights at the stern, plainly indicated its artificial nature ("The Airship In San Antonio," San Antonio Express, April 26, 1897).

This story appears in this chapter because the sighting is just after midnight on April 25.

"Red lights at the stern" indicates that the red lights were physically mounted on the rear of the ship. The observer's placement of the red lights matches other descriptions, as does the observation placing of the green lights on the side of the airship.

THOUGHT IT WAS A COMET

Shortly after midnight a telephone message was received from the International 8c Great Northern depot, calling attention to a large star or comet that could be plainly seen from this point, far in the northwest. Some ten or fifteen minutes previous to that, however, the motorman on the last car out to Laurel Heights had observed the strange solitary light.

The news of the appearance of what was supposed to be a comet spread rapidly over the city and soon a crowd of men gathered at the corner of Soledad and Houston streets to await the appearance of the body. In order to get a better view a number of the watchers went to city hall, where access to one of the upper galleries was gained, and a good view of the approaching light was had. The prevalent opinion was that the object was a small sized comet of unusually close proximity to the earth, but all doubts of the real nature of the phenomenon were soon set to rest.

As the object drew nearer and nearer, slowly to the watchers, but in reality at a marvelous speed, it *suddenly swung around to the right*, displaying, as it made its graceful curve, *a number of lights that scintillated like a cluster of green stars*. In addition to this numerous dim white and cream flickering lights reached from the headlights to the stern, which, it soon developed, was adorned with a *cluster of brilliant little red sparks of light*. *(The little red sparks were emitted from the commutator brushes of the electrical motors that powered the propellers.)*

The maneuvering of the object in lowering and rising, as well as the arrangement and color of the lights *left no doubt but that the object was the airship* which has been hovering over the central portion of Texas for the past several days.

No stop was made, but an almost southeasterly course was pursued by the ship. The aerial visitor passed out of sight by degrees, the *red stern lights* growing dimmer and dimmer until they seemed to gradually dissolve into the blackness of the night ("The Airship In San Antonio," *San Antonio Express*, April 26, 1897).

There are now a sufficient number of corroborating accounts to safely say the red stern lights designated the backside or rear of the airship. But why did the airship need to identify its backside if the skies over America were not occupied with other airships? Only an inventor concerned with the prospect of inadvertently colliding with another airship in the darkness of night would even think to place signal lights on the rear and sides of an airship. The placement of signal lights is persuasive evidence of additional ships going about the spring nights of 1897.

MADE ITS ESCAPE

Airship Fled When it Discovered it Was Observed at Lacoste

Lacoste, Tex., April 24—To the Express. I thought it would be interesting to you to give a description of a most curious object visible to the entire inhabitants of Lacoste, Tex., upon the night of the 24th inst [*April 24*].

What I suppose to be an airship appeared about 8:50 p.m. making a circuit in the heavens above Lacoste station, then gradually ascended and rushing off at a marvelous speed in a northern direction about 60 miles an hour.

The airship appeared to be about 40 feet long shaped like an acute angle and equipped with what appeared to be canvas, but from the distance, which was about half a mile, I cannot describe it exactly. By the aid of a telescope *two men were plainly seen* and the light which flashed could be seen at a great distance. When first seen the airship appeared to be alighting, as it circled the town for about ten minutes, but we were sadly disappointed when the object disappeared from our vision. Yours truly, James J. Jones (*San Antonio Express*, April 27, 1897).

The two men seen on this airship may or may not have been S. E. Tillman and A. E. Dolbear, mentioned in a previous account describing two men aboard an airship.

Bay City, Texas, April 28.—The airship passed over Matagorda at 12:00 o'clock midnight, Sunday 25th instant. A little boy saw it, ran in the house and told his parents to come and see the big bird flying, they stepped out of the house and saw it: 'twas going in a westerly direction. Several other reliable persons saw the ship (*Houston Post*, April 30, 1897, p. 7).

AIRSHIP AGAIN

The airship made its appearance again early yesterday morning [April 25]. At least three young men who were camping up on Bull Creek, at Huddle's point, say they saw it. Messrs. Geo Proctor, Ted Tobin and Jno Caldwell went up the lake Saturday afternoon for a couple of days' camp and pitched their tents at Huddle's Point. About 3 o'clock yesterday morning it began to rain, and the young men were compelled to get up and fasten their tent. It was at this time they saw the mysterious aircraft. They claim it was in sight fully fifteen minutes and are positive they could not have been mistaken. At intervals of every few seconds it would *throw its searchlights*, and the boys say the light looked *as big as four ordinary arc lights*. It made its appearance from behind Mount Bounell and traveled north. The boys broke camp last afternoon they say because it was raining so hard, but that mysterious light probably made the rain seen wetter than usual (*Austin American Statesman*, April 26, 1897, p. 3).

AIRSHIP LOCATED

It is enroute to Cuba to Scatter Dynamite Among Weyler's Forces.

Philadelphia. April 26.—A carefully planned expedition left for Cuba last night [*April 25*] from near Sea Isle, N.J. The supply of arms and ammunitions left New York Saturday on lighters and was placed on a tug between Barengal and Long Branch. The tug came steadily down the coast and was soon joined by another boat. In the way of munitions, the expedition took along a Hotchkiss gun, 1,000 rifles, 13,000 rounds of ammunition, 2,000 machetes, a lot of medicine and *what is known as an experimental flying machine adopted to the use of dynamite* (*Austin Daily Statesman*, April 27, 1897, p. 1).

The U.S. Army maintained an experimental airship program at an army balloon post outside Denver, Colorado. The reference to an "experimental flying machine adopted to the use of dynamite" is intriguing. This "carefully planned" expedition was probably a military expedition financed and sponsored by the Cuban rebels' political party, the Cuban Revolutionary Party, based in New York City. The use of airships for dynamiting cities seems to be a theme running through several airship accounts. Was the government involved in a secret project to bomb Havana? We cannot say with any degree of certainty at this point. However, Professor (and Captain) Tillman, crew member of an airship mentioned in chapter 7, held the occupation of instructor of chemistry at West Point U.S. Military Academy. Tillman later became superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy. Was Tillman's connection to the airship crowd a coincidence or part of a covert plan?

According to the U.S. Military Academy archivist, as quoted by Daniel Cohen, Tillman applied for and received a leave of absence from the academy from April 24 to an unknown date. In consulting with the academy

historian, I have found through my research that he had no such leave in April. The only papers the current Academy historian found concerning a leave for Tillman were dated for a leave in September. Yet, Tillman was positively identified as one of the two individuals present at Stephenville on April 17 and he was seen checking into a hotel in New Orleans a few days later. Was Tillman on some type of detached orders, flying around the Texas countryside with the full knowledge and consent of his superiors? The latter explanation is the only one that makes sense unless we believe there are leave papers for Tillman with an earlier date and the archivist just could not locate them. Perhaps, there was a hidden (army) agenda. Or, maybe Tillman did not need leave orders, as it was the week of Easter, a holiday at the U.S. Military Academy.

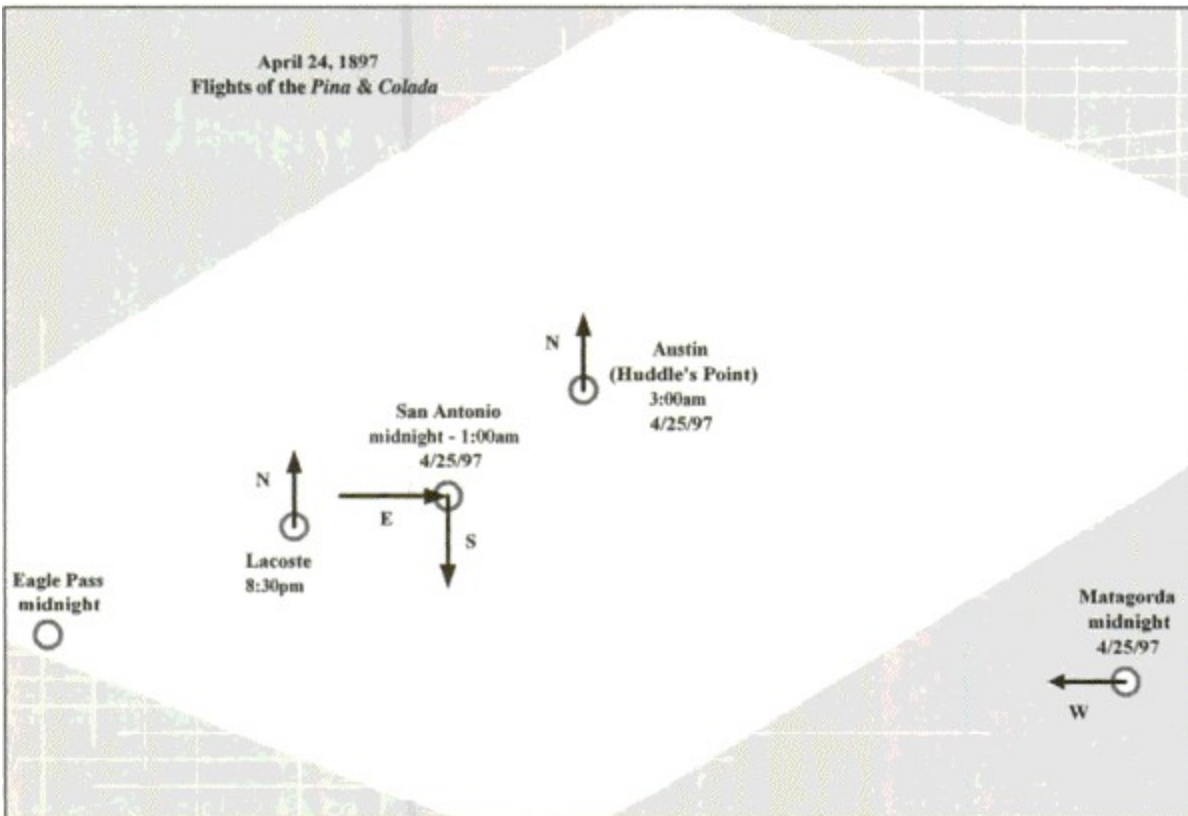
ANCHOR OF THE AIRSHIP

Merkel, Texas, April 26.—Some parties returning from church last night [April 25] noticed a *heavy object dragging along with a large rope attached*. They followed it until in crossing the railroad it caught on a rail. On looking up they saw what they supposed was the airship. It was not near enough to get an idea of the dimensions. A light could be seen protruding from several windows; one bright light in front like a headlight of a locomotive. After some ten minutes a man was seen descending the rope, he came near enough to be plainly seen. He wore a blue sailor suit, was small in size. He stopped when he discovered parties at the anchor and cut the rope below him and sailed off in a northeast direction.

The *anchor is now on exhibition* at the blacksmith shop of Elliot & Miller and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people (*Houston Post*, April 28, 1897; *Terrell Times-Star*, May 7, 1897).

A California inventor by the name of Dr. C. A. Smith, when interviewed by a *San Francisco Call* reporter in November 1896, stated that his airship would possess just such an anchor and that he was planning a trip across the continent in April 1897.

Dr. Smith's presence in Texas in April 1897, associated with an airship similar in design to the one he patented in 1896 (see appendix A) and matching his description of the airship identified in the *San Francisco Call* interview, is proof beyond any reasonable doubt that these airships were not figments of people's mind, manifestations of mass hysteria, or the ghosts of railroad or newspaper hoaxes; but they and the men who flew them were real. (See chapter 19 for full *Call* interview with Dr. Smith.)



April 24, 1897, sightings

We can clearly see two areas of airship operations on the night of April 24. The distance from Matagorda to San Antonio is 203 miles. Airships were seen in both cities almost simultaneously. Obviously, one airship cannot be in two places separated by such distance at the same time. To account for the sightings, we conclude there must be two airships about on the night of April 24. One airship is ranging the east coast of Texas (Matagorda) while the other is exploring the southern portion of the state.

TABLE 20
April 24, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/24/97	Lacoste	TX	8:50 P.M.	N	60 mph	1/2 mile	SAE 4/27/97
4/24/97	Eagle Pass	TX	Midnight				SAE 4/27/97

Note: *SAE = San Antonio Express*

TABLE 21
April 25, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/25/97	Matagorda	TX	Midnight	W			HP 4/30/97
4/25/97	San Antonio	TX	Midnight - 1:00 A.M.	E then S			HP 4/30/97
4/25/97	Huddle's Point	TX	3:00 A.M.	N			AAS/ADS 4/26/97

Note: *HP = Houston Post*
 AAS = Austin American Statesman
 ADS = Austin Daily Statesman

CHAPTER₁₅

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 1897

The airships seemed to take the day off, as only one sighting occurs for April 25. And we continue ...

Rosanky, Texas, April 26.—About 11:20 [*April 25*] last night the airship was seen passing Rosanky, Texas, about two hundred feet in the air. It made a *noise something like a swarm of bees*; the lights were bright; three lights were seen and it looked to be about twenty feet long. It caused quite an excitement and people do not understand the strange visitor (*Houston Post*, April 29, 1897, p. 10).

The noise, "something like a swarm of bees," sounds like the humming of fans or propellers and electrical motors.

TABLE 22
April 25, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/25/97	Rosanky	TX	11:20 P.M.			200 ft	HP 4/29/97

Note: *HP = Houston Post*

CHAPTER₁₆

MONDAY, **A**PRIL 26, 1897

There are two sightings for April 26. The airships are getting scarce. Let's continue.

ANOTHER AIRSHIP STORY

Stockman From Devine Says It Passed Over His Ranch

Mr. W. B. Adams, a prominent ranchman and merchant of Medina County, came to town yesterday and after transacting the business that brought him here, spent the rest of the day in telling about how the airship passed over Medina County.

"The ship flew directly over my ranch near Devine, last Monday [April 26]," he said to an intensely excited group in front of the Southern Hotel, "and was plainly seen by myself and several other people on the ranch. It was about forty feet long, about 300 feet high, and in the matter of appearance tallied pretty closely with descriptions given by people in other sections who have seen it. It was going in the direction of Mexico, and making pretty good time. As nearly as could be made out it *contained seven or eight people*. As it passed over, a piece of paper was thrown over, which fluttered down to following in plain legible English: "This is the best part of Texas we have passed over. The climate seems delightful, the air pure and the scenery picturesque. In fact, we are prone to pronounce this the finest country that a flying machine ever flew over. Tell them that you saw us."

Mr. John Herring of San Antonio here interposed to remark that Mr. Adams was never in politics, and that he would back any statement Mr. Adams might make or words to that effect.

"There is great excitement down that way over the appearance of the aerial monster," continued Mr. Adams.

"At first it was believed by many to be of supernatural origin, but when its occupants throw over their opinion of that part of Medina County, we were reassured somewhat, deciding it to contain a part of prospectors who know a good country when they see it" (*San Antonio Express*, April 28, 1897, p. 5).

ANOTHER AIRSHIP

Conductor Sam Betters and Brakeman Harry Babcock, of the Southern Pacific, are of the opinion that there is a whole fleet of airships wandering about the skies, or that the one particular airship, which nearly everyone claims to have seen at another place at the same time is a fast traveler. As Messrs. Betters and Babcock were out on their run Monday night [April 26], Babcock was sitting on the brake of a box car, while the train was passing Spofford. The train was speeding along, when something struck Babcock on the shoulder and almost knocked him from his perch. He only heard a humming noise and as he turned to see where the mysterious blow came from he saw the white winged airship making fast time for the west (*San Antonio Light*, April 29, 1897, p. 4).

HISTORY OF THE SHIP

So *many contradictory reports* as to this airship have been published that the public has almost come to believe it a hoax. In many instances particularly bright clusters of stars have been mistaken by feverish imaginations for the ship, and in others romancing space writers have spun fabulous yarns in regard to this mysterious vessel.

Little in reality is known of the exact nature of this airship, except that it is the *product of 'two American inventors*.

The ship was completed probably on Nov. 27 of last year and was seen for the first time on the evening of that day as it rose from one of the numerous rock ridges or islands *off the California coast*. For several days it hovered over San Francisco, creating a profound sensation. The columns of the San Francisco Express were filled with the news of the aerial mystery. The correspondents of the San Francisco journals all over California were instructed to keep watch of the movements of the mystery, in hopes that a man might be on the spot should the navigator make a descent to the earth. The Examiner finally succeeded in ferreting out the island where the ship had been put together, and from whence it had started on its aerial voyage. By degrees a general idea of the structure of the ship was secured.

The investors were *Hiram Wilson, a native of New York and son of Willard H. Wilson, assistant master mechanic of the New York Central Railroad, and a young electrical engineer, C.J. Walsh of San Francisco*. The men had labored on their project several years, and when their plans were matured they had the parts of the ship constructed to order in different sections of the country, whence they were shipped to the rendezvous at San Francisco and were assembled on the island ("The Airship In San Antonio," *San Antonio Express*, April 26, 1897).

I do not think the Wilsons and Walsh were "investors" in the sense that they invested their money into the airship project. I think "investors" in this account implies that they put their time and sweat into designing and building the airship, that is, they were the inventors.

The fact that there were many contradictory reports would be expected if multiple airships (perhaps each designed somewhat different from the other), with varying lengths and encompassing various numbers of crew members, were flying about every night.

In the final chapters we discuss Hiram Wilson, Willard Wilson, and C.J. Walsh.

ITS VOYAGE TO TEXAS

After some experimental navigation in California [*in November 1896*] an attempt was apparently made to cross the continent and the ship was traced as far East as Utah, after which nothing was heard from it for months. [*Then the airships suddenly appeared over the Midwest in the spring of 1897.*]

The most plausible theory of the sudden disappearance of the ship [*in 1896*] is that some defects were developed and that a rendezvous was made in some out of the way section of the West until changes could be affected. It is believed that the present trip of the machine is for further experimental purposes.

The story of the renewed movements of the airships is well known to the readers of The Express, accounts of its passage over New Mexico and the West having been given from time to time in the press dispatches. *[Accounts from New Mexico papers for the year 1897 would certainly shed additional light on the subject].*

Since its advent in this state, it has coursed about indiscriminately for several days. In that time it has been seen by hundreds of people and two descents are known to have been made. It was thought that a descent was intended in this vicinity on account of the ship's close proximity to the earth in passing the city, but none was probably made, as the ship was seen some time after midnight (*April 26th?*) by Papio Guerra, an employee on the Yturri ranch, about fourteen miles southeast of the city. The ship at that time was high in the air and rapidly speeding in a southeasterly direction ("The Airship In San Antonio," *San Antonio Express*, April 26, 1897).

TABLE 23
April 26, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/26/97	Spofford	TX	Night	W	Fast time		SAE 4/29/97
4/26/97	Devine (Medina County)	TX		S	Pretty good time	300 ft	SAE 4/28/97

**Devine is 34 miles southwest of San Antonio. Spofford is 102 miles west of Devine.*

Note: *SAE = San Antonio Express*

CHAPTER₁₇

APRIL 27-**M**AY 12, 1897

There are eleven sightings reported for the period April 27 through May 12. I suspect there were many more sightings, but few were reported to the newspapers, and few newspapers printed the reports they received. Why? Because airships were becoming common sights and just were not newsworthy anymore. We finish the tabulation of Texas airship sightings with this chapter. The remaining chapters are devoted to exploring the information we have collected from these reports. To complete this portion of our story, we continue with the reports .. .

TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 1897

THOUGHT IT WAS AN AIRSHIP

People at Van Alstyne Mistook a Central Special for the Aerial Tourist.

Denison, Tex. April 28.—The people of Van Alstyne thought they had captured a real airship last night [*April 27*] when the Central special [*a passenger train*] bearing Gen. Hubbard and party passed through there about 9:30 o'clock. They had been reading about the airships touring the country, and the big electric headlight on the engine was something new to them. The train was coming down grade at a rate of speed that would have made even an airship envious. Some one saw the headlight, and as there was no train due at that hour, he at once announced the airship was about to alight at Van Alstyne. The news spread like wildfire, and when the train stopped at the station the platform was thronged with people to see the sight. Superintendent L. A. Daffan, who was in the party, went out and talked to those assembled at the station, and tells the story of how they mistook the train for an airship with a great deal of gusto (*Dallas Morning News*, April 28, 1897).

THE AIRSHIP

MR. McGOLDRICK NOW HAS AN ORDER TO FILL

Is Acquainted With The Navigators But is Oath Bound—They Use Gas
And Weights

Mr. W. H. McGoldrick, superintendent of the gas department of the San Antonio Gas and Electric Company, says of the famous airship which has been so often of late in various parts of Texas that he is well acquainted with the promoters of the same and has been in constant communication with them, *up to the last four days ago*. He is under oath, however, not to divulge their names or the plan upon which their airship is constructed, but he is free to say that the ship is *lifted by gas and operated by gas and the same agent is used in the culinary department of the airy travelers*. They use *acetylene gas* and he has now an order for a quantity for them which they can store for a journey of thousands of miles. *The gas in use is contained in a large silk bag in the center of the ship. Inside the silk bag is a bag of rubber which holds 28,700 cubic feet of this gas at one filling*. As to the sails, rudder and construction Mr. McGoldrick will give a description later to the Light. *He says the machine is raised and lowered with weights* (*San Antonio Light*, April 28, 1897, p. 5).

Two thousand pounds can be lifted by 28,700 cubic feet of hydrogen gas. Acetylene will only lift about 90 percent of the amount lifted by hydrogen. Therefore, the airship mentioned in this account could only lift approximately 1,800 pounds. If the 28,700 cubic feet number is correct, the airship observed in this account must have been one of the smaller (50 or 75 feet) airships. The dimensions for a 28,700 cubic foot airship would be approximately 75' x 20' x 20' or some combination thereof. These

dimensions are in close agreement with some of the observations made in previous accounts.

The method of using weights to raise or lower the airship involves shifting the weights forward or rearward to force the vessel's nose up or down, as appropriate.

In November 1896, Dr. C. A. Smith said he was constructing an airship that used acetylene gas and he would be flying it around the continent in April 1897. Also, he stated that the lights would be battery operated. What better place to set your airship down than next to a company that can replenish your supply of gas and recharge your batteries? (See the "Supplies for Airship" account in chapter 12 and the November 1896 *San Francisco Call* interview with Dr. C. A. Smith in chapter 19.) However, Dr. Smith said his airship would be 160 feet long, much longer than the one identified in this account. Is there another explanation? Of course, there is, but we will delve into the particulars in the latter chapters. You may be getting tired of hearing that refrain, but we must develop the story in a coherent fashion, else it gets too confusing to keep track of who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Of great interest is McGoldrick's comment that the "promoters" have been "in constant communication with them, up to the last four days" or since April 23 or twenty-fourth. Why did McGoldrick lose contact with the airships? Could it have been because of the crash in Aurora and the subsequent statewide search (by the other vessels) for the lost ship?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 1897

THE AIRSHIP SEEN HERE

IT PASSED OVER THE CITY EARLY YESTERDAY MORNING IN
A RAIN MOVED SLOWLY, PLAINLY VISIBLE

Seen by More Than One Person. Work of Hiram Wilson, Son of the
Master Mechanic of the New York Central.

The airship, carrying a large headlight, passed over the city yesterday morning *[April 28]*, apparently 300 or 400 feet above the earth. It moved slowly at first, traveling in a northwesterly direction, but its speed seemed to be greatly increased when it reached a point probably over Shoal Creek.

A gentleman out north of the capitol saw it, and a colored man living on Robertson Hill had a sight of the aerial visitor.

A fine view of it was had by Mr. Otto F. Porsch, 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. He is well known and has a large circle of friends. A Statesman reporter saw Mr. Porsch at his place of business yesterday, and he told the following story:

"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," and Mr. Porsch arranged his hands in a *Vshape*, somewhat like the tail of a fish. "It was still moving very slowly, 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."

Asked if he saw any colored lights, he said:

"No, I did not. It was just a very large, ordinary light and very blinding until it passed me."

Mr. Porsch said that a gentleman living out north of the capitol told him yesterday forenoon that he had seen the ship at the same time Mr. Porsch did.

Mr. Porsch said: "After it had disappeared I went back into the house and looked at the clock, and it was exactly fifteen minutes after 4.

A colored man named Gray saw the ship as it passed over yesterday morning.

The Galveston News of yesterday contained a story that the vessel landed in Uvalde a few days ago near the residence of Sheriff H. W. Baylor. Two men were aboard, with whom Mr. Baylor talked, one of them giving his name as Wilson, and he said he had lived in Fort Worth, and the News of yesterday confirmed the story and shows he did live in the Panther City, where he worked on an airship ("The Airship Seen Here," *San Antonio Express*, April 29, 1897).

The description of the airship's rear in this account, "V-shaped," agrees with Dr. C. A. Smith's description of the same: "the furstrum of a cone." Dr. Smith described such an airship in a November 1896 *San Francisco Call* interview six months prior to the date of the sighting given in this account. (See Dr. Smith's *San Francisco Call* interview in chapter 19.) Was this the same ship carrying Mr. Wilson? If so, were Mr. Wilson and Dr. Smith collaborators? (See the account in chapter 12 titled "Supplies for Airship.")

THE AIRSHIP

Panola County Farmer Talked with the Navigators To the Editor of the Post

Seeing so much about the airship in the papers put me on the look out, and much to my gratification my vigilance was rewarded, not only in seeing the airship, but also had the pleasure of meeting a party of aerial travelers.

About 8 o'clock p.m. [April 28?] I heard my horses—old gentle work stock—snorting, running and bucking around like a drove of broncos on a regular stampede. On going out to my lot to see what could have alarmed them, I sighted about a quarter of a mile off and seemingly about 300 feet from the earth a very brilliant and a variegated light, coming from SW and headed NE, traveling rapidly. It would occasionally make a circle, and now and then be reflected down to the earth, virtually turning a very dark and cloudy night into day.

After hovering around for a few minutes it gradually descended in an open field nearby. I, having by this time recognized it as an airship, went directly to the place of landing, and on arrival found the ship of about the same make up as given by various correspondents. Its *ere w was composed of five men*, three of whom entertained me while the other two took rubber bags and went for a supply of water at the well, 100 yards off. They informed me that this was *one of five ships* that had been traversing the country over recently; and that this individual ship was the same one recently landed near Beaumont, in this state, after having traveled pretty nearly over all the northwest. They stated that these ships were *put up in an interior town in Illinois*.

They were rather reticent about giving out information in regards to the ship's manufacturer and since they had not yet secured everything by patent, but stated that they would soon be secure in this, and expected to establish a factory in St. Louis at an early day, and would at once enter into active competition with the railroads for passenger traffic, especially in transcontinental travel. They stated that they could shorten time from Atlantic to Pacific two or three days. The ship's crew were careful not to forget earthly things, though traveling in the heavens. They were all supplied with edibles of all sorts—likewise drinkables; had a good supply of beer and champagne. Also had a full supply of musical instruments.

The ship was seen by a number of people in this section and some very amusing scenes took place. A good many of the semisuperstitious thought it had close connection with Judgment day. It passed near a camp meeting being held by the sanctified people, some of whom went into paroxysms of alarm, while others hailed it as a special messenger sent in a divine and providential way to throw light into the minds of their benighted neighbors who are yet wandering in the darkness of religious theories taught by the old school churches. The ship left my farm at 8:30 p.m., bound for St. Louis, so the party told me. H. C. Lagrome, Deadwood, Panola County, Texas (*Houston Post*, April 30, 1897, p. 7).

This account was first printed in the *Shreveport Times* on April 24. The sighting actually occurred on April 23. (See chapter 13, "The Airship Seen by a Thoroughly Reliable and Well Known Citizen (To the Times)" account.) The *Shreveport Times* credits an H. L. Lagrome of Deadwood for the story, while the *Houston Post* credits an H. C. Lagrome. There are wording differences between the two accounts but no substantive differences.

Several previous accounts have stated that the airship was but one of five manufactured in Iowa, but this one states that the crewman said this was

one of five ships built in Illinois. Of course, Iowa is but a great stone's throw across the Mississippi River from Illinois. But, I think the crewman must have said Iowa and either the observer or the reporter "heard" Illinois.

This observer noticed the crew were "well supplied with musical instruments." Maybe Walter Williams (of the "Has a Music Crew" account in chapter 7) really did hear the crew playing music while sleeping on Mount Calm.

Conroe, Texas, April 29.—B. F. Hord, night operator, a most respectable gentleman,. reports seeing the much talked of airship last night [April 28], which was at a great height and traveling southwesterly (*Houston Post*, April 30, 1897, p. 7).

THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 1897

AIRSHIP COMING WILL BE IN TOWN NEXT TUESDAY NIGHT

Passed Over Main Plaza Yesterday Morning And Will Come Back
Next Tuesday Night

The famous airship which has recently created so much talk all over the country, passed over San Antonio yesterday morning [April 29] and will again visit us next Tuesday [May 4].

Yesterday morning between one and two o'clock a waiter at the Southern Hotel was going across Main Plaza when he heard something heavy fall near by and turned to see if someone had not thrown a stone he discovered a small piece of iron with a tag and a letter attached thereto. He then looked up to see from whence it came and says he saw a large, cigar shaped object moving through the air almost over Wolfson's store, going north, but could distinguish no lights on the object as the airship is reported to carry.

The object which had fallen was a lock used for holding a rope to prevent it from slipping and bore evidence of having been removed from some freshly painted surface, white paint adhering to it in several places. To this, "attached by a hempen cord, was an ordinary ship ping tag, bearing the inscription "Just from the airship 'Sacramento.'"

A letter enclosed in a small envelope, was also tied to the weight and addressed "To the public."

These the boy gave to another waiter named Pablo Remedios, who took them to Mr. Chas. A. R. Campbell, the druggist, where they were given to a Light reporter this morning.

The following is the letter contained in the envelope attached to the weight and which is self explanatory and is given verbatim, even to some incorrect spelling:

"On board the Airship 'Sacramento,' April 27, 1897. As we have just landed and received our mail and papers we have noticed from articles in the papers, that there is some doubt in the minds of the people as to the existence of an airship sailing over the country; in order to convince the people of your city, we will sail over San Antonio on May the 4th between 6:30 and 8 o'clock P. M. going in a westerly direction, entering the city near Government hill and going west following the line of the S. P. Railroad as near as possible.

"If the people are on the lookout we will try to give as pretty a display as possible for our small ship. If the weather is not fine you need not look for the ship, as we *always land in case of storms and on dark nights*. We expect to have our ship ready for general use, in carrying passengers and freight by fall, until then we will be very secret in regard to our movements. We will make three copies of this and drop them in different parts of the city, as we pass over tonight, in the hope that one may be found for publication. 'First Mate L. S.^m

The letter is written in a clear, bold hand, in ink, on ordinary paper and occupying the first and second pages. It was either written by some practical joker and thrown from the roof of one of the tall buildings in the vicinity and the finder's imagination about seeing the

object moving off was somewhat stretched, or is a genuine message from the navigators of this strange air craft.

The truth, however, will be known next Tuesday night, when the airship will either put in its appearance and prove itself a reality or will not show up and prove the note to be a fake (*San Antonio Light*, April 30, 1897, p. 5).

Well, there is no known report of the airship's appearance over San Antonio on May 4. Either the note was a fake—which is entirely possible, as there were other notorious fake notes from the aircrew—or the airship found "other fish to fry."

The remark about landing on dark or stormy nights is consistent with the reported sightings of the airship.

AERIAL NAVIGATION

San Antonio is the latest station passed by the airship, and the Express vouches for it as a bona fide craft. That there really is such an invention now seems beyond doubt. Numerous reputable citizens have caught sight of it, passing through the air over various parts of the state, giving unimpeachable testimony proving the fact. The great feat of navigating the air seems beyond all doubt to have been accomplished. That which has been the dream of men for many generations, which was attempted by the scientists many centuries ago, has been done through the tireless efforts of the genius of the present day. It is a fitting crown for the innumerable great and wonderful inventions which have marked progress of this nineteenth century, now so fast drawing to a close. It is also a fitting triumph for our proud republic that this last great turn of the wheel of progress has been made by American genius.

A flying machine that will fly is no longer an impossibility—it seems beyond all doubt an established fact. What has so long been considered the futile effort of a class of cranks will most probably soon be disclosed to the wondering world as an ingenious contrivance made by intelligent effort, which will rank its producer with Fulton, who so astonished the world with the steam boat, with Morse who electrified the world with the telegraph, with Edison, Teale, and countless others who have given to man such productions of their genius and labor. Who knows? The revolution in present methods of travel and communication between distant lands which the accomplishment of aerial navigation will produce is too vast, and involves too varied possibilities to be grasped in a moment. Its contemplation affords infinite matter of dreams and speculation as to what man may do, how space and time may be annihilated—when the air may be made to transport one whither one lists.

What next will the divine gift of genius contribute towards the onward progress of the world {*Brownsville [Texas] Daily Herald*, April 29, 1897, p. 2).

AIRSHIPS MAY BE UNCLE SAM'S.

He Has Been Experimenting With Dirigible Balloons.

It may be that those people out west who have for the last six months have been filling the papers with accounts of a mysterious airship which they have seen in the sky are not monumental liars after all. It is possible that experiments now being made by the United States government with a view to producing a dirigible, a controllable balloon—in other words, a genuine airship—may be responsible for their visions.

For several years the government has had in its employ a well known aeronaut, who gets, it is said, a salary of \$10,000 a year, and constant work and experiment has been going on. Every great nation has a balloon department in its army organization and a balloon depot. The balloon depot of the United States is at Fort Logan, near Denver, and the whole balloon business is in charge of the signal service of the army.

A profound secrecy has been maintained as to what has been accomplished, even army officers themselves only getting vague inklings of what is going on. The captive balloon problem seems to have been pretty well solved by all nations, and in the next war among other powers there is no doubt that the movement of each other's armies will be watched from balloons sent in the air and held by a rope 1000 feet long. But it is the airship, the dirigible balloon, that the nations are after, the United States among them. It will be remembered that Fredrick Allen Gower, Nordical's first husband, thought he had solved the problem of a dirigible balloon capable of being used for war purposes, and lost his life in attempting to cross the British channel in an airship of his own invention.

About a year ago it was announced that the Italian government had been successful in its airship experiments, and had constructed dirigible balloons, which, in case of war, would be let loose over the devoted heads of hostile armies. These airships were said to be arranged so as to drop dynamite in the camps and forts of an enemy or on his soldiers marching in the field, captain *Phillip Reade*, not long ago in an article in one of the service magazines, stated that the United States had made extensive experiments with dirigible balloons, and that the results had been most encouraging, but would not be made public except in case of war. There have been rumors of late of an airship in process of construction at Fort Sheridan, near Chicago, but they were rumors of the baguette kind, and Fort Logan would be the natural place for the construction of such a dirigible balloon.

There is hardly any doubt that the United States has in its possession an airship which is regarded by the officers of the signal service corps as fairly successful. For all that is known definitely on the subject by outsiders it may be several. It is possible that it is one of Uncle Sam's dirigible balloons -which has been so exciting the western folk.

The most tangible thing which has come from the west about the mysterious airship so many declare they have seen, or else the greatest "fake," is a photograph taken by Walter McCann last Sunday from a suburb of Chicago, which shows an airship in the sky. Experts who examined the two negatives taken by McCann were unable to detect any tampering with them, and believed the photograph to be genuine. Also several people were ready to swear that they saw the airship in the city at the time McCann took the picture, and saw McCann operate his camera. At any rate, there is one interesting thing about his picture: the airship shown in the photograph is not so unlike the German war balloon in shape. At the last maneuvers of the German army a balloon was used, which was pronounced the most successful of its kind. It was cigar-shaped, with a rudder aft and a projection below the after part of the body on the machine like the keel of a vessel. The airship which McCann says he photographed was very like it.

The German balloon, however, was not of the dirigible variety, but was held captive by a long rope. In these days of submarine torpedo boats and aerial dynamite throwers war is assuming a new and interesting phase. Is this western airship a reality and the forerunner of Tennyson's vision in Locksley Hall:

"Heard the heavens filled with shouting and there rained a ghastly dew;

From the nations' airy navice, grappling in the central blue far along
the world-wide whisper of south wind rushing warm;

With the standards of the nations plunging through the thunderstorm
(*Galveston Daily News*, April 29, 1897, p. 10).

Recall a previous article ("Airship Located," chapter 14) that claimed an experimental airship adopted for dropping dynamite was on board a ship that was part of a military expedition headed for Cuba. When considered in light of Captain Tillman's presence in the airship arena, this article lends some credence to the supposition that the airships flying about in the spring of 1897 may have been the product of a secret government project.

MAY2-MAY12,1897

Editorial comment: The airship appears to be a purely Western invention this time, and the East is taking no interest whatever in it. Possibly gentlemen who are out late in the East are simply too full to look up (*Houston Post*, May 2, 1897).

THE AIRSHIP

A Very Reliable Citizen of Medina County Vouches For It.

Mr. Nato Villareal, of San Antonio, yesterday received the following letter from Mr. Ed. Krause, a well known merchant of Medina Station, which Mr. Villareal has given the Light for publication:

Kind Sir and Friend: After wishing you well, I will tell you that much wrote of airship paid our city a visit. I have been reading and hearing a great deal about the air motor, but have always believed it to be a fake, but now I am convinced that it is so, as last night *[the letter is not dated so we do not know when "last night" is]* it hovered over my place and finally came down just back of the Hermann gin.

There are *two men and a woman and child* with the ship. The child is very sick, and one of the men (*he says his name is Jones*) came over to get some milk. I told him to go over to your ranch and your people treated him nicely.

As it was very dark last night, and you know our street car line has no headlight, it came pretty near striking Mr. Jones, as it was returning from the opera house. I wish it would have struck Mr. Jones, as then I would have been in possession of his airship.

Well returning to the airship, they also wished to have a doctor so I got Dr. Bywater. He gave them the necessary medicine. After we had the child O.K I asked Mr. Jones over to the saloon, and we had a few scoops of Lone Star beer. He bought a corkscrew and some bottle beer. So we walked back to where the airship was.

When they were ready to ascend, Katherine Garza came up, (Mr. Arnold will tell you who Katherine is) and roped the airship. The poor fellow hung to the rope a while, but soon had to leave all holds go and drop. The airship is cigar shaped and from the way she sailed is surely a good success. When you come out again will tell you exactly where the ship landed and show you the print on the ground. Your friend, ED KRAUSE,

PS. Our street car is in fine shape. Send out some headlights as we don't want any damage suits to pay (*San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1897, p. 7; *Houston Post*, May 7, 1897, p. 4).

AIRSHIP SEEN AT LLANO

Rumor that It Is A Spanish War Scout Seemingly Confirmed

Llano, Texas, May 9.—(Special.)—The much talked of airship was seen at this place last night [*May 8*] about 10:00 o'clock by several persons who are perfectly reliable in every way. When first seen it was just over the city and moved slowly in a northwesterly direction. When almost directly over the Algona Hotel it was seen to pause for a short time as if inspecting the buildings which are to be used for a military school, then continued to sail serenely in a northwesterly direction. The ship was visible for about twenty minutes, and was seen by ten or twelve persons (*Austin Daily Statesman*, May 10, 1897, p. 2).

MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIP

Edison Denounces It as a "Pure Fake"—Thinks It Absurd Believes,
However, That airships Will Be Successfully Constructed in Future—
Will Only Be Toys at Best

Thomas A. Edison doesn't think much of airships. He was seen recently in his West Orange, laboratory in regard to a late account of the movement of the airship, according to which a letter was dropped from it on a farm near Astoria, Ill., with a cipher enclosure addressed to Edison and signed "C. L. Harris, electrician airship No. 5."

Mr. Edison paused from a luncheon of sandwiches, pumpkin pie and tea to observe: "You can take it from me that that is a pure fake. I have had several men named Harris in my employ, but I know nothing of C. L. Harris."

"I have no doubt that airships will be successfully constructed in the near future, but there has been too much talk about this suppose airship out west. I have always found that there is much talk before these airships are tired and very little afterward.

"It is absolutely absurd to imagine that a man would construct a successful airship and keep the matter secret. When I was young we used to construct big colored paper balloons, inflate them with gas, and they would float about for days. I guess some one has been up to that same game out west.

"When an airship is made it will not be in the form of a balloon. It will be a mechanical contrivance, which will be raised by means of a very powerful motor, which must be made of very light weight. At present no one has discovered such a motor, but we never know what will happen. We may wake up to-morrow morning and hear of some invention which sets us all eagerly to work within a few hours, as was the case with the Roentgen rays. Their success may come. I am not, however, figuring on inventing an airship. I prefer to devote my time to objects which have some commercial *value*. *At best airships would only be toys* (*San Antonio Light*, May 13, 1897, p. 3).

Well, our best nineteenth-century minds did not have crystal balls or clairvoyant brains. Thomas Alva Edison did not have a high regard for the notion of men flying. From our perspective, of 100-plus years in the future, we can say with a great degree of certainty that he was wrong about airships only being toys.

Editorial comment: There is this to be said for Prof. Barnard's airship—he isn't afraid to show it (*Houston Post*, May 13, 1897, p. 4).

See chapter 20 for an account of Professor Barnard and his airship.

THAT AIR SHIP.

Some Kind of Object Passed Over the City. Fort Worth May 12.

Captain Scobie said last night (*May 12*) that about 8 o'clock Mrs. Scobie called him to see something strange passing over the city and on going into the yard he could observe something that might have been an airship or balloon.

It was high up, being above the small clouds flitting through the sky at that time. It was a dark object with a wonderfully bright light on top of it and it was going rapidly in a southeastern direction.

The captain said it had no appearance of being a meteor or star, *but moves as balloon would*. What it was he could not undertake to say, but that he saw it there is no doubt.

Many others report having seen the sky flyer at the same time (*Dallas Times Herald*, May 13, 1897, p. 6).

Editorial Comment: As lightly as we may treat the airship problem, there are thousands of wise people who think that the next century will be the age of utilization of the atmosphere for transportation purposes as the present century has been the age of steam and the beginning of electric inventions and discoveries. *Those of us who are living now are just a century too soon to witness man's greatest triumphs*, but we have the advantage of our greatgrandfathers (*Houston Post*, May 14, 1897, p. 4).

We can say the same thing about ourselves, and so it is with each succeeding generation as the years tumble on by. There were some conflicting opinions in 1897 about the ability of man to design and build a successful flying machine and about what conquering the air might bring in terms of future benefits to humankind. Recall the article that gave Edison's opinion of flying. This editor was right. Too bad he never lived to see the Concorde fly faster than the speed of sound.

Although occasional references to airships continued in some newspapers around the country, the mysterious flying machines were never seen again in Texas, nor were the airships mentioned in any Texas newspaper after May 13, 1897.

TABLE 24
April 27 - May 12, 1897, Sightings

Date	City	State	Time	Dir	Speed	Alt	Reported by
4/29/97	San Antonio	TX	1-2 A.M.	N			<i>SAL</i> 4/30/97
4/28/97	San Antonio	TX	Early morning	SE-NW		300-400 ft	<i>SAE</i> 4/29/97
4/28/97	Austin	TX	4:15 A.M.	NW			<i>ADS</i> 4/29/97
4/28/97	Conroe	TX	Night	SW		Great height	<i>HP</i> 4/30/97
5/8/97	Llano	TX	10:00 P.M.	NW	Slowly		<i>ADS</i> 5/10/97
5/12/97	Fort Worth	TX	8:00 P.M.	SE	Rapidly	High	<i>DTH</i> 5/13/97

Note: *SAL* = *San Antonio Light*
 SAE = *San Antonio Express*
 ADS = *Austin Daily Statesman*
 HP = *Houston Post*
 DTH = *Dallas Times Herald*

CHAPTER₁₈

SOLUTIONS

We have sifted through the pertinent newspaper stories focusing on the great 1897 airship mystery and have sorted a considerable amount of wheat from the chaff. Now, we have six choices to make regarding the origin of the airships.

1) THE GREAT MASS-HYSTERIA PANDEMONIUM

According to Profs. Robert E. Bartholomew and George S. Howard (former chair of the psychology department at Notre Dame University), in their book *UFOs and Alien Contact: Two Centuries of Mystery* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), the answer lies in "conventional theories of social psychology"—the airships are a figment of peoples' imaginations resulting from mass hysteria. (Whatever that is—perhaps, a "scientific" construct to explain something scientists cannot explain because they did not trouble themselves to find out who Samuel Tillman, A. E. Dolbear, Hiram Wilson, Elmer Benjamin, U.S. Marshal Williams, etc. were?)

Bartholomew and Howard say, "the phantom airship wave of 1897 can be explained using theories of social psychology." He goes on to state how unreliable human perception is and how it is greatly influenced by the person's frame of reference at the time of a perception. Bartholomew does not offer any convincing empirical evidence that people did not see anything other than what they claimed to see in 1897. He only offers suspect theories.

What can be said about the existence of such a social construct as mass hysteria? The term "mass hysteria" is a refuge for weak-minded individuals who do not understand how to analyze their data. So-called scientists do not do their homework, or they do a shoddy job of it, and summarily jump to the "mass hysteria" conclusion. In their minds, only with perfect proof,

embodied in the presence of a physical specimen, can there be safety in admitting to something other than "mass hysteria."

Too many reputable and reliable eyewitnesses, such as engineers, scientists, doctors, judges, and lawyers, saw the flying machines for anyone to summarily dismiss them as hysteria. Sure, there were bound to be false reports generated from the quill of morose, bored, and idle newspaper correspondents, motivated by pressing deadlines and the desire for a paycheck. Also, one cannot discount the existence of false accounts resulting from the publicity- and thrill-seeking element of society. However, even tossing out the suspect accounts, there are still too many stories given by respectable individuals to dismiss all of them as hysteria.

2) A SECRET GOVERNMENT PROJECT AND SUBSEQUENT COVER-UP

Within the body of one Texas airship newspaper article, an individual who is a professor of chemistry at the U.S. Military Academy is mentioned as a member of the airship crew. Capt. Samuel E. Tillman is identified as a crew member of the airship found upon the ground at Stephenville ("The Great Aerial Wanderer," chapter 7) on April 17. Another Louisiana article (see chapter 10, "The Airship/One Man Saw It in New Orleans Last Night") identifies Tillman and Dolbear staying at a New Orleans hotel on the same day an airship was seen in New Orleans. The connection between Captain Tillman and the airship appears to be a strong one. The U.S. Military Academy historian cannot find any leave papers for Tillman dated April 1897. Therefore, for Tillman to be absent from his post at West Point and roaming the country in an airship, he must have been either AWOL (a serious infraction of military law, punishable by imprisonment) or participating in the flying experiments with the knowledge and approval of his superiors. Since he went on to serve in the army, including a tour of duty as superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, until he retired with no known disciplinary actions, it is probable the U.S. government was knowledgeable of his participation in the flying experiments. To what extent the government participated in the experiments is unknown. Why the government did not use the technology for gainful purposes may lie in the genesis of the Spanish-American War. A book exploring the use of the airships after the spring of 1897 is planned for publication sometime in 2004. Why was a professor of the U.S. Military Academy aboard the

airship? Was the government involved in the design and manufacture of the airships, and did the government subsequently cover up the airship project? The answers to these legitimate questions are found in the remaining chapters.

For thirty years, I have worked on numerous classified government projects and am very much aware of the military's ongoing experimentation with new technology. For obvious reasons, the military does not go around test-flying state-of-the-art experimental aircraft in daylight. They test those weird-looking machines at night at varied locations during certain times in the test program. What many people see and believe to be UFOs are really experimental or prototypical military aircraft. For examples, look to the early days of the stealth fighter and bomber. What would you have believed you saw if you had encountered one of them (and many people did) for the first time at midnight in 1976? A extraterrestrial UFO, of course.

The military may test more than one experimental aircraft at a time, so even multiple sightings of two or more weird-looking airships may be attributed to military test-flying. Also, the military experiments with all kinds of beyond-leading-edge technological devices—not just funnyshaped aircraft, but also different kinds of propulsion systems, even antigravity systems.

Will the military admit that one of its latest and greatest creations has been spotted and classified as a UFO? No, they will not. However, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) admitted, in 1997, that the United States military establishment deceived the American public for many years in an effort to conceal information concerning high-altitude spy planes. The spy planes, first the Lockheed U-2A and then the Lockheed SR-71, accounted for over half of the UFO reports during the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

The military still flies the SR-71 and other experimental planes. It is reasonable to believe that many UFO sightings today can be attributed to secret military aircraft going about their nightly business. I am not privy to all the weird and crazy things the military experiments with, but I have been associated with enough strangeness to realize many UFO sightings in this country are the result of various governmental bodies performing "magic" in the air. Just as most UFO sightings have a plausible explanation, so too does the great airship mystery of 1897.

3) THEY WERE FROM ANOTHER WORLD

Profs. Robert E. Bartholomew and George S. Howard further theorize that, "The maneuvers described by witnesses were far above any technology of the period—even by today's standards." If this is so, were the occupants of these airships visitors from another world? A published firsthand account of an encounter between an earthling and the "supposedly unearthly" visitors gave credence to the supposition that the flying machines were from another world. Was the manufacturing of these airships done in this world by human hands and guided by an alien knowledge far superior to our own? Remember, this was a time of great, even frenetic, invention in Western society.

Well, with all due respect, these professors are wrong when they say the airships performed maneuvers "far above any technology of the period—even by today's standards." Bartholomew and Howard may be great mass-hysteria proponents, but apparently they know little about aviation or technology. In fact, the maneuvers (simple up, down, and forward maneuvers that helicopters routinely perform today) were quite within the bounds of the technology of the period, albeit the reliability of the machines would be questionable.

There are numerous accounts of individuals coming upon the airships as they reposed on the ground. These accounts often describe the vessels in some detail. In every case, the descriptions of the airships are consistent with 1890s technology and the descriptions of the crew members are consistent with earthly beings. There is not a single, reliable description of an airship with greatly advanced technology (like what you would expect from an alien spaceship that had to pass the boundless distance of space) in all the accounts of airship sightings. Nor is there an account of a live, extraterrestrial crew member.

Although most observers admit that they do not understand the underlying technology that propels the ships so fast and high, the descriptions still include the technology of the period. Not a single observer

remarks on any advanced machinery beyond that already known to exist on earth. Additionally, all firsthand accounts of contact and interviews with the ship's crew members speak of men and women from this planet and assumed to be English-speaking, else the person relaying the story would have mentioned the method or language they used to communicate. We cannot reach any conclusion other than the crew members were from earth, not from Mars or any other world.

The evidence points to machines that incorporated nineteenth-century technology. However much we may wish to attribute the sightings to an alien presence among us, it is unlikely the Martians, or any other galactic neighbors, are going to traverse the void of space using vehicles clearly incorporating nineteenth-century human technology. The accounts describe the airships' construction in terms of aluminum framework, oil-soaked, cloth-covered wings, copper (or brass) bearings, woven baskets, mechanical capstans and iron anchors, and simple mechanical propulsion systems. Batteries and internal combustion engines provided motive power and lift was accomplished using hydrogen or, perhaps, acetylene gas—hardly the technology one would use for interplanetary or galactic travel.

While some people from the time period may be inclined to attribute the mysterious sightings to beings from another planet, it is technologically immature for us, in 2003, to assume beings are going to fly through space in vehicles that are composed of typical nineteenth-century machinery. The firsthand technical descriptions of the craft do not even come close to admitting of interplanetary travel of any sort. An interesting aside is the possible relationship between the great 1897 airship mystery and the genesis of one science-fiction classic. Given the publicity of the strange vessels, and the speculation that the visitors were from Mars, is it any wonder that Herbert George Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds*, published in 1898?

The two remaining conclusions left for us to consider are (1) they were products of a great newspaper or railroad hoax or (2) they were inventions of this planet.

4) A GREAT RAILROAD HOAX

Because numerous airship sightings were reported by railroad employees, at least one investigator claims the whole airship business was a hoax perpetuated by the railroads. Keep in mind that in 1897 railroads were the equivalent of our interstate highway system. They comprised the major transportation arteries linking the economic centers of the country. Roads outside of major population areas were still not much more than wagon trails.

The viewpoint of those who support the railroad-hoax theory fails to comprehend the importance of (at least) two strings of copper wire, part of a communications system called the telegraph (strung from post to post adjacent to every railroad line in the nation): every railroad depended upon the telegraph for managing its rail traffic. The combined lines of all the railroads formed a communication grid covering virtually the entire country. The railroad telegraph was the foundation of mass communication in America.

Without radio beacons to guide them, the airship captains followed the paths of the railroads to navigate from town to town in the night. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe railroad employees and passengers would see the airships more frequently than any other segment of the population. Whenever railroad employees or passengers sighted an airship, it was only natural for them to breathlessly recount the circumstances to the telegraph operator at the next railroad station. News of the sighting then spread very quickly across the region and nation via the widespread telegraphic system.

Since the railroad telegraph was not used continuously for rail-management purposes, the lines were available for fee-based public use. The railroads sold access time much like we purchase access time on the Internet today. That is, people could send telegrams across each railroad's telegraph lines for a per-word fee. The railroad telegraph lines were the only outside communications link most communities had.

The numerous companies owning the railroad lines stretched across the nation precludes the possibility that far-spread telegraphers working for different employers could coordinate and weave such a convincing hoax and maintain it for a seven-month period. The railroad telegraphers were only reporting what they were asked to report, namely, the airship stories as told by eyewitnesses and reporters.

Also, the railroad hoax explanation fails to account for the involvement of men such as George D. Collins, William Henry Harrison Hart, Elmer Benjamin, Willard Wilson, Prof. Samuel E. Tillman, Dr. Amos Dolbear, and the other airship characters who designed, built, and flew the airships. The existence of these men and their contribution to the airship story is well documented in the newspaper stories of the day. In chapter 20 additional information regarding their participation in the airship story is presented.

5) A GREAT NEWSPAPER HOAX

In the late nineteenth-century, newspapers, typically large metropolitan papers, knowingly printed fake stories whose subjects were typically of

some supposed scientific achievement or discovery. These hoax stories, generally quite detailed and seemingly factual, would require several weeks for their entire plot to be presented. These types of stories became known as serials. The reading public was never sure of the serial's veracity until the end of the last installment, when the author would expose the plot for the fiction it was. Such was entertainment before the age of the television. Was the great outpouring of airship stories in 1897 a series of newspaper hoaxes?

There were some (infamous) airship stories that are clearly identified as hoaxes. One fake story involved an airship's supposed calf-knapping near Yates Center, Kansas. Several local citizens decided one day to humor themselves and the population with a fictional airship story. The conspirators boldly told the false account to the local newspaper. The gullible editor printed the story without questioning the facts. Taken as it is, the story might seem factual. However, within the context of several thousand airship stories, it stands out as singularly false.

Virtually every community had its jokesters who were quite willing to deceive the public and the newspapers. The newspapers themselves occasionally ran fake stories (on other topics) as weekly serials. It is entirely possible that some newspapers ran deliberately fabricated airship stories for one reason or another. However, to believe that all the newspapers and all the people west of the Mississippi were joined together in one great brotherhood of hoaxers stretches credulity.

Conspiracies are difficult to maintain when the number of conspirators is small and impossible to keep up when the number of participants exceeds more than two. It seems, in the heyday of the telegram, impossible for a great number of newspapers to hoax the public for over seven months. Let us not forget that many of the accounts include the names of the people who claimed to see the airships and talked to the crew members, and these were real people who lived in the respective communities.

As mentioned earlier, when a newspaper ran a serial, it typically identified it as such at the end of the last installment. No newspaper ever identified any airship story as a serial, and many was the number of newspapers that ran airship stories across the West, Midwest, and Southwest. Most of these papers were small, locally owned and published papers. It doesn't seem probable that all of them would join together in one great hoax on the American public. What else can be said, other than most of the stories were about real places, real people, and real airships?

6) THEY WERE INVENTIONS OF THIS WORLD

Impossible as it may seem, the airships could have been inventions of this world designed and built by enterprising individuals who were well financed. An airship that could travel over 100 miles per hour and attain an altitude of 10,000 feet in 1897 certainly sounds incredible today. Does it sound any more incredible than the feat of a young man who, on July 2, 1982, sat down in an aluminum lawn chair tenuously tethered to several helium-filled weather balloons, untied the restraining ropes, promptly shot up to an altitude of 16,000 feet, and unwittingly became a UFO for two hours? This man won the country's admiration as a daring man of adventure, albeit with a goodly dose of reckless courage. Does the airship story seem any more incredible than the story of the inventor from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, who demonstrated, in 1863, for President Lincoln's War Department, an airship he flew over 100 miles per hour and at an altitude greater than 15,000 feet?

Steven Robson, an experienced heavy aircraft (Boeing 747) driver for a major airline, confirms that upon final approach a heavy aircraft's altitude will generally be between $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, with a speed of 135 to 145 miles per hour. Of course, the actual speed and altitude of a heavy jet may differ from this typical speed and altitude, depending upon many factors, including the type of jet and the terrain, wind speed and direction, barometric pressure, etc. But, the 135-145 miles-per-hour speed is a good yardstick with which to compare the recorded speed of the airships.

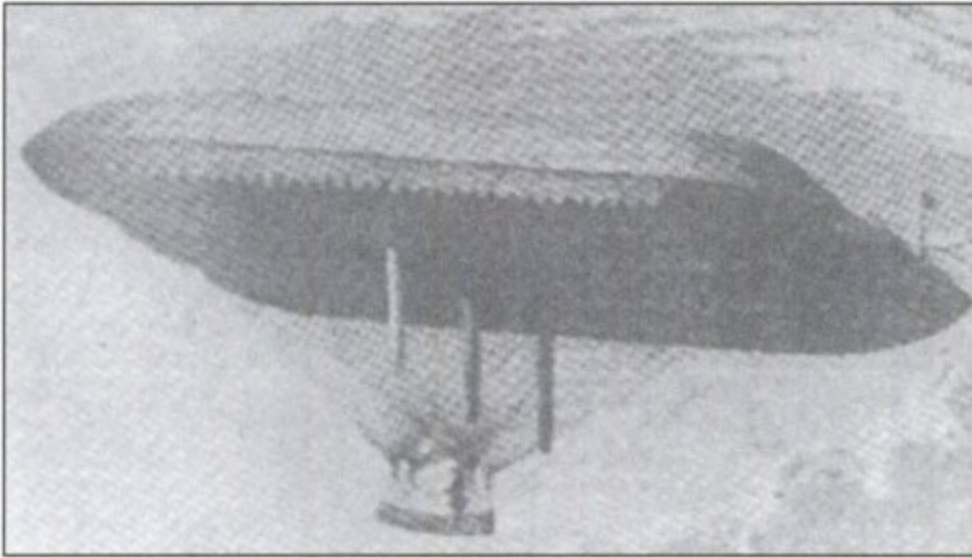
If you observe a heavy aircraft at night as it passes from horizon to horizon, on final approach, it will remain visible about ten minutes as it makes its way across the night sky. Of course, the exact length of time an airplane is visible depends upon cloud conditions, the angle the craft makes between you and the horizon, and other factors—such as on what terrain you are standing. But, the observations recounted from the 1897 Texas airship sightings and the typical nighttime airplane sightings today are remarkably similar for the area (Plano, Texas) where I live. So, what may be said of the detractors who still advocate that the witnesses in 1897 were seeing meteors or shooting stars flying across the night sky? The only

shooting star known to take ten minutes to get from horizon to horizon in Dallas is a Hollywood star.

The numerous statements that the airships exceeded the speed of the "fastest passenger trains," or was in excess of 90 miles an hour, may seem inconceivable. However, read the *New York Herald* account of the September 1863 flight by Dr. Solomon Andrews. (See chapter 20 for additional information regarding Dr. Andrews.) It shows that at least one well-documented flight in excess of 120 miles per hour occurred thirty-four years previous to the April 1897 flights over Texas. (By Dr. Andrews' calculation, the maximum speed was more than 200 miles per hour.) It is not difficult to imagine similar flights occurring thirty-four years later.

As in the 1896-97 airship sightings, Dr. Andrews' amazing feat was not so much the design and fabrication of an airship that could actually fly, but the speed and altitude at which it could navigate. These are the things that cause people to question the truthfulness of such accounts today. Only if we build and fly such a machine now will we ever put to rest the doubts raised by the skeptics. (Note: A small group of retired naval officers constructed a replica of Andrews' airship in the 1960s, but I do not know if it was successfully flown.) But for all other readers, even if they remain unconvinced of the story's veracity, the *New York Herald* articles on Andrews will at least shed additional light on the subject.

The body of evidence points to a true airship story of terrestrial origin, with test flights beginning in California in the fall of 1896 and proceeding across the country to the Midwest before turning south and arriving in Texas in April 1897. A group of well-financed, secretive individuals, based in a remote California community, a quiet Iowa village, and a small New York town have left behind a wondrous story of daring accomplishment. It appears they did not just suddenly appear out of the thin mists of time but may have been secretly building and flying machines for over forty-eight years. Their fanaticism for secrecy has left a puzzle, as Dellschau claimed, for "wonder weavers" to piece together.



Dr. Solomon Andrews and his aeron flying machine
(Photocopy of lithograph courtesy the Institute of
Aeronautical Science, New York City)

Who were the men who built and flew the airships? Where did they come from? What became of them? Why didn't the inventors step forward and receive the acclaim and financial rewards of an adoring country? We will examine these questions in the remaining chapters.

We have just completed a penetrating review of a remarkable body of information offering substantial evidence that the great 1897 airship mystery was, actually, factual events that occurred over the night skies of the immense Lone Star State. It is only now that some of the puzzle pieces are falling into place, and the story of these incredible inventions can be told.

CHAPTER₁₉

THE CALIFORNIA STORY (OCTOBER 1896-JANUARY 1897)

The numerous airship sightings of 1896 and 1897 began with the observation of a clearly identifiable airship over Sacramento in November 1896, well documented in the *Sacramento Bee* and the *San Francisco Examiner*. But, a month before the Sacramento sighting, residents of Nevada, California, in the early evening of October 22, witnessed a "triple-connected meteor" ("Three Meteors in Line," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 23, 1896, p. 7). Said to have appeared over the western horizon at "ten minutes past 6:00," the oddity soon disappeared a "little north of east," in the general direction of Oroville, a community that will assume some importance in the airship story.

A San Francisco attorney claiming to represent the interests of a California airship inventor whose last name was Benjamin announced, in November 1896, that the inventor had successfully built three airships. Could the "triple-connected meteor" have been the three airships performing a test flight or just out on a joyride, astounding the good citizens of northern California? In the same paper, the *Examiner*, there is also a report of "A Queer Thing in The Sky" seen by the San Francisco residents "shortly after 6:00" (October 22, 1896). Nevada, California, is sixty-eight miles northeast of Sacramento. So began, in the fall of 1896, the great California airship mystery.

There were no more California reports of weird atmospheric sightings and odd flying visions until Wednesday, November 18, when the *Sacramento Evening Bee* published an account titled "Voices in the Sky" (*Sacramento Evening Bee*, November 18, 1896, p. 1). The account focuses on the appearance over Sacramento, between the hours of 6 and 7 P.M., on Tuesday, November 17, of an electric arc lamp propelled by unknown forces and accompanied by the sound of voices. "It came out of the east and sailed unevenly toward the southwest, dropping now nearer to the earth, and

now suddenly rising into the air, again as if the force that was whirling it through space was sensible of the dangers of collision of objects upon the earth." One eyewitness claimed to have heard a voice on board the vessel shouting, "Lift her up, quick! You are making directly for that steeple."

A meteoric path is a fixed path and is defined by the physical laws of the universe. This description of the flying arc lamp does not come close to describing the path of meteors. Meteors don't go up and down, deliberately trying to avoid earthly obstacles. And it seems quite unreasonable to associate a human atop a meteor, shouting directions for its guidance.

The *Bee* goes on to say, "That much hundreds of the people saw it." Witnesses "living at points of the city along a rough diagonal line, yet far distant from each other" claim they "heard voices issuing from it in mid-air—not the whisperings of angels, not the sepulchral mutterings of evil spirits, but the intelligible words and the merry laughter of humans." This description of the sounds associated with the flying arc lamp hardly admits of alien beings, meteors, or anything else other than the presence of earthly beings flying along with the electric arc lamp and somehow connected to it.

Apparently the sight of the flying arc lamp also caused "great consternation," and who wouldn't be concerned? Yet there is no evidence in the *Bee* account of a mass-hysteria reaction to the odd atmospheric object. Remember, this was 1896. Although there was much public debate and newspaper space given to the idea of human invention and the possibility of human flight in the era, the only objects people had previously witnessed in the skies before were either birds, astronomical phenomena, kites, or balloons. A new, strange object would cause concern. But hysteria? Just doesn't seem likely and the account, as written by the *Bee*, certainly does not contain any hint of mass hysteria. Instead, the tone of the account is one of awe and even gratification, similar to the blessed birth of a long-expected baby. The much-talked-about and long-awaited event, the invention and successful flight of an airship, had finally occurred.

In the same article, under the heading "Coming to California," the *Bee* states, "Last night's Bee contained a telegram from New York announcing that a man [Wilson?] had perfected an airship and would on Friday [November 20] of this week, accompanied by one or two friends, ascend from a vacant lot in the metropolis and go directly to California [a distance of 2,830 miles], which he promised to reach in two days." Additionally, the telegram included a description of "an apparatus which was electrical

(Fargo batteries?], to supply light and power for the astonishing contrivance."

For the inventor in this article to reach California in two days, his ship had to average a speed of fifty-nine miles per hour. Any invention of mankind flying in the skies before the Wright brothers sounds preposterous to most of the postmodern generation, and anyone claiming to fly across the continent at an average speed of almost sixty miles per hour seems the same. But, who was making claims to fly from New York to California in two days? This could only be the Wilson airship that was identified in a Beaumont sighting and said to have possessed an electrical means of propulsion.

But, to continue the California story. The presence of an "electric arc lamp," dipping then rising as it bobbed around the housetops and dodging the church steeples and office spires as it made its way along its course, seems odd. If such a device was attached to some type of airship, then surely the craft must have been sufficiently visible for some description to be gained. And so it was. On November 19, the *San Francisco Call*, a morning paper, ran an account titled "Strange Craft of the Sky/Sacramento Men Describe the Aircraft/Claim They Saw Its Occupants and Heard Them in Conversation" and datelined Sacramento, California, November 18: "As far as can be learned by eyewitnesses, the body of the craft was oblong and egg-shaped with fan-like wheels on either side, whose rapid revolutions, beating the air, served to propel the vessel directly against the wind, and in so doing caused the vessel to sway from side to side with a wavering motion, similar to that of a boat being forced against the rapid current of a stream" (*San Francisco Call*, November 19, 1896, p. 1).

The northern California sightings continued virtually unabated, until January 23, 1897. The last-known account of a California airship sighting was reported on the twenty-second by the *Sacramento Evening Bee* ("And Now Lodi," January 22, 1897, p. 1). The airship was seen at Lodi, about thirty-six miles southeast of Sacramento. According to the *Bee*, "The ship seemed to be under perfect control" and "was heading southeast." After this date, the airships began to be seen in states east of California.

It is not my desire to reiterate all of the California airship newspaper stories. The descriptions associated with the airships are very similar and

even identical, in most cases, to the Texas accounts. What is of great interest, however, are a few articles whose topics relate to the identities of the airship inventors.

On November 21, 1896, a San Francisco attorney by the name of George D. Collins claimed to represent the inventor of the airship. His interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle* follows:

A LAWYER'S WORD FOR THAT AIRSHIP

George D. Collins Says It Flies It Hails From Oroville Safely
Housed Now Near San Francisco The Attorney Says He Has Seen The
Queer Craft And Promises an Exhibition

San Francisco, Cal., Nov. 22.—The mystery of the airship which has been amusing the State and puzzling some worthy citizens of Sacramento has made a change of base and now there are plenty of reputable people in and about San Francisco ready to make oath that they have seen the strange thing in the heavens and that in appearance and motion it was identical with the ship of dazzling lights and buzzing machinery which menaced a church spire at the capital.

More than that, there is a San Francisco attorney, George D. Collins who asserts that the airship exists, that the inventor is his client, that the strange craft sailed without mishap from Oroville to San Francisco, that it did pass over Sacramento on its way to the bay, and that within a few days this invention, which is the solution of one of the world's oldest and toughest problems, will be navigated in daylight, so that all San Francisco may see it, and that it will circle and rise and sink over the central part of the city.

And yet, there are wicked skeptics who chuckle and make rude jokes about an epidemic of humbug, and who poke all manner of fun at the good people who think they saw an airship in the sky.

Attorney Collins, who occupies offices on the second floor Crocker Building, was seen about the matter at his home in Alameda last night.

He said:

"It is perfectly true that there is at last a successful air ship in existence and that California will have the honor of bringing it before the world. I have known of the affair for some time and am acting as attorney for the inventor. He is a very wealthy man who has been studying the subject of flying machines for fifteen years and who came here seven years ago from the State of Maine in order to be able to perfect his ideas away from the eyes of other inventors. During the last five years he has spent at least \$100,000 on his work. He has not yet secured his patent, but his application is now in Washington. I cannot say much about the machine he has perfected, because he is my client, and besides he fears that the application will be stolen from the Patent Office if people come to know that his invention is practicable.

I saw the machine one night last week at the inventor's invitation. It is made of metal, 150 feet long, and is built to carry fifteen persons. There was no motive power as far as I could see, certainly no steam.

It is built upon the aeroplane plans and has two canvas wings 18 feet wide and a rudder shaped like a bird's tail. The inventor climbed into the machine and after he had been moving some of the mechanism for a moment I saw the thing begin to ascend from the earth very gently. The *wings flapped slowly* as it rose and then a little faster as it moved against the wind. The machine was under perfect control all of the time.

When it got a height of about ninety feet the inventor shouted to me that he was going to make a series of circles and then descend. He immediately did so, beginning by making a circle about 100 yards in diameter, and gradually narrowing in till the machine got within thirty feet of the ground. It then fell straight down, very gracefully and touched the earth as lightly as a falling leaf.

"The reports from Sacramento the other night were quite true. It was my client's ship the inhabitant's saw. It started from Oroville, in Butte County, that evening and flew sixty-five miles in a straight line directly over Sacramento. After running up and down once or twice over the capital, my friend came on a distance of another seventy miles and landed on a spot on this side of the bay, where the ship now lies, guarded by three men. The inventor found, during this trial trip, that his ship had a wave-like motion that made him seasick. It is this defect that he is now remedying.

In another six days several defects will be done away with and it is then his intention to immediately give the people of San Francisco a chance to see his machine will fly right over the city and cross Market street a dozen times. I cannot tell you where he is housing the ship or what his name is, as I am under a pledge of secrecy but it is a fact that the machine does its work perfectly, and will astound the world and revolutionize travel when it has been displayed before the public. The inventor can fly with it to New York to-morrow if he wants to.

He has forsaken the idea of Maxim and Langley entirely in building the machine and has constructed it on an entirely new theory" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1896, p. 16).

Recall the shape of the rudder variously depicted as a broad sail, steering sail, tail of a fish, etc., that was described by the airship observers on April 15 at Denton ("The Airship Again"), April 16 at Paris ("Seen at Paris"), April 16 at Greenville ("C. G. Williams Saw It"), April 16 at Ladonia ("Two Gentlemen View It"), and April 28 at San Antonio ("The Airship Seen Here"). Each of the descriptions of the airship's tail is similar to Collins' description of the airship in the *Chronicle* account.

In the *San Francisco Chronicle* article, Collins claimed the airship "wings flapped slowly as it rose." There are several Texas newspaper articles detailing eyewitness descriptions of airships that either flapped or fanned their wings. The articles and the description of the wing movement are "fanned the breeze" (chapter 4, "Looks Like a Passenger Coach"), "with wings flapping regularly" (chapter 6, In Texas), "wings flapped regularly" (chapter 7, "Airship Seen in Galveston"), "flapped very rapidly" (chapter 7, "A Judge Sees It"), "flapping its wings" (chapter 17, "The Airship Seen Here").

Collins gave the length of the airship as 150 feet. The Texas newspaper articles that give a similar length for the airship are "it must have been 200 feet long" (chapter 5, "Seen at Paris?"), "about 150 or 200 feet long" (chapter 6, "Flight of the Airship"), "about 150 feet long" (chapter 7, "The Airship"), "length must have been 150 to 200 feet" (chapter 8, "Landed on the Brazos").

The San Francisco airship Collins describes is very similar to the airship(s) described by various Texas newspaper articles. Was the San Francisco airship(s) responsible for the wave of Texas airship sightings during the spring of 1897? It certainly seems so.

George D. Collins claimed in this and other California newspaper interviews to represent the airship inventor. In a November 22 *Chronicle* article, Collins said the larger parts of the airship had been manufactured back east then shipped to Oroville and Stockton for assembly. Collins goes on to identify a six-foot-tall, approximately forty-year-old dentist who resided in the 600 block of Ellis Street as the airship inventor whom he

represented. Dr. E. H. Benjamin was identified in the article as the only person matching Collins' description and who lived in the 600 block of Ellis Street. According to the article, Dr. Benjamin lived at 633 Ellis Street. Collins told the reporter the inventor had friends and a relative in Oroville. In this same article, it is mentioned that (former) Attorney General William H. H. Hart met with Collins to discuss the airship and its Oroville inventor. Hart told the reporter he believed Collins, and "I have no doubt," the general said, "that the affair is bona fide" ("Collins Sticks to His Airship Story," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1896, p. 12).

Collins' statements aroused the curiosity of every newspaperman in the area, and they quickly encamped on Benjamin's front porch, desiring additional interviews and details ("A Lawyer's Word for That Airship," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1896, p. 16). In another newspaper interview, Collins identified the airship inventor as hailing from Oroville and about forty-seven years old ("A Winged Ship in the Sky," *San Francisco Call*, November 23, 1896, p. 1).

In a *Call* interview (printed in the *Examiner* and the *Chronicle* also) at his San Francisco residence, 633 Ellis Street, on November 24, Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin denied the role of airship inventor. He did state that George Collins was his legal representative, but for the invention of dental appliances. He mentioned he had an uncle, Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin. In the same article, George Collins back-pedals and starts claiming he knows nothing of the airship or its inventor ("The Apparition of the Air/Benjamin Talks," *San Francisco Call*, November 24, 1896, p. 1; "Have You Seen It in the Sky?" *San Francisco Examiner*, November 24, 1896, p. 9; "Coy Mr. Collins and His Airship," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1896, p. 9).

Collins was sequestered with Benjamin for several hours at Benjamin's residence on Sunday, November 22. On Monday, Benjamin journeyed to Collins' office in the Crocker Building. Afterward, both men denied any knowledge of airships and any association with any airship enterprise. In the *Chronicle* article, a dispatch from Oroville confirmed Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin was the uncle of Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin and that Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin was originally from Carmel, Maine, and he had been in California about seven years ("Coy Mr. Collins and His Airship," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1896, p. 9).

Maybe because of Benjamin's reservations about Collins' ability to represent his interests adequately or due to second thoughts of another nature—whatever the reason—Collins began to back off his original statements and denied that he ever made the claim to represent the airship inventor ("Coy Mr. Collins and His Airship," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1896, p. 9). Finally, in another interview published in the *San*

San Francisco Examiner ("Have You Seen It in the Sky?" November 24, 1896, p. 9), Mr. Collins stated that his original comments were misconstrued by the *Chronicle* reporter.

Collins went on to say that the only contact he had with any airship inventor was the previous week, when a stranger entered his office and asked him to file a patent application. But as the inventor had no model, Collins sent him away and told him to come back when he had completed one. The lawyer then said that the *Chronicle* reporter must have confused this "model" story with the story of Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin, a dentist whom Collins represented. Dr. Benjamin invented dental devices. However, in the same *San Francisco Examiner* article, the reporter told of an old friend and law-school classmate of Collins, attorney Frederick Bradley, who claimed that Collins told him several days previous to his interview that he (Collins) represented the airship inventor, had seen the airship, and was preparing the legal papers for the inventor's patent application.

In another *San Francisco Call* article ("Benjamin Talks," November 24, 1896, p. 1), a dispatch from the paper's Oroville stringer claims that Dr. Elmer Benjamin was originally from Carmel, Maine. (According to the 1890 Butte County Great Register, Benjamin's Oroville uncle, Dr. F. W. Benjamin, was born in Maine. See "The Oroville, California, Benjamins" section in chapter 20.)

It seems Collins' eagerness to publicly discuss the airship and its inventor was counter to his client's desire to maintain a strict code of secrecy surrounding his awesome machine. The attorney was now backpedaling as fast as he could in a fruitless attempt to undo the damage to Benjamin's interests, which he had unwittingly performed. But, apparently, Collins, by now, had publicly said too much.

Then Arty. George Collins told the reporter he could not speak freely about the airship, as the inventor was his client and he (the inventor) was concerned about his patent being stolen. So, one wonders why Collins chose to speak up on the matter in the first place? Perhaps, like many people, he could not refuse his fifteen minutes of fame. The extent of the inventor's distress became evident the next day, when Collins informed the papers that he was no longer representing the inventor.

A *Call* article dated November 25 states that (former) Attorney General William H. H. Hart assumed the legal responsibilities of the airship inventor "yesterday," Tuesday, November 24. Hart states he assumed the legal duties "due to the loquacity of Mr. Collins." The article states Hart assumed the responsibilities because "The inventor, who is said to be extremely desirous of maintaining his incognito, thinks that Collins talked not wisely and too much." Hart, not exactly a paragon of discretion himself, goes on to identify the airship inventor as a Dr. Catlin (Dr. C. A. Smith—See "An Inventor's Opinion," below) who was assisted by Dr. E. H. Benjamin and a George Applegate ("Mission of the Aerial Ship," *San Francisco Call*, November 25, 1896, p. 1).

Mr. Collins, a young and brash attorney, lost possibly his best client. In a *San Francisco Call* article ("Mission of the Aerial Ship," November 25, 1896, p. 1), the reporter states that the legal interests of the airship inventor were transferred from George Collins to William H. H. Hart, a former California attorney general. Collins' previous comments concerning the airship and its inventor, followed by his attempt to camouflage the truth with misleading information concerning Dr. Elmer Benjamin and the dental inventions caused the newspaper reporters to look at Benjamin as the airship inventor. Mr. Collins' denial, quoted from the newspaper, reads, "This Dr. [Elmer] Benjamin referred to is a dentist. He is a client of mine and an old friend and I am trying to help him get out a patent on a new sort of gold crown for teeth. He has been experimenting for some time and calls upon me frequently. He has nothing whatever to do with the airship project."

Under the byline "The First Trip" (*San Francisco Call*, November 25, 1896, p. 1), the *Call* reporter, quoting an unidentified source, wrote that some copper bearings became overheated during the maiden voyage flight that Dr. Elmer Benjamin made alone. After Dr. Benjamin moved out of his boarding-house room, numerous copper filings were found in the carpet. Dentists typically did not use quantities of copper large enough to leave such a large deposit of filings in the carpet. And several individuals who knew Benjamin claimed he never practiced his profession while residing in California. Either the good doctor was making bearings or copper bushings. The *Call* reporter hints that his unidentified source is a stockholder in the venture, who refers to the inventor by "doctor."

Copper is soft, too soft to be very useful for bearings or bushings. Perhaps, the material found in the carpet was not copper, but brass. Good quality brass can be mistaken for copper by the uninformed and brass bushings were, and still are, commonly used.

Did Dr. Elmer Benjamin ever practice dentistry? For about eight years, Benjamin roamed the California countryside, ostensibly as an agent for a piano company called Sherman, Clay, and Company, a San Francisco firm. He occasionally passed through Woodland, a community about nineteen

miles northwest of Sacramento, and would assist Dr. Fred Holmes, a local dentist, in some procedure. According to Dr. Holmes, Benjamin also assisted a dentist in San Francisco named Dr. Hill. On one occasion, Benjamin made a comment to Dr. Holmes that he had an invention that would revolutionize the world ("Aerial Navigation," *Woodland Daily Democrat*, November 23, 1896, p. 3).

Two months prior to the first appearance of the airship over San Francisco, Dr. Benjamin quit the piano company and set up a dental office at 113 Powell Street, San Francisco, a home owned by Dr. S. W. Dennis and occupied by him and his son. Dr. Dennis stated that while occupying a portion of his home, Benjamin was engaged in several inventions of which Dr. Dennis presumed were of a dental nature.

On November 23, Dr. Benjamin left word at the rooming house where he was boarding, 633 Ellis Street, that he was going out of town and would not return for a week. Where did the good doctor go? According to the *San Francisco Examiner*, he apparently went to Oroville, as the paper received a telegram from him on the evening of the twenty-third advising the newspaper that he was not a party to the airship ("Have You Seen It in the Sky?" November 24, 1896, p. 9).

In the *Oakland Tribune* ("A Clue at Last," November 24, 1896, p. 1), a George Carleton, city electrician, claimed a friend told him he knew the airship inventor and that it was constructed near Oroville. Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin's uncle, Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin, lived in Oroville ("Coy Mr. Collins and His Airship," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1896, p. 6). According to the reporter, Benjamin moved from Maine to California around 1884. Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin was also known to be in Oroville on November 15 and sixteenth, visiting his aunt and uncle. So, we can place Dr. Elmer Benjamin in the immediate vicinity of Oroville, the supposed origin of the airship, shortly before it was seen over Sacramento.

In "Mission of the Aerial Ship" (*San Francisco Call*, November 25, 1896, p. 1), it is reported that former attorney general William Hart admits his new responsibilities for representing the airship inventor and his interests. William H. H. Hart made public announcements of patent applications and other business matters pertaining to the airship inventors. In this article, Mr. Hart stated that the purpose of the airship is to travel to Cuba in support of the insurgents and bomb targets in Havana. This is undoubtedly the origination of all the stories concerning the airship's Cuban destination. For throughout the remainder of the airship sightings, newspapers across the country continued to speculate that the airship was headed for Cuba.

Was the United States military interested in using airships for bombing? One newspaper referenced a bill of lading from a New York port concerning one military supply ship bound for Cuba and laden with one "experimental" airship. It is known that the U.S. Army was trying to develop an airship at a facility near Denver, Colorado. I suspect any

experimental airship packed away on a military cargo vessel was one manufactured by the government and not any of the airships sighted in the fall of 1896 and the spring of 1897. Why? All the airships sighted during the covered time period were quite capable of flying across the open water (from any number of places Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, or Texas) to get to Cuba without requiring disassembly for shipment. However, if the military had succeeded in developing an airship and wished to keep the matter secret—a typical military strategy— then the machine would have been transported in a disassembled state, thereby providing some degree of protection from prying eyes and inquisitive minds. But, the implications of such a government strategy are frightening, as the United States government was not at war with Spain in April 1897.

Did the makers of the flying machines intend to use their devices as machines of war or were the "bomb Havana" comments designed to mislead the uninformed as to their real purpose? After the first airship was seen, a year would pass before the United States declared war on Spain. Certainly any American bombing of Cuba in the fall of 1896 or the spring of 1897 would be viewed by the Spanish and the rest of the world as justification for declaring war on the United States. So, one wonders why newspapers would be advocating a "bomb Havana" strategy in 1896? Could it be that certain powerful economic and political forces in the United States had a vested interest in starting a war with Spain? Was the government secretly planning to bomb Havana? In February 1898, when the United States did declare war on Spain, one individual was virtually single-handedly responsible for the declaration. His name was William Randolph Hearst, a powerful economic and political force in both San Francisco and New York City in the spring of 1897. He was also one of the very few men in the country with sufficient financial resources to fund airship research and development.

Continuing with the Hart interview in the *San Francisco Call*, Mr. Hart told the reporter there were actually two such flying machines, one developed in the East (with which he had been involved for some time) and one developed in the West (of which he had just assumed the legal responsibilities for). In the same article, the reporter adds that a "Dr. Catlin" was the actual inventor of the airship and Dr. Elmer Benjamin and a George Applegate were his assistants. The reporter did not state where he got this new information.

A seemingly innocent comment of William Hart's is interesting. In the interview, he said he would use the airship for warlike purposes, but before it could be so utilized, two modifications were required. One necessary modification was providing armor to the undercarriage for some degree of protection from small-arms fire. The other modification required some provision to allow the machine to float in case it should crash while traversing open water. The inability of the machine to float may have played a large role in the reason why the great airship story died before the

machines were ever put into practical commercial use. We will discuss the probable disappearance of two airships over open water in the last chapter.

Mr. Hart also makes the claim that the motive power was supplied by electric batteries. Based on the nature of his comments, Hart seems to be talking about the California airship and not the airship constructed "back East (the rural New York town?)," with which he claims to have been previously associated. But in later interviews he specifically states that the Eastern airship's motive power was supplied by electrical batteries. In one account, Hart advised the reporter that his interest in a new storage battery, called the Fargo battery, was responsible for his assuming the legal responsibilities for the East Coast airship.

"The High Speed Worm" (*San Francisco Call*, November 25, 1896, p. 1) features an interview with a William J. Kenney of Kenney and Payton, model makers and bicycle dealers. Mr. Kenney stated that "a man about 45 years of age (Dr. E. H. Benjamin?), wearing a gray mustache, and appearing to be a professional man" came into his shop three or four weeks previous, laying before him the plans for "an unusually large and high-speed worm" and its gear. The man asked Kenney to make the worm and gear practically frictionless. Mr. Kenney thought the purpose of the device was to improve upon the cyclometer, a gasoline motorpowered bicycle. But second thoughts caused him to realize the worm and gear were too sophisticated for this; he then concluded that the device might be used to run a dynamo. The manufacturing required two weeks, and the cost was something greater than \$145. Kenney stated that one bill alone was for \$145, a large sum of money in 1896. After the appearance of the airship, he became convinced that the device was built to perform some function on the vessel.

Recall the "Was Aboard an Airship/The First Description of the Modern Invention to Be Published" account (*Dallas Morning News*, May 16, 1897) in chapter 9, which featured George Dunlop. Mr. Dunlop wrote to his good friend Dr. D. H. Tucker of his conversation with the airship inventor:

"That there was a receiver made of aluminum (and of this metal the engine and everything connected with the ship so far as I saw was constructed), from which pipes passed to what appeared to me to be a square box, at each end of which was a cylinder with an exhaust chamber, in which worked a piston attached to a very singularly

constructed driving wheel like the sprocket of a bicycle, except that there were four wheels, one within the other, and these Mr. Wilson called the accumulators. There were two sets of such wheels with a combined velocity surpassing anything heretofore constructed. By the peculiar arrangement of the wheel within a wheel the balance of the centripetal and centrifugal forces was preserved in the presence of 65,000 revolutions a minute; that is, the velocity of revolutions in these wheels would equal 65,000 revolutions of an ordinary wheel ten feet in diameter in one minute if such a thing were possible."

Sounds like "high-speed worm and gear" are needed to transfer the power from these "accumulators" to the driving fans (or propellers). But, if two accumulators were used, then two worm and gears were necessary. So, if all the parts were made "back East" then perhaps one worm and gear failed during initial testing, requiring the speedy manufacture of replacements by the local San Francisco firm of Kenny and Payton.

Perhaps in an attempt to deflect the spotlight from himself, Dr. Benjamin walked into the *Chronicles* office on November 24 ("Mars and Venus Under Suspicion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 25, 18986, p. 16) and confessed he was the inventor of the airship. He said he had worked on perfecting a machine for seven years. From the tone of the article, the Chronicle staff apparently did not take his claim too seriously. They failed to grill the good doctor on any details of the airship and its manufacturing and let him walk out of the office without acquiring any additional information. Perhaps the staff was too awe-struck by the doctor's admission to ask any coherent questions.

Remember, this was a time when anything other than birds and kites flying about in the atmosphere was unknown, and the idea of manned flight was considered a superhuman achievement. We can equate the feeling of the times with our thoughts about the first man on the moon—a heroic and seemingly impossible accomplishment for the times.

In the account titled "Supplies for Airship" (chapter 12), an airship crew member advised the observer to just call him Smith. It seems like such an innocuous remark on the surface, yet if the circumstances are probed further, it is amazing what may be uncovered. Let us assume the man's real name was Smith. Can we connect someone by this name to the airships? Not only can we connect Smith to the airships, but we can also connect him to the Sonora Aero Club.

In the same paper as the initial Collins interview, there is an interview with a locally renowned inventor named Dr. C. A. Smith. This Dr. C. A. Smith is the same "Dr. Catlin" identified in the William H. H. Hart interview.

An Inventor's Opinion

Dr. C.A. Smith Has No Doubt That An Airship Is Being Tested

"Have I an airship? Well, I can't say that I have," said Dr. C.A. Smith, the inventor, when seen in his office in the Spreckles Building last night, "but, I have not reason to doubt that it is an airship the people in this city and other cities have seen in the heavens for the past few nights.

I have been experimenting on air machines for the past fortyeight years and have invented no less than thirty useful machines some of which have been used in every State of the Union. I know of its practicability as I have had a model running through the air."

"I expect to have machinery ready for business in the beginning of *next April* to make a trip *across the continent*. It will be *160 feet long* from bow to stern and *125 cylinder*. The main body will be 125 feet long. The front end will be a cone, as it is a scientific fact that a cone presents less resistance in passing through the air than any other solid body. The gas compartments will be in the upper portions of the cylinder and cone, and after being filled with hydrogen and acetylene gas, recently discovered, they will be hermetically sealed. The sheet aluminum to be used is lighter per square foot than the oiled and varnished silk used in making balloons."

"The rear end of the ship will be made like a frustrum of a cone and the air will thus pass freely back to *the propeller, which will drive the ship*. In the interior will be a cabin for passengers *35 feet by 40feet*, entirely portioned off from the gas. In the bow inside of the shell will be a pilothouse, from which the rudders will be operated and controlled. It will have *windows*, so that the pilot can see in all directions."

"A *horizontal rudder* of sufficient dimensions will steer the ship up or down, and a *vertical rudder* will steer it to right or left. Both will be on the stern. The *wings* will extend the full length of the cylinder and in flight will be used as aeroplanes, *like the wings of the larger birds*, and in crossing currents of air they will be closed, when in a light atmosphere, too light for the gas, the wings can be utilized to carry the ship up into the atmosphere."

"There will be a *wellhole in the bottom for an anchor* and above will be a capstan on which the *rope will be wound*. The ship will land by deflecting the wings and the horizontal rudder; the *propeller will drive the ship forward*, the aeroplane, wings and rudder steering it to earth. It will pass above a platform where an anchor rope will be fixed and the captain will then draw it down onto the platform."

"I can get a Maxim engine which weighs 320 pounds and produce 180 horsepower. The ship will carry from twenty-five to thirty passengers. I calculate the ship will run at a *speed of 100 miles per hour and perhaps more*."

"As to light, we can have a *storage battery* to give all that is necessary. The gas will be enclosed in *aluminum* compartments, so that it cannot escape, and this will insure permanent buoyancy, and as a consequence, absolute safety."

"I do not know who is the inventor of the airship that people say they see flying through the atmosphere. When it is placed before the public, I think, be seen that it is identical with the one I have described."

San Francisco Call, ("An Inventor's Opinion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1896, p. 16).

The appendix A includes an airship patent submitted by a Charles Smith of San Francisco in 1896 that agrees in every detail with the above pronouncements. Either Charles and Catlin Smith are one and the same, or they are father and son.

A description of the horizontal and vertical rudders is detailed in the *Chronicle* account featuring Smith, along with a description of the vessel's wings and a well hole and capstan that was to be used for an anchor. Recall the story in the *Houston Post* titled "Anchor of the Airship" (April 28, 1897), which told of an airship losing an anchor in Merkel, Texas, on the night of April 25, 1897. That article, as well as the *Chronicle* article, mentions the rope connecting the anchor to the airship. It was Dr. Smith's intention to use the anchor and capstan to actually pull or lower the airship to Earth upon landing. It appears that was the same maneuver attempted by the airship operators the night it was spotted in Merkel (where it lost its anchor).

Was Dr. Smith an original Sonora Aero Club member? We don't know for sure, but his statements lend a great deal of weight to the supposition. If Dr. Smith had been building airships for forty-eight years, that places him in the right spot (Northern California) and the right time to be an original member of the Sonora Aero Club.

Taking the description of Dr. Smith's airship at face value, it sounds like the firsthand accounts of at least one of the airships encountered in the pastures of Texas in April 1897, five months after Smith's *San Francisco Chronicle* interview. Did Dr. Smith fulfill his prediction to have an airship ready to fly over the continent in April 1897? And did he fly over the Texas countryside in the early spring of 1897? After examining the necessary records, we can state with a great deal of certainty that Dr. Smith kept his word and he was a participant in the spring 1897 airship mystery.

Continuing the California saga, we now go to a *San Francisco Examiner* article dated November 25, 1896. In this article, William Hart told the reporter he went back east because of some interest in a new light-weight battery. This interest led him to the inventor of the Eastern airship. Although he would not divulge the name, Hart did say the inventor was located in New Jersey and his name had appeared in the California paper in the last three weeks. Mr. Hart stated that it was remarkable that two men working at the opposite ends of the continent should develop two flying machines so much alike. Perhaps, Mr. Hart had never heard of the Sonora Aero Club, which seems to be the connection between the two inventors.

Mr. Hart curtly informed the reporter that he had advised both parties to consolidate their interests, advice Hart claims they heeded. If such a claim is true, we have possibly identified at least three of the airships seen in Texas in April 1897. The Oroville (or Western) airship of Dr. Elmer Benjamin, the New Jersey—Perth Amboy or Goshen, New York—(or Eastern) airship of this new aforementioned inventor, and the San Francisco airship of Dr. C. A. Smith.

The New Jersey inventor by the name of Dr. Solomon Andrews, of Perth Amboy, designed and built a flying machine in 1863! Dr. Andrews

submitted the plans for his airship to no less an authority than the United States War Department in the spring of 1862 ("Aerial Navigation," *New York Herald*, September 8, 1863, p. 3). The War Department was not sufficiently interested and showed no desire to purchase any airships from Dr. Andrews. So, he set about to build the airship with his own funds in the fall of 1862. The *New York Herald* visited the doctor on several occasions during the airship's manufacturing. When Dr. Andrews made a successful test flight on September 4, 1863, the *New York Herald* was there to cover the story. According to the accounts, the airship traveled in upward, sweeping spirals at a speed sometimes exceeding 200 miles per hour! Exaggerated? Probably. Truthful? No doubt about it! The incident is too well documented to be denied. Chapter 20 includes the newspaper account of Dr. Solomon's invention.

And what about the fourth airship seen in the skies of 1897 America? In a *San Francisco Call* article titled "It Flitted Over San Jose" (November 28, 1896, p. 1), former attorney general William Hart announced to a group of professional friends that the inventors intended to immediately start building a second airship in the vicinity of Bolinas. Bolinas is thirty miles northwest of San Francisco. George Collins stated in an interview that the airship, on its maiden voyage on November 17, came to rest on a farm outside San Francisco. Perhaps, it came to rest on the same farm near Bolinas. But, the fourth—and possibly the fifth through the eighth—airship may have been manufactured in "a quite Iowa village."

In another *Call* article ("Hart's Aerial Inventor Has Three Aerial Fliers," November 29, 18986, p. 1), Hart makes the astounding claim that the inventor he represents actually has three airships. The larger one could accommodate three people and the smaller only one person. The third airship was currently being constructed. According to Hart, this machine was designed to be powered by both gas and electricity.

Several statements of Hart's make this article particularly interesting. The small ship accommodating only one person, presumably the pilot, could be the airship that crashed and burned in Aurora, Texas. Recall the body pieces recovered at Aurora were thought to belong to only one individual. But, I don't think this airship crashed at Aurora. All of the airships that flew in Texas accommodated more than one person. The small, one-man airship may be the airship that exploded in Michigan.

In a *Dallas Morning News* article ("Was Aboard an Airship," May 16, 1897), George Dunlop states he was introduced to Mr. Scott Warren, a passenger on the airship, and a friend of the inventor—a Mr. Wilson. Of great interest is whether or not any possible relationship existed between Scott Warren and a Mr. W. H. Warren of Hayward, California. Hayward is twenty-seven miles southeast of San Francisco. In a *Grass Valley (California) Morning Union* article ("Built an Airship," November 29, 18986, p. 4), Mr. Warren states that he built and successfully flew a one-man airship.

Another interesting statement of Hart's is his description of the inventor. Hart described the inventor as a dark-skinned man who was employed as an electrician to a Spanish surnamed general. Other than a reference to a Mexican cook, no other dark-skinned individual is mentioned in any of the airship accounts. This statement seems to be a deliberate falsehood designed to get the reporters off Dr. Benjamin's front porch. Up until the November 29, 1896, *San Francisco Call* article, reporters were camping on the front porch of the boarding house where Benjamin previously lived. On the thirtieth, Dr. Benjamin packed all his belongings and moved out.

In a *San Francisco Examiner* article ("Airships Now Fly in Flocks," November 25, 1896, p. 1), General Hart discloses the existence of an East Coast airship, distinct from the Benjamin airship. Hart proclaimed that his interest in the East Coast airship was due to a storage battery used in the airship. He called the battery a Fargo battery. Hart professed he united the East and West Coast airship interests because the two airships' designs complemented each other. When asked where the East Coast inventor was located, he replied, "Well, I think there is no harm in telling you. He is in New Jersey. His name has been printed in the papers within three weeks. I shall not come closer to identification of him than that. I saw him and saw his airship while I was East. My interest in the storage battery that he uses brought us together." Thomas Alva Edison's Edison Battery Company was located in Bloomfield, New Jersey. Edison was the most prolific battery inventor, receiving 147 patents for battery design and development. Was Edison the inventor of the "Fargo battery?" Hart's comment "I saw him and saw his airship" implies the inventor of the battery and the inventor of the (East coast) airship were one and the same. Yet, Edison publicly proclaimed, "At best air ships would only be toys" (chapter 17, "Mysterious Airship").

Tantalizing questions concerning the California connection remain to be answered. Who was the mysterious New Jersey inventor? Was Dr. Smith a founding member of the Sonora Aero Club? Also, could Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin's uncle have been an original Sonora Aero Club member? Was the George Collins client who assembled his airship at his aunt's home near

Oroville also the nephew of Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin? Seems like all fingers point toward Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin.

The first California sighting occurred on November 17. The last California sighting occurred on the twenty-second. Benjamin was known to be in Oroville on the fifteenth and sixteenth. His whereabouts between the sixteenth and twenty-third are a mystery. On the twentythird, he packed his things at his rooming house at 633 Ellis Street ("Have You Seen It in the Sky?" *San Francisco Examiner*, November 24, 18986, p. 9) and left for Oroville. Perhaps Dr. E. H. Benjamin had nothing to do with the airships, but it is easy to place him in the right places at the right time. And if we integrate the comments of former attorney general William Hart with these suspicions, it is even easier to finger Benjamin as airship inventor extraordinaire. Toward that end, we will investigate the backgrounds of the individuals identified in the airship accounts and see if a sensible story emerges.

CHAPTER 20

IN SEARCH OF THE AIRSHIP PLAYERS

The airship accounts mention various individuals—witnesses and crew members. It is not my intention to positively confirm the existence of every airship witness. Others have performed that tedious task and confirmed that the witnesses were real people who lived and worked in the places mentioned. Because previous investigators quickly leapt to the conclusion that the airship mystery was either a hoax or a mass hysteria phenomenon, no other researcher seems to have closely followed the historical trail left behind by the crew members. We will examine the personal, professional, financial, and political relationships of the individuals identified as crew members in the newspaper accounts. From what is left of the scant paper trail, we will attempt to determine how the airship crew members relate to the airship story and to each other.

Were these real people? Who were they? Where did they come from? What were their personal and professional relationships to each other? How did they come to be together in the fall of 1896 and spring of 1897? Were they employed in the capacity identified in the newspaper articles? Did they live and work where the newspapers indicated? Or, were they figments of reporters, or telegraphers, overtaxed imaginations? It seems very reasonable to believe that if these men were who they were portrayed to be in the newspaper accounts, then the airship story gains an incredible amount of authenticity. In that case, the airship story moves from the realm of lore, legend, and reputed hoaxes into the sphere of truth, reality, and history. With this prospect in mind, we begin our search for the people.

While some crew members left a moderate paper trail to follow, others left little, and still others cannot be sufficiently identified at this time to even determine who they really were. The information in this chapter stitches together the pieces of the crew member's lives that were unearthed

while investigating this mystery. The colorful mosaic of seemingly disparate lives comes together for a brief moment of historical glory.

Several researchers have poked into the background of a couple of the main characters, namely, Wilson, Dolbear, and Tillman. The meager results of their searches makes it obvious that no one has seriously reviewed the historical records that these individuals left behind. Else they would have discovered various interconnections between the individuals and interesting facets of their lives. For example, was there any way that the East Coast Wilsons could have met the West Coast Benjamins long before their interests in airships united them in 1896? The answer is yes. I will demonstrate the likelihood of their meeting thirty-plus years before they flew the skies of Texas in 1897 via not just one possible venue of contact but two.

Evidence places Dr. F. W. Benjamin forty-two miles from Goshen, New York (purported home of the Wilsons), in 1864 when he reenlisted in his Civil War military unit. Is this just a coincidence? Did F. W. Benjamin meet any of the Wilson clan while so near Goshen? Answers to such questions are speculative, but by now, the coincidences are becoming far too many to ignore. We will explore many more such coincidences in this chapter.

Various historical documentation was searched for information concerning the airship members. Where information was found, the source is noted.

TABLE 25
The Cast of Characters

Relation to Story	Name	Relation to Others	Profession	Home	Notes
Airship crew member	Willard H. Wilson	Father of Hiram Wilson	Assistant master mechanic of the New York Central Railroad	Lived in Texas and New York	Husband of Luna (Walters) Wilson
Airship crew member	Hiram Wilson	Son of Willard H. Wilson	Inventor	Native of New York(?); lived in Texas 1876-77 and New York	
Airship crew member	Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin	Nephew of Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin	Dentist; inventor	Native of Carmel, Maine; lived in San Francisco and Oroville, CA	
Airship crew member	Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin	Uncle of Dr. Elmer H. Benjamin	Physician	Lived in Oroville, CA	Physician's assistant in Civil War

TABLE 25 (continued)
The Cast of Characters

Relation to Story	Name	Relation to Others	Profession	Home	Notes
Airship crew member	Dr. C. A. Smith	Associate; Sonora Aero Club member(?)	Inventor; scientist	San Francisco	Built and flew airships for forty-eight years
Airship crew member	Dr. Solomon Andrews	Associate; Sonora Aero Club member(?)	Inventor; scientist; physician (died in 1872)	Perth Amboy, NJ	Founded the Inventor's Institute in 1847; demonstrated airship to War Department in 1863
Airship crew member	C. J. Walsh	Associate	Electrical engineer	San Francisco	Participated with Wilsons' crew
Airship crew member	Samuel E. Tillman	Associate; coinvented Fargo battery(?)	Inventor; scientist; university professor	U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY	Participated with A. E. Dolbear's crew
Airship crew member	A. E. Dolbear	Associate; coinvented Fargo battery(?)	Inventor; scientist; university professor	Tufts University, Medford, MA	Participated with S. E. Tillman's crew
Airship inventor	William H. Warren	Father of Scott Warren	Merchant	Hayward, CA(?)	Built airship near Hayward; funded airship research
Airship crew member	Scott Warren	Son of W. H. Warren	Engineer	Hayward, CA(?)	Participated with the Wilsons' crew
Airship crew member	Jackson	Associate	Unknown	Unknown	
Airship crew member	Mr. Walters	Grandfather (or uncle or cousin) of Hiram Wilson	Engineer	Unknown	Participated with Wilsons' crew
Airship captain	Randall	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	See "Looking for James Randall" section in this chapter
Legal representative	William H. H. Hart	Attorney for inventors	Attorney	Born in England; raised and educated in Iowa; lived in San Francisco	United East and West Coast interests via Fargo battery
Legal representative	George D. Collins	Attorney for inventors	Attorney	San Francisco	Original legal representative for Elmer Benjamin

TABLE 25 (continued)
The Cast of Characters

Relation to Story	Name	Relation to Others	Profession	Home	Notes
	(Charles) McKnight	Associate	Inventor(?)	Sherman, TX	Was said to have airship at U.S. Marshal Williams' ranch
	U.S. Marshal John Shelby Williams	Accomplice(?)	Law enforcement	Near Paris, TX	Did Williams also own a farm near Conroc?

Now we will examine each participants' past and determine what is of interest to us.

LOOKING FOR THE WILSONS

We have several clues for identifying the Wilsons involved in the airship mystery. In the chapter 10 "Navigator Wilson/Left a Message for His Friend Akers" account, we have the Wilson place of residence: ". . . who gave his name as Wilson, and place of residence as Goshen, N.Y.,..." In the chapter 16 "History of the Ship" account, the observer claims that "The investors were Hiram Wilson, a native of New York and son of Willard H. Wilson, assistant master mechanic of the New York Central Railroad,. . ."

Since the Wilsons were father and son, we would expect to find them together until Hiram reached his majority. The New York U.S. census data for 1840 to 1860 yields the following information:

TABLE 26
Wilson's: New York Census Record

1840 WILSON WILLARD W. 1840 WILSON HIRAM	Jefferson County NY Jefferson County NY	011 Ellisburg 734 Clayton
1850 WILSON WILLARD 1850 WILSON HIRAM	Oswego County NY Oswego County NY	315 Fulton Village 090 Oswego
1860 WILSON W. H. 1860 WILSON HIRAM	New York County NY New York County NY	1043 19 W. Nyc District 2 229 18 W. Nyc District 6

Note: Wilson's census records are abbreviated.

The Willard and Hiram Wilson identified in these New York census records are probably brothers or uncle and nephew, not father and son, and the Hiram involved with the airship seems to be relative young in 1898—say, in his mid-thirties to mid-forties. Our Hiram was probably born sometime in the 1850s. Recall Sheriff Akers thought Hiram to be about twenty-four years old when he met him in 1876.

So, we clearly have a Willard and a Hiram Wilson residing in New York at the outbreak of hostilities leading to the War Between the States. An examination of the Yankee muster records for Willard Wilson includes two entries of interest:

Willard Wilson #1's 24th New York Infantry

Regiment Muster Record

Enlist date: 21 September 1861

Enlist place: Port Ontario

Enlist rank: Priv

Enlist age: 19

Served New York

Enlisted I Co. 24th Inf Reg. NY

disch disability at Belle Plain, VA on 31 March 1863

(New York: Report of the Adjutant-General, NY

Roster Published in 1894-1906)

Willard Wilson #2's 24th New York Infantry

Regiment Muster Record

Enlist date: 15 October 1861

Enlist Place:

Enlist Rank: Priv

Enlist Age:

Served New York

Enlisted K Co. 24th Inf Reg. NY (No further record)

(New York: Report of the Adjutant-General, NY

Roster Published in 1894-1906)

Willard Wilson #1 was discharged for disability at Belle Plain, Virginia, on March 31, 1863. Disability in those pre-modern medicine days typically meant an amputated arm or leg or some other such debilitating cause. It is not likely such an individual would, thirty-four years later, design, build, and fly airships around the country. Therefore, we can estimate the Willard Wilson of interest to us is Willard Wilson #2.

When looking at the war records of the people associated with the 1897 airships, the 24th New York Infantry Regiment and the Third New York Light Artillery Battalion appear regularly. The 24th New York Regiment served in the same army as the Third New York Light Artillery throughout the war. Both outfits served in the Army of the Potomac and fought in the major eastern-theater land battles. However, both units were assigned to different corps. The Third New York Light Artillery served primarily in the Sixth and 24th Army Corps, while the 24th New York Regiment served primarily in the Third Army Corps. The 24th New York Regiment also saw some detached duty in the army of the Shenandoah. It does not seem likely—given that a typical corps usually numbered around 20,000 men—that Wilson, serving in the Twenty-fourth, would have met any members of the Third New York Light Artillery Regiment during the war, but it is possible.

Where was Wilson after the war? According to comments made by Hiram Wilson in the airship accounts, as substantiated by Sheriff C. C. Akers, Willard and his son were in Texas in the mid-1870s. Looking for the Wilson duo in the 1870 census record, we do not find them in Texas. However, we do find that the 1870 California census shows a Hiram and a Willard Wilson living in California.

TABLE 27
Wilsons: California Census Record

1870 WILSON WILLARD	Klamath County, CA	383 South Fork Township	Federal Census Index CA129193141
1870 WILSON HIRAM	Santa Clara County, CA	070 Gilroy Township & City	Federal Census Index

The 1880 census yields a W. H. Wilson in Texas. Hiram stated they lived in Fort Worth. Therefore, the 1880 Texas census listing a W. H. Wilson for Tarrant County must be our man.

TABLE 28
Wilsons: Texas Census Record

1880 WILSON W. H.	Tarrant County TX067	Fort Worth Federal
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From the census data it appears Willard and Hiram Wilson left New York State for California sometime after the Civil War before journeying to Texas in the mid-1870s. Wilson was said to be the master mechanic for a New York railroad. The New York Central Railroad is now part of the Conrail system. Employment records for Wilson are not available. Did railroad business take him from state to state, or was he going about airship business? In 1868, the nation's shores were connected via iron rails. It is entirely plausible to find a railroad man looking for opportunity in northern California around 1870.

THE OROVILLE, CALIFORNIA, BENJAMINS

In several California newspaper accounts, George Collins claimed he represented the interests of the airship inventor Elmer H. Benjamin. Collins stated that Benjamin hailed from Carmel, Maine, and had relatives living in Oroville, California. According to the published information, E. H. Benjamin migrated to California around 1889. (Benjamin "came to California seven years ago to perfect his design.")

We will go in search of Benjamin and his relatives by examining pertinent historical documents both in Maine and California. A search of the census records for Carmel, Maine, yields the following data from the 1880 census record.

TABLE 29
1880 United States Census
Census Place: Carmel, Penobscot, Maine
Household:

Name	Occ.	Rel	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace	Parents Bp
John B. Benjamin	Physician	Self	Male	M	W	57	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME
Mary A. Benjamin	Keeping House	Wife	Female	M	W	44	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME
John F. Benjamin	Merchant	Son	Male	S	W	22	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME
Elmer H. Benjamin	Horse Trainer	Son	Male	S	W	19	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME
Linnie Benjamin	At School	Dau	Female	S	W	15	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME

Occ = occupation

Rel = relation to head of household

Marr = marital status

Parents Bp = parents birthplace

From the census record, we can ascertain Elmer H. Benjamin was born in either 1860 or 1861, depending upon the date the census was enumerated (June 5, 1880) and his day and month of birth. Note his father's profession as a physician.

The International Genealogical Index-North America contains a listing for an Elmer E. Benjamin, born August 27, 1872 in Carmel, Maine, to the parents of John and Orilla (Austin or Osmand) Benjamin. John and Orilla were married on March 3, 1856, in Carmel, Maine. This information is noted here since future researchers may ponder if there is any relationship between the two Elmers.

A search of the California census records for Elmer H. Benjamin produces the following data from the 1930 census record.

TABLE 30
1930 United States Census
Census Place: Palo Alto, Santa Clara, California
Household:

Name	Occ.	Rel	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace	Parents Bp
Elmer H. Benjamin	Dentist	Self	Male	M	W	59	ME	Fa: ME Mo: ME
Marie Benjamin	Keeping House	Wife	Female	M	W	45	MS	Fa: MS Mo: MS

Occ = occupation

Rel = relation to head of household

Marr = marital status

Parents Bp = parents birthplace

The 1930 U.S. Federal Census lists an Elmer Benjamin living in Palo Alto, California. His age is given as fifty-nine. Since the date of the census is April 5, 1930, Benjamin's birth year, according to the census record, would be either 1870 or 1871. His occupation is listed as dentist. Furthermore, his birthplace is given as Maine. Although I think his age is incorrectly stated on the census, this appears to be our man! His spouse's name is Marie and her birthplace is Mississippi.

There is a discrepancy among the Elmer H. Benjamin data we have. The discrepancy is Elmer Benjamin's age in 1897. The California newspaper accounts place his age variously as either forty or forty-seven (see chapter 19). The 1930 census gives his age as fifty-nine, making him twenty-five in 1897. There is no doubt the Elmer Benjamin identified in the 1930 census is the correct Elmer Benjamin. I think the 1930 California census lists Benjamin's age incorrectly. The 1880 census identifies his birth year as 1860 or 1861; therefore, in 1930, he would be sixty-nine, not fifty-nine. If such is the case, when Benjamin was flying airships in the fall of 1896, he was approximately thirty-five years old. I cannot fathom why George D. Collins identified Benjamin's age as "about 40." Perhaps, he appeared to be about forty in 1897.

I did not find Benjamin in the California Death Index (1940-1997), so either he died between 1930 and 1940, or he moved from California.

We know from the California newspaper articles that Dr. Francis W. Benjamin of Oroville was Elmer H. Benjamin's uncle. We will look around Oroville for Benjamin's relatives. Besides establishing the existence of Dr. Francis Benjamin, we have an ulterior motive for exploring this topic that will soon be clear. Oroville is in the physical, political, and administrative domain of Butte County. The 1860 California census index for Butte County lists the following Benjamins (residences are not given):

TABLE 31
Oroville, California, Benjamins

Name	Age	Place of Birth
John	37	NY
Riis (Reese?)	45	WE
Elizabeth	31	WE
S. J.	11	WE
J. A.	9	WE
John P.	3	CA

Note: WE = Wales

John

was born in New York in 1823. We do not know when John migrated to California, but the Butte County census does place him in the county in 1860. Why did he migrate from New York? Was it because of gold fever, or was he in some manner connected with the Sonora Aero Club? Recall Dellschau's cryptic comments about the strong association between the Sonora Aero Club and the NYMZA, an unidentifiable acronym. The

NYMZA was a mysterious New York organization involved in scientific research of a—what would now be called—dubious nature, such as "free energy."

There are no Benjamins listed in Butte County in the 1870 census. There are eleven Benjamins in the 1880 California census, but John is the only one with an Oroville place of residence. This is not the same John Benjamin enumerated in the 1860 census. The John listed on Table 32 is identified in the census as black. The John given on Table 31 is identified as white. Given the stated differences in race and the differing ages (two years), the two men are not the same individual.

TABLE 32
1880 Census of Oroville, Benjamins Born in New York

Census Date	Name	Age	Place of Birth
1880	John	55	NY

We cannot peruse the census records to see which Benjamins lived in northern California in 1890, because, unfortunately, the 1890 census records were destroyed in the Commerce Building fire. However, another source for the records of 1890 is the Butte County Great Register.

TABLE 33
1890 Butte County, California, Great Register

Name	Age	Place of Birth	Profession	Residence	Comments
Francis Wakelee	49	MA	Physician	Oroville	(when he registered to vote 19 Mar 1884)
Reese (Riis?) Price	68	Wales	Miner	Cherokee	(when he registered to vote 26 May 1884)
Hector	68	NY	Carpenter	Mountain House	(when he registered to vote 29 May 1884)
William Henry	22	CA	Laborer	Cherokee	(when he registered to vote 22 Sept. 1886)
Alfred Reese	21	CA	Miner	Cherokee	(when he registered to vote 6 Aug 1890)

Dr. F. W. Benjamin first appears in Oroville in 1884, when he registered to vote (according to the 1890 Butte County Great Register). The Dr. Francis Wakelee Benjamin listed in the table is the uncle of one Dr. E. H. Benjamin, formerly of Carmel, Maine, and San Francisco and the inventor/builder of California airships. Dr. F. W. Benjamin practiced medicine in Oroville for a number of years. While we cannot determine

exactly when he arrived there, it is clear from the historical record that he was living and practicing his profession in Oroville in the 1880s. Note that **Elmer's** father and uncle shared a common profession as physicians.

Possibly our most fruitful source of information concerning Dr. F. W. Benjamin is his Civil War muster record. The roll data clearly shows Benjamin working during the war as an assistant surgeon. The unit he served with was U Co., 3rd New York Light Artillery (LA) Regiment. Note the roll lists his place of enlistment as Poughkeepsie, New York. Poughkeepsie is forty-two miles northeast of Goshen, New York, in Orange County. As you will see, Dr. Benjamin's muster record may be the glue that binds the pieces of this story together.

Francis W. Benjamin's 3rd New York Light Artillery Muster Record

Francis W Benjamin, New York
 Enlist Date: 08 August 1864
 Enlist Place: Poughkeepsie, NY
 Enlist Rank: Priv
 Enlist Age: 27
 Promoted to Full Asst Surgeon on 15 September 1864
 Served New York
 Enlisted U Co. 3rd LA Reg. NY
 Mustered Out at Syracuse, NY on 15 July 1865
 (New York: Report of the Adjutant-General, NY Roster,
 Published 1894-1906)

TABLE 34
Benjamins of Orange County, New York, Census Records

1810 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	483 Federal Population Schedule	NY 1810 Federal Census
1820 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	305 Blooming Grove Federal Population Schedule	NY 1820 Federal Census
1830 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	115 Blooming Grove Federal Population Schedule	NY 1830 Federal Census

TABLE 34 (continued)
Benjamins of Orange County, New York, Census Records

1830 BENJAMIN, FRANCIS L.	Orange County NY	118 Blooming Grove Federal Population Schedule	NY 1830 Federal Census
1840 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	289 Warwick Federal Population Schedule	NY 1840 Federal Census
1840 BENJAMIN, HECTOR	Orange County NY	026 Blooming Grove Federal Population Schedule	NY 1840 Federal Census Index
1850 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	034 Warwick Federal Population Schedule	NY 1850 Federal Census Index
1850 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	042 Newburgh Federal Population Schedule	NY 1850 Federal Census Index
1860 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	620 Newburgh Federal Population Schedule	NY 1860 Federal Census Index
1860 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Orange County NY	884 Newburgh Federal Population Schedule	NY 1860 Federal Census Index
1860 BENJAMIN, WILLIAM	Orange County NY	910 Newburgh Federal Population Schedule	NY 1860 Federal Census Index

TABLE 35
Benjamins: 1870 Butte County Census Records

1870 BENJAMIN, HECTOR	Butte County CA 002 Bidwell Township.	Federal Population Schedule	CA 1870 Federal Census Index
1870 BENJAMIN, JOHN	Butte County CA 092 Ophir Township.	Federal Population Schedule	CA 1870 Federal Census Index

Note: Notice the absence of John and Hector Benjamin from the Orange County, New York, census after 1860 and the subsequent appearance of these two individuals in Butte County.

TABLE 36
Benjamins: Burials in Cherokee Cemetery, Oroville, CA

Name	Born	Died	Age	Notes
Henrietta Valentine	Feb. 1861	Jan. 24, 1881	19 years, 11 months	Daughter of Elizabeth and R. P. Benjamin
Elizabeth	Dec. 28, 1829	Dec 30, 1899		Wife of Reese
Reese	Sept 12, 1814	April 9, 1892		Same as Reece? See below. Same Riis from 1860 census?
Alfred	No data	No data		
Luella	1882	Feb. 13, 1904	22 yrs, 10 mths, 13 days	Female Caucasian, single, born in Butte County
Elizabeth	September 1828	Dec, 30 1898		Caucasian, married, born in England
Reece	1817	April 9, 1893	76 years	White male, married, born in Wales
Roy	1889	July 12, 1892	Age 3 years, 6 months, 21 days	White male, born in California
William	No data	May 4, 1894	30 years	White, married, born in California

Note: F. W. Benjamin is conspicuously missing. One would think the local physician would be buried in the town cemetery. But he is not. Is it possible his remains lie at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, somewhere near Beaumont or Staten Island as the result of an airship disaster?

To recapitulate, in 1897 three Benjamin's of some interest to us lived in Butte County, California: John was seventy-two, Hector was age 75, and Francis was 56. It is entirely possible that these three Benjamins were brothers or cousins or some combination thereof (born in Blooming Grove, Orange County, New York). The census records show all three men residing near each other in Orange County at differing times.

What is important about Orange County, New York? It is the purported home of another family of great interest in this story: the Wilsons (who did not leave a well-documented paper trail in Orange County). Note the distance from Blooming Grove, New York, to Goshen New York: a mere 8.3 miles. It appears that the Orange County, New York, Benjamins migrated to Butte County, California, between 1860 and 1870. Goshen is located in the political subdivision of Orange County, and the Wilsons claimed residence in or near Goshen before the Civil War.

So, it also seems entirely probable that the Benjamins and Wilsons were intimate acquaintances long before the country was startled by the sight of flying machines in the nightly skies. Some of the older Benjamins weathered the War Between the States in New York, while others left for California in the 1840s and 1850s, perhaps seeking their fortunes in the gold fields. The fact that, in the 1890 Butte County Great Register, two of the Benjamins listed their occupations as miners lends credence to the theory that the Benjamins migrated from New York to Oroville to seek their fortunes in the California gold fields.

The *Yuba, Sutter, Colusa, Butte, and Tehama Counties, California Directory*, dated 1885, lists a Francis W. Benjamin working in Oroville as a physician and surgeon. This Francis W. Benjamin is the uncle of one Elmer H. Benjamin.

TABLE 37
Francis Benjamin's Oroville Record

Name	Occupation	Location	City	State	Year
Francis W Benjamin	physician & surgeon	office adjoining Roger's drug store	Oroville	Ca.	1885

We know John Benjamin of New York was not Elmer H. Benjamin's father, as the 1880 census data shows Elmer's father was born in Maine. Was John Benjamin of New York a relative of F. W. and E. H. Benjamin? I cannot prove or disprove any family connection at the moment, but I strongly suspect there is one. The very fact that the New York Benjamins migrated to Oroville around 1850, then later Francis and, still later, his nephew Elmer appear in Oroville lends credence to the suspicion these Benjamins were family.

I do find the fact that Prof. Samuel E. Tillman, another character involved in the airship mystery, retired to Maine interestingly coincidental.

LOOKING FOR WILLIAM H. H. HART

William H. H. Hart's existence in 1897 is easy to prove. He had recently completed a four-year term as California's attorney general. Holding such an esteemed position in the state government should suffice to prove beyond any doubt that William H. H. Hart was a real person with more than passing political connections. But, we want to explore in greater depth who Hart was and where he came from. We are motivated to dig deeper into Hart's past for several reasons. One author scoffs at William Henry Harrison Hart's claim to have been a boy-soldier. Because the author does not believe Hart's claims of being a fighter and soldier when he was thirteen years old,

he does not believe his claims to represent and unite the various airship interests. I will demonstrate Hart was everything he claimed to be.

We are discovering that as we delve into each of these individual's backgrounds, we stumble across more and more similarities and intersections of their lives. While some of the material concerning the individuals may seem irrelevant, ultimately you will see the relationships.

The following is Hart's official California state biography:

An English immigrant at age four, he was captured by the Blackhawk Indians, then later orphaned at age 11. With his turbulent upbringing, he directed his youthful energy and desire for danger by joining the Secret Service at age 14. He bravely fought in the violent battlefields of the Civil War. Elected as Attorney General on November 4, 1890, and took office January 5, 1891. Died on May 12, 1903, at the age of 55 (*A History of the California Attorney General's Office* [Sacramento: State of California, 1983]).

William H. H. Hart was born in Yorkshire, England, on January 25, 1848. The James Hart family emigrated from Yorkshire to Iowa on the ship *Columbia*, arriving in New York on January 2, 1857. According to the ship's manifest, young William was seven years old, not four as stated in his official California biography. But, given a birth year of 1848, he was in fact twenty-three days short his ninth birthday. His father, James, continued to Illinois where relatives awaited him and his family.

TABLE 38
Columbia's Manifest

Name	Age	Sex/Occ	Origin	Destination
James Hart	44	M/Farmer	England	United States
Mary Hart	44	F/Wife	England	United States
Harriet Hart	20	F/Servant	England	United States
Sarah Hart	15	F/Servant	England	United States
William Hart	7½	M/Child	England	United States
Lewis Hart	5	M/Child	England	United States
Samuel Hart	10m	M/Child	England	United States

The Blackhawk Indians captured young Hart in 1861 and held him captive for six months. In the raid upon their homestead, young Hart's father, mother, and siblings died. Hart supposedly joined the secret service when he was either thirteen or fourteen. The secret service, as we know it, was not organized until 1865, when Hart would have been about fifteen. There is no doubt young Hart joined the federal service at thirteen. According to one source (*Builders of Our Nation: Men of 1913*. Chicago, IL: np, 1914, p. 236), Hart enlisted in the army on January. 23, 1862. I cannot find that muster record. However, I do find two other muster records for Hart.

It is known Hart fought at the battles of Vicksburg, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Champion Hill, and Missionary Ridge. At Missionary Ridge, on November 25, 1863, Hart was wounded in three places while carrying dispatches from General Grant to General Sherman. Only trustworthy men were selected as dispatch riders. The fact that Hart was on the commanding general's staff as a dispatch rider implies he already had an established reputation as a young man of distinction at the age of thirteen. His assignment to General Grant's headquarters may have been associated with his "secret service." The *Overland Quarterly* (1896) says he was "under special orders" when he served General Grant.

After the Civil War, Hart studied criminal law in the office of Judge W. E. Leffingwell in Lyons, Iowa; commercial law in office of Hon. A. R. Cotton of Lyons; and real-estate and corporate law under Boardman and Brown in Marshalltown, Iowa. Hart received his law degree in 1870 then served as city attorney for De Witt, Iowa, from 1870 to 1871.

Lyons is now a suburb of Clinton, Iowa. It is 1.5 miles north of downtown Clinton and rests on the banks of the Mississippi River.

De Witt is in Clinton County. De Witt is 22 miles west of Lyons.

Marshalltown is in Marshall County. Marshalltown is 150 miles west of Lyons.

Keokuk, Iowa, is 158 miles south of Lyons.

Hart migrated to San Francisco in 1873. His law partner in San Francisco was Julius Foster Fassett. William and Julius were also brothers-in-law. William married Loretta Hedden sometime before 1880, and Julius married her sister, Anna Hedden. Both Loretta and Anna were born in Iowa. On August 11, 1888, William and Loretta gave birth to their only child, Lowell J. Hart.

William Hart was elected California attorney general in 1890. He served from January 1891 until January 1895.

The following two tables list Harts of interest to us in the census records:

TABLE 39
Harts in California

1870 HART WILLIAM	Butte County CA	009 Concow Township	1870 Federal Census
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TABLE 40
Harts in Iowa

1870 HART, WILLIAM	Warren County IA	505 White Breast Township	1870 Federal Census
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White Breast, Iowa, is 53 miles south of Des Moines.

Hart enlisted in the army January 23, 1862, and was honorably discharged February 1866. Note the day of Hart's enlistment—two days before his fourteenth birthday, assuming he was born on January 25, 1848. This is our man. Supporting this premise is Attorney General Hart's contention he served in the Union forces when he was thirteen years old. However, I can find no official muster record for Hart in January 1862. Hart's official state biography says he joined the secret service at the beginning of the war. Yet, the secret service, as we know it today, was not founded until 1865. It is known Hart was a courier for Grant until he was wounded at Missionary Ridge. Between November 26, 1863, and May 1864 when he joined the 44th Iowa Infantry Regiment, Hart was probably recovering from wounds received at Missionary Ridge.

Hart's widow applied for a pension in 1910. She included on the pension form the two regiments in which he served, the 44th Iowa Infantry Regiment (May 16, 1864-September 15, 1864) and the 147th Illinois Infantry Regiment (February 03, 1865-January 20, 1866). Muster records vouch for Hart's service in these two regiments. Both of these regiments were "homeguard" types of regiments. "Homeguard" regiments were garrison units and saw little field action. "Homeguard" regiments generally consisted of young, old, and infirm recruits. Such home guard service may

indeed confirm the supposition Hart was recuperating from the wounds he received at Missionary Ridge.

Initially, in the race to swell the ranks of the army, and because no one—North or South—thought the war would last long, men were enlisted for ninety days only. After the first battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861, Northern war planners realized the war was probably going to last somewhat longer, initiating variously 100-, 120-, then 180-day enlistments before finally settling into two- or three-year enlistments. However, homeguard-type units still enlisted men for short periods of time as determined by real or imagined risks to hearth and home. Young Hart, enlisting in May 1864, was a 100-day warrior before reenlisting in the 147th Illinois.

Hart's enlistment age is somewhat exaggerated on the 44th Iowa muster record, perhaps to convince a skeptical recruiting officer of his fitness for service.

William H. H. Hart's 44th Iowa
Infantry Regiment Muster Record

Claimed Residence in Clinton County

Enlist Date: 16 May 1864

Enlist Place:

Enlist Rank: Priv

Enlist Age: 18

Served Iowa Enlisted F Co. 44th Inf Reg. IA Mustered Out at
Davenport, IA on 15 September 1864

Source: Roster 6c Record of Iowa soldiers in the War of Rebellion
Published by English in 1910

Notice Hart claimed residence in Clinton County when he enlisted in 1864. De Witt is in Clinton County. After the war, Hart studied law in De Witt. Perhaps, Hart was living in De Witt when he enlisted.

The 44th Iowa Infantry was a 100-day regiment. Of 867 officers and men, one man was killed and 18 died of disease. The regiment mustered in at Davenport on June 1, 1864, and mustered out at Davenport on September 15, 1864. The regiment did garrison duty at Memphis and La Grange, Tennessee. Hart's company, Company F, was recruited from Clinton and Jackson Counties.

William H. H. Hart 147th Illinois
Infantry Regiment Muster Record

William H. H. Hart

Claimed Residence in Dixon (Illinois?)

Enlist Date: 03 February 1865

Enlist Place:

Enlist Rank: Priv

Enlist Age:

Served Illinois Enlisted G Co. 147th Inf Reg. IL Mustered Out
at Savannah, GA on 20 January 1866

Source: Illinois: Roster of officers and Enlisted Men

Published in 1900

This short history of the 147th Regiment is derived from the *Official Records of the Rebellion*.

The 147th Regiment Infantry was organized at Camp Fry, Chicago, Ill., for one year service. On February 18, 1865 the regiment moved to Louisville, Ky., thence to Nashville, Tenn., February 21-25, and to Chattanooga, Tenn., and Dalton, Ga., February 27-28. The regiment was attached to the 1st Brigade, 2nd Separate Division, District of the Etowah, Dept. of the Cumberland to July, 1865 then the Department of Georgia to January, 1866.

Regiment performed duty at Dalton, Ga., and operated against guerrillas until May 1, 1865. Expedition to Mill Creek March 14-16. Action near Dalton March 14. Expedition to Spring Place March 20-22, and to Ringgold March 28-29. Moved to Resaca May 1-2, thence to Calhoun June 26, to Dalton July 2-3. To Marietta, Macon and Albany.

July 27-31. Duty there and at Americus and Smithville until November. Moved to Macon and Hawkinsville November 4-6, thence to Savannah November 25-December 3. (Cos. "F" and "I" at Hawkinsville until November 28. Joined Regiment at Savannah December 5.) Duty at Savannah until January 23, 1866. Mustered out January 20, 1866. Moved to Springfield, Ill., January 23-31. Discharged February 8, 1866. Regiment lost during service 3 Enlisted men killed and 31 Enlisted men by disease. Total 34.

Because he did not believe Hart's claims of being a fighter and soldier when he was thirteen years old, Daniel Cohen, author of *The Great Airship Mystery*, scoffed at William Henry Harrison Hart's claims to have represented and united the various airship interests. He asserts that William H. H. Hart is a liar about his military service, and therefore, everything he

professes to know about the airships is a lie. Cohen forms his opinion of Hart on Hart's claim to be in the military at age thirteen—something that seems impossible today. The biographical sketch of Hart given in *Important Men of Nineteen-Thirteen* buttresses Hart's claim, with him having enlisted two days prior to his fourteenth birthday on January 23, 1862. His official state biography states he originally went into the secret service in 1862. Although many young boys served in the Northern army in such capacities as drummer, bugler, or other primarily noncombatant roles, it would be remarkable for a thirteen year old to serve in the secret service. In any case, from the public record, we know that young Hart saw a good portion of the war looking out from the serious end of a musket, certainly from 1862 onward.

Connecting the airship players together is important to building a strong case for the airships' existence. In 1849, a John H. Hart of Goshen, New York (the Wilsons' hometown) and his cousin Matthew traveled to the California gold fields via ship (John Linville Hall, *Around the Horn in '49: The Journal of the Hartford Union Mining and Trading Company* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1928), 189). I have not ascertained the familial relationship, if any, between this John Hart and the Harts of Iowa. Did William Hart have relatives in California prior to his migration to the state? One Augustus L. Hart of San Francisco was a California attorney general in the 1880s. Was William Hart related to him? The tendency for people to migrate where their relatives had gone before was a constant theme in the 1800s in America. That said, it should be no surprise that young Hart, motherless and fatherless by 1873, would move to the Golden State to be near his father's brother. A question looking for an answer: Was Augustus L. Hart an uncle or near relative of William H. H. Hart?

There are forty-six William Hart's listed as residing in Iowa in the census records from 1790 to 1890. There are no Francis or Elmer Benjamins listed in those same Iowa censuses. It is unlikely that the Harts (William's immediate family) and Benjamins were acquainted, because one family lived in Iowa and the other in New York. However, there may be a connection between the Benjamins of Goshen, the Wilsons of Goshen, and the Harts (John and Matthew) of Goshen.

Another important connection to be made in the airship mystery's foundation is the location of the "quiet Iowa village." Where did William Henry Harrison Hart's father settle in Iowa? A "quiet Iowa village" named Keokuk. James Hart's 1860 census record, given in Table 41, documents his residence in Keokuk in 1860. Later on, we will discover another airship inventor named Marcellus McGary, who lived in Memphis, Missouri. McGary built an airship in Keokuk, Iowa, in 1893 and flew in it in a public demonstration in November 1896, the month the California boys chose to introduce their airships to the good citizens of northern California.

TABLE 41
James Hart's Iowa Census Record

Year	Surname	Given Name	County	State	Page	Town-ship or Other Info	Record Type	Database
1860	HART	JAMES	Lee County	IA	093	3 W Keokuk	Federal population schedule	IA 1860 Federal census index

The 1889-90 San Francisco directory clearly shows William H. H. Hart living and practicing law in that city. According to a descendant of Hart's law partner, Julius Foster Fassett, who was married to an Anna Hedden, Hart was married to Loretta Hedden. Loretta and Anna were sisters, making Julius and William brothers-in-law. Though the search to contact Hart's descendants has been unsuccessful, Fassett's descendants revealed that there are no known papers or records from the law practice.

TABLE 42
San Francisco, California, Directories, 1889 and 1890

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
William H. H. Hart		attorney-at-law	230 Montgomery, rooms 23-24	1426 Jackson	San Francisco	CA	1889
William H. H. Hart		attorney-at-law	230 Montgomery, rooms 23-24	r. 204 Broderick	San Francisco	CA	1890

TABLE 43
1889 San Francisco City Directory

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
W. H. H. Hart	Blue Jacket Mining Co. (Elko Co. Nev.)	secretary	230 Montgomery, room 3		San Francisco	Ca	1889
W. H. H. Hart	Copper King Mining Co. (Cochise Co., A. T.)	secretary	230 Montgomery, rooms 23-24		San Francisco	Ca	1889

The 1889 San Francisco city directory lists Hart as the secretary of several mining companies. The "A. T" in the second column of the bottom row of Table 43 stands for Arizona Territory. Any guesses as to who was the principal owner of these two mines? None other than George Hearst, perhaps the richest man in America in 1890.

While living and practicing law in San Francisco, Hart became a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R., Geo. H. Thomas Post No. 2, of San Francisco), Masons, I.O.O.F., and the California Bar Association. His residence when he died was Palo Alto and his office was located in the Monadnook Building, San Francisco, California.

A patent application for an airship by Samuel West of San Francisco, patent number 553,634, dated January 28, 1896, is included in the appendix. The West patent application is noteworthy because William H. H. Hart of San Francisco is assigned one-half of the patent rights. Hart was, in truth and fact, the legal representative of airship inventors.

Immigrant; Indian captive; orphan; boy soldier; student; attorney; migrant; settler; California attorney general; member of the board of directors of prestigious and financially lucrative companies; active in Union veterans' movements, charitable and professional organizations; and esteemed community leader, William Henry Harrison Hart was an influential and powerful attorney in 1896 San Francisco. Apparently, Hart was everything he claimed to be, including the legal representative for the East- and West-Coast airship interests.

LOOKING FOR AUGUSTUS L. HART

Born in Bloomfield, Indiana, on October 15, 1849, Augustus Loring Hart apparently resided in Linn County, Iowa, for some period of time before journeying to California. He was a former California state attorney general from January 5, 1880, until January 7, 1883. Could he have been related to William H. H. Hart? Perhaps, William is Augustus's nephew. It seems

reasonable to believe young William Hart would migrate to a city where an influential relative could assist him in his profession.

Augustus Hart's father died sometime between 1860 and 1870. The exact date and cause of his death was unavailable. Augustus died in Livermore, California, in 1901.

TABLE 44
Iowa Census Record of Augustus L. Hart

State	Year	County	Record Type	Township	Page	Database
IA	1860	Linn County	Federal Population schedule	Buffalo Township	134	IA 1860 Federal census index

Note: Same county William Henry Harrison Hart studied law in?

LOOKING FOR U.S. MARSHAL WILLIAMS

In the chapter 3 account "McKnight's Airship," the paper reported that "A man named McKnight has been working on an airship at U.S. Marshal Williams' ranch . . ." (*Dallas Morning News*, April 10, 1897, p. 4). In the chapter 11 account "At Conroe," the newspaper reported, "... they were disturbed by a call from three strangers who said they were from San Francisco, Cal. They were most reliable gentlemen ... They had left the ship at Williams ranch near town and walked in to get supper by way of a change." Is this ranch owner the same U.S. Marshal Williams of Paris, Texas? Conroe is near the home of the Texas state prison system at Huntsville.

But, just who is Marshal Williams? John Shelby Williams was appointed U.S. marshal of the Eastern District of Texas for a period of service from January 15, 1894, to February 28, 1898. Marshal Williams' territory included Conroe. Perhaps he owned a second ranch near Conroe. John Shelby Williams, Jr., was born in Sonoma County, California, in 1848, the son of John S. and Maria Louisa (Gordon) Williams. In 1849 John and Maria moved to Butte County. His father died in May, soon after moving. In 1850 Maria married Lindsay Carson, a Butte County man, and they were living in Sonoma County in 1880. U . S. Marshal John Williams, Jr., was raised in Butte County and left for Texas in 1870. A birth year of 1848 would place him in the same age group as many other airship characters, such as William Hart and Dr. Elmer Benjamin, who also have strong Butte County connections. The information source for John Shelby Williams (Sr. and Jr.) comes from the *California Pioneer Register and Index 1542-1848*, page 384. From the historical record, it appears extremely probable that

U.S. Marshal John Shelby Williams and the Butte County, California, airship crowd were longtime acquaintances.

The 1880 census record shows that John Shelby Williams, Jr., was living in Lamar County, Texas, and additional information has him living in Red River County in 1890—a county immediately east of Lamar County. Paris, Texas, is located in Lamar County.

For the record, a John S. Williams is listed in the 1870 Fannin County census. Fannin County is immediately west of Lamar County, but this Williams, apparently, is not our man. According to Tom Scott, county historian, this Williams died in 1871, had a brother named Thomas, and was from Virginia. But, there may have been a family connection between John Shelby and the Fannin County Williams.

It is reasonable to believe the airship captains would choose to keep their vessels out of sight on the secluded ranch of a longtime friend who could legally enforce a no-trespassing edict. A search of Fannin County deed records reveals several Williams' who owned property in and around Bonham. Only one John Williams with sufficient acreage during the right time period to be of interest to us shows up in the deed records. This John Williams, who owned seventy-six acres located between Bonham and Ladonia, appears to be the owner of the "Williams ranch" reported in the newspaper account. In the illustration giving the location of Williams' ranch, it is identified by the circle between Ladonia and Bonham.

The legal description of the Williams property is "P.A. Hulsey, E. H. Sebastian, and Frank Sebastian to John Williams for \$200.00 part of the survey of one league and one labor granted to Daniel Davis ... on the waters of the Sulphur River 76 acres. November 29, 1880" (*Fannin County Deed Book 10*, p. 378).

We estimated the general area of the airships' daytime lair using a tried-and-true mathematical method called triangulation. The estimate pinpoints the lair somewhat north and west of Bonham. This estimate comes from shooting a back azimuth using sighting information from the newspaper accounts—an approximation, as several factors influence the results. The most obvious problem with shooting a back azimuth is the assumption that the object was traveling in a straight line. Wind and course changes can

make such an approach to determining the flight origination of airships somewhat inaccurate. The back azimuth estimate is a "in the ballpark" estimate. We were certainly in the ballpark with this one. The back-azimuth estimate was off by only about fifteen miles! The evidence identifying John Shelby Williams' ranch as the location of the airships' daytime lair is incontrovertible.

LOOKING FOR SOLOMON ANDREWS

While the thought of an airship flying around the sky in 1897 at speeds of 100-plus miles per hour and at altitudes of 10,000-plus feet may seem astounding, the fact is that others were flying the skies of America and Europe sometime before 1897. The first "officially recognized" airship to be powered by a mechanical engine was built and flown by a Frenchman, Henri Giffard, in 1852.

In the United States, Dr. Solomon Andrews would serve as an early inventor of airships. Andrews, thrice mayor of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, was born in 1806 and died on October 20, 1872. Obviously, Dr. Andrews was not a member of the 1897 airship team. But he may have contributed greatly to their organization and achievements, and it is even likely that he was their mentor and inspiration. Like several other characters in this saga, Dr. Andrews was a prolific inventor.

Solomon Andrews was an M.D. and served on the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. He was, for a time, health officer of his hometown, Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where he developed the town's first sewerage system to help fight cholera and yellow fever. Andrews created, among many other useful items, a lock, a sewing machine, a barrel maker, a fumigator, a velocipede, a gas lamp, forging presses, a kitchen stove, an airship (called the *Aeron*), and a pipe that would "filter out harmful substances" from tobacco.

He purchased the old army barracks in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in 1847 and converted the dilapidated wooden structure into the Inventor's Institute, where he was joined by many other inventors. Because of his great interest in flying, Dr. Andrews later changed the name (and the focus) of the organization to the Aerial Navigation Company. This company was probably responsible for one somewhat famous 1849 *New York Herald* advertisement that offered airship transportation to the California gold fields. According to the advertisement, a prospective miner could be in

California in just a couple of days versus the threemonth boat trip or the six-month overland journey. A question worth asking: Was the Inventor's Institute, or Aerial Navigation Company, the precursor of the Sonora Aero Club? Andrews had an office in New York City at 11 Walker Street. It is known that men of wealth visited with Dr. Andrews and invested their money with him. The Inventor's Institute may very well be the mysterious NYMZA Dellschau mentioned as the financial sponsor of the Sonora Aero Club.



Dr. Solomon Andrews circa 1863
(Courtesy from an old newspaper)

Also, in 1847, Dr. Andrews performed an incredible publicity stunt that gained the attention of the country. A successful inventor, he chained a locked trunk containing \$1,000 (a huge sum in 1847) to a lamppost in downtown New York City. Then he advertised for any person to pick the lock and claim the \$1,000 as their reward. For three months, many people tried—perhaps, every safe cracker and locksmith in the city. No one succeeded. From this triumphant demonstration, he secured a lucrative contract to supply locks to the national government. There can be no doubt the demonstration gained Andrews many new contacts and investors in the business world, which probably helped him obtain financing for his aerial navigation experiments.

In a letter dated August 9, 1862, Dr. Andrews wrote President Lincoln, suggesting he could "produce an aerostat for reconnaissance, if nothing more, in aid of the armies of the Union" (Mary Kingsley, "The Flying Jerseyman, Dr. Solomon Andrews of Perth Amboy," *Proceeding of the New*

Jersey Historical Society (July 1954): 169). Lincoln liked the idea and asked the War Department to keep him informed of Dr. Andrews' progress. Lincoln further requested eyewitness accounts of the progress and test flights of Dr. Andrews' airship.

"The machine was completed and made her first flight in June, 1863" (Roger B. Whitman, "He Flew an Airship Before the Wrights Were Born!" *Popular Science*, (January 1932): 13) Dr. Andrews' airship flew into the wind on its maiden voyage, reaching an altitude of 200 feet and landing safely. The motorless airship worked and was navigable but had some problems with control. After completing refinements, Andrews tested it again, with promising results. Determining the ship ready for public observation, and probably keeping in mind the president's desire to have eyewitness accounts of the airship's success, Andrews invited the press to witness a flight of the *Aeron* on September 4, 1863. A reporter from the *New York Herald* was obviously impressed:

AERIAL NAVIGATION. / An Extraordinary Invention— The Air
Navigated Successfully-The Great Air Ships— Incidents of Their Trial
Trips.

We have this week the pleasure to record the success of the most extraordinary invention of the age, if not the most so of any the world ever saw—at least the greatest stride in invention ever made by a single individual.

In October last Dr. Solomon Andrews, of Perth Amboy, NJ, commenced the construction of a war aerostat, for reconnoitering purposes, on his own personal responsibility, not being able, after submitting his plans to the War Department, to make the honorable Secretary of War "see the utility" of a machine which would go over into [] and reconnoitre the force and position of the enemy. His plan showed on the face of them to any one not stupid that the machine could not do otherwise than go ahead in any direction in which the bow was pointed, and that, too, with any amount of power or force which might be desired, and which greenbacks would readily procure. The power required and the propelling apparatus added but little weight to the aerostat, whether of large or small dimensions; consequently it did not increase the dimensions of the aerostat beyond

that of balloons of ordinary construction, much less in size than many that are now made. The machine made by Mr. Andrews would carry up three men in addition to all the fixtures and paraphernalia for its forward movement. IT contained twenty-six thousand cubic feet of hydrogen gas. It carried him, weighing one hundred and seventy-two pounds, and to hundred and fifty-six pounds of ballast.

Upon his invitation last spring we have sent our reporters at three different times to witness his experiments with his machine, and have watched his progress with great interest.

Its form was that of three cegars pointed at both, secured together at their longitudinal equators, covered by a net, and supporting by one hundred and twenty cords a car sixteen feet below under its center..

The car was twelve feet long, made of basket work, and was 16 inches wide at the bottom. The aerostat, or cylindroids, were made of varnished linen, like ordinary balloons.

On Friday, the 4th instant, he made his last experiment, and demonstrated to an admiring crowd the possibility of going against the wind, and of guiding her in any and every direction with a small rudder having only seventeen square feet of surface. He made no long flight in one straight line, lest his *modus operandi* aboard be divulged; but by a most ingenious plan demonstrated her capabilities beyond all possibility of doubt, whilst he prevented a public knowledge of his method of propelling.

After a few short flights, to satisfy himself and a few friends that all was right, and that she would do all he had contemplated, he set her off in a spiral course upward, she going at a rate of not less than 120 miles per hour, and describing circles in the air of more than one and a half miles in circumference. She made twenty revolutions before she entered the upper strata of clouds and was lost to view. She passed through the first strata of dense white clouds, about two miles high, scattering them as she entered in all direction. In her upward flight could be distinctly seen her rapid movement in a contrary direction to

the moving clouds, and as she came before the wind passing by them with great celerity. As she was distinctly seen thus to move, both below and above the clouds on the clear blue sky at 5:00 o'clock p.m., with the sun shining clear upon her, there could be no mistake or optical delusion to consider.

As to her propelling power and motive apparatus, it behooves us not now to speak. It might be considered contraband of war, or affording aid and comfort to the enemy, for with such a machine in the hands of Jeff Davis the armies around Washington would be powerless to preserve the capitol.

We think Dr. Andrews deserves more praise for the patriotic ingenuity with which he has preserved his secret, and yet tried his grand experiment in the open air before the public, than even that manifested in the conception and construction of his machine. Of that and its beautiful simplicity we may have occasion to speak hereafter. We have the documents (*New York Herald*, September 8, 1863, p. 38).

Aerial Navigation. / TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD

Perth Amboy, New Jersey

Sept 8, 1863.

Will you have the goodness to publish, for the information of scientific men, the fact that the twenty revolutions made by my aerial ship in her spiral circle of half mile diameter were made in time of fourteen and a half minutes. To me the most astonishing thing was that the material of which she was constructed withstood the resistance of the air at so great a velocity. It was, however, prepared for it, by being brought to a point at the bow ends of the three cylindroids over conical pieces of cork five inches in diameter at their base. Strong cord secured these points to the apex of light strips of wood, extending along the sides of each cylindroids, and meeting together at that point.

Your reporter has spoken within bounds as to the rate of her speed. The first eleven revolutions were made in seven minutes and few seconds. The last three revolutions were made in three and a half minutes. A gradual diminution of velocity was a matter of course. The circles did not diminish in diameter, for they appeared larger to the view as she ascended, and they must have increased in size from her slower movement, owing to a diminution of motive power, as well as the rarer air acting upon her rudder. Hence the calculations made by your reporter on the whole number of revolutions, in the whole period

of time before she was lost to view in the upper strata of clouds, falls far short of her greatest velocity. It must have been over two hundred miles per hour at the earlier portion of her spiral movement. Very respectfully, yours, Solomon Andrews {*New York Herald*, September 9, 1863, p. 4).

Dr. Andrews was frustrated in his efforts to promote his airship with the War Department, but he finally was able to schedule an appointment with President Lincoln and report to him personally. Lincoln ordered Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to form a congressional committee to investigate the invention and make recommendations for its acquisition. Congressional hearings were held in March 1864. The committee recommended the airship be purchased by the War Department immediately. Apparently, Edwin Stanton, a man of limited vision, squashed the recommendations, and on March 22, 1865, Andrews received a letter from the House Military Affairs Committee stating they were really not that interested, and besides, the war was over, seemed to be their laconic attitude.

The Records of the Committee on Military Affairs, 17th-79th Congresses (1822-1946) lists Solomon Andrews and his flying machine: "Many petitions are pleas from American inventors who sought congressional approval of their inventions. During the 19th century, the committee was asked to consider the following inventions: . . . The petition promoting Dr. Solomon Andrews' 'aerial ship' with inflatable cylinders includes a photograph of the machine (38A-G12.13)."

I suspect Dr. F. W. Benjamin and most of the other airship crowd read in the fall of 1863 the stirring exploits in the *New York Herald* of Solomon Andrews and his flying machine. Newspapers were an eagerly sought-after commodity on the Civil War battlefield, as the war-weary soldiers were hungry for news. The newspapers were held in high esteem by the soldiers, as they brought to the battle-scarred veterans not only news of home and even battle results, but also a sense that in some place people still lived normal lives. Perhaps, sitting around a campfire somewhere in the Virginia forest, they read the story of Andrews and determined to duplicate his feats when the war was over.

Of interest is the fact that Dr. Andrews served with the Sanitary Commission during the fall of 1864. He was stationed at Pittsburg Landing and Harrisburg Landing on the James River near Petersburg, Virginia. A medical doctor, he may have personally met Dr. F. W. Benjamin while performing his duties during the siege of Petersburg. Considering such

members of the Sanitary Commission routinely inspected and assisted field hospitals, it is probable the two men met. Andrews may have even met some of the airship crowd who were wounded during some period of the war.

LOOKING FOR MCKNIGHT

Recall the comment from the "McKnight's Airship" account: "A man named McKnight has been working on an airship at U.S. Marshal Williams' ranch ..." Unfortunately, all we have is McKnight's last name. Utilizing the scant information we have, let's see if we can connect a McKnight to the airship crowd. Several McKnights from Orange County—the political division where Goshen, New York, is located—are listed on various census records. What is absolutely electric is the discovery of a Charles McKnight in Orange County, New York, in 1860 and a Charles McKnight in Sherman, Texas, in 1870. A Charles McKnight is identified in the 1870 federal Texas census as living in Sherman in Grayson County. Charles McKnight is not listed in any other census for Texas other than that of 1870. Sherman is forty-seven miles northwest of Ladonia, Texas, site of Williams' ranch and the airship lair.

The Charles McKnight identified in the 1860 federal New York census in Orange County is listed as living in New Windsor. New Windsor is about sixteen air miles from Goshen (home of the Wilsons). Charles McKnight is not listed in any other census for New York other than that of 1860.

TABLE 45
Charles McKnight's New York Census Records

1860 MCKNIGHT CHARLES	Orange County NY	161 New Windsor Federal Population Schedule	NY 1860 Federal Census
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TABLE 46
Charles McKnight's Texas Census Records

1870 MCKNIGHT CHARLES	Grayson County TX	178 Sherman Prec. 5 Federal Population Schedule	TX 1870 Federal Census Index
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Is the Orange County, New York, Charles McKnight the same Charles McKnight of Grayson County? We cannot say for certain, but isn't it strange that a Charles McKnight would show up in the same two places as Hiram Wilson, on or about the same time? We do not know where Charles McKnight was between 1870 and 1897.

LOOKING FOR PROF. (CAPTAIN) SAMUEL E. TILLMAN

Samuel Escue Tillman was born in 1847 in Tennessee. He graduated from the West Point Military Academy, class of 1869, and eventually returned to the esteemed halls as a professor of chemistry, mineralogy, and geology in 1880. He was the author of *Elementary Lessons in Heat; and Essential Principles of Chemistry*. Tillman also authored *Academic History of the Military Academy, 1802-1902 (The Centennial of the United States Military Academy, 2 vols., Washington: GPO, 1904)*. Tillman led an eventful life as a soldier, inventor, and educator. By 1902, he was promoted to the rank of colonel. He served as superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy from August 13, 1917, until his retirement from the army on June 11, 1919. He was promoted to brigadier general upon his retirement. He died in 1942.

The 1860 federal census data lists Tillman as a thirteen-year-old youth in Bedford County, Tennessee. The 1870 federal census lists him as a twenty three year old in Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey. Note that Jersey City and Perth Amboy (home of Dr. Solomon Andrews) are about eighteen air miles apart. Solomon Andrews did not die until 1872. Did Tillman meet Dr. Andrews? We don't know, but aren't the coincidences mounting in this great story?

TABLE 47
Samuel Tillman's Tennessee Census Records

1860 TILLMAN SAMUEL E.	Bedford County TN	208 W Division 7th Dist Federal Population Schedule	TN 1860 Federal Census
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TABLE 48
Samuel Tillman's New Jersey Census Records

1870 TILLMAN SAMUEL	Hudson County NJ	194 3 W. Jersey City Federal Population Schedule	NJ 1870 Federal Census
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Samuel Tillman
(Courtesy U.S. Military Academy)



Amos Dolbear, 1874
(Courtesy Tufts University)

LOOKING FOR PROF. AMOS E. DOLBEAR

Amos Emerson Dolbear was born in Norwich, Connecticut, on November 10, 1837. He graduated from Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, in 1866. In 1867 he graduated from the University of Michigan with the degree of M.E. He received the degree of Ph.D. in 1883, also from the University of Michigan. From 1866 to 1867 he was instructor of chemistry at the University of Michigan. From 1867 to 1868 he was assistant professor of natural sciences at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. From 1868 until 1874 he was professor of natural sciences at Bethany College, Behtany, West Virginia, and mayor of that city from 1871 to 1872. In 1874 he was appointed professor of physics and astronomy and chairman of the department at Tufts College, College Hill, Massachusetts.

One hundred years ago, Prof. Amos E. Dolbear of West Virginia published his formula for telling the air temperature from the rate of treecricket chirping. A man of many interests, Dolbear clearly demonstrated in his book *Modes of Motion, or Mechanical Conceptions of Physical*

Phenomena that he was a leading physical-science theorist at the turn of the century.

He made valuable contributions to science. Among the inventions that he has perfected are the electric gyroscope, used to demonstrate the rotation of the earth, in 1867; tuning forks, for the exhibition of Lissajous curves, in 1872; and the opeidoscope, for the exhibition of vocal vibrations. In 1873 he began to study the convertibility of sound into electricity and, in 1876, perfected and patented his magneto electric telephone (the basis for his lawsuit against Alexander Graham Bell for patent infringement), and the static telephone in 1879. He published *The Art of Projecting* (Boston, 1876), *The Speaking Telephone* (1877), and *Sound and its Phenomena* (1885).

In 1882 Professor Dolbear communicated over a distance of a quarter of a mile without wires. (This fact is particularly noteworthy because it proves Professor Dolbear preceded radio pioneers Hertz and Marconi.) Professor Dolbear received a U.S. patent for a wireless telegraph in 1882 and obtained a patent for an induction method of wireless telegraph in 1886. He was recognized for his contributions to science at both the Paris Exposition in 1881 and the Crystal Palace Exposition in 1882. Dolbear retired from Tufts College in 1914.

Dolbear, throughout the latter half of the 1800s, acquainted himself with all of the leading scientists of the country. One such associate of Dolbear's, Moses Gerrish Farmer, was a prolific inventor in the mid 1800s. In September 1859, Farmer discovered the law of the self-exciting dynamo, a necessary device for the electrical propulsion of airships. Farmer completed the first dynamo machine in 1868, lighting a house to demonstrate its usefulness.

At the dawn of the new century, Professor Dolbear applauded Farmer's achievement, commenting that the dynamo was "an invention which has made possible all the electrical industries of today." Between 1864 and 1868, Farmer perfected a rechargeable thermoelectric battery (the Fargo battery?) and, in 1868, constructed the largest one ever built for the deposition of copper upon steel to produce the American-compound telegraph wire. Professor Dolbear was in good company. A man with such an inquiring mind would certainly find great interest in the flying machine of Dr. Andrews. Dolbear and Tillman probably knew each other through their professions, as each was a leading educator, author, and inventor during the historical period of interest.

LOOKING FOR MR. WALTERS

In the chapter 9 account "Was Aboard an Airship," the writer stated that one of the crew members was identified as Mr. Walters, airship engineer. Other crew members aboard were identified as Mr. Wilson and Mr. Scott Warren. Let us assume that the Mr. Wilson referred to was the same Mr.

Wilson identified in other accounts, namely, Mr. Hiram Wilson. Then, the Mr. Walters on this flight may have been Mr. Wilson's grandfather or other close relative. Hiram Wilson's mother was named Luna (Walters) Wilson. Her father was James P. Walters. The familial relationships are documented by *The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (vol. 149, p. 113).

LOOKING FOR C. C. AKERS

Not much information surfaces regarding C. C. Akers. I imagine the counties and organizations he served as a law-enforcement officer contain archived records of his service. It is sufficient for us to place him in or near Fort Worth around the time Hiram Wilson was a young boy living in or near the community. Other aspects of his life are of no great interest to us. The only Texas census record for an Akers is the 1880 census, which lists a C. C. Akers living in Maverick County. Akers and Wilson say they knew each other in the 1870s in Fort Worth.

TABLE 49
Sheriff Akers' Texas Census Record

1880 AKERS C. C.	Maverick County TX	048 E. D. 105 Federal Population Schedule	TX 1880 Federal Census Index	TX2893562
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LOOKING FOR GEORGE APPLGATE

Recall attorney Hart's comments concerning George Applegate and the assistance he provided Dr. Smith and Benjamin during the construction of an airship. Others have claimed Hart was a liar for various reasons. Let's see if we can associate Applegate with any other airship characters in some context outside the airship story. Perhaps, if such an association were found, it will establish further proof of the airship story's veracity. California census records only list one George Applegate:

TABLE 50
George Applegate's California Census Record

1860 APPLGATE, GEORGE W.	Placer County CA	560 Auburn 3rd Township Federal Population Schedule	CA 1860 Federal Census Index	CA36438033
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George W. Applegate can also be found in Civil War muster records:

George Applegate's 3rd Light Artillery
Regiment Muster Record

Enlist Date: 30 August 1864
Enlist Place: Auburn, NY
Enlist Rank: Priv
Enlist Age: 23
Served New York
Enlisted Batty I Co. 3rd LA Reg. NY
Mustered out at Trenton, NJ on 13 June 1865
(New York: Report of the Adjutant-General, 26 June 1900
Number: 1250585 State: NY, Published 1894-1906)

Applegate served in the same light-artillery regiment as Dr. Francis W. Benjamin for over nine months. Considering most Army of the Potomac artillery and infantry regiments, originally numbering anywhere from 1,000 to 1,800 men, after a battle or two numbered 250 men or less, it is very likely the two men knew each other.

George Applegate's name does not appear in the newspaper accounts other than in Hart's inconsequential remark concerning Dr. Smith. With such scant information concerning the subject, we have to dig to find additional information on Applegate.

TABLE 51
Pacific Coast Directory Entry for George Applegate

Given Name	Surname	Location	Occupation
George W.	Applegate	Lisbon, Placer, California	general merchandise

Although Applegate lived in California he served in a New York regiment. A discerning individual may ask how that was possible. Well, bounties in 1864, the year George enlisted, were paid by states to fill their enlistment quotas. The states, as a natural consequence of the bounty system, began to bid for the bounty men (e.g., paid volunteers). By the end of the year, bounties as high as \$1,500 (an incredible sum in 1864) were being paid. Perhaps, he enlisted in a New York regiment to obtain as much bounty money as possible. But, more likely, he joined the 3rd New York Light Artillery because he already knew the Benjamins from Butte County, California, and wanted to serve with men he knew.

There is no doubt George Applegate was a real person who served with Dr. Francis W. Benjamin for nine months in the Army of the Potomac. Was Hart making up a fanciful story to amuse the newspaper folks and get his name in the paper as one author has suggested? Ask yourself, how could Attorney Hart fabricate a story that was over forty years in the making?

LOOKING FOR GEORGE D. COLLINS

There does not seem to be any doubt that George Collins was a real person in 1896. However, just to make it formal, a check of the San Francisco directory for the years 1889, 1891, and 1895 does show a George Collins in San Francisco in 1870, practicing law.

TABLE 52
San Francisco, California, Directories (1889, 1891, 1895)

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
George D. Collins		attorney at law	715 Clay, rooms 11-13	1939 Broadway	San Francisco	CA	1889
George D. Collins		attorney at law	57 Murphy Bldg	r. Palace Hotel	San Francisco	CA	1890
George D. Collins		attorney at law	723 Market	723 Market	San Francisco	CA	1895

George married both Agnes and Charlotta Newman on May 15, 1889. Perhaps, George was Mormon? According to a reference in a San Francisco newspaper account, George Collins resided in Alameda in 1897. Agnes died in May 1901. In 1905, Charlotta Collins sued for divorce, desiring maintenance, alimony, and child support. George testified he was not married to Charlotta, apparently having lived only with Agnes during the intervening years before her death. In any case, Charlotta produced a marriage certificate, whereupon George was indicted for perjury. George fled to Canada and was subsequently extradited to the United States in 1906. He was found guilty of perjury and sentenced to fourteen years in prison. Besides making headlines during his perjury trial, he stirred the

populace with an attempted escape from California's infamous San Quentin prison.

By 1930 George is out of prison and living in San Francisco, married to Clarice. From the 1930 census record we can see George was born in Kentucky. This information is corroborated by the California Death Index. From the death index, we also learn George was born on July 4, 1864. Armed with his place of birth and birth date, we find George in the 1880 Kentucky census record.

TABLE 53
1930 United States Census
Census Place: San Francisco City, San Francisco, California
Household:

Name	Occ.	Rel	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace	Parents Bp
George D. Collins	Lawyer	Self	Male	M	W	65	KY	Fa: NIR Mo: NIR
Clarice	None	Wife	Female	M	W	49	CA	Fa: SCO Mo: NJ

Occ = occupation

Rel = relation to head of household

Marr = marital status

Parents Bp = parents birthplace

NIR = Northern Ireland

SCO = Scotland

TABLE 54
Collins' Deaths in California
From California Death Index (1940-1997)

Surname	Given Name	Middle Name	Sex	Birth Date	Death Date	Birth Place
Collins	George	Daniel	Male	4 Jul 1864	4 May 1944	Ky
Collins	George	D.	Male	8 Apr 1892	28 Jan 1965	Calif

Collins did not serve in the military during the Civil War. From Table 54 we see Collins was too young to serve. The California Death Index (1940-1997) lists his birth date as July 4, 1864.

TABLE 55
1880 United States Census
Census Place Harrodsburg, Mercer, Kentucky
Household:

Name	Occ.	Rel	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace	Parents Bp
Wm. P. COLLINS	Farm Hand	Self	Male	M	W	39	VA	Fa: VA Mo: VA
Lucy Ann COLLINS	House Keeping	Wife	Female	M	W	38	KY	Fa: VA Mo: VA
William COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	20	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
James COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	17	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
George COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	16	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Speed COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	12	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Lucie COLLINS	Farm Hand	Dau	Female	S	W	11	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Preston COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	8	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Nannie COLLINS	Farm Hand	Dau	Female	S	W	7	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Evaline COLLINS	Farm Hand	Dau	Female	S	W	6	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Richard COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	3	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Levi COLLINS	Farm Hand	Son	Male	S	W	2	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY
Emily COLLINS	Farm Hand	Dau	Female	S	W	2M	KY	Fa: KY Mo: KY

Occ = occupation

Rel = relation to head of household

Marr = marital status

Parents Bp = parents birthplace

Why was Collins the airship inventor's legal representative? This is a legitimate question that does not have a clear answer at the present. Benjamin said he used Collins for his legal business because they were old friends. Suffice it to say Collins was closely related to a very powerful and rich man. I suspect this man was the airship financier. If this is the case, then it seems reasonable that he would give business to a relative. The data at this juncture is somewhat speculative, but an additional work is planned that will explore the financing of the airships.

George Collins, attorney at law, airship legal representative, husband and father, died May 4, 1944. Perhaps, a descendant will come forth with documentation to prove beyond any doubt that the airship story was factual.

LOOKING FOR JAMES RANDALL

There are few clues to follow when attempting to discover the identity of the airship captain "Randall," named so in the chapter 13 *Fort Worth Register* account titled "The Airship," (April 24, 1897, p. 5). Other than this surname, there is not much information that can be used to identify this person. But if we look for a Randall in all the places we find the other airship characters, right off we discover a James Randall from Butte County. See Table 56.

TABLE 56
James Randall's California Census Record

1860 RANDALL JAMES	Butte County CA	628 Oregon Township Federal Population Schedule	CA 1860 Federal Census Index	CA18139261
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Now with a first name, James, we can check Civil War muster records. Is it a coincidence we find a James Randall serving in the same New York light-artillery regiment as Dr. F. W. Benjamin and George Applegate?

James Randall's New York Muster Record

Enlist Date: 30 August 1864

Enlist Place: Mentz, NY

Enlist Rank: Priv

Enlist Age: 23

Served New York

Enlisted Batty A Co. 3rd LA Reg. NY

Mustered out at Washington, DC on 06 July 1865

(New York: Report of the Adjutant-General,

NY Roster Published by on 1894-1906)

Looking for James Randall in San Francisco directories, we discover one James Randall in the 1889-91 directory.

TABLE 57
San Francisco, California, Directories, 1889-91

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
James Randall		laborer	W s Tennessee nr Solano		San Francisco	CA	1889

We find two James Randalls in the 1898 Shasta County, California, Register. One Randall is too young to be the one of interest. The other James Randall's age is given as fifty-eight. The Civil War muster record for James Randall listed his age as twenty-three in 1864, making this James Randall fifty-seven or fifty-eight, depending upon when his birth month and day occurred, in 1898. Considering the regiment James Randall served in, it is likely we have identified the correct James Randall. Note that in the Shasta County, California, directory, Randall's birthplace is listed as New York.

TABLE 58
Shasta County, California Register, 1898

Name	Occupation	Age	Nativity	PO Address
3800. Randall, James B.	Miner	33	Rhode Island	Knob
3801. Randall, James H.	Carpenter	58	New York	Bayles

The Shasta County James Randall's occupation is listed as carpenter. From the numerous airship newspaper accounts, we discover or infer parts of the airship are made from wood. It seems logical to me that the airship crew would include a man with such skills to repair broken parts and make improvements in the design.

The James Randall, carpenter, identified in the 1898 Shasta County Register (see above) seems to be the same James Randall identified in the 1870 Census (see below). Although the census lists his marital status as

married, no other Randall's are listed for Township 2. If the information is accurate, then Randall's wife was not living with him at the time.

TABLE 59
1870 United States Census
Census Place: Township 2, Contra Costa, California
Household:

Name	Rel	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
James Randall	Self	Male	M	W	30	NY

Rel = relation to head of household

Marr = marital status

The birthplace of the James Randall listed in the 1870 census is given as New York. The birthplace for Randall in the census agrees with the Shasta County Register birthplace. After searching the New York census records, I found several James Randalls born in New York. Without a town for reference, I could not identify any of them as the James Randall of interest to us. There were no James Randalls from Orange County, a site of particular interest to us because of the Wilsons. The James Randall in the 1870 census does not appear in any other California census records.

Although I am certain the James Randall identified in the previous California directories and census records is the Randall of interest to us, I found a James Randall living in Keokuk County, Iowa, in 1880 (1880 History of Keokuk County Iowa, Warren Township). I find this information intriguing due to the connection between Hart and Iowa. I do not know if the Keokuk, Iowa, James Randall is the same individual as the California James Randall, but the information is included here for your contemplation. As there is no James Randall listed in the 1880 California census, it very well could be the same individual.

LOOKING FOR WILLIAM H. WARREN

Information about Warren is scarce. A William Warren from San Francisco enlisted in the 2nd Cavalry (California) Regiment in 1864. This may or may not be the Warren of interest.

William Warren's 2nd Cavalry Regiment Muster Record

Enlist Date: 03 November 1864

Enlist Place: San Francisco

Enlist Rank: Priv

Enlist Age

Served California

Enlisted B Co. 2nd Cav Reg. CA

Mustered out at Fort C on 28 May 1866

(Register of California Men in the War of the Rebellion 1861 to 1867, published by J. D. Young, State Printing in 1890)

Another William H. Warren was a professor of engineering at Sidney University, Australia, from the 1870s to the 1900s. Although I cannot place him in San Francisco, or more specifically, Hayward, in the fall of 1896 or spring 1897, an official at Sidney University advised me he passed through San Francisco in the fall of 1897. What is intriguing is Professor Warren's specialty: strength of materials. Given the known composition of the airship team and the talents of the various individuals, a strength-of-materials engineer is exactly what they needed to succeed.

LOOKING FOR SCOTT WARREN

Looking in the places in which other characters were located, we find a Scott Warren in Iowa.

TABLE 60
Scott Warren's Iowa Census Record

1870 SCOTT WARREN	Story County IA	192 Washington Township Federal Population Schedule	IA 1870 Federal Census Index	IA018327590
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Scott Warren's home—Washington, Iowa—is seventy-four miles north and a little west of Keokuk. However, Washington is near Wapello, Iowa, the location where William H. H. Hart received part of his law training. The chapter 9 newspaper account, "Was Aboard an Airship," identifies Scott as an engineer. Perhaps, Scott Warren is a close relative of William Warren? Perhaps, but insufficient information at the moment precludes any additional speculation.

LOOKING FOR C.J. WALSH

In the chapter 16 account titled "History of the Ship," one C. J. Walsh, an electrical engineer from San Francisco, is identified as one of the "investors" in the airship. There was a prominent Walsh family living in San Francisco at the turn of the century. One member of this family, Jane C. Walsh, was a San Francisco deputy coroner around 1903. She was the first female in the United States to hold this position.

I have not come across any information with which I can link C. J. Walsh to any other member of the airship team. However there is an interesting observation to be made in the transposition of letters between the initials of Jane C. Walsh and C.J Walsh. Could Jane C. and C. J. Walsh be the same person? Maybe, maybe not. Women were observed participating in the spring flying extravangza. However, being an electrical engineer required a significantly different education from someone performing the role of coroner. But, many people are doubledegreed. It is certainly an interesting thought to ponder.

Looking for Other Airship Inventors

Were other unidentified individuals involved in the 1897 airship mystery? Several accounts mention the presence of nameless crew members. We don't know who these men were but we may uncover something fruitful by indulging in a little guesswork. What about other known inventors going about the business of inventing airships in the latter half of the 1890s? A survey of these individuals reveals several intriguing possibilities.

LOOKING FOR MARCELLUS MCGARY

Was the airship an invention of a local Texas boy named Charles McKnight? I don't think so. But, as the airship(s) moves about the country, we see reports concerning local individuals who are attempting to complete and fly some type of airship that will solve the problem of "aerial navigation." It seems like every community, great and small, had at least one local individual working on the problem. And why not? It was generally agreed by all that great wealth, fame, and fortune awaited the first successful individual.

One such local fellow who experimented with airships was Marcellus McGary, who died on October 22, 1927, at Helmer, Idaho. Marcellus was not originally from Idaho, having moved there in 1907 from the area around Memphis, Missouri. McGary is remembered in Memphis for having demonstrated, in Memphis, on November 26, 1896, his airship. You may recall November 1896 was the month the California boys chose to introduce their airship(s) to the good citizens of northern California.

Of great interest is the method of propulsion McGary adopted for his airship and the location of his manufacturing facility. McGary's idea of propulsion was to have the wings move, or flap, in a birdlike motion, and as stated earlier, he manufactured his airship in Iowa. The following newspaper articles mentioned airships employing the exact same method of propulsion: "Seen at Paris?" (chapter 5), "Another Man Saw It" (chapter 6), "In Texas" (chapter 6), "Airship Seen in Galveston" (chapter 7), "Something More about Airship" (chapter 10), and "The Airship Seen Here" (chapter 17).

The Iowa connection to the airship story is by now a strong one. Amazingly, we discover that McGary manufactured his airship in Keokuk, Iowa. Perhaps Marcellus was one of the unidentified pilots or crewmen flying with the airships in 1897 Texas. And Keokuk, a recurring location in the airship story, just may be the location of the "quiet village in Iowa."

On March 16, 1893, the *Farmington (Iowa) Herald* reported that the editor of the newspaper, in the company of E. A. Musgrave, while walking down a Keokuk street, was invited by Marcellus McGary to view a working scale model of the airship he was building. The editor—after offering some detail concerning how McGary came upon the idea for propelling his airship by studying the flight of birds and the swimming offish—explained that the airship is propelled by "a system of wings and fins operated by an electric motor capable of producing great velocity." The editor went on to say that McGary was leaving for St. Louis, where he would construct a ship capable of carrying six people. On September 2, 1893, McGary left Memphis for Burlington, Iowa, where he was to perform a test flight. According to the *Memphis Reville*, McGary could not find any gas in Burlington and therefore could not fly the machine.

For some reason he went on to Chicago, perhaps looking for a source of gas to inflate the "air department." According to the *Reville*, McGary left the airship in Chicago with a Mr. Baker—for exhibition. While the *Reville* admitted to seeing the McGary airship model work, it does not say McGary ever successfully flew the real thing. However, the account does include a photograph of the McGary's airship floating some distance in the air.

By November 1896, it is known McGary had his airship finished. He christened it the *Columbus*. According to other sources (Eugene Dodge, *A City Called Memphis*, [Eugene Dodge, 1975], 373), he successfully demonstrated that the airship could perform its intended function on November 26, 1896.

The airship seen by Walter L. Norwood and Bob Tevis ("In Texas," chapter 6, and "Airship Seen in Galveston," chapter 7) and Judge Love ("A Judge Sees It," chapter 7) was said to have wings that flapped like a bird. Such an airship was designed and built by Marcellus McGary. In the *Memphis Reville* articles, McGary's airship was said to be able to carry six passengers and crew. Judge Love said he found five men reclining upon the ground when he came upon the airship while hunting one afternoon.

Airship stories concerning McGary's attempts to conquer the skies were printed in the *Memphis Reville* on the following occasions:

December 29, 1892	McGary is waiting for airship motor.
March 16, 1893	McGary demonstrates airship model.
August 3, 1893	McGary has completed the airship gondola.
September 21, 1893	McGary takes airship to Burlington, IA.
October 26, 1893	McGary's airship is displayed in Chicago.
November 26, 1896	McGary demonstrates his airship in Memphis, Missouri.
September 18, 1941	Summary of previous articles.

The *Reville* celebrated its centennial birthday in 1941 by printing summarizations of articles it had printed the past 100 years. In a September 18, 1941, article, "McGary's Airship —Built in 1892 by M McGary," summarizes the previous *Reville* articles.

Was McGary part of the exclusive 1897 Texas aviators club? Did he know Hart, Benjamin, Wilson, Dolbear, Tillman, McKnight, and the other members of the airship crowd? You may recall several Texas news stories, including "A Judge Sees It," where the pilot, although interviewed, was not identified. It is not beyond the realm of possibility one of the unidentified pilots was Marcellus McGary. While there is not any known piece of evidence directly linking any of these men to McGary, it is safe to say there is an extremely good chance they all knew each other and that McGary was a participant in the spring 1897 flights over of Texas and Louisiana.

LOOKING FOR MICHAEL MCMAHON

Another possible but unidentified player in the airship mystery is Michael McMahon. McMahon was born in 1840 and died on September 10, 1929. In 1884 he invented and successfully flew an airship while living in or near Minneapolis, Minnesota.

LOOKING FOR PROF. ARTHUR C. BARNARD

This account demonstrates that other inventors were feverishly at work trying to solve the problem of aerial navigation. Barnard was partially successful.

AIR SHIP THAT MOVES

Prof. Barnard Gives an Exhibition of His Machine at Nashville and Sails Fifteen Miles

Nashville, Tenn., May 6. (1897) Today at the Tennessee centennial exposition Prof. Arthur Barnard, physical instructor of the T.M.C.A. of Nashville, began a journey in an airship constructed by himself. Prof. Barnard promised to sail against the wind after arising into the air and he did so. The airship will be continued in use at the exposition. Prof. Barnard said he would land at the starting point tonight. The ship is forty-six feet long and twenty in diameter.

Mr. Barnard, who returned with his airship tonight says that he has perfected a machine which will fly under ordinary conditions. He said tonight that it was not perfect, nor could it be perfectly controlled, but he believed that he could perfect it so that its course could be controlled. After disappearing from view this morning, the ship circled around, the navigator hoping to meet with a favorable current.

At last the ship began to sail to the west, and Mr. Barnard says as far as Watkins, a village fifteen miles from Nashville the gas in the balloon attachment began to give out.

He then sought a safe place to descend and came down easily. While aloft a sudden gust broke one of the spans of the ship. No other damage was suffered. The entire time he was aloft was one and one-

half hours. He was returning along the line of the outward flight when he was forced to land (*San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1897, p. 7).

This is a factual account of events as they occurred in Nashville at the exposition. So, we now have indisputable evidence that there are airships and there are airship inventors, probably more than could be comfortably counted in an hour's time. However, some were more successful than others.

Professor Barnard was not a member of an exclusive California or New York airship club. If he was, perhaps his airship would have been a bigger success at the exposition.

Editorial comment: There is this to be said for Prof. Barnard's airship—he isn't afraid to show it (*Houston Post*, May 13, 1897, p. 4).

LOOKING FOR DR. CHARLES A. SMITH

There are two references to Smith in this book. The first reference appears in the newspaper article "Supplies for Airship" in chapter 12 ("Never mind about my name; call it Smith"). The second reference appears in chapter 19 in a George Collins interview ("An Inventor's Opinion"). Let's see what else we can find out about a Charles A. Smith of San Francisco.

Examining Civil War muster records, we find there is no lack of Charles A. Smiths. The Charles A. Smith who served in the 5th California Infantry is probably the Charles Smith of interest, but there is insufficient information to conclude they are the same individual.

TABLE 61
Civil War Service Records for Charles A. Smith

Surname	Given Name	Middle Initial	Co.	Unit	Rank - Induction	Rank - Discharge	Notes	Allegiance
Smith	Charles	A.	B	5 California Infantry.	Captain	Captain		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	G	2 District Of Columbia Inf.	Private	Private		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	I	2 District Of Columbia Inf.	Private	Private		Union
Smith	Charles	A.		8 Indpt. Battery, N. Y. L. Art'y	Private	Private	56 N.Y.V.	Union
Smith	Charles	A.		19 Indpt. Battery, N. Y. L. Art'y	Private	Private		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	A	5 N. Y. Cavalry.	Private	Sergeant		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	A	16 N. Y. Infantry.	Private	Private		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	A	143 N. Y. Infantry.	Sergeant	Lieutenant		Union
Smith	Charles	A.	B	117 N. Y. Infantry.	Private	Private		Union
Smith	Charles	A.		Battery, C. 3 N. Y. L. Art'y	Private	Private		Union

When we look in the census record, we find a Charles Smith living in Butte County in 1860. KimsheW does not appear on any available maps, so I am not sure where the community is in relation to Oroville. KimsheW Creek is about thirty-eight miles north of Oroville.

TABLE 62
Census Record

1860 Charles Smith	Butte County CA	594 Kimshew Township Federal Population Schedule	CA 1860 Federal Census Index	CA18139261
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Checking the San Francisco directories, we find a Charles A. Smith working as a machinist in the city in 1889. The next year, 1890, we find a Charles Smith, Jr., working at the same physical location. But, we now have a Charles A. Smith identified as a physician. Smith is referred to as a "doctor" in the Collins interview. I believe both Charles A. Smiths are the same person. Machine work was a necessary endeavor if you wanted to build a successful flying machine in 1897.

TABLE 63
San Francisco, California, Directories, 1889-91

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
Charles A. Smith	Charles Smith	machinist		1415 Powell	San Francisco	CA	1889
Charles . Smith, Jr		machinist		r. 1514 Powell	San Francisco	CA	1890
Charles A. Smith		physician	22 Hermann		San Francisco	CA	1890

What else can we find that pertains to Smith? Charles Smith of San Francisco applied for an airship patent. He was awarded patent number 585,893 on April 2, 1896. See appendix A for a copy of his patent application.

A SUMMARY OF THE AIRSHIP FACTS

As you may readily see, San Francisco; Texas; Butte County, California; Orange County, New York; and the Army of the Potomac are central factors to the airship story. The origins of the story are not in the creative minds of newspaper reporters but in the mud and blood of battle and the pastoral scenes of rural Iowa.

Hiram Wilson stated in an account, "this is but one of five built in a quiet village in Iowa." Hart's boyhood home in Keokuk, Iowa, and the known fabrication of McGary's successful airship in Keokuk are undisputable

facts. These facts are compelling circumstantial evidence for establishing the validity of Wilson's repeated claims to pilot but one airship of five "built in a quiet Iowa village." Recall Hart's claim to represent the East Coast airship interests via his legal connections to the development of the Fargo battery. If the East Coast inventor asked his legal representative where a secluded place to build his airship would be, the representative's birthplace, Iowa, would make a sensible answer. It is entirely possible Wilson was telling the truth when he made the "quite village" comment.

TABLE 64
The Airship Connections

Name	Loc. 1	Loc. 2	Loc. 3	Loc. 4	Loc. 5	Loc. 6	Loc. 7	Muster Records
William H. H. Hart	X	X			X		X	Various units
George Applegate	X						X	Bat I, 3rd NY LA/3rd Div/18th Army Corps
Elmer Benjamin	X	X						
Francis W. Benjamin		X					X	Bat U, 3rd NY LA/3rd Div/18th Army Corps
Willard Wilson			X	X			X	K Co., 24th NY/1st Brig/1st Div/1st Army Corps
James Randall	X	X			X		X	Bat A, 3rd NY LA/3rd Div/18th Army Corps
Hiram Wilson			X	X				
Charles McKnight			X			X		
John Shelby Williams		X				X		
George Collins	X							
Marcellus McGary					X			
Solomon Andrews							X	Sanitary Commission (served 18th Army Corps)

Locations Legend:

1—San Francisco

2—Butte County, CA

3—Orange County, NY

4—Fort Worth

5—Iowa

6—N Texas

7—Army of the Potomac

Dr. Elmer Benjamin claimed to have built three airships in California. Was he referring to three for which he was singly responsible, or was he including Dr. Smith's and W. H. Warren's airships in the tally? I suspect Dr. Benjamin's comment included them all. It is reasonable to conclude that Benjamin, Warren, and Smith were a team in San Francisco, collaborating on the airships built there. I would even go so far as to say these gentlemen were part of a design team that was probably directed by Dr. Smith—a reasonable assumption, given Dr. Smith's stated years of experience designing, building, and flying airships and the assumed inexperience of the other two individuals.

What about the Wilson airship? If the Wilsons built their own airship, we have a total of nine vessels (California's three, plus Iowa's five, plus Wilson's 1). I believe the Wilsons did build a New York airship. On Tuesday, November 17, 1896, the *Sacramento Bee* received an intriguing telegram from New York City advising the *Bee* that an airship would lift off from a vacant New York City lot with the pilot and one or two friends on Friday, November 20, 1896, and leave immediately for California. The author of the telegram said he would be in California in two days. From the California newspaper reports, we know that an airship was seen over Sacramento on November 18. However, it was not until November 22 that an airship was seen over San Francisco (Oakland). Perhaps, the Smith-Warren-Benjamin team announced their California airship to the world over Sacramento on November 18 while the Wilson team announced their New York airship to the world over San Francisco on November 22.

From the pilot/crew member comments in the newspaper account, we can gather that at least two West Coast, one Iowa, and one New York airship participated in the spring 1897 Texas flying spree. One airship exploded in Michigan. Three airships subsequently arrived in Texas. So, we have four well-documented airships accounted for.

If nine airships were built by these men, what happened to the other five? We do not know how many West Coast or Iowa airships survived their initial or maiden flights and subsequently were able to participate in the spring flying extravaganza. Conversely, we do not know how many did not

survive their maiden voyages. Nor can we say for certain that the other five did not participate in the spring airship regatta in some fashion. We do know that airships were seen in other parts of the country while the Texas sightings were occurring. For example, during April 1897, at least one airship was seen in Washington State. However, with the evidence currently available, we can only account, with a great degree of certainty, for four airships.

LOOKING FOR THE IOWA STORY

If five airships were built in Iowa, then it seems reasonable to suppose that Iowa was the site of numerous airship sightings. And it was. Iowa was also the site of numerous fake airship sightings involving kites, balloons, Chinese lanterns, fake notes, and at least one great and creative hoax. However, there are numerous truthful sightings.

An analysis of the Iowa sightings was performed by the author, and the results are somewhat ambiguous. The sightings seem to be much more scattered than they are in Texas. This can be attributed to the lack of sufficient newspaper accounts used in the analysis. That is, if all the newspaper accounts in the state were available for analysis, then a more accurate picture would emerge.

The airship sightings do not resolve to a particular area in the state as they did with the Texas sightings. The most probable cause for this is the lack of a choice of bases in Texas, whereas the airship inventors may have had ample bases in Iowa to land their airships by day. If the Iowa group of inventors did indeed have a choice of landing sites, then the data would not yield so clear and definitive a base.

There does seem to exist more than usual activity in the southeastern portion of the state, indicating William Henry Harrison Hart's boyhood home of Keokuk may have been the "quite Iowa village" mentioned in several newspaper accounts. From the data available, I could not shoot back azimuths (the method used to locate the Texas base at Marshal Williams ranch near Ladonia) of the sightings and pinpoint one particular area that the airship crew would have used for a daytime base. But, using a little logic, we may be able to narrow the prospective area down to a particular portion of the state.

The airship crew preferred to fly by night. In interviews, they gave several reasons for this. No, they were not vampires. The sight of the undulating ground moving under them resulted in airsickness. Also, some ground-dwelling men felt at liberty to take potshots at the airships. Those two reasons alone are sufficient excuses for avoiding daytime flight. So, if we accept the premise that the airships would not lift off until dusk, then we may have a useful method for detecting the Iowa base. All we need do is look where the majority of the early evening sightings occurred.

From the Iowa-sighting data, it appears the Iowa base was east of a north-south line from Keokuk to Burlington and south of an east-west line from Burlington to Davenport. As previously discussed, Keokuk was William H. H. Hart's childhood home. The Iowa sightings support the contention Keokuk was the "quiet Iowa village."

The Iowa Sightings

The Iowa sightings are listed in Table 65. The sightings were plotted by day and time. The results were not particularly fruitful. I leave graphing the Iowa accounts and verifying this information to the reader's industry.

TABLE 65
Iowa Sightings

Date Observed	Community	Time	Direction of Travel	Newspaper and Date Reported
4/3	Albia	10:00 P.M.	N	<i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/7/97
4/3	Vinton	9:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/9/97
4/7	Wolf Creek (?)	Night	S	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/13/97
4/8	Waterloo	1:00 A.M.	Southerly (from Cedar Falls)	<i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/8/97
4/8	West Liberty	7:30 P.M.	W	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/9/97
4/8	Solon	8:30 P.M.	W	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/9/97
4/8	Cedar Rapids	9:00 P.M.	N	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> (evening edition) 4/9/97
4/8	Mt. Pleasant	9:00 P.M.	W	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/10/97
4/8	Ottumwa	9:30 P.M.	W	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/10/97
4/8	Vinton	Night	NW	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/10/97
4/8	From Vinton, IA (8:00 P.M.) to Northwood, IA (10:30 P.M.) to Waseca, MN (about midnight traveling west) to Madison, SD (1:00 A.M.). The sightings were reported by railroad telegraphers as the airship followed the rail lines from state to state.	From 8:00 P.M. until 1:00 A.M. on 4/9/97	From Vinton, a northerly direction until Northwood, then westerly; was seen following the B., C.R., and N (Burlington, Cedar Rapids, and Northern) Railroad (in IA) then the M. and St. L. (Minneapolis and St. Louis) Railroad (MN) then the Milwaukee Railroad (into SD)	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/10/97 <i>Des Moines State Register</i> 4/10/97

TABLE 65 (continued)
Iowa Sightings

Date Observed	Community	Time	Direction of Travel	Newspaper and Date Reported
4/8	Fairfield	8:50 P.M.	NW	<i>Des Moines State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/8	West Liberty	7:30 P.M.	NW	<i>Des Moines State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/8	Solon			<i>Des Moines State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/8	Wausaw, WI	10:00 P.M.	From SE to NW	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/8	Nebraska City, NE	9:30 P.M.	From SE to NW	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Boone	Night		<i>Des Moines State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Des Moines	Between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Pella	Night/ 10:30 P.M.	Toward Des Moines	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/10/97 <i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Monroe	Night		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Evanston, IL	9:00 P.M.	Westerly	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97 <i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Mount Carroll, (IL?) (128 miles west of Chicago)	8:40 P.M.	From northeast then changed to due west	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Marshalltown	Shortly before 8:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Clinton	7:30 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/11/97
4/9	Nassau	9:00-10:00 P.M.	SW	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/10/97
4/9	Maxwell	8:00 P.M.	E then N	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Holstein	8:15 P.M.	NW	<i>Marshalltown Times-Republican</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Eldon	7:25 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/11/97
4/10	Ottumwa	7:40 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/11/97
4/10	Albia	8:10 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/11/97
4/10	Waterloo	1:00 A.M.	From the E	<i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/10/97
4/10	Keokuk	9:00 P.M.	Westward	<i>Keokuk's Sunday Gate City</i> 4/11/97
4/10	Rhodes	11:00 P.M.	NE	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Earlham	9:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Fort Dodge	8:00-9:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Grundy Center	9:30 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Brooklyn	9:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Bayard	8:45 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97

TABLE 65 (continued)
Iowa Sightings

Date Observed	Community	Time	Direction of Travel	Newspaper and Date Reported
4/10	Grinnell	9:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Lake City	8:00 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Melbourne	9:00 P.M.		<i>Marshalltown Evening Times-Republican</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Algona			<i>Marshalltown Evening Times-Republican</i> 4/13/97
4/10	LaHarpe	8:30 P.M.	S	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/15/97
4/10	Bancroft to Sioux City to Armstrong to Algona to Estherville to Swea City	1:00 A.M.		<i>Marshalltown Evening Times Republican</i> 4/13/97
4/10	Buffalo Center	9:30 P.M.	NW	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/11	Bloomington, IL	Noon	NE	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/13/97
4/11	Green Island	10:00 P.M.		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/13/97
4/11	Bellevue	11:00 P.M.		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/13/97
4/11	Hawarden(?)	12:30 A.M.	N	<i>Des Moines Leader</i> 4/13/97
4/11	Kinmundy(?)	8:00 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/12	Bedford	5:30 P.M.	Toward Fontanelle	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/12	Dubuque	After midnight		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/13/97
4/12	Burlington	8:30 P.M./early this morning	?/W	<i>Council Bluffs Globe</i> 4/13/97 <i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/13/97
4/12	Fontanelle	8:30 P.M.	NW	<i>Des Moines Leader</i> 4/13/97
4/12	Jewell	10:30 P.M.	E	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/14/97
4/13	Clinton	9:00 P.M.	W	<i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/14
4/13	Winterset(?)	8:30 P.M.	NW	<i>Des Moines Register</i> 4/15/97
4/13	Audubon	11:00 P.M.		<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/15/97
4/14	Birmingham	7:00-8:00 P.M.	From S then NW	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/16/97
4/14	Underwood	9:00 P.M.	NE	<i>Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil</i> 4/16
4/15	Springfield, IL	Noon		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/16/97
4/15	Council Bluffs			<i>Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil</i> 4/16
4/15	Herman (IL?)	Night		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/17/97
4/15	Sigourney	Night	From Hedrick	<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/17/97
4/15	Disco, IL	8:30 P.M.		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/17/97
4/16	Coppack(?)	9:00 A.M.		<i>Burlington Hawk-Eye</i> 4/17/97
4/16	Waterloo	Morning		<i>Waterloo Daily Courier</i> 4/16/97
4/16	Hoyt, WI	2:00 A.M.	From SE	<i>Iowa State Register</i> 4/17/97
4/16	Belmond		SW	<i>Marshalltown Evening Times-Republican</i> 4/17/97

LOOKING FORTHE SONORA AERO CLUB

Charles A. A. Dellschau was working for his son-in-law, Anton Stelzig, when he retired as a clerk in 1899. Using mixed media, he began painting pictures of airships. The works include intricate collages showing the vessels with shiplike decks beneath balloon pontoons manned by crews of gentlemen who were sometimes accompanied by a cat. Surrounding the pictures and notebooks is a cloak of mystery.

TABLE 66
Houston, Texas, Directories, 1882-95

Name	Business Name	Occupation	Location 1	Location 2	City	State	Year
Charles A. A. Dellschau	A. Stelzig	salesman		rooms A. Stelzig	Houston	TX	1887, 1888
Charles A. A. Dellschau	A. Stelzig	clerk		A. Stelzig	Houston	TX	1892, 1893
Charles A. A. Dellschau	Anton Stelzig	clerk		Mrs. E. Stelzig	Houston	TX	1894, 1895

Dellschau started his documentation project at least three years before the Wright brothers lifted off at Kittyhawk. His collages document the activities of a secret California organization called the Sonora Aero Club, which was dedicated to inventing and flying "aeros" or flying machines. In his notebooks, Dellschau recounts how, in his youth (circa 1850), the Sonora Aero Club members were engaged in building wondrous flying machines in which they joyfully cavorted about the California countryside. Dellschau seems to have been the club's draftsman, as he never depicts himself flying in any of the club's aeros.

Is Dellschau's account of the Sonora Aero Club fact or fiction? Are the accounts of crashes and deaths true or just adventurous tales of his own creation? Only by analyzing his drawings and writings and doing careful detective work may we determine with any degree of accuracy whether or

not the Sonora Aero Club actually existed and if Dellschau was an employee of the organization in the 1850s. Unfortunately, the individual who possesses most of Dellschau's notebooks refuses to allow anyone to study them. However, he has leaked enough information to whet the appetite and give the scent of the quarry. And the few Dellschau drawings that are available to the public (through the Houston Menil Foundation and a New York art gallery) substantiate many of Dellschau's claims.

The emigration records confirm that Dellschau arrived in the United States from Hamburg, Germany, in 1853. He listed his age as twenty-five years old and stated he was born in Brandenburg, Prussia. His occupation is listed as a farmer. Dellschau's letter of citizenship places him in Harris County in 1856 and Fort Bend County in 1860. Between 1853 and 1856, the known historical record is quiet concerning Dellschau's whereabouts. The Germany native claims that the Sonora Aero Club performed its magical feats of flying in the 1853-56 period. However, there is no known record of Dellschau being in California during this time.

According to those who have reviewed Dellschau's notebooks, "But where the historical records are silent, the artist's notebooks make raucous, profligate claims" (Cynthia Greenwood, "Secrets of the Sonora Aero Club," *New Times*, [December 10, 1998]). Dellschau illustrates a remarkable number of airship designs for vessels with names such as *Aero Mio*, *Aero Trump*, *Aero Schnabel*, *Aero Mary*, and *Aero Jourdan*. Supposedly, some of Dellschau's drawings and accompanying text include stories of stolen craft, flaming crashes, broken necks, and death. The general appearance of most of the flying machines, or aeros, is that of a gas-bag, semirigid, cylindro-conical shaped (dirigible-shaped) machine with huge fans providing the thrust. All were powered by a secret fuel that provided lift and thrust by driving the ship's wheels, side paddles, and compressor motors. Hydrogen gas was possibly used as a fuel in an internal combustion engine to provide the motive power, or thrust, for the aeros.

According to Dellschau, the inventor of the club's almost magical fuel was Peter Mennis. Supposedly, Mennis kept the formula secret. Upon his death in a fiery aero crash in the early 1860s, the other club members disbanded due to lack of fuel to propel their machines.

The reduction of water into its components, hydrogen and oxygen, was a well-known chemical process in 1850, and scientists knew how to convert the hydrogen gas to energy in an internal combustion engine. However, it was not a cheap process. Even today, internal combustion engines that use hydrogen as a fuel exist. Such engines can generate sufficient horsepower for most purposes, and the hydrogen burns cleanly, with no pollutants. The

use of hydrogen as fuel makes sense, except for the cost associated with producing it, which is still an economic burden today. It is plausible 1850 airships received their thrust from hydrogen gas-burning internal combustion engines.

What about lift? Hydrogen gas could also be used to provide lift for the airships. One cubic foot of hydrogen gas will lift 0.076 lb. at 32° F and 760 mm pressure. Note that higher temperatures and a less-dense atmosphere require less gas to lift the same weight. We can determine the lifting power of hydrogen through the following exercise:

0.076 lb x 10 cubic feet = .76 lb lifting power at 32 F and sea level
0.076 lb x 100 cubic feet = 7.6 lb lifting power at 32 F and sea level
0.076 lb x 1,000 cubic feet = 76 lb lifting power at 32 F and sea level
0.076 lb x 10,000 cubic feet = 760 lb lifting power at 32 F and sea level
0.076 lb x 100,000 cubic feet = 7,600 lb lifting power at 32 F and sea level

100,000 cubic feet = 1,000 ft x 100 ft x 1 ft = 100 ft x 100 ft x 10 ft

or

150 ft x 30 ft x 25 ft = 112,500 cubic feet

Do the dimensions 150' x 30' x 25' sound familiar? They are about the same dimensions reported by many observers of the airships.

A carriage with the dimensions of 30' long, 20' wide, and 8' high, slung underneath a gas air bag would have 600 square feet of floor space. If we divide 7,600 lbs. by 600 square feet, we arrive at 12.66 pounds/square-foot weight distribution. This seems about right for a ship designed to carry as many as twenty people—albeit somewhat crowded. And the amount of space for each person would be 30 square feet (or a space of 5' x 6'. Of course, some amount of floor space was required for the machinery and controls reducing the amount available for crew and passengers.

Why are Dellschau's notebooks and their stories important? If the stories are true, the Sonora Aero Club members were aviation pioneers. And, perhaps, the notebooks hold clues that would help explain the 1896-97 Texas (California, Michigan, Illinois, etc.) airship sightings. Three of the Sonora Aero Club members mentioned in Dellschau's notebooks are a Smith, Wilson, and Andrews. Smith and Wilson figure prominently in the 1897 Texas sightings. And could the reference to an Andrews be the same or a relative of Dr. Solomon Andrews of Perth Amboy, New Jersey? There may be a connection between Solomon Andrews and the Sonora Aero Club. Dellschau shows one Sonora Aero Club airship, similar in design to the airship Andrews flew in 1863, with the cryptic caption "A la Andrews." Dr. Andrews just might have been an original or even founding member of the Sonora Aero Club, and the Aerial Navigation Company may have been the precursor or foundation for the Sonora Aero Club.

Dellschau mentions a man by the last name of Wilson. Could the Wilson in his accounts be the same Wilson who shows up flying about Texas in 1897? Wilson tells at least one interviewer that he is from Goshen, New York. Dr. Andrews built his flying machine in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Goshen and Perth Amboy are eighty-five miles apart. Coincidence? The California newspaper articles detailed in chapter 19 include an interview by Charles (or Catlan) Smith. Dr. Smith tells the newspaper reporter that he has been designing, building, and flying airships for fifty years. Dr. Smith may be an original member of the Sonora Aero Club and/or the Aerial Navigation Company.

At least one UFO researcher has visited Sonora, California, and claims he found no evidence that the Sonora Aero Club ever existed. Is it possible that Dellschau made up all the stories contained in his notebooks? Is it possible the colorful drawings of wonderful flying machines were figments of his imagination? Yes, it is possible. However, if such a group of inventors were so secretive, would they name their place of business after the same community in which they operated? The unfolding of the 1897 airship story suggests that the Sonora Aero Club may have been located near Oroville, another California community some distance from Sonora.

Why California? Secrecy, climate, woods, and, perhaps, George Hearst. The California desert was sparsely populated in the 1850s, the climate was conducive for the activity, financial aid was available in the form of newly enriched gold mine owners, and perhaps, the characteristics of California birch appealed to the airship builders.

Secrecy seems to be a significant issue with the Sonora Aero Club. It is claimed that a Dellschau pictograph depicts one aero crash in the 1850s that was engineered by other club members because the club member used his aero for hauling freight for an outsider (Cynthia Greenwood, "Secrets of the Sonora Aero Club," *New Times*, [December 10, 1998]). Another club member was supposedly prohibited from building an aero because he talked to outsiders about the club. Even Dellschau felt compelled, in the 1900s, to enter information in his notebooks in code. Apparently, even fifty or more

years after the group's heyday, he still felt sufficiently threatened that he hid the secrets of the Sonora Aero Club.

The California desert climate is conducive for airship experimentation. Even today, the United States Air Force maintains the Air Force Flight Test Center, an experimental aircraft test facility, at Edwards Air Force Base. NASA maintains the Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards. Edwards is located adjacent to Palmdale, California, a community northwest of Los Angeles. The Air Force and NASA maintain their flight-test facilities at Edwards because the climate allows yearround flight-testing. Seems like a justifiable reason for airship inventors in 1850 to locate their test facility in the California desert.

Although aluminum was known to exist in the 1850s, extraction of aluminum metal in any great quantity was not a commercial venture until 1886. The aeros needed to be lightweight to be feasible. Steel and iron were just not good candidates for airships, due to the weight of the metal. But, something strong was needed for the framework. Remember Howard Hughes and the *Spruce Goose*? Hughes and staff created the largest ever flying machine almost entirely out of laminated birch (airframe and surface structures) with fabric-covered control surfaces (except the flaps) and flew it on November 2, 1947. Dellschau explains in his notebooks that at least one 1850s airship was disguised as a gypsy wagon. Wagons in the 1850s were made of wood.

And, perhaps, California was chosen so that the creative engineers who designed these flying machines and their machinery could be near the gold fields. The cost of producing hydrogen, the machine work required to produce the specialized mechanical features of the airships (such as gearing, specialized fabrics, and basketwork) required a fat bank account. A rough approximation of the cost of each airship would be \$10,000 (1850 currency). Keeping in mind that, forty-seven years earlier, the United States bought most of the land west of the Mississippi River for about \$12,000,000, you can see that \$10,000 was a large sum. In comparison, in one 1896 interview, George Collins claims that one airship inventor expended \$100,000 to perfect his machine.

The founding date of the club coincides with the early California gold rush. Perhaps, the club members were well-off mine owners or businessmen. However, Dellschau does mention New York financial backing. Possible New York connections include Andrews' Inventor's Institute (known, by 1849, as the Aerial Navigation Company) and George Hearst. Solomon Andrews' Inventor's Institute was in New Jersey but he maintained an office in New York City.

George Hearst left New York for the California gold fields in 1849. Before he left, an intriguing advertisement for a ride to the gold fields in the relative comfort of an airship was published in a New York newspaper. This advertisement was probably published by Andrews' Aerial Navigation

Company—the only New York-connected organization known at the time to be involved in airship research. Shortly thereafter, the Aerial Navigation Company seems to fade into history, while the Sonora Aero Club begins its short run. Let us review the facts: While George Hearst was in New York City, there was an Aerial Navigation Company. George Hearst leaves for California and there the Sonora Aero Club was established. Coincidence?

According to Dellschau, the Sonora Aero Club received financial backing from the NYMZA. There is at least one reference to a Maine connection. It appears in the 1896 newspaper account featuring George Collins, in which he said that the inventor he represented hailed from Maine. No one knows what NYMZA stands for. Could it be the New York and Maine Zionist Association? Dellschau was Jewish. Or, could NYMZA be a code word for the Inventor's Institute/Aerial Navigation Company?

Were the 1850s aeros used to haul freight and passengers to the California gold mines for the New York financiers? It is reported that at least one New York newspaper advertisement, dating from 1848, offered would-be miners an airship ride from New York to California. But, the advertisements ceased soon after they appeared. It is not known if any passengers or freight were ferried across the continent via airships. Could the 1848 advertisement be connected to the Sonora Aero Club member who Dellschau notes was murdered for using an airship to haul freight, apparently without the permission of the organization's leader(s).

Why didn't the Sonora Aero Club continue to fly its machines from the 1850s to 1897? Dellschau claims that only one aero club member possessed the airship fuel formula. Also, Dellschau's descriptions of three crashes include the death of the one individual who knew the fuel formula. According to his notes, some of the club members spent the next few years trying to re-create the fuel formula. This may be the reason there was no more flying after the late 1850s by the Sonora Aero Club.

The most influential member of California society from 1850 until his death in 1891 was George Hearst, father of William Randolph Hearst. It seems unlikely any airships would be flying the California skies without his knowledge and approbation. If an investigator wants to locate the base of the Sonora Aero Club, a good starting place would be in researching the travels, residences, and financial interests of George Hearst. I am fairly convinced Hearst financed the Aerial Navigation Company and the Sonora Aero Club. He was certainly in a great position to not only finance the clubs but also reap the rewards of their efforts. Hearst was financially well off and well connected to the banking and business establishments of San Francisco

and New York City. He was probably the first California-New York commuter on the airships. Follow the path of Hearst and you will find, somewhere along the way, the scent of the Aerial Navigation Company and the Sonora Aero Club.

LOOKING BACK

One of the airship(s) inventor's legal representatives, the former California state attorney general William Henry Harrison Hart, made public announcements of airship patent applications and other business matters pertaining to the airship inventors. General Hart was elected attorney general and served from January 1891 until January 1895. It seems unlikely Hart could achieve success in the California political arena without the support of George Hearst, who was a U.S. senator from California and the owner of the most influential California newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner* at the time of Hart's election. Subsequently, William Randolph Hearst supported Hart, as evidenced by Hart's continued participation on the board of directors of Hearst mining interests. Was the former attorney general playing a great joke upon an unsuspecting populace? Considering the social centers of gravity the general swirled in, I think not.

Three individuals we investigated in this chapter may be the connecting threads between the various airship mysteries (1840s to 1897) we have examined. Dr. Solomon Andrews, Willard Wilson, and Dr. Charles Smith, peers extraordinaire, may have been designing, building, and flying airships from the 1840s.

CHAPTER₂₁

AURORA REVISITED

Let's take another look at the purported "alien" airship crash in Aurora, Texas. Why do so at this particular point in the story? We have slowly built a strong case for the existence of the airships and their inventors. Although we proceeded pretty much on faith that most newspapers and most people were truthfully reporting what they saw and heard regarding the airships, we have built a strong case for the existence of the men and machines largely on circumstantial evidence. We have woven an intricate mosaic of the men and machines who startled a nation over one hundred years ago. Given that the airships and their inventors are fact, it may be interesting to review the Aurora crash in light of the knowledge we now possess.

Perhaps, there really was a crash with casualties, as the local newspaper and government official reported. If the Aurora crash did occur, it seems reasonable to reconcile the event with other airship sightings occurring elsewhere. Toward that end, we will explore the events leading up to the purported crash and determine if there is a continuity of events that yields a believable and plausible explanation for the Aurora crash.

Let's assume the occupant(s) of the airship that crashed in Aurora were creatures of this Earth and not aliens, as the two Aurora individuals interviewed by the *Dallas Morning News* had advocated. If we assume the occupants were alien(s), we immediately become embroiled in the arguments for and against interplanetary travel—in vehicles that are clearly constructed using pre-twentieth-century technology. Anyone with even a fundamental understanding of technology and the universe will quickly realize the practical impossibility of flying through the void of space in such vehicles. So, the assumption that the occupant(s) were human and the craft and pilot were of this planet is a valid assumption. Arguments supporting this assumption are provided in another section of this text.

Recall the chapter 7 account "The Great Aerial Wanderer," which told of a grounded airship experiencing mechanical difficulties near Stephenville—southwest of Aurora—on the morning of the purported crash. In relation to the time of the Aurora crash, when was the airship on the ground near Stephenville? Was there sufficient time for it to travel from Stephenville to Aurora prior to the time of the crash? Does the airship's observed direction of flight coincide with the direction it should have been going if it was coming from Stephenville and attempting to return to the daytime lair? Did the Stephenville airship eventually crash and burn in Aurora? What evidence remains to convince us that the Aurora crash was fact and not fiction?

We will revisit the chapter 7 *Dallas Morning News* account titled "A Windmill Demolishes It" (April 19, 1897, p. 5) and examine certain key passages. Perhaps we can discern the truth.

"ABOUT 6 O'CLOCK THIS MORNING ..."

An airship experiencing mechanical difficulties was seen by many distinguished Stephenville citizens sometime "early in the morning" on April 17, 1897, the day of the Aurora crash. Stephenville is eighty-four miles southwest of Aurora. Unfortunately, the Stephenville account does not state the time the grounded airship was viewed by the long list of distinguished Stephenville citizens. We must use a dose of deductive reasoning to see if we can narrow the window of the Stephenville sighting and place an approximate time on it. Then we can compare the time of the Stephenville sighting with the time of the reported crash. If the times correspond, we have substantial argument to support the existence of an airship mishap occurred in Aurora on April 17, 1897.

The Stephenville account places the time of the sighting as "early in the morning." For these country folks, this was sometime prior to the beginning of morning twilight. Morning began before it was light enough to see how to do the daily chores, such as milking the cows, gathering the eggs, feeding the livestock, etc. Farmers, and many town dwellers, rose before dawn to

prepare for the ensuing day. The wood-burning stove had to be stoked and fired, water had to be fetched from the well, and numerous other labor-intensive chores, unknown to modern city dwellers, had to be performed before a person could sit down and enjoy breakfast.

From my childhood days living on the farm, I recall that morning began about one hour before beginning morning nautical twilight (BMNT). BMNT is defined, by no less an authority than the U.S. government, as the time of day when a person can see 400 yards on a clear day. On the fateful day of the Aurora crash, BMNT occurred at 4:34 A.M. Central Standard Time (from an old American Nautical Almanac, Washington, DC: U.S. Govt Printing Office, nd.). If "morning" is one hour before BMNT, "early in the morning" would be sometime before 3:30 A.M. Let us place the time somewhere around 2:30 A.M.

The airship would have three hours, or more, to travel the eighty-four miles from Stephenville to the crash site. Considering the vessel's maximum speed, it is reasonable to assume the pilot could cover this distance in the time allotted, even factoring in the need for reduced speed due to mechanical difficulties.

But, what if the crew was on the ground repairing the ship for so long that they could not possibly have flown from Stephenville to Aurora in the available window? If we examine the Stephenville account, we see that the correspondent wrote, "They rapidly made the necessary repairs, . . ." implying the airship was on the ground but a short time.

"IT WAS TRAVELING DUE NORTH ..."

The airship's direction of travel mentioned in "A Windmill Demolishes It" is consistent with the supposition that it was attempting to return to its daytime hiding place at Williams' ranch, near Ladonia. To fly from Aurora to Williams' ranch requires an eastward course correction. However, an airship flying to such a destination would not make a course correction until all danger of passing over or near Dallas had passed, as the danger from daytime observers was great.

Suppose that the Aurora airship was the same as the grounded airship outside Stephenville. Presume the crew repaired the airship sufficiently well enough to fly from Stephenville (as the account states). And let us assume that the crew wished to return to their daytime hiding place. Then, it seems likely the crew would fly on a line from Stephenville to Aurora in order to avoid passing over Fort Worth and Dallas in the daylight. If you look at a map of the area, you will see Aurora is actually north and a little east of Stephenville. You will also note that a segmented line from Stephenville to Ladonia that will bypass Fort Worth and Dallas to the west will pass near Aurora. One segment will be north from Stephenville with another segment northeast. The intersection of two such lines occurs somewhere just south of Aurora.

Remember, any number of good citizens were taking potshots at the aerial monsters when they had a chance. Also, the inventors desired to keep their invention secret, or at least they wished to keep many of the particulars secret. So, passing around Fort Worth or Dallas and northwest out of Stephenville would place them over Aurora at approximately the same time as the crash. Upon approaching Aurora, the airship would be required to turn north then east in order to reach Williams' ranch.

There is one glaring problem with the Stephenville-to-Aurora flight path. The problem is the reported direction of flight as the airship left Stephenville: "the ship rose gently into the air and sailed off in a southwesterly direction." Southwest was in the opposite direction of Aurora. What can we make of this? In numerous accounts, including the Stephenville account, the crew members alluded to the secret nature of their project and their desire to keep the particulars of the airship from public view. If they did not want the public to ascertain the particulars of their airship ("They refused to have their machine critically inspected and refused to talk further as to their plans for the future"—"The Great Aerial Wanderer"), it seems reasonable that they would fly away in the opposite direction of their intended destination, circling toward their true destination only when out of sight. The inventors were clever enough to realize that another clever individual could triangulate airship sightings and quickly locate their daytime hiding spot. So, to prevent any such attempts to discover their daytime lair, after leaving the crowd behind, the crew changed course, heading north for their real destination.

"SOME OF THE MACHINERY WAS OUT OF ORDER..."

The report that the vessel was "gradually settling towards earth" implies a gas leak of some proportion less than a total blowout of the envelope, a failure of some mechanical control device, or the inattention or inability of the pilot to attend to the affairs of the ship, maybe because of incapacitation.

One or more of the hermetically sealed compartments containing the hydrogen used for lift might have been leaking a significant amount of gas. The amount of reserve hydrogen in a compressed form on board is not known, but it could not have been very much, if any, given the size of the machines.

According to the Aurora account, the airship was traveling in a straight line and the pilot made no attempt to avoid the judge's windmill. It is reasonable to suppose the pilot would have attempted to evade the windmill, if possible. If he had attempted to evade the windmill, it also seems reasonable that the witnesses would have commented upon that fact. Since the witnesses did not report any evasive maneuvers by the airship, we are left to conclude either the airship and/or the pilot were unable to perform any maneuvering.

Did the pilot, while preoccupied working on the machine and trying to fix the problem, become unaware of the impending collision? Or, did the pilot succumb to some unknown hazard, perhaps the leaking gas, leaving the airship to fly without any human hands at the controls? It seems most likely that the pilot lost control of the airship for some reason and was "riding her until he couldn't ride her anymore."

**"COLLIDED WITH THE TOWER... WITH A TERRIFIC
EXPLOSION, SCATTERING DEBRIS OVER SEVERAL
ACRES OF GROUND"**

Modern UFO enthusiasts have searched the judge's acres and claim to have found crash debris. According to their statements, an analysis of the material disclosed that the metal was aluminum, consistent with the technology of the era and also consistent with the statements of the crew members and the purported inventors concerning the airship's construction.

**"THE PILOT OF THE SHIP IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN
THE ONLY ONE ON BOARD"**

This sentence presents a problem that seems controversial in light of what we know about the earlier Stephenville sighting. Witnesses of the airship in Stephenville observed two men, who gave their names as S. E. Tillman and A. E. Dolbear, working on the airship. We know Tillman and Dolbear did not perish in a crash in Aurora, as they continued to lead distinguished lives in their chosen professions well into the twentieth century. Yet, the statements of the numerous eyewitnesses to the Aurora crash imply there was one individual on board. Perhaps, the airship that experienced mechanical difficulties at Stephenville was not the airship that exploded at Aurora. If it did crash at Aurora, who was minding the ship? Perhaps, another individual was present and unnoticed, or just not mentioned in the Stephenville account, and this is the person who perished. There are several candidates among the crew members identified in other

sightings, including Smith, Jackson, Walters, McKnight, and possibly Scott Warren.

Did two of the crew members, recognizing the possibility of a crash, alight from the airship somewhere between Stephenville and Aurora and take a train back to the daytime lair? There are numerous small communities on a straight line between Stephenville and Aurora where the other crew members could have sought ground transportation. However, the most likely place would be Weatherford, as it is the largest community between Stephenville and Aurora. Weatherford was on a Southern Pacific Railroad east-west rail line. The crewmen could easily have caught a train into Dallas, switched (if necessary), and continued on to the base at Ladonia. Ladonia was on a rail line extending through the countryside between Sherman and Commerce. But, we must also realize there is a possibility that the Aurora airship was not the airship seen in Stephenville.

"HE WAS NOT AN INHABITANT OF THIS WORLD."

The claim that the pilot was an alien was made either because the body was so badly disfigured it did not appear to be human or because the informants wanted to gain publicity for themselves or their community. Such a wild claim would quickly turn into notoriety. The community leaders would have ensured a retraction was printed in the newspaper if the claim had been false, but no such retraction was made. We are left to conclude that at least some of the townspeople really thought the unrecognizable remains were that of an alien being.

The fact that well-respected individuals around the country had previously gone on public record stating their belief that the airships were from Mars lent a degree of acceptability for assuming the remains were of Martian origin. In the chapter 6 account titled "Statesman's Mystery Man," the newspaper reporter asks, "With these soldiers of Mars cavorting around over our heads, do you think there is any danger to us on the earth?" Numerous newspapers continually referenced the airships and their crews as Martian, so it should be no surprise that the Aurora citizens would make such a claim—if you consider the citizens were "prepped" by the newspapers to believe these theories. But, why were newspapers making the Martian claims? This particular historical period begins a widespread

and hugely popular belief in the existence of Martian life. The recently discovered "Martian canals" were the subject of many speculative newspaper and magazine articles, many of them citing world-renowned scientists' beliefs in the probable existence of intelligent life on Mars. Many newspapers, including the *Dallas Morning News*, advanced the argument that the machines were piloted by visitors from the red planet. If you were told by the "learned" portion of society that the airships were of alien origin, then you would, reasonably, consider any disfigured recovered bodies were also alien, especially if the whole body was really not identifiable.

Some Aurora citizens may have seen the crash as an opportunity to exploit the situation for great financial gain. According to some of the folks who have casually studied the circumstances surrounding the Aurora crash, by advocating that the remains were Martian, two of the key witnesses hoped to generate a stampede of tourists from all over the world. Supposedly, Judge Proctor (whose windmill was destroyed) and T. J. Weems (the U.S. Signal Service officer) were the culprits who falsely reported the crash and recovery of Martian remains. Judge Proctor would certainly gain financially from any tourist attraction his property became.

But, according to this line of reasoning, by alleging the remains were Martian, the two only introduced skepticism to the story, thereby killing any tourist trade likely to result even if the crash really happened and the pilot was an earthly being. In 1897, an airship crash involving humans from San Francisco or New York was sufficient to generate some amount of interest and resulting tourism. If such a scenario was the cause of the false report, the greedy were overcome by their greed and profited not from their voracity (pun intended).

"PAPERS FOUND ON HIS PERSON ... ARE WRITTEN IN SOME UNKNOWN HIEROGLYPHICS"

Sounds oddly like the coded symbolic information in Dellschau's notebooks. Dellschau seemed to be greatly concerned with secrecy and wrote many entries in his notebooks in a symbolic code. Interviews between observers and crew members give the impression that the inventors were apprehensive about maintaining the secrets of the airships. So, does it not seem reasonable that documentation describing important details would be coded?

It certainly seems so. The use of the word "hieroglyphics" in this account was, unfortunately, a poor choice to describe the papers found. This weird claim, among others in this case, was one of the reasons some people branded the crash as a fake. If the correspondent had used the term "coded," the account might have gained more acceptance as being truthful.

"IT MUST HAVE WEIGHED SEVERAL TONS."

My calculations show a hydrogen gas air bag of the approximate dimensions described could lift a total of 5 tons. (See "Looking for the Sonora Aero Club" section of chapter 20.)

"THE SHIP WAS TOO BADLY WRECKED TO FORM ANY CONCLUSION AS TO ITS CONSTRUCTION OR MOTIVE POWER."

In an accident of this type, accompanied by a devastating fire, bodies are disfigured beyond recognition. The vehicle would have burned considerably from the flammable liquids and gases on board, and of course, it would have melted also. Automobile fire can result in severe disfigurement of the involved passengers and quite a meltdown of the structure, even though they do not carry one tenth of one percent of the flammable materials these airships must have carried, a voluminous quantity of hydrogen or other flammable gases. Imagine just how much more of a meltdown occurred in a hydrogen-filled airship. Now, it is no surprise the airship "was too badly wrecked to form any conclusion."

"IT WAS BUILT OF AN UNKNOWN METAL, RESEMBLING ... ALUMINUM AND SILVER"

This metal was probably aluminum alloy or, perhaps, a coated (anodized) aluminum. In either case, the base material was aluminum and was strange only because it was not in general, or popular, use. Farmers used steel and iron for all manner of purposes about the home and farm. At least one character in this story may have experimented with making an aluminum and silver alloy. Prof. Amos E. Dolbear's close confidant and friend Moses Farmer experimented with alloys of aluminum using copper, silver, and

other metals as early as 1860. Whatever manufacturing processes Farmer discovered for alloying aluminum, he likely shared the technology with Dolbear. Dolbear may have even worked closely with Farmer in his experiments. In the 1860s, Farmer also made alloys of aluminum and gold to be used in dental (a Benjamin connection?) work and jewelry.

Dellschau claimed that some of the carriages of the 1850s airships were made from aluminum! Also, in November 1896, six months prior to the Aurora crash, Dr. C. A. Smith, in an interview with the *San Francisco Call*, stated his new airship would be made from aluminum. It seems that for some time prior to the crash, aluminum was in demand as a structural component in the airship business.

"THE TOWN IS FULL OF PEOPLE TO-DAY WHO ARE VIEWING THE WRECK"

Of one fact we can be certain: if the town had not been full of people viewing the wreck, someone from Aurora would have written the newspaper with the allegation that the statement was false and the correspondent a liar.

In 1897, people were quick to correct false reporting, and newspapers were just as quick at printing the corrections. Recall the chapter 6 account ("He Did Not See the Ship") of an R. N. Burt, who was said, by a third party, to have seen the airship. Several days later, the newspaper received a letter from Mr. Burt stating the report was false. Also, newspapers were sensitive to the competitive environment in which they functioned. In many respects, newspapers faced stiffer competition then, due to the number of papers in the same community. A rival newspaper was sure to set the record straight in a civic, helping-hand gesture to the other paper. Credibility, if nothing else, was necessary to keep the competition at arm's length.

Yes, there were famous newspaper-generated hoaxes during the era. But, the editors/authors always came forth with an admission of false reporting after the hoax, typically a serialization, had run its course. No such admission concerning the Aurora crash was ever forthcoming.

On June 16, 2000, I visited with Carolyn Dodson, a longtime Decatur, Texas, resident. Carolyn, taking time off from remodeling her early Texas home, related to me the story of her grandmother, born in the early 1890s in

Indian Territory. Her grandmother was named Nova and her maiden name was Bowman. Nova's mother, suffering from ill health, died within two years of Nova's birth. Nova's dad, realizing he could not work and take care of such a young child, brought Nova to his parents' home in Aurora, Texas, in 1895. There, Nova grew up.

She told Carolyn of the daily trips she took with her grandmother into Aurora to pick up the mail and purchase any necessary household items. When Carolyn asked her if there was any truth to the alleged Aurora crash, Nova told her that she remembered going into town that day with her grandmother and there was a state of great excitement and general commotion. Since she was too young, about six years old, she did not remember any particular details, only the sense of a great commotion and the *large number of people in town*. As she grew older, she realized, from the discussions around the neighborhood, the excitement that day was due to the airship crash.

"THE PILOT'S FUNERAL WILL TAKE PLACE AT NOON TO-MORROW."

Many people, then and now, believe the Aurora crash was faked because the town was so quick to bury the "Martian" body afterward. If the crash truly happened, goes popular thinking, the remains should have been remanded to science for study—after public display, of course. Well, if you have a disfigured and burnt-beyond-recognition body, or pieces thereof, on your hands in 1897, you cannot preserve it by any means other than placing it, or them, in a freezer.

I do not know if Aurora had such a freezer, but I suspect it did. Most communities of any size in 1897 included an icehouse and Aurora was a sizable community. However, I cannot imagine the icehouse owner agreeing to store such an offensive article. His business would suffer greatly, as people undoubtedly would refuse to buy the "contaminated" ice. The only recourse the townspeople had was to bury the body pieces as soon as possible, before the stench became loud. (And I think the majority of the townspeople knew or suspected the body was human, so there really was no valid reason for rendering the carcass over for study, anyway.)

Other individuals have examined the Aurora crash story and offered their views of what really happened. Perhaps the most extensive investigation of the crash was conducted by a *Dallas Morning News* reporter who investigated the incident in the 1970s. He did not examine the crash in the

context of the entire airship story (beginning in the fall of 1896 and proceeding until early May 1897). Instead, he focused on the specific events and accounts surrounding the original crash report. Using questionable logic, he reached the conclusion that the crash and the airship stories were fake. He based this opinion primarily on three points: a 1907 Wise County history excluded any mention of the crash, the inventors never stepped forth to acknowledge their invention, and there were no surviving artifacts in the 1970s.

He believed such a glaring omission from the county history was powerful proof that the crash was a fake. If it actually occurred, he reasoned, Wise County would gleefully include such an interesting story in their official history. He seemed to overlook Aurora's circumstance by 1907. It was one very small community in Wise County, and the "historian," not an Aurora resident, chose subjects of interest to her and wrote whatever pleased her. Such county "histories" are written not necessarily to record the "truth" for posterity, but to record the author's usually highly biased version of it, and they typically involve only the "moneyed" element of the community and their accomplishments.

Since the inventors failed to come forth and claim their rights of invention, including the adulation of an admiring world, the *Dallas Morning News* reporter believed such a disdainful dismissal by the inventor(s) of posterity's accolades was proof of a great airship hoax. The *Dallas Morning News* reporter utterly failed to recognize the fact that many people labor and achieve great things without any regard for posterity's outlook upon their contribution to the progress of the human race. But, there are other reasons preventing the airship inventors from stepping up and claiming their rightful place among history's famed. We know they labored in secrecy and desired not fame but to keep their invention to themselves, that they might enjoy their machines. However, in the airship business of 1897, some inventors, possibly the inventors of the Aurora airship or their associates, did attempt to get recognition for their efforts. The crash in Aurora may be just one of the reasons why the inventors went unrecognized for their labors, along with these others (or a combination of them):

- bought out by the railroads
- crashes/deaths
- loss of financial backing
- government intervention

- inventors were really not seeking financial gain

Finally, the *Dallas Morning News* reporter believed if the airship stories were true, then something relating to the airship—complete vessels, parts, drawings, or documents—would have survived. Recall the number of lawsuits Alexander Graham Bell had to fight to protect his telephone patent—at least 600, including one filed by Prof. A. E. Dolbear. Does it take a great leap in imagination, then, to assume the inventors would have locked up everything related to the airships and their design to maintain the greatest possible secrecy? And who knows if some barn, attic, or cellar near Aurora, Texas; Goshen, New York; or Oroville, California does not possess several locked trunks stuffed with yellowed drawings and documents, moldering and leisurely crumbling to pieces? And perhaps, lying nearby, slowly rusting, are a few odd looking (airship) implements of some supposed but unknown farming utility. And there is the possibility that the descendants of William H. H. Hart, former California attorney general, or his law partner, have in their possession the legal documents Hart was preparing for the inventors.

Countering the conclusions of reporters and others who do not believe there was a crash are several compelling eyewitness accounts. In the 1970s interviews, two lifelong Aurora residents, who were about twelve years old in 1897, claimed to remember the crash was factual, each giving the interviewer some amount of details. One individual stated she never talked of the crash before, for fear of being branded a liar or kook. In the 1970s, the United States was inundated with numerous UFO sightings, and admitting having seen one was becoming less burdensome, even for old folks. The impression given by the lady in the interview was that the 1970s climate was conducive for admitting she had seen such wonders long ago.

One point of contention between one of the individuals interviewed in the 1970s and the original newspaper story revolves around the structure the airship supposedly struck. The 1897 Aurora newspaper stringer informed everyone the airship struck a windmill. In the 1970s, at least one Aurora resident claimed Judge Proctor had no windmill, but rather a windlass. The Wise County tax records support the account of the 1970s resident, as there is no windmill listed in the property-tax records of Judge Proctor. However, if the windmill was relatively new, it probably would not show up on the tax records. A visit to the former property of Judge Proctor reveals the home was sitting upon a small hill. I have never seen any windmills in Texas reposing upon a hillside. The distance from the surface to the water table makes a windmill impractical if it is not sitting in the vicinity of a creek or other low or level ground. So, from this observation alone, Judge Proctor probably did not have a windmill close to his house. But, not far off is a creek bed.

Does it make any difference which one—a windmill or a windlass— was on the judge's property? In the overall airship mystery, it does not. It is sufficient to know the airship struck something and subsequently exploded and burned. But, the validity of the airship story does not depend upon any single facet of the story but rests upon the entire collection of stories—the sequence of events from the initial 1896 California sighting to the last sighting off the coast of New York in 1897—which is compelling when you consider all the individual accounts. When viewed as a whole, they quickly jell to form a coherent set of events that yield sensible answers to penetrating questions.

Another point of contention concerning the validity of the Aurora crash concerns the lack of crash debris at the alleged site. According to one airship investigator, MUFON researchers allegedly combed what was Judge Proctor's property in the 1970s. He claimed the investigators found bits and pieces of metal scattered about the place and analyzed the pieces in two separate laboratories. The alleged analysis stated the metal had been subject to a very high temperature (i.e., molten) and had an unknown crystalline structure. Yet, the metal was determined to be of a common type found in period stoves (perhaps cast iron?). The researcher did not disclose whether the analysis labeled the metal as aluminum or iron.

I twice tried to contact MUFON's Texas state director to ask him if he could confirm published statements supposedly made by MUFON regarding the recovery and identification of metal shards from the Aurora crash site. He declined the interview.

I then e-mailed the national director of MUFON. A representative from the company, who gave no name in the e-mail, gave a cryptic response: "As for the tale of the UFO accident in Texas, we have no information at this level, although the story persists in UFO lore. The ancillary aspect of retrieved artifacts and analysis of same may be apocryphal. Your query is being copied herewith to other MUFON offices; perhaps they can shed more light on MUFON's alleged involvement, if any."

If MUFON examined the Aurora crash site and recovered anything worthwhile, it seems the national director is not aware of it and the state director does not want to talk about it. For the MUFON national director's office to refer to the recovery and analysis of crash debris as ancillary implies that the company considers such evidence unimportant. What a strange approach from an organization supposedly interested in determining and proving the existence of UFOs. Also, by referring to them as apocryphal, is the national director's office informing me that MUFON's recovery and subsequent analysis of Aurora crash debris is not a true story? I strongly suspect MUFON did not recover any metal debris and the alleged MUFON analysis did not happen, as the organization has not come forth with detailed information concerning their findings. I question if the MUFON folks even went to the correct property, or any property, to search for crash debris.

In any case, anyone searching for metal shards would not likely recover any sizable pieces, as those would have been melted for horseshoes and farm implements. For the record, I did not observe any crash debris when I visited the property.

What happened to all of the metal that was certainly left upon the smoldering ground after the crash? Does "waste not, want not" ring any bells? The creed was a battle cry for people in 1897. Every last bit of metal from the crash would have been shoveled into a cart and hauled off to the blacksmith's shop for immediate recycling. And can you guess who the local smithy was? None other than our friendly, informative, government signal officer, Mr. T. J. Weems, who doubled as the town blacksmith.

TABLE 67
T. J. Weems' Texas Census Record

1880 WEEMS, T. J.	Denton County TX	147 E. D.	106 Federal Population Schedule	TX 1880 Federal Census Index	TX314109434
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If one discounts the supposed recovery of an alien life form, then believing the Aurora crash actually happened is quite easy. Just hours before the crash, numerous credible witnesses saw an airship experiencing mechanical difficulty within easy flying distance of Aurora. Several credible witnesses and bystanders have said over the years that such a crash did occur. In the context of the numerous airship sightings in 1896 and 1897, it is plausible such a crash really happened. Unfortunately, a couple of Aurora citizens—by advocating the remains were Martian supposedly in an effort to increase the local tourist trade—have cast doubt upon the historical significance of the airships' existence. For these airships, flying faster and higher than any flying vessels produced in the early twentieth century, set flying records before records were kept.

CHAPTER₂₂

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AIRSHIPS?

In the spring of 1897, the press was buzzing with reports of airship sightings. Experts were rendering opinions on the validity of these accounts, and there were as many opinions as there were opinion makers. But there was one universal opinion: whoever successfully flew a machine about the skies first would become a rich and famous man.

The statement given by the inventor in the chapter 6 account "C. G. Williams Saw It"—"See here, young man, don't give this thing away. We are experimenting with this vessel. So far it is a success. We expect to revolutionize travel and transportation"—is certainly pregnant with the thought of great financial gain. Human nature being what it is, we can assume the inventors expected at least some gain and recognition from their efforts. With such a financial reward beckoning, why did the airships' architects fail to reap the reward of their labors? Possible answers include (1) a buyout by the railroads, (2) crashes/deaths, (3) loss of financial backing (4) government intervention, (5) they really were not seeking financial gain, (6) some combination of the above. The technology of the period admits the capability of 100 miles-per-hour-plus flight for inventive individuals who seized the opportunity and made headlines around the country. Unfortunately, the inventors did not exploit their handiwork for great financial gain. If they had, the world might have been different in 1900. So, what happened?

If the inventors succeeded in revolutionizing travel and transportation, ruthless railroad barons would certainly see an end to their ironclad dominance in transportation. Could New York railroad financiers have plotted the destruction of the airships and their inventors to maintain their dominance in the most significant industry in America? Railroading was so important to the nation's economy, Dow included ten railroad stocks in the original complement of twelve stocks comprising the Dow (Jones)

Transportation Averages in 1884. Is it possible for one industry to throttle another, fledgling industry? Over the last one hundred years, we have witnessed just how ruthless certain individuals, including William Randolph Hearst, can be in protecting their rice bowl. Railroad barons may have played a role in suppressing the success of the airships.

There were four airship crashes. If nine airships were produced and four were destroyed, we still have five airships unaccounted for (regarding their final outcome). The inventors do not mention how many airships crashed during initial flight-testing. Perhaps, of all the airships, only four successfully completed their initial tests, and those began the series of flight tests in the spring of 1897—but, because too little information is available, we can only speculate.

If the crashes took the lives of the inventors, then we have at least a partial explanation why the technology was not successfully pursued any further. The financial backers may have realized that, while the lift and motive technology existed to propel the machines over 100 miles per hour, the reliability and safety technologies required to build ships for commercial use were not adequate.

A RECAP OF POSSIBLE CRASHES

Nina

The *Nina* crashed in Aurora.

Pina

For at least two nights she was searching the Gulf for her missing sister ship, the *Nina*, which had crashed in Aurora. The figures of the sightings for April 20 and 21 show an airship around southern Louisiana early in the morning. This airship, the *Pina*, was searching the waters while her sister ship, the *Colada*, was searching the Texas interior for the missing *Nina*.

Notice after April 22 the land sightings continued in the interior of the state, meaning the *Colada* was still following a search plan. It probably did not expect to meet up with the *Pina* for several more days. But, no more airship sightings occurred near the Gulf after April 22. Why? On the night of the twenty-second, the *Pina* probably crashed somewhere off the Gulf Coast while performing its search.

Colada

The number of sightings after April 22 were greatly reduced, as would be expected if only one airship (of the original three appearing in Texas) was left. From the April 24 sightings, it appears that soon after April 22, the *Colada* drifted down to southeast Texas and began a frantic hunt for the second missing ship, the *Pina*. The evidence for such a supposition lies in the flight patterns of the *Colada*, as sightings began again in the southeast area, while simultaneously the number of sightings faded over the interior.

The last reported sighting in Texas occurred on the evening of May 11. What happened to the last airship? Perhaps by this date the *Colada* pilot and crew knew of the Aurora crash from reading the newspapers they had acquired during their search, and they may have suspected the same fate for the *Pina*.

After fruitlessly searching the southeastern area for several days for some sign of the missing *Pina*, they decided to return to their home base. But, which one—California, Iowa, or New York? On May 13, the *Denver Evening Post* reported the statements of a seafaring captain regarding the crash of a balloon or airship at sea off the coast of New York.

Balloon at Sea

Large Airship Reported Lost in the Ocean Near New York

Quarantine, S.I. (Staten Island), May 13 Pilot William Furrie of Sandy Hook Pilot Boat No. 20, which brought the Norwegian fruit steamer Leon into port this morning reports on arrival at Quarantine that while cruising at 5:40 o'clock yesterday afternoon about three miles east of Sand Hook light ship he sighted a large balloon apparently about four miles south.

The wind was from the southward and the balloon came along at a rapid rate, sinking gradually. The pilot boat was headed toward the balloon, but it fell into the water and sank within a few yards of the boat (*Denver Evening Post*, May 13, 1897, p. 1).

Unfortunately Pilot Furrie does not give a more detailed description of what he saw sinking into the ocean other than labeling it a "large balloon." Was it a typical round, gas, air-bag balloon—like those used in balloon launches at modern-day festivals? Or, was the pilot describing a dirigible-

shaped balloon? Note the sub-title of the article: "Large Airship Reported Lost in the Ocean Near New York." People of the era sometimes referred to airships as balloons, but they never referred to a balloon as an airship.

The wind direction is an interesting element. It is from the south, meaning that the airship the pilot saw was approaching New York from the south. ("The wind was from the southward and the balloon came along at a rapid rate" implies the "balloon" was traveling with the wind.) The date of May 13 is intriguing, as the last sighting in Texas was May 11. The timing is about right for the *Colada* to have traveled from the coast of Texas to New York. Could this be an account of the last moments of the last airship? And could the pilot have been Hiram Wilson? Did he lose his life at sea on May 13, 1897, in a tragic airship accident off the coast of New York as he tried to return home?

The Fourth and Fifth (Iowa) Airships

How many airships were there? In C. A. Smith's newspaper interview, he mentions building three airships. Hart mentions uniting the East Coast "interests" with the West Coast interests, thereby implying there is at least one East Coast airship (the Wilsons?); then we have the reference to the five airships built in a "quiet Iowa village." When we add these numbers we come up with nine airships. But, I don't think there were nine. I think there were just five, the five constructed in Iowa.

Let's look at the number of airships from this perspective for a moment. When the "interests" were united, we have no idea how far along the construction of the airships had progressed. Let's assume the construction was not yet begun. Then, it is reasonable to find all the airships were built in the same location, if nothing else, just for the convenience and efficiency of the matter. In this case, we have Smith's three airships and the Wilson's airship. That gives us four airships. Where is the fifth? I think Marcellus McGary was a member of the airship team and his airship, its manufacture in Keokuk, Iowa, well documented, is the fifth Iowa airship.

Several newspaper accounts refer to "five airships built in a quiet Iowa village." Yet, only three appeared over Dallas on April 15, 1897. Assuming the Texas airships were all manufactured in Iowa, there are still two Iowa airships unaccounted for. Where were the fourth and fifth airships that

night? We must delve into the Midwest and the Northwest to determine the answer.

An April 13, 1897, *Detroit Evening News* article ("Went to Smash," p. 4) reported an airship crash. According to the article, two old soldiers, George W. Somers and William Chadburn, saw the airship on Sunday (April 11) evening near Galesburg, Michigan. Both men claim the airship had passed over into the distance when they heard a dull explosion and the airship immediately disappeared from their sight. They described the report as the sound of heavy ordnance followed by the sound of flying projectiles.

Continuing in the same article, a Mr. and Mrs. Wallace said they distinctly heard an explosion in the same general area, but thought it was thunder. But, the night sky was clear on the evening of April 11, 1897. Two miles from Scotts, Michigan, a farmer found "some part of an electrical appliance" in his field. In another location, a "partially fused propeller" made of "some light material" was found. The explosion must have been centered over Comstock Township. Three men engaged in shingling a barn testified that the morning after the explosion the completed area of the roof was embedded with metal fragments, with many penetrating through the shingles and impinging upon the underlying boards.

In a *Battle Creek (Michigan) Daily Moon* article ("The Airship," April 13, 1897, p. 4), the newspaper duly reported the appearance of the airship, witnessed by "some 20 reputable citizens," at 8:55 "last night" (April 12?) over Battle Creek, traveling southeast at an altitude of about one mile. According to the article, an explosion was heard, sparks flew from the airship, and it dipped down then gained altitude again before all its lights were extinguished, becoming invisible in the clear but dark sky. This same incident is reported by several other newspapers in the Battle Creek vicinity. Apparently, the explosion and subsequent shower of sparks was sufficiently loud to attract the attention of all nearby communities.

On April 15, the *Detroit Evening News* ("Airship Again," p. 4) reported George Parks and his wife were crossing a field about five miles from Battle Creek on the evening of April 13 and found the wheel of an airship seen crossing the field earlier. The wheel may have come from the airship that exploded in the vicinity. The Parks family makes no mention in the article of hearing the explosion.

According to the stated direction of travel in the *Daily Moon*, after passing over Battle Creek, the airship would soon pass over Galesburg then Comstock. Comstock is 22 miles west of Battle Creek and now a part of Kalamazoo. Galesburg is 17 miles west of Battle Creek and five miles east of Kalamazoo. The date of the article and the time of explosion ("last night") seem to indicate that the explosion heard at Battle Creek was on the April 12, 1897. But, the date could have been April 11, the same night the

airship was seen just a few miles away at Galesburg and Comstock when it was heard to explode.

Other than the debris mentioned in these articles, no additional physical evidence of a crash exists. No other large pieces were recovered, and there are no known reports of any human remains being found. How could two communities 22 miles apart have heard the same explosion? When an explosion occurs at some altitude, the resulting sound wave may travel great distances. The *Daily Moon* account places the airship's altitude at about one mile. The airship was geographically situated where all three communities could hear a loud explosion from the reported altitude of the airship.

Our fourth airship was in Michigan on April 12, disabled (possibly destroyed) and unable to follow its sister ships to Texas.

We have one Iowa airship left to account for. While the three airships were preparing to pass over Dallas on the night of April 16, another airship was seen on the ground with a broken propeller near Mead, Washington.

The Airship

Some People Claim To Have seen It

A number of people around the city today are declaring in positive terms that an air ship has been seen in this neighborhood. Some declare they have seen it themselves, others have seen people who have seen the machine. One man who gives his name as Thurber declares he saw the air ship, a cigar shaped machine made of aluminum about 25 feet long. He says it was stranded beyond Mead at the mouth of Dead Man creek, and had one propeller broken. It seemed to have been abandoned by its owner, but it was surrounded by a big crowd (*Spokane [Washington] Daily Chronicle*, April 16, 1897, p. 5).

Mead is 1,964 miles from Dallas. In the spring of 1897, we can account for three airships in Texas, an airship that exploded over Michigan, and

another airship seen broken down in Washington State. We have accounted for the five airships built in "a quiet Iowa village."

We can say the evidence presented in this book demonstrates all of the airship characters mentioned in the various newspaper articles regarding the 1897 airship mystery were intimately connected to each other by virtue of place, profession, organization, and/or family. The actors in the airship mystery were real people with real professions and their relationships with each other encompassed five decades of American history, including a Civil War, an Indian war, a gold rush, and the great migration of settlers from the East to the West. These men were pioneers not only in the sense of settling new territory, but they were also pioneers in the fledgling aerospace industry. Real men flew real airships in the spring of 1897.

The crash off Staten Island may have been the last sighting of any of the five airships that first stunned then amazed the country for one brief moment in our history. If so, it is probable that the airships' aluminum superstructure and other parts are salvageable. A successful search and recovery of the remains could confirm the airship story and credit the brave inventors and adventurers with their wonderful flying machines.

CONCLUSION

I worked as a shift supervisor for the Naval Space Surveillance System for a year. I have worked on classified government projects for about twenty years. I have enjoyed the beauty of the night sky for many hundreds of nights. I have never observed a UFO in my entire life. I love the idea of our planet Earth being just one member of a large body of inhabited planets scattered throughout the universe. For some reason, it seems scary to think that if we fail, all intelligent life in the universe will be extinguished. And who knows how many of those planets may have civilizations populated with creatures far more advanced than our own that know how to successfully propel themselves outside their solar system? Yet, I know most earthly UFO sightings have a plausible explanation that does not resolve to "aliens from another planet" or "mass hysteria."

There is a growing body of evidence to support the assertion that a group of individuals designed, built, and flew airships from the late 1840s. Their early work in the 1850s may have lead directly to the manufacture and flight of several airships responsible for the great 1896 and 1897 airship mystery. Although very secretive, their work is gaining attention and additional details are coming to light.

A plausible and very strong case for seemingly incredible high-speed airship flight in the Texas skies during 1897 was presented in these pages. If we believe the newspaper accounts, at least those with the same timbre, we are left to conclude that a small group of inventors and adventurers, in 1897, amazed the world for a few short days in the spring with their wonderful flying machines before unexpectedly meeting untimely ends. And perhaps locked away and forgotten in some dusty attic waiting for another helpful nurse to "take care of that mess and clean it all up" are documents that will reveal the whole airship story.

AFTERWORD

"We must be alarmingly enterprising, and we must be startlingly original . . . and do new and striking things which constitute a revolution."

—William Randolph Hearst (date unknown)

In 1897, American newspapers sent hundreds of reporters, artists, and photographers to Havana, Cuba, to document Spanish atrocities during the Cuban war for independence. The war correspondents, including such notable personalities as author Stephen Crane and artist Frederic Remington, when they arrived, found no Spanish atrocities. In fact, they found very little worth reporting. "There is no war," the great Western artist Frederic Remington wrote to his newspaper boss, William Randolph Hearst, "request to be recalled." The infamous Hearst rashly sent a succinct cable reply to Remington, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war."

On the moonless night of February 15, 1898, after most of the crew had retired for the night, the American battleship U.S.S. *Maine* mysteriously exploded in Havana Harbor, Cuba, with the loss of 270 American men. No unusual sounds were heard just before the explosion. Although Spain had no means for delivering a torpedo to the *Maine*'s hull, the newspapers claimed the Spanish military was responsible for torpedoing the battleship. For weeks after the *Maine* sinking, the *New York Journal* (a Hearst paper) devoted more than eight pages a day to the disaster. Soon, the American public was screaming for revenge. President McKinley was not in favor of war, but the United States Congress, responding to popular sentiment, declared war on Spain.

William Randolph Hearst asked, "How do you like the [New York] Journal's War?" *New York Evening Post* columnist Edward L. Gotkin acidly

retorted, "It's a crying shame that men should work such mischief ... to sell more papers."

Isn't it an odd coincidence Dr. Solomon Andrews demonstrated, for the War Department's consideration, in September 1863 a motorless, that is noiseless, airship seemingly capable of delivering ordnance to ground, or water, targets? And isn't it another odd coincidence a fellow by the name of Rich experimented dropping torpedoes by balloon in February 1897? Rich performed his torpedo experiments in the great state of Iowa. Perhaps, Cuba was the intended destination the airships were bound for after all. As there was not much in the way of a Spanish fleet to bomb and since the United States had not yet declared war on Spain, maybe, just maybe, Hearst decided to speed things up a bit by bombing the *Maine*, just to "furnish the war."

APPENDIX A

AIRSHIP PATENT APPLICATIONS

The following figures depict the patent applications of Solomon Andrews (awarded July 5, 1864, patent number 43,449), Charles Smith (awarded August 11, 1896, patent number 585,803), and three other inventors (H. Heintz, patent number 580,941, awarded April 20, 1897; E. J. St. Croix, patent number 573,549, awarded December 22, 1896; and D. Reed, patent number 591,692, awarded October 12, 1897). Additionally, a patent application for Samuel West (of San Francisco, patent number 553,634, awarded January 28, 1896), not included here, is noteworthy because William H. H. Hart of San Francisco is assigned one-half of the patent rights.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

SOLOMON ANDREWS, OF PERTH AMBOY, NEW JERSEY, ASSIGNOR TO
SOLOMON ANDREWS, JR.

IMPROVEMENT IN AEROSTATS.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 37,649, dated July 5, 1864.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, SOLOMON ANDREWS, of Perth Amboy, in the county of Middlesex, in the State of New Jersey, have invented a mode by which the air may be navigated, and a new and useful machine by which it may be done which machine I call an "Aereon;" and I do hereby declare that the following is a full, clear, and exact description of the construction and operation of the same, reference being had to the annexed drawings, making a part of this specification.

In Figure 1 there are three aerostats of a cylindrical form pointed at each end, joined together by a membrane or diaphragm at their longitudinal equators, covered by a net from which four rows of cords extend to a long and narrow car suspended below the center, the ballast and aerostat in the car. It ascends and descends on inclined planes in the atmosphere, because of its form or construction, hence it is poised obliquely. The angles of inclination are produced by the position of the aerostat in the car or the removal of other weights, and it is steered by a common rudder.

To navigate the air with this vessel, it is only necessary to step to the rear end of the car, thus elevating the bow five to ten degrees, and by throwing out a little ballast she will go ahead on the ascending plane. When she has ascended as high as the aerostat wishes to go, he opens one of the valves and discharges some gas, at the same time stepping toward the forward end of the car, which will depress the bow, elevate the stern, and so change the angle of inclination, when she will go ahead on the descending plane. On a near approach to the earth he has only to step to the middle or rear end of the car, and thus elevate the bow. To stop her momentum at any rate of velocity, sail horizontally for a short distance, or throw out more ballast and go ahead again on the ascending plane. Having forward motion, she is turned by the rudder just like a boat on the water. Stern way may also be had if desired. Before the ballast is exhausted come down to a depot, replenish the wasted gas and ballast, and go on again.

One pound of ascending or descending power will give to this vessel a forward movement of one mile per hour, and each additional pound will increase her speed in about the same

ratio, so that by ascending or descending with a power of two hundred pounds a speed of two hundred miles per hour may be attained, and common varnished linen is strong enough to resist the pressure on the bow at that rapid rate, if brought to a point and held so by some inflexible frame-work.

The foregoing I consider a full and comprehensive description of my invention; but as aerial vessels have never before been directed in their course by the will of man, I shall go more into detail, even at the risk of being verbose.

I effect locomotion in the atmosphere in any given direction by means of the form or construction of the aerostat, the motive power being the attraction of gravitation.

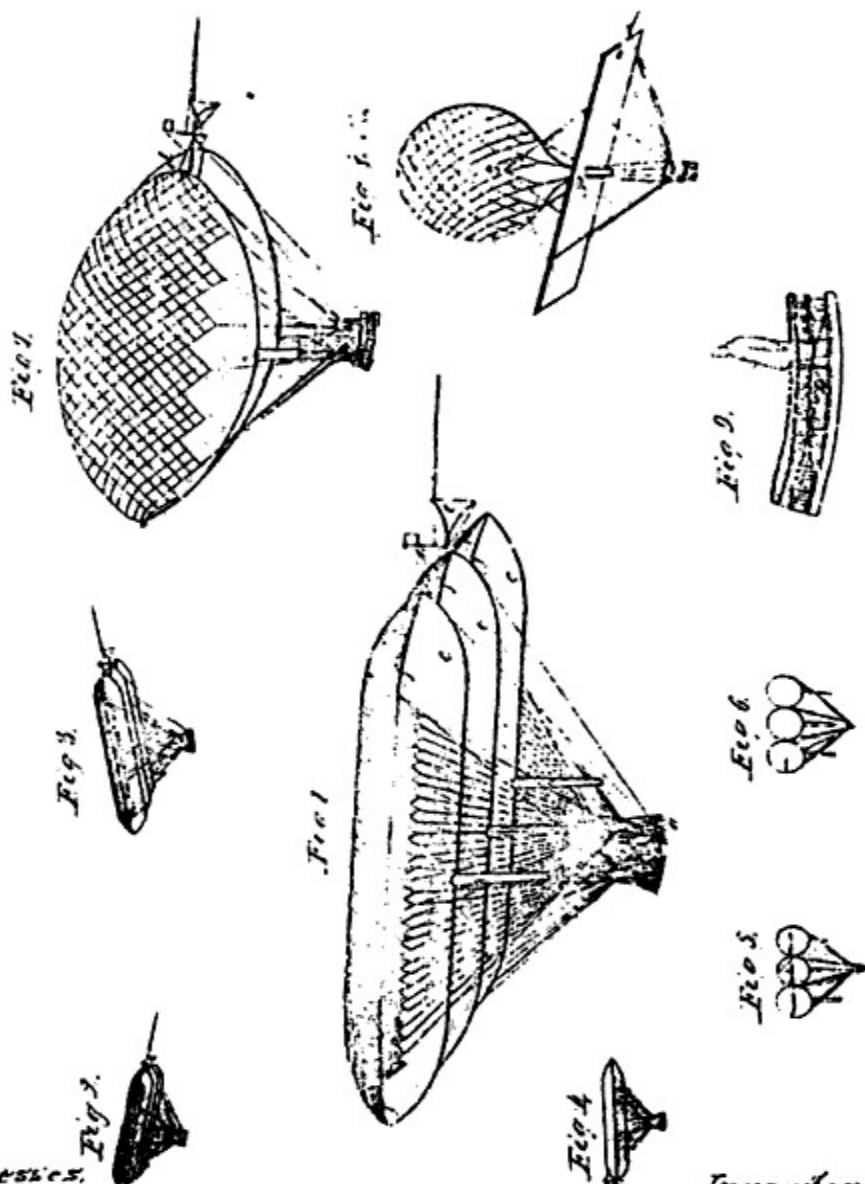
To be more explicit, the difference between the specific gravity of the aerostat and that of the atmosphere, in which it floats I use to propel the aerostat over the surface of the earth, by ascending and descending on inclined planes in the atmosphere by means of the shape or form of the aerostat itself, or a disk thereto attached.

A balloon or spherical body lighter than an equal bulk of the atmosphere will ascend perpendicularly to the horizon, as was demonstrated by the Messrs. Montgolfier, of France. If currents prevail in the atmosphere, the balloon will of course move in the same direction at the same rate of speed. If heavier than the same bulk of air it displaces, it will descend in the same way. But if made in any other shape and kept suspended by the center of gravity in any oblique position it will ascend or descend, as the case may be, on the line of least resistance. Thus, if made in a flattened and elongated form and kept in an oblique position, it will ascend or descend in the plane of its longest axis, because it meets with less resistance in that direction, and this produces a forward movement. If such an aerostat be held perfectly horizontal, it will move only perpendicularly, (supposing no current in the air) because it finds no opposing force to the direction of gravitation, and gravitation always acts perpendicularly to the horizon. It is, then, by an opposing force or resistance to gravitation on one portion of the aerostat by which I compel the aerostat to move forward on a semi-hori-

S. ANDREWS.
AEROSTAT.

No. 43,449.

Patented July 5, 1864.



Witnesses,
Alfred S. Brown
E. A. Abbott

Inventor,
Shuman Andrews

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

CHARLES ABBOTT SMITH, OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

AIR-SHIP.

SPECIFICATION forming part of Letters Patent No. 565,805, dated August 11, 1896.

Application filed April 2, 1896. Serial No. 585,893. (No model.)

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, CHARLES ABBOTT SMITH, a citizen of the United States, residing at San Francisco, in the county of San Francisco and State of California, have invented certain new and useful Improvements in Aeronautics; and I do declare the following to be a full, clear, and exact description of the invention, such as will enable others skilled in the art to which it appertains to make and use the same, reference being had to the accompanying drawings, and to the figures of reference marked thereon, which form a part of this specification.

My invention relates to the construction of air-ships and to the means for guiding and controlling the same, the object being to provide a navigable vessel having large carrying capacity and adapted to be manipulated and controlled with ease and facility.

In the accompanying drawings, which illustrate my invention and form a part of this specification, Figure 1 represents a side view of the ship; Fig. 2, a rear end view; Fig. 3, a vertical transverse section on the line *a a* in Fig. 1; Fig. 4, a vertical longitudinal section on the line *b b* in Fig. 3.

I propose to construct the hull or body of the ship of thin sheet metal—preferably of aluminum or of aluminum alloy on account of the lightness of this material—and to render the same buoyant by charging it with hydrogen or other light gas. The vessel so constructed and charged is propelled by a screw-propeller of usual or preferred construction and is guided or steered by horizontal and vertical rudders, by the manipulation of which it is directed upward, downward, or laterally, and in direction changed at will. I propose also to augment the buoyancy and carrying capacity by means of hinged vibrating wings operated from within, all as hereinafter fully described.

The hull or body comprises a cylindrical portion 1 and a pointed or cone-shaped bow 2, the body portion having at the rear end an overhang 4, which projects back over the screw 5, and to which is hinged the horizontal rudder 6, whereby the vessel is guided in a vertical direction.

The hull is divided into compartments 7 8 9 by horizontal partitions 10 11, (see Figs. 3 and 4,) extending longitudinally through the body portion 1 and somewhat into the

cone-shaped bow 2, the middle compartment 8 being intended for passengers, freight, &c., and for the reception of the necessary driving machinery, while the upper and lower compartments 7 9 are intended to be charged with gas. The middle compartment, which may be denominated the "cabin" or "saloon," is provided at the sides with windows 12 for the admission of light, and in the bottom with openings or wells 13 14, which extend through the lower compartment 9 and through the bottom of the hull, as shown in Fig. 4. The first of these openings, which is in the pointed bow 2, is intended as a lookout in a forward direction, while the other, 14, which is approximately amidships, is provided for the purpose of permitting an anchor or grapple 15 to be lowered and hoisted there through.

16 16 designate two vertical rudders mounted at the stern at opposite sides of the screw 5, the latter being in rear of the rudders, so as not to interfere therewith. These rudders may be operated by hand or by machinery in the usual manner, and therefore no connections are shown in the drawings.

17 17 are two wings hinged at the upper part of the vessel, extending approximately the whole length of the cylindrical body portion 1 and curved into concavo-convex form, so as to lie, when folded, snugly against the sides of the body. (See Fig. 2.) These wings are adapted to be vibrated, and are intended by their action on the air to assist in buoying and sustaining the vessel, their action being similar to that of a bird in flying, and it will be understood that when vibrated regularly and in unison they will exert a lifting force, their convex upper surfaces offering less resistance to the air in their rising movements than is offered by their concave surfaces in the falling movements, the difference being the measure of their lifting force at each vibration.

As a means for operating the wings I show a series of drums 18, geared with and adapted to be rotated back and forth by an engine 19, of any suitable or preferred style or construction; but other mechanisms and motive power may be employed if found expedient, those features forming no part of my invention, which is independent of the driving mechanism, it being only necessary that suitable machinery and connections be employed for op-

erating the wings. In practice I propose to employ either a naphtha-engine or a small electric motor, according to the purposes for which the ship is to be used and the distances to be traversed. Cords or ropes 20, attached to the wings, extend to the drums 18, passing through vertical tubes 21, which project above the vessel, and over pulleys or rollers 22, mounted at the tops of said tubes, said rollers being employed for the purpose of preventing friction. By rotating the drums 18 in one direction the wings are raised and by rotating in the opposite direction they are allowed to fall. Other cords 23, also attached to the wings, pass over pulleys or rollers 24, mounted at the sides of the vessel, and thence through openings 25 in the walls thereof to the drums 18, the arrangement being such that the cords 20 23 are alternately wound up and unwound to impart the required vibratory movements to the wings.

While I show separate drums for the cords 20 23, it is to be understood that they may be manipulated by a single drum, it being only required in such case that they be connected with the wings at equal distances from the hinges or axes of vibration in order that they may be kept taut while being wound up and unwound. The horizontal rudder 4 is operated also by means of cords 26 and 27, attached, respectively, to the upper and lower sides thereof and running also to the interior of the vessel, where they may be manipulated in the same manner as the cords 20 23 to raise or depress the rudder, or they may be manipulated by hand, as may be found most expedient.

For purposes of illustration I show a separate motor 28 applied to the shaft of the propeller 5, but it is to be understood that in practice I propose to use a single engine or motor, one having the least possible weight, and to drive all the operating machinery thereby.

29 designates a safety-valve of any preferred style or construction applied to the gas-chamber to prevent overcharging. As represented in Fig. 4, this valve has a stem 30, which projects down through the chamber or compartment 7 and the partition 10 into the passenger-compartment 8, whereby it is adapted to be opened at pleasure to permit the gas to escape. In this connection it is proper to state that the two gas-chambers are in communication with each other, so that a single charging-opening and a single safety-valve will answer for both. A communicating passage is shown at 31 in Fig. 4.

The gas-chambers are charged with gas through a valve 32 of any suitable construction, which valve, after the charge has been introduced, is to be tightly closed.

Having now described my invention, I claim—

1. The aerial vessel shown and described, the same comprising a cylindrical shell or body having a pointed or cone-shaped front

end, longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings hinged to the body at the top thereof and having a curvature corresponding with that of the body so as to fold closely against the sides thereof, in combination with machinery located within the body at, or near, the bottom for operating said wings.

2. In an aerial vessel of the character described having a hollow cylindrical body and a pointed or cone-shaped front end, the whole adapted to be charged with gas, in combination with longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings having a curvature corresponding with that of the body and adapted to fold closely against the sides thereof, said wings being hinged to the top of the body, machinery located within the body for operating the wings, and devices also operated by said machinery for propelling and steering the vessel.

3. In an aerial vessel of the character described, a hollow cylindrical body having a pointed or cone-shaped front end, the body being divided by suitable partitions into an upper compartment for gas and a lower compartment for machinery, passengers, &c. in combination with devices for propelling and steering, longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings hinged to the body at the top thereof and adapted to fold against the sides, and driving machinery located in said lower compartment for operating said wings and the propelling and steering devices.

4. In an air-ship the combination of a hollow cylindrical body divided longitudinally by a horizontal partition into an upper compartment adapted to be charged with gas, and a compartment below the gas-compartment for the reception of machinery, passengers, &c., longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings hinged to the top of the body and extending outward in opposite directions, and suitable machinery within the ship connected with said wings to operate the same.

5. An air-ship having a cylindrical body, longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings hinged to the body at the top thereof, and mechanism within the body connected with said wings to operate the same positively in both directions.

6. An air-ship having a hollow cylindrical body, a compartment for machinery, passengers &c. located wholly within the cylindrical body, the latter, outside of said compartment being adapted to be charged with gas, longitudinally-extending concavo-convex wings hinged to the top of the body, driving machinery located within said compartment, and cords or similar connections leading from said driving machinery both to the upper and lower sides of said wings for operating the same positively in both directions.

In testimony whereof I affix my signature in presence of two witnesses.

CHARLES ABBOTT SMITH.

Witnesses:

WM. A. DEANE,
CHAS. E. CORRY.

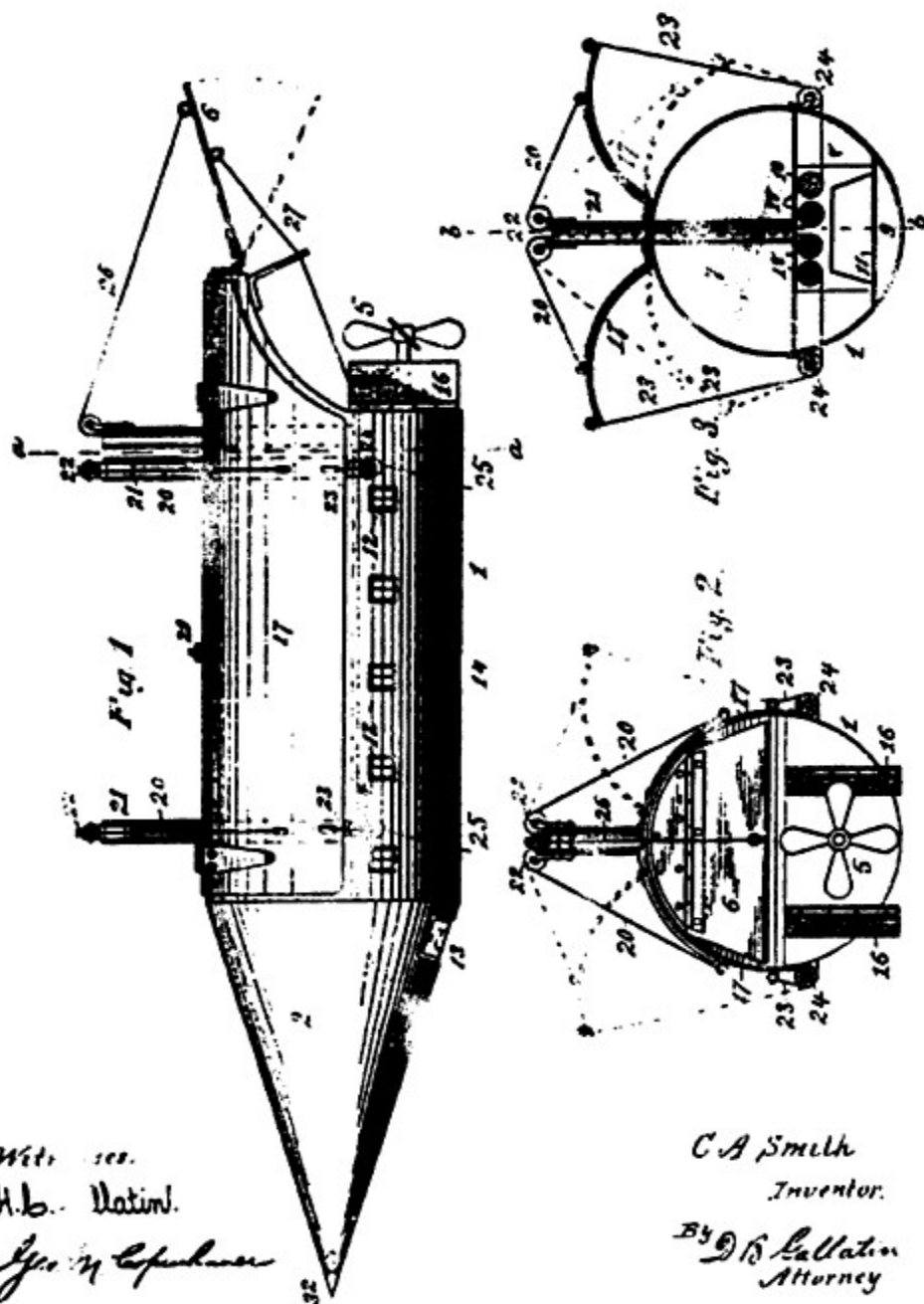
(No Model.)

C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

2 Sheets—Sheet 1.

No. 565,805.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witness.
A. C. Watson.
J. H. Carpenter

C. A. Smith
Inventor.

By J. B. Hallatin
Attorney

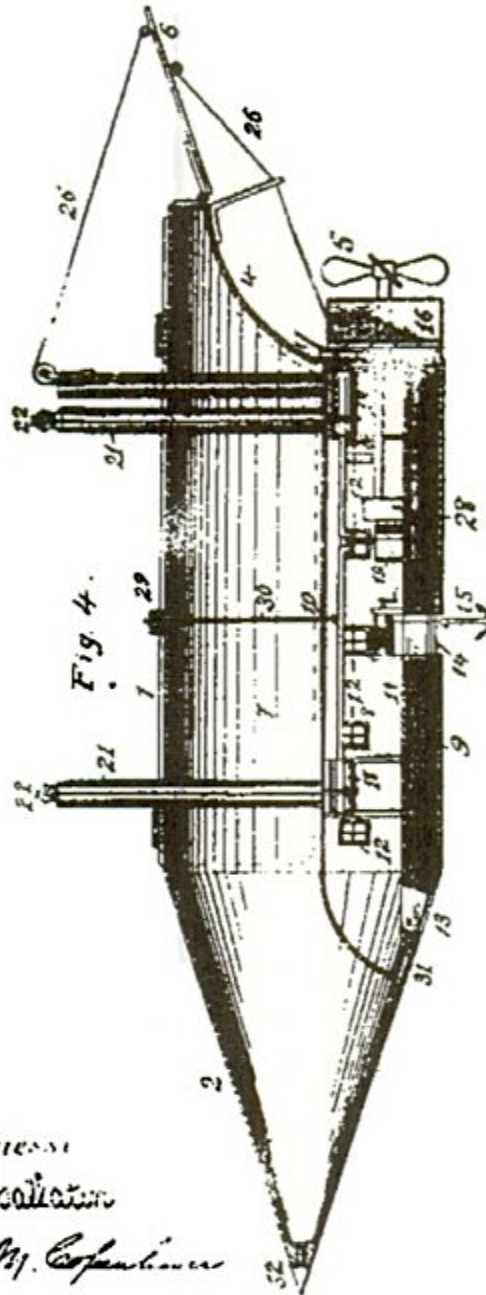
(No Model.)

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.

C. A. SMITH.
AIR SHIP.

No. 565,806.

Patented Aug. 11, 1896.



Witness
Attestation
Geo M. Carpenter

C. A. Smith,
Inventor.
By G. B. Hallen
Attorney

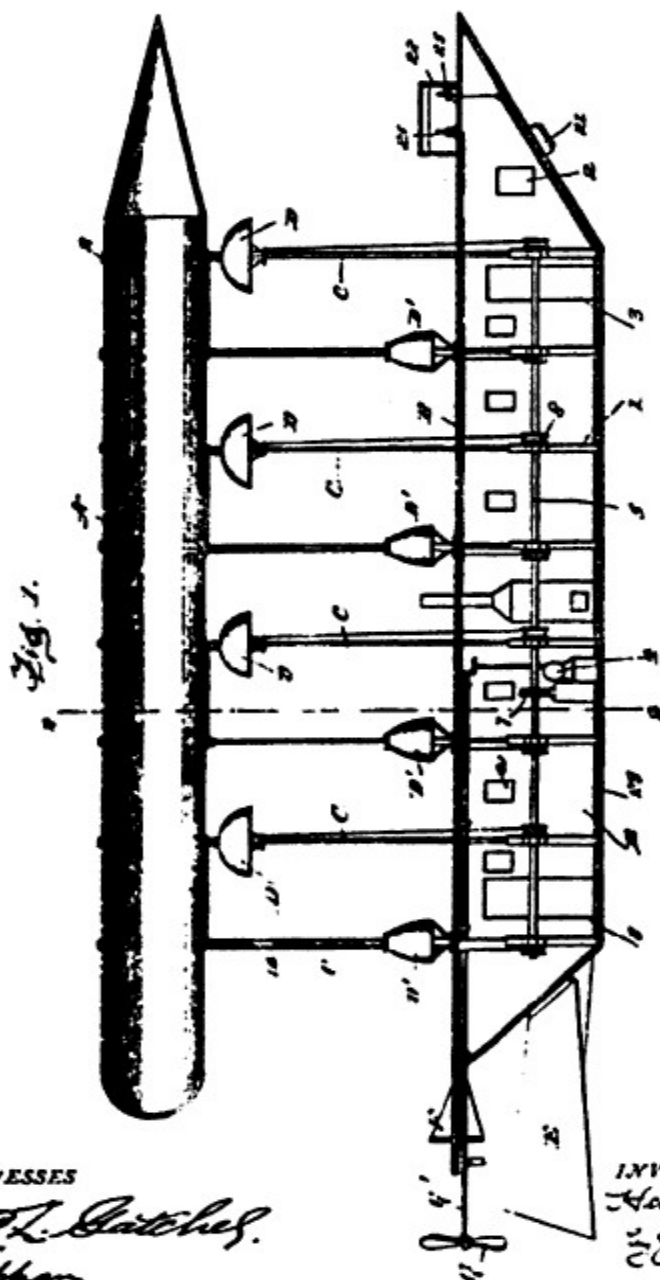
(No Model.)

2 Sheets—Sheet 1.

H. HEINTZ.
AIR SHIP.

No. 580,941.

Patented Apr. 20, 1897.



WITNESSES

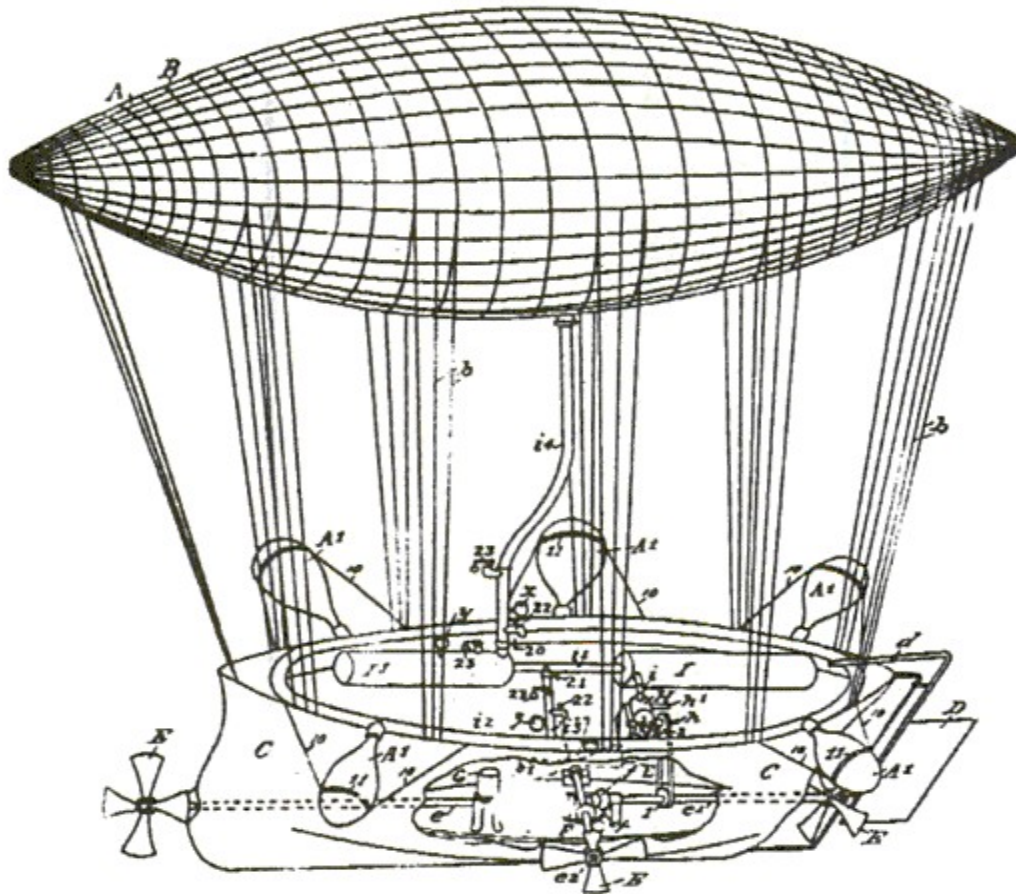
Thos. L. Gatchel.
J. Kappan

(No Model.)

E. J. ST. CROIX.
AIR SHIP.

No. 573,649.

Patented Dec. 22, 1896.



Witnesses

Alfred F. Trueman
William P. Smith

Inventor

Edward J. St. Croix

(No Model.)

D. REED.
AIR SHIP.

3 Sheets—Sheet 1.

No. 591,692.

Patented Oct. 12, 1897.

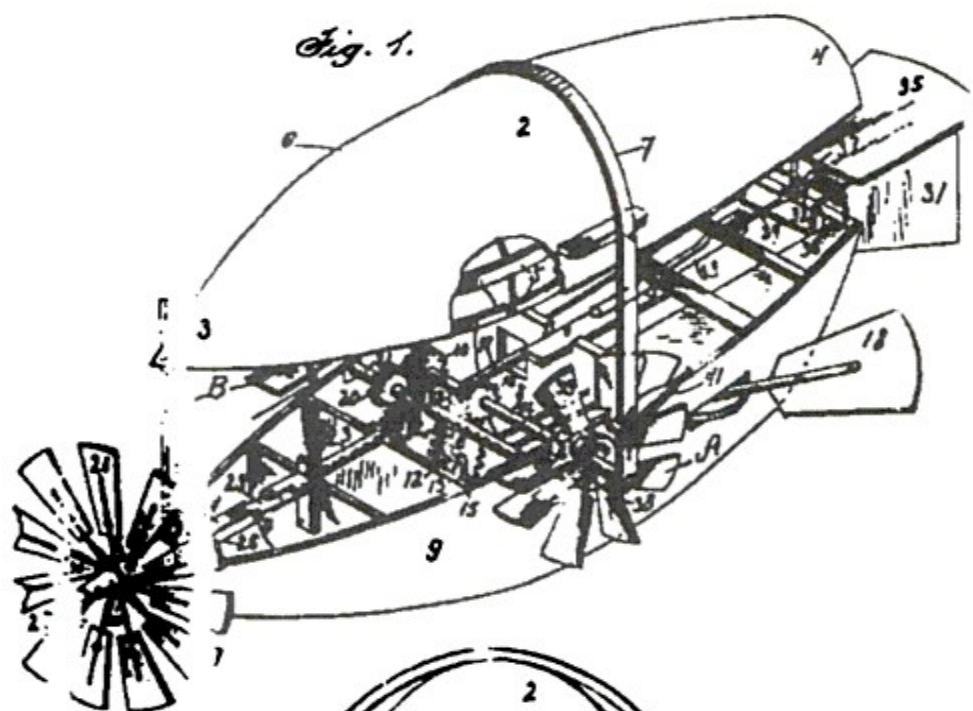
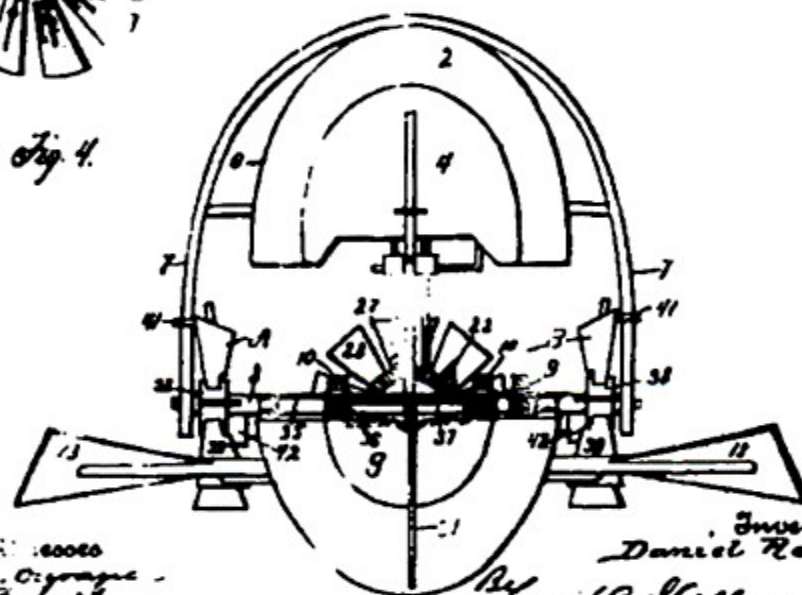


Fig. 4.



20: 10000
J. L. O'Grady
J. L. Smith

Inventor
Daniel Reed

By *A. H. Hillman*

Att. in

APPENDIX B

NEWSPAPERS KNOWN TO CARRY AIRSHIP STORIES

(1896)

ARKANSAS

Harrison Times

Osceola Times

CALIFORNIA

Anaheim Gazette

Auburn Placer Herald Riverside

Enterprise

Bakersfield Daily Californian

Eureka Daily Humboldt Times

Folsom Weekly Telegraph

Fresno Daily Evening Expositor

Grass Valley Daily Morning Union

Los Angeles Times

Marysville Daily Appeal

Merced Star

Napa Register

Oakland Tribune

Pacific Grove Review

Placerville Mountain Democrat

Redwood City Times-Gazette

Sacramento Bee

Salinas Daily Index

San Diego Record

San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco Examiner

San Jose Daily Mercury

San Jose Pioneer

San Rafael (Marin County) Tocsin

Santa Cruz Sentinel

Stockton Daily Reporter

Woodland Daily Democrat

INDIANA

Knightstown Banner

Knightstown Sun

New Castle Tribune

MISSOURI

Poplar Bluff Daily American

NEVADA

Austin Reese River Reveille

Battle Mountain Central Nevadan

Belmont Courier

Carson City Morning Appeal

Carson City News

Dayton (Lyon County) Times

Elko Free Press

Ely White Pines News

Genoa Weekly Courier

Reno Evening Gazette

Virginia City Enterprise
Winnemucca Daily Silver State

OREGON

Ashland Tidings
Astorian
Daily Eugene Guard
Portland Morning Oregonian
Salem Statesman

WASHINGTON

Seattle Daily Times
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
Spokane Daily Chronicle
Tacoma Daily Ledger
Tacoma News

WEST VIRGINIA

Sistersville Oil Review

(1897)

ALABAMA

Birmingham News

ARIZONA

Tucson Daily Citizen (Tucson)
Tucson Star

ARKANSAS

Arkansas Democrat
Little Rock Gazette
Mena Weekly Star
Mobile Daily Register
Pine Bluff Commercial

CALIFORNIA

San Francisco Call

COLORADO

Boulder Daily Camera
Colorado Springs Gazette
Denver Post
Denver Rocky Mountain
News
Pueblo Chieftain

DELAWARE

Wilmington Every Evening
Wilmington Morning News

FLORIDA

Jacksonville Times-Union
Tampa Tribune

GEORGIA

Atlanta Constitution
Atlanta Journal

IDAHO

Boise Daily Statesman

ILLINOIS

Alton Evening Telegraph
Argus
Aurora Daily Beacon
Bloomington Daily Bulletin
Bloomington Daily Pantagraph
Canton Daily Register
Centralia Daily Sentinel
Charleston Daily Courier
Chicago Journal
Chicago Tribune
Clarion Leader
Daily Illinois State Register
(Springfield)
Daily Jacksonville Journal
Decatur Republican
Dixon Evening Telegraph

Galena Daily Gazette
Galesburg Evening Mail
Jacksonville Daily Illinois Courier
Lincoln Semi-Weekly Courier
Lincoln Weekly Citizen
Monmouth Daily News
Monmouth Review
Morris Daily Herald
Mt. Vernon Daily Register
Ottawa Daily Journal
Ottawa Weekly Republican-Times
Pana Weekly Palladium
Paris Daily Beacon
Peoria Daily Transcript
Peoria Evening Times
Pontiac Daily Leader
Quincy Daily Herald
Quincy Daily Journal
Rockford Daily Register
Rockford Daily Republic
Rock Island Quincy Morning Wig
Rock Island Daily Union
Savannah Journal
Springfield News-Telegram
Springfield State Journal
Sterling Evening Gazette
Streator Daily Free Press
Streator Daily Monitor
Taylorsville Daily Breeze

INDIANA

Angola Herald
Attica Fountain-Warren Democrat
Auburn Courier
Aurora Dearborn Independent
Bedford Daily Mail
Blackford (Hartford County) Telegram
Bloomfield News
Bloomington Republican-Progress
Bloomington Telephone

Bloomington World
Bluffton Banner
Bourbon Mirror
Brookville American
Brookville Democrat
Brownstown Banner
Butler Record
Cannelton Enquirer
Columbus Daily Herald
Columbus Daily Times
Columbus Evening Republican
Crawfordsville Daily Journal
Crawfordsville Review
Crown-Point (Lake County) Star
Danville (Hendricks County) Gazette
Daviess County Democrat
Delphi (Carroll County) Citizen
Denver Tribune
Ellettsville Farm
Evansville Courier
Evansville Journal
Fairmount Weekly News (no April 22, 1897 account)
Farmland Enterprise
Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette
Franklin Democrat
Franklin Republican
Gas City Weekly Journal
German Huntingsburg Signal
Goshen Weekly Democrat
Greencastle Daily Banner-Time
Greenfield Herald
Greensburg New Era
Greensburg Review
Hancock Democrat
Hartford City Telegram
Hobart Gazette
Indianapolis Journal
Indianapolis News
Indianapolis Sentinel

Indianapolis West Side Herald (none
after April 15, 1897)
Indianapolis World
Jasper Weekly Courier
Kentland Democrat (no April 16,
1897 account)
Kokomo Daily Tribune
Kokomo Dispatch
Lafayette Journal
LaGrange Standard
LaPorte Weekly Argus
Lebanon Patriot
Ligonier Banner
Logansport Chronicle
Logansport Daily Journal
Logansport Daily Pharos
Logansport Daily Reporter
Logansport Times
Madison Courier
Martinsville Republican
Michigan City News
Mishawaka Democrat (no April 16 or
April 22 accounts)
Mitchell Commercial
Monticello Herald
Monticello White County Democrat
New Albany Daily Ledger
Newport Hoosier State
Noblesville Democrat
Noblesville (Hamilton County)
Democrat
Noblesville (Hamilton County)
Ledger
North Judson News
Osgood Journal (or *Ripley Journal*)
Peru Republican
Petersburg (Pike County) Democrat
Rensselaer Republican
Rockville Republican
Rockville Tribune

Rushville Republican
Shelbyville Shelby Democrat
Shoals Referendum
South Bend Daily Tribune
Sullivan Democrat
Terre Haute Evening Gazette
Vincennes Daily Sun
Warsaw Daily Times
Warsaw Northern Indianan
Washington Waterloo Press (none after
April 15, 1897)
Worthington Times

IOWA

Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye
Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette
Daily Nonpareil Council Bluffs
Globe
Davenport Daily Leader
Des Moines Daily News
Des Moines Iowa State Journal
Des Moines Iowa State
Register
Des Moines Leader
Farmington Herald
Keokuk Daily Gate City
Marshalltown Evening Times-
Republican
Sioux City Journal
Waterloo Daily Courier

KANSAS

Atchison Daily Globe
Emporia Gazette
Fort Scott Daily Monitor
Hutchinson Daily News
Independence Star and
Kansas City Gazette
Topeka Daily Capital
Wichita Daily Eagle

KENTUCKY

Carlisle Mercury
Lexington Daily Leader
Lexington Morning Herald
Lexington Morning News
Louisville Courier-Journal
Louisville Evening Post
Louisville Times
Madisonville Hustler
Middleboro Weekly Herald
Owensboro Daily Inquirer
Owensboro Daily Messenger
Paducah Daily News

LOUISIANA

Alexandria Daily Town Talk
Baton Rouge Daily Advocate
New Orleans Daily Picayune
New Orleans Times-Democrat
Shreveport Times

MAINE

Portland Daily Evening Argus

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Globe

MICHIGAN

Adrian Evening Telephone
Battle Creek Daily Moon
Bay City Times-Press
Benton Harbor Evening News
Detroit Evening News
Detroit Free Press
Flint Daily News
Grand Haven Daily Tribune
Grand Rapid Evening Press
Holland City News
Ionia Daily Standard
Iron Mountain Daily Tribune

Jackson Daily Citizen
Kalamazoo Gazette
Lansing State Republican
Manistee Daily Advocate
Manistee Daily News
Marquette Daily Mining Journal
Marshall Daily Chronicle
Midland Sun
Mt. Clemens Monitor
Muskegon Daily Chronicle
Niles Daily Star
Owosso Argus Press
Port Huron Daily Times
Saginaw Courier-Herald
Saginaw Evening News
Saginaw Globe
Utica Weekly Sentinel

MINNESOTA

Duluth News-Tribune
Minneapolis Tribune
St. Paul Dispatch
St. Paul Pioneer Press

MISSISSIPPI

Jackson Daily Clarion-Ledger
Jackson Daily News
Natchez Daily Democrat

MISSOURI

Carrollton Daily Democrat
Kansas City (Mo.) Star
Kansas City (Mo.) Times
Liberty Tribune
Marshall Democrat-News
Memphis Reville
Moberly Daily Monitor
Rock Port (Atchison County) Mail Rock
Port
Rolla Herald

Sedalia Evening Democrat
Shelbina Democrat
Shelbyville Shelby County Herald
St. Joseph Daily Herald
St. Joseph Daily News
St. Louis Globe-Democrat
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Tusculum (Miller County)
Autogram

MONTANA

Butte Miner
Great Falls Tribune

NEBRASKA

Auburn Advertiser
Beatrice Weekly Express
Kearney Hub
Lincoln Nebraska State Journal
Omaha Daily Bee
Omaha World-Herald

NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque Morning Democrat
Las Vegas Daily Optic

NEW YORK

Albany Evening Journal
Buffalo Courier
Buffalo Evening News

NORTH CAROLINA

Carthage Blade
Daily Charlotte Observer
Fayetteville Observer
Graham Alamance News-Gleaner
Raleigh Caucasian
Raleigh Tribune
Rockingham Rocket
Wilmington Messenger

NORTH DAKOTA

Fargo Forum and Daily Republican
Minot Daily News
Minot (Ward County) Reporter

OHIO

Bowling Green Daily Sentinel
Canton Repository
Cincinnati Commercial Tribune
Cincinnati Enquirer
Cleveland Plain Dealer
Steubenville Daily Republican
Steubenville Herald

OKLAHOMA

Arapaho Bee
Cheyenne Sunbeam
Cushing Herald
Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman
Stillwater Oklahoma State Sentinel

OREGON

Astoria Daily Budget
Portland Morning Oregonian

PENNSYLVANIA

Erie Daily Times
Harrisburg Patriot
Lancaster Intelligencer
Pittsburgh Dispatch
Pittsburgh Post

RHODE ISLAND

Providence Journal

SOUTH CAROLINA

Charleston News-Courier

SOUTH DAKOTA

Aberdeen Daily News

Sioux Falls Argus-Leader
Yankton Press and Dakotan

TENNESSEE

Chattanooga Daily Times
Clarksville Daily Leaf-Chronicle
Knoxville Daily Tribune
Memphis Commercial-Appeal
Nashville American
Nashville Banner
Nashville Daily Sun

TEXAS

Abilene Reporter
Austin American Statesman
Austin Daily Statesman
Austin Times
Brownsville Daily Herald
Bryan Morning Eagle
Cleburne (Johnson County) Review
Dallas Morning News
Dallas Times-Herald
Denison Sunday Gazetteer
El Paso Times
Fort Worth Register
Gainesville Daily Hesperian
Galveston Daily News
Houston Post

UTAH

Logan Tri-Weekly Journal
Nephi Republic
Ogden Standard
Provo Daily Enquirer
Salt Lake City Desert Evening News
Salt Lake Herald

VIRGINIA

Norfolk Dispatch

Norfolk Virginian
Richmond Dispatch
Richmond Evening Leader
Richmond State
Roanoke Times

WASHINGTON

Spokane Daily Chronicle
Washington Post

WEST VIRGINIA

Charleston Gazette
Huntington Daily Tribune
Parkersburg Daily Journal
Parkersburg Daily Sentinel
Wheeling Intelligencer
Wheeling Register

WISCONSIN

Beloit Daily News
Beloit Free Press
Fond du Lac Daily
Commonwealth
Green Bay Gazette
Kenosha Evening News
Madison State Journal
Milwaukee Daily News
Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin
Milwaukee Journal
Milwaukee Sentinel
Oshkosh Daily Northwestern
Portage Daily Register
Racine Daily Journal
Racine Times

WYOMING

Cheyenne Sun-Leader
Lusk (Converse County) Herald
Rock Springs Miner

CANADA

Alberta

Edmonton Bulletin

British Columbia

Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser

Manitoba

Brandon Mail

St. Boniface La Manitoba

Winnipeg Morning Free Press

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Michael Busby, himself an engineer with experience in avionics, space surveillance, and flight-test engineering, examines the evidence and weighs the various theories. The result is a compelling argument favoring the existence of a secret aviation program that predates the Wright brothers' famous flight in 1903.

Michael Busby earned his bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from the University of Texas and served eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps. His engineering career has spanned twenty-four countries and has included projects with the Naval Space Surveillance System, Collins Avionics, Rockwell International, and Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Corporation. Mr. Busby lives in Longview, Texas.



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"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."

—*Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1897



Six years before the Wright brothers' successful flight and more than fifty years before the term "UFO" was invented, eyewitnesses from California to Michigan to Louisiana reported seeing mysterious craft sailing through the sky. Newspapers across the country chronicled these sightings, like the account of the spectacular crash in Aurora, Texas, quoted above. Theories abounded, but the facts have eluded historians.

In *Solving the 1897 Airship Mystery*, Michael Busby reveals the truth about a secretive group of inventive men whose flying machines enthralled the nation six years before the Wright brothers flew at Kittyhawk, North Carolina. He has researched the backgrounds of the numerous individuals involved, including such prominent figures as San Francisco attorney George Collins, who professed to be legal representative for the airship inventors; Dr. Elmer Benjamin, San Francisco dentist and inventor; Prof. Amos Dolbear, chairman of Tufts University's Department of Astronomy and Physics; Prof. and Brig. Gen. Samuel E. Tillman, professor of chemistry (U.S. Military Academy—class of 1869) and U.S. Military Academy superintendent (1917-19); U.S. Marshal John Shelby Williams, federal marshal for the eastern district of Texas; California attorney general William H. H. Hart, immigrant, orphan, boy soldier, Indian fighter, and California pioneer; Dr. Solomon Andrews, the Perth Amboy, New Jersey, mayor, inventor, and physician; and San Francisco physician Dr. Charles A. Smith, who, with Dr. Andrews, pioneered aviation.

A call to duty from a divided country brought these men together during America's deadly fratricidal war. Serving in the Army of the Potomac, they forged lifelong friendships in the mud and blood of battle. After the Civil War they returned to their civilian professions, ultimately uniting again to design, build, and fly the amazing airships of 1897.

Featuring exhaustive research and numerous tables, illustrations, and maps, *Solving the 1897 Airship Mystery* is a startling addition to the history of flight.

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