

UFO'S: A History

1896

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(Previous title: The UFO Wave of 1896)

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Privately Printed at Fremont, California

Second Edition Published December 1987

FOREWORD

The mystery of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) is not a modern one. For a long time inexplicable things have been seen in the sky.

During the latter part of 1896 history's first big UFO wave took place when thousands of amazed people reported strange lights moving about in the sky over many cities of Central California. A careful examination of the 1896 flap could help answer the biggest question of all about UFOs. Are UFOs extraterrestrial?

The following account is the most complete and accurate survey of the 1896 wave yet compiled.

THE THING OF WHEELS AND CRANKS AND FROLIC.

Oh, say, you airy phantom,
Far up aloft afloat,
Are you some nervous goblin
Who likes to steer a boat?
Say, do you use the atmosphere,
As others use the sea?
And as you note our wonder
Do you chortle in your glee?
You hang out lights of warning
Across the misty sky,
But then you quickly vanish--
Oh, how? and whence? and why?

Some have not had the honor
To see your trailing gleam,
Yet 'tis against all reason
To say the others dream.
Some have not heard the voices
Your crew sends forth at night,
But still, as a phenomenon,
We vote you out of sight.
We cannot solve the problem:
Are you all gross, material?
With wheels, joints and engines--
Or wraithlike and ethereal?

We'd like to learn about you;
Permit us then to guess,
For you have got us rattled
To a point of keen distress.
Are you a Shortridge thunder bird,
Turned loose among the stars
From interstellar spaces
To scare the warlike Mars?
Or does the ghost of Hornbrook
Whirl down the giant void,
Revisiting the worldlings
His fables once annoyed?

Flammarion predicted
That stars would fall as rain--
So far as we have noticed
The most of them refrain.
To bring a pour of stars it seems
Was quite beyond his power,
But lights like yours may indicate
He did scare up a shower.
Magnetic currents--fearsome, weird--
Maybe have made the flash
To let the erring mortal know
His globe is soon to crash.

One editor is certain
You really are a ship,
And most adroitly manage
To give his sleuths the slip.
He thinks that now, or later,
The human race will fly;
So can't you, as a favor, soon
Take him aboard and try?
For if your motive power consists
Of force akin to wind,
He is as large a bag of that
As you will ever find.

Our faith it might be stronger,
But earth is rich in liars
Who do not pause to ponder
The future and its fires.
They'd see a ghost on every cloud
To sell the tale for space,
And spend the price for pie and cake
Wherewith to feed the face.
But come again, oh, toy balloons!
We rather like your style--
We see your catch of suckers
And join you in a smile.

The San Francisco Examiner.
November 26, 1896.

SOARING BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

Twenty Centuries of Effort
to Fly Like the
Birds.

From the Classic Man of Crete
to the Mystic Man of
Oroville.



EX-ATTORNEY-GENERAL W. H. H. HART.

HAVE YOU SEEN IT IN THE SKY?

The Light That Never
Touches Land Nor
Sea.

Last Night It Made a Visit to
the St. Nicholas
Hotel.

Saw Two
an

BLAIR PARK

over the Coast
Sees When
the.

Boyle Roche
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SAILED OVER LOS ANGELES

Three Strange Lights Seen
Above the City of
Angels.

BACK ON THEIR COURSE

Hart Tells Why His Client's
Airship Takes to Great
Altitudes.

SO MUCH EASIER TO OPERATE

The Attorney Gives an Account of a
Wonderful Electric Storage
Battery.

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QUEER THINGS YOU SEE WHEN—

A Mysterious Wanderer of
the Skies Perplexes
People.

The Sea Serpent Has Drawn in
His Horns and His Nose
Is Out of Joint.

Now an Airship Appears in the Dark-
ened Heavens and Causes
Consternation.

POLICEMEN RING FOR THE WAGON.

Stories of People Who Saw Mysterious
Bright Lights Moving Among the
Clouds at Night-Time.

Lord, how the world is given to flying! That is not exactly what Faistad said, but it comes to the same thing. The sea serpent has been called in. His melancholy trail no longer slavers the silly seasons. His hairy head erects itself no longer on the practical horizon. And of his horns and hands there are some who tell—in fact, the sea serpent's human nose is out of joint and he has been superseded in the affections of the people by a mysterious "airship." That some object has yet explained or accounted for has been seen traveling the skies in different parts of the State for several nights past appears to be established by the testimony of credible witnesses. What the thing may be nobody knows. That it is an airship capable of carrying a heavy freight seems impossible. A review of the record of fall

SIGHTED TRIPLE LIGHTS.

A Rapid Aerial Traveler Observed
in Placer County.
BOWMAN, PLACER COUNTY,

SAN JOSE STARTLED.

Several Persons Claim They Saw
the Airship Traveling in
That Vicinity.

SAN JOSE, CAL., Nov. 24.—People in this city were startled to-night about 11 o'clock, on beholding a bright light moving rapidly in the heavens, and they are convinced that they beheld the famous airship. It was seen moving in the direction of Gilroy, as was testified by Eugene Barre, Dan Manning and Jerre Sullivan, who are employees of the Sunset Telephone Company. The light was of such a character that the parties are convinced that it was none of the ordinary lights in the sky. About one hour afterward others saw the same mysterious

FAITH IN SONOMA.

in reference
aerial tra-
erect here.
ality have
e strange vi-
fruit ranch.
his family
is ago and
Sonoma County, and it now transpires
singular sight that several citizens whose integrity is unquestionable have noticed the mysteriously brilliant light flying through the air at night with a headlight as brilliant as an electric flash.
J. B. Loefer, proprietor of the Hotel at this place, decries

On September 20, 1896, an astronomer named Swift noticed a point of light, the magnitude of Venus, out over the Pacific Ocean. The point of light was approximately one degree from the setting sun as twilight fell over San Francisco. The following afternoon Professor Perrins, working at the Lick Observatory atop the 4,000 ft. high Mt. Hamilton due east of San Jose, California, received a telegram from Swift announcing the possible discovery of a new comet. At dusk on the 21st, Professor Perrins mounted a Herschel-prism on a twelve inch telescope and scanned the sky in every direction in the neighborhood of the sun as it slowly sank below the horizon, however, the "comet" had disappeared.

About the first week of November, 1896, as dusk was descending on San Francisco, His Honor, Mayor Sutro, drove up in his carriage to his mansion which was west of the city and overlooked the Pacific. Members of his household staff rushed out to meet him with a remarkable story. It seems a "strange object" had hovered in the air just offshore over Seal Rock. The darkness had masked the features of the unknown aerial thing, but a powerful light had been discernable on the rear portion as well as a row of lights down its side, as the object suddenly flew away toward the east, passing overhead at an estimated 500 foot altitude. The Mayor noticed that his servants were "full of wonderment" as they told of the sight. He gave the episode no more thought for two weeks.

On Tuesday, November 17, 1896, Charles Lusk, cashier of the Central Electric Street Railway Company in Sacramento, California, stepped outside for some fresh air at his place of residence at 24th and "O" Streets. The weather had been worse than usual that winter, and the black evening skies, troubled with intermittent rain, drew his attention. Suddenly there appeared over the rooftops a bright light sailing on a westward course at a 1,000 ft. altitude. The following day, Mr. Lusk reported the sight to the fellows at the Car Barn, where, to his surprise, the "light" was already the main topic of discussion. There was a faint shape visible behind the light and the men agreed the thing could only be a powered balloon of some sort. Others in the neighborhood had apparently witnessed the same passage of the mystery light since the city's two newspapers carried an account of the phenomenon.



Central Electric Railway Car House, Sacramento 1896

George Scott, an assistant to the Secretary of State, had been chatting with a trio of acquaintances on the steps of the State Capitol building when the floating sky light caught his eye. He had called attention to the remarkable sight, but his friends dismissed it, calling it an illumination of some distant hillside. Privileged to have a key to the Capitol building, Scott led the others to the observation deck at the very top of the Capitol dome. From their excellent vantage point the group discerned the dim outline of a dark body sweeping through the air adorned with three lights.

A few of the townsfolk remembered the boast which had appeared in the newspaper a few days previously, of a New York inventor who claimed he intended to set sail for California in a powered balloon. On the strength of that boast, rumors began to grow fast. An Associated Press story from New York, dated November 17th, had told of a man named Leon who was constructing an aircraft in Hoboken, which could allegedly carry him across the continent. As a result of that story, some of the car men at the street car Car Barn jocularly volunteered to the press that they had heard crewmen aboard the "balloon" shouting orders to the helmsman to avoid church steeples. One fellow who used to work for the street railroad, R.L. Lowry, outdid his former buddies with this description:

I was standing near the Sacramento brewery when my attention was directed skyward by hearing a voice up there call out, "Throw her up higher; she'll hit the steeple," evidently mistaking the tower of the brewery for a church steeple. Then I saw the light. It seemed like a light within a globular glass covering that magnified it. Above the light I saw two men seated as though on bicycle frames and working with a bicycle movement. I heard one of them say, "We will get to San Francisco about half-past 12," but not mentioning whether midnight or afternoon. Above these two men, who seemed to be working their passage, was a kind of mezzanine box capable of holding two or more people, but I saw no others. Above this was a cigar-shaped body of some length. There were wheels at the side like the side wheels on Fulton's old steam boat.

J.H. Vogel, a bartender, was standing just down the street from the Car Barn crowd and he told a different story: "I saw the light and above it a dark body dimly outlined in the form of an egg with the small end forward. I heard a muffled buzzing of machinery." That was all Mr. Vogel would claim.

The Car Barn foreman, Mr. Snider, didn't engage in the

elaborations of the other employees when approached by a reporter from the *Sacramento Bee*. Mr. Snider merely affirmed that a white light, neither a star nor a meteor, had been seen by him and his men about seven o'clock on the night of the 17th.

Still, a few stories persisted that "voices" had been heard, though some likened the sounds heard to a sweet chorus of singers that seem to have an artificial quality like that produced by a phonograph. Many were unable to make out any distinct words at all, blaming such difficulty on the intermittent intensity of volume due probably to wind currents in the air. Not everyone would volunteer even a conservative opinion. E. Caverly was approached by a reporter from the *San Francisco Call*, but stayed mum on what he saw, giving the impression that he he had witnessed something uncanny.

Those residents that lived in Oak Park, a Sacramento suburb, told newsmen that something had circled high in the sky over that place the day before, leaving a smoke trail, and now they were wondering if there could be a connection with the sky light mystery. The *Sacramento Record-Union* published a very sketchy item on page four in contrast to the *Bee's* front page treatment. Not sure what the "light" was, the *Record-Union* called the light a "wandering apparition" and titled its article: "What Was It?"

A reporter for the *San Francisco Call* telegraphed word of the sky light to his newspaper which printed an account on the 18th, telling San Franciscans that a "light" had approached Sacramento at about 1,000 ft. altitude and then had risen to about double that height as it came in from a north-east direction. When it arrived at the city limits, the article continued, it turned to the south, and bore southwest toward San Francisco. In the process the light had floated over the street car company barn, causing the startled employees of that place to emerge en masse. The story added that the passage of the mysterious visitant took thirty minutes, furthermore the story continued, a postal telegraph lineman spotted a similar phenomenon earlier, near Suisun, at nine o'clock Sunday evening. The *Call* told its readers that the car men had glimpsed a faint shape that resembled a balloon, so there was a general consensus in Sacramento that it could only be some kind of powered balloon-type airship since it moved into the teeth of a heavy wind.

On the 19th, the *Sacramento Bee* ran more about the Tuesday episode on its front page which asked: "Airship or What?" calling it a "queer phenomenon." The light was now the talk of the town. The opinions were split as to whether it was a meteor or a balloon. The description of voices

and an elliptical, propeller-driven airship given by a couple of people was regarded by the majority of Sacramento citizens as the embellishments of hoaxsters. General agreement, though, centered around the arc-lamp type light. Nonetheless, unsubstantiated rumors were circulated that a balloon contrivance was tethered somewhere on the outskirts of the city. The *Sacramento Union*, a critic of the local uproar, printed a story painting the mood of the populace as 99% skeptical. Five of the electric railway motormen, T.P. DeLong, D. Curl, F.E. Briggs, M.F. Shelly, and the ex-employee, R.L. Lowry, (now the center of attention) found their names in the *Union* along with details on the "voices" and the alleged specifications of the airship.

As the days passed and the "unknown New York inventors" did not land, the motormen became the object of ridicule with every fare boarding the electric railcars making flip-pant remarks about when the next airship was due. It was not long before the number of wisecracks approached intolerable levels. By November 20th things began to quiet down. The *Sacramento Union* ran a comic fictional piece with a group of hillbilly types engaged in a country store, wild tale contest about the "airship," complete with humorous accents. The *Union* noted that: "Hundreds agree that the light was rising, falling, and moving slowly, but only two or three hold that they saw the machine and only one (R.L. Lowry) gives any rational description of it."

The *San Francisco Chronicle* mentioned nothing until the 19th, when they carried a small story on page five titled: "Strange Tale of a Flying Machine," "Romance from Sacramento," "Said to Have Been Seen by Many Citizens." The *San Francisco Chronicle* preferred to see more of a hoax than an airship. Diagnosing the airship sighting as the affliction of the staggers, the *Chronicle* wondered in print why the marvelous flying machine had neglected to pay its respects to San Francisco. The *Chronicle* suggested that the Bible pounders around town might be right when they loudly sermonized that the citizens of the Bay Babylon were Hell bound and that San Francisco was hardly the place any decent soul would venture near. All day, the *Chronicle* went on, shoppers and businessmen "glanced furtively" upward expecting to see a black oval and passed off such unusual interest in the sky as concern for the weather. A reporter down at Police headquarters had told the editor's desk to relate the fact that the local law enforcers characterized the sky light as a fake, but that the night squads planned to engage in some amateur astronomy. Meanwhile, said the *Chronicle*, a peddler had spent a profitable day selling cheap telescopes on Market Street carrying a sandwich board advertising: "Watch Out for Great New York Airship." The *Chronicle* even sought the advice of Professor George Davidson who saw the nonsense as the work of the imagination of

the "wild-eyed," holding that the reported helter-skelter arrangement of the rumored propellers on the airship, and the claim that people on the ground could clearly hear the conversation of the "Airship's" crew 1,000 ft. in the air, were the products of a "free-masonry of liars." He could expect, he snorted, that at least a thousand fools would be victims of eyestrain, having spent their evenings searching the heavens. Weather observer Hammon shared the professor's conclusions, annexing it with his own comment that only a true heavier-than-air craft could perform as the reported Sacramento "balloon."

Elsewhere editors shared the disbelief of Dr. Davidson. The *Stockton Daily* finally took notice of the ruckus with an editorial jibe at the imaginations of its northern neighbors, proposing that they were perhaps still under the influence of the "airy flights" of the recent Presidential campaign.

A letter to the editor was published in the *Sacramento Bee*, which entitled a complaint about the sky light tomfoolery with the words, "A Car Barn Conspiracy." And the *Bee's* editor began to be concerned about the reputation of Sacramento.

On the 20th, the *Chronicle's* airship enthusiasm had shrunk to the size of a small article on page thirteen titled, "More of a Hoax Than an Airship." Along with the paper's waning interest, someone on the staff made a careless error by referring to the Sacramento mystery object as a "black oval speck with outstretched wings." As for the mysterious wheels, they could be traced solely to the imagination of R.L. Lowry. However, one must keep in mind the state of technology in the late 1890's.

What happened to the "Airship"? No one could offer any information on that score. News value of the "hoax" was all but dead and public opinion was more or less convinced that the "Airship" was being kept aloft with the hot air of liars.

South of Sacramento, at a small town named Tagus, about ten miles west of Visalia, California, an incident occurred which seemed unassociated with the "Airship" stories up north. It seems that about two o'clock in the afternoon of November 20th, Mr. S.H. Rison claims to have seen what he believed to be neither an airship nor a balloon:

(It was)...more like a canvas sheet spread out floating in a north-easterly direction at about an altitude of two thousand feet. He was pumping water and a tramp came up and asked him for a drink. While drinking the water, he saw the

object floating in the air and called Mr. Rison's attention to it.

They watched until it was out of sight and could see nothing but the canvas. Mr. Rison had not heard nor read of the Airship at Sacramento.

On Saturday, the 21st, the *Chronicle* ventured to ask if the strange light over Sacramento might have been Diogenes' ghost, fruitlessly searching the town with his lantern--a jest with unflattering overtones for the citizens there. The *Sacramento Record-Union* tried to put the finishing touches to the airship debate by suggesting Ignis Fatuus (Swamp gas) and other jejune logic.

At five-thirty of the church-day afternoon, the sky was obscured with a dark, angry ceiling of clouds, resulting in a premature twilight, when "It" came out of the northwest, exhibiting a small searchlight flashing out in sharp relief against the solid, low-hanging overcast. "It" evidently was bent on a repeat of Tuesday's run. Only this time it was not going to skirt the city out where the Car Barn was located; instead, it headed directly for downtown Sacramento!

Mr. Isaac Gough, who happened to look up while walking near Second and "K" Streets, claims to have been the first to see the oncoming marvel. After a moment's hesitation to convince himself he was not seeing things, he dashed down the street shouting the alarm in all the stores, saloons, and hotels. People quickly spilled out into the cool evening air to see the amazing aerial prodigy with their own eyes. As the word spread like wildfire, the much-abused motor men raced their trolleys across the town yelling and clanging their car bells with all the zeal they could muster now that the opportunity to salvage their reputation unexpectedly presented itself.

Luckily, the enigma was in low gear and Jacob Zemansky, a cigar store proprietor, had a small telescope which he brought to bear. He gave the crowd around him a running account of a dark mass rising and falling which the bright light seemed to be attached. The staff of the "we'll-believe-it-when-we-see-it" *Record-Union*, hearing the uproar outside, charged through the front door of their office bug-eyed. Though the dark sky did not permit them to distinguish detail, they returned to their desks much impressed by the large, bright, evidently electric light carried along by the mystery ship.

Edward Carragher, owner of the Saddle Rock Restaurant, had a pair of field glasses which also disclosed a large,

dark body supporting the light. Dr. Amiel Morris, of Woodland, California, was called outside by Carragher, who pointed out what the doctor believed to be a ball of fire sailing along about six hundred feet in the air.

The Sacramento representative of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Colvin Brown, a leading debunker of the airship tales, was horrified at what was happening. During the twenty minute passage, the chagrined journalist grabbed an almanac and attempted to convince a nearby knot of people at Seventh and "K" Streets that the planet Venus must have slipped its orbit and was now coursing overhead. Making no impression on the excited observers, the never-say-die newspaperman went off in search of Sergeant Barwick, the head of the weather bureau, to have him explain the thing as a meteor.

The *Contra Costa Gazette*, which was published weekly at Martinez, California, later managed to obtain complete information for its November 28th issue. The "light," it seems, appeared in the northwest and headed slowly southwest. As the light reached the southern edge of Sacramento, the enigmatic visitor turned west and then south, after which it was absent for a period of time. Later the phenomenon made another appearance out of the west, finally to leave the skies over Sacramento on a northwest heading. The *Gazette* allowed that whatever it was, it permitted everyone an extended look.

Among the groups of witnesses that evening was a cluster composed of State officials and lawyers of repute, all of whom had fancied themselves above the hysteria of the *profanum vulgus*; they were among the most astonished. The Governor's executive secretary took in the sight with amazement, appraising the flicking mystery as definitely not a star (the sky was overcast anyway) or some breed of meteor, but undeniably an arc light. The aerial riddle moved with such quickness, he swore, that he had to keep shifting his position as the downtown buildings intervened. Dignified reticence kept him from endorsing the "Airship" theory, although he conceded that the traveling light was neither a phony nor a mistaken celestial body. District Attorney Frank D. Ryan stared at the spectacular sight and muttered aloud: "And there will be strange sights seen in the heavens. Wars and rumors of wars. I shall certainly attend church tomorrow, for this may be the advent of the millennium." And then feeling that perhaps he was becoming too serious, Ryan forced a laugh and turned to those around him and spoke in a lighter tone: "That thing is too deep for me. I don't understand it. It might be that aerial travel has been accomplished. It seems as strange and improbable as were the inventions of the telephone, phonograph and the electric power applied to streetcars."

The Regional Military Signal Corps Commander, also an on-looker, subscribed to the anti-hoax theory and suddenly re-

membered an inquiry two gentlemen had made at his office around four o'clock only that afternoon. A Mr. Haines and a Mr. Fleetheart both said that they had the good fortune to have been gazing upward when an object crossed high overhead in the azure and vanished in the northwest. The Signal Corps Lieutenant assured the two men that the dark, misty thing could only have been a cloud, but the miffed duo insisted that the rapidity of its passage, and the then clear sky precluded a prank by the weather. Now, an hour and a half later, a strange flying body had approached Sacramento from the northwest, same compass reading, so the officer informed the press that the public could well believe a real air vessel was flying about in the sky.

It will be remembered that our mystery light had disappeared to the south of Sacramento for a short spell. The *Livermore Herald* quoted two gentlemen who said they had a fantastic encounter near Knights Ferry in Stanislaus County (southeast of Sacramento) on the evening of the 22nd. While their buggy rattled across a bridge, something like a ball of fire caught their eye about a furlong ahead. The "fireball" rose slowly and then flew low for one hundred yards before beginning a shallow climb. The strange thing began its take-off in the direction of the perplexed witnesses, yet made a half circle maneuver to keep its distance. At two hundred yards, the men discerned a couple points of intense white light on the "nose" at right angles to the body and another on the rear as the red glowing object rushed by. The two watched open-mouthed, as the thing gathered speed and sped out of sight. In relating their story to the editor of the *Herald*, the gentlemen discounted the meteor possibility, remarking that the thing skimmed the surface of the ground. Nor did they want to give credence to the popular balloon rumors. However, they asked, if it were not an airship, what could it have been? They left the editor with statements that the aerial mystery must be shorn of the burlesque antics of irresponsible newspapermen, for they could vouch for the authenticity of the phenomenon. The witnesses were two prominent Methodist ministers, Rev. H. Copeland, and Rev. John Kirby.

One is also inclined to believe these men of the cloth; their description correlates with the one given by Nick White, editor of the *Sacramento Record-Union*: "... (I) at one time saw several smaller lights in addition to the larger light. When the direction [of the airship] changed, but one of the lights was visible."

Back in Sacramento on the 22nd, convinced and excited crowds of people chattered in their homes and hotel lobbies far into the night about the new wonder of science they had just seen. The saloons were doing a roaring business, as endless toasts were offered to the unknown inventor that had finally mastered the age-old dream of air travel. The Wed-

nesday edition of the San Francisco Call which had carried speculation on the possible workings of airships and had told of the Hoboken inventor, was hunted down all over town. When a copy was found it was passed around among friends but jealously guarded for that particular issue had suddenly become a collector's item. Even Walter Mallory, Sacramento's deputy sheriff, now stepped forward to be formally listed as an original Tuesday night witness of the visitant's passage over the Capitol. Mr. Mallory told everyone that he had just left the jail and was walking near Kearny and Broadway on Tuesday night when he happened to notice the unusual sight:

It was a strong white light, seemingly moving. I thought it was a balloon attached, at first, but on a closer observation I thought I recognized a dark body immediately over the light, somewhat of a different shape than a balloon. The more I observed it, the more puzzled I became as to what it was.

The papers the next day proclaimed that there could be no doubt as to the airship's reality, describing how suddenly and completely, skepticism had evaporated because of the display of the previous evening.

The "light" had not finished its nocturnal wanderings, for having left the Sacramento sky at approximately six o'clock, it appeared one hundred and fifty miles to the south-east. There, a brilliant shaft of light was seen over San Leandro, in the East Bay, south of Oakland, California. This "mysterious bark," as the *Oakland Tribune* termed it, rose and fell in an undulating fashion and was seen by Selby Yost, a motorman of the Alameda Electric Railway line (those Car Barn types again), as well as by passengers, C.H. Ellis, Miss Wilson and her unnamed friend. An unidentified youth had first spotted the "bark" and dashed to the nearest "expert" on the phenomenon—the local streetcar operator. A large dark shape was seen emitting a stream of light from its forward part as it floated rapidly toward the northwest and then turned in the direction of Hayward, where it vanished in the darkness. Mr. and Mrs. W.J. Rodda, strolling the street that evening, backed up the witnesses on the Alameda car, saying that they discerned a light in the sky about the same time. When reporters heard that the light was also supposed to have hovered over Saint Mary's College in Oakland, they went knocking on the door of the director of the college, Brother Walter. He said:

I gave no special thought to the light that was seen, because there was nothing to attract my attention to it until I heard some of the people about the college discussing the airship story. I found, upon talking to several students and members of the faculty, that none who observed the illumination

gave any thought to it except to surmise it was a meteor, although it moved rather slowly for that. Nothing, I learned, was visible except the light, and that was of such a character as to cause no special comment.

One would believe the unknown aerial navigator had made a direct transit from Sacramento to San Leandro, yet accounts have the aerial visitor leaving the capital city on a north-west bearing. Luckily, a telegraphic message, received by the Sacramento *Record-Union* office, reported that shortly after six the airship had flown twenty miles west near Folsom, the site of the new hydro-electric plant, moving along on a southern heading before pivoting to the southwestern tract into a bank of heavy clouds.

At eleven o'clock, Frank Everette, living in Santa Clara, south of Hayward, glimpsed the light bound for an unknown destination in the southeast.

The foregoing sightings do form a rough sequential scheme for the night of the twenty-second and make it appear unlikely that all of the witnesses had been inspired by telegraphic accounts, which lends credence to the actual physical character of the phenomenon.

Now that thousands had viewed the Airship over Sacramento, the suspense became unbearable as people waited for the genius responsible to land his craft and exhibit the machine for public inspection. Earlier in the month of November, a Bay Area attorney had received assurances from an inventor, who wished to remain anonymous, that the problems of air travel had indeed just been solved. George D. Collins, who had a law practice in San Francisco, let it leak out that a mysterious client of his evidently had been the one cruising among the clouds over the Capitol. Collins had been impressed with the claims of the unnamed improviser who said that \$100,000 and five years had gone into perfecting a 150 ft. machine equipped with canvas wings. Furthermore, this San Francisco member of the Bar declared that he had been "favored with a demonstration at a secret location." Up to the day of the 21st such claims received an indifferent reception, but the sensation at Sacramento on the 22nd caused the over-running of Collins' home and office by reporters and just plain snoopers pressing him for details. Backed into a corner, Collins said the aerial nocturnal wonder was hidden in a Berkeley barn during the daylight hours, and that a mysterious Dr. Benjamin of Ellis Street had something to do with the construction of the vehicle. That temporarily got everyone off Collins' back, and self-appointed detectives rushed to search Ellis Street and Berkeley to run down a lead. The case began to take on the flavor of a Victorian dime novel.

The November 23rd edition of the *Call* carried a front

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

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

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

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

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

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

added that: "...the *Examiner* sent a man to me today who said they had treated the whole affair as a huge joke, but found that the people were looking at it in a serious manner and they were ready to give the news received, regardless of how improbable it might look. He asked me to give a true account of the matter as far as I knew anything, but when I denied having seen the machine work or having ridden in it, he laughed, and said I was hedging."

Similarly, Collins snapped to a reporter from the *San Francisco Bulletin*: "Oh, now, what are the papers saying?" "Why, my airship grows larger and larger. It is expanding indefinitely. The first day I was its sponsor, today I am hedging it on behalf of its sponsor. Oh, I get lots of funny letters and see lots of funny people and I think they are likely to get worse. One man wants space for a peanut stand on the airship; another a barber shop."

Newspapers with Collins' remarks hadn't been on the street more than a few hours when something was spotted hovering high over Sixth and Broadway Streets in Oakland. Around seven o'clock that evening the sidewalks began to fill with crowds gawking upward. The light would hang motionless and then move around in different directions. Witnesses said it performed "evolutions" and blinked on and off. Reporters noted the more prominent persons among them for their readers: Colonel Garriety; George Hatton, the managing editor of the *Tribune*; city electrician Carleton; and Melvin Holmes, the ex-deputy Superintendent of Streets. The aerial rover, as the *Call* termed it, seemed to move to a position over San Francisco and then to return to the dark night sky over Oakland, where it disappeared for a while.

At that time, just south of Oakland, three men saw a powerful light southeast of them, moving toward the bay. One of the men, Mr. Hooson, made the observation that, "One peculiar feature of the light was the way it changed from time to time. It appears as if the operator of the searchlight was placing red and blue glass before the light occasionally so as to make the light more noticeable...no star has ever done that in the past and I am not ready to believe one is doing any such capers at present."

The *Call* quoted Deputy Constable Robinson's estimate that some five thousand people were watching when the mystery light reappeared over East Oakland:

It wheeled around over Alameda and then seemed to cross over San Leandro toward Piedmont. By the time it was headed for Piedmont, the excitement was intense. Proprietors and clerks came to the shop doors, bartenders left their pumps, ladies stopped walking and directed their attention heav-



VANQUISHED, THE SEA-SERPENT PREPARES TO DIE OF GRIEF.



ONE MAN WHO SAW IT.



THE AIRSHIP BUG.



INVENTED THE AIRSHIP.

Swinerton
Cartoons

enward. Cable and electric cars slacked up so that passengers might peep at the wonderous light. At the Golindo Hotel, the windows were thrown open and guests appeared with all manners of spyglasses and looked at the traveling light. Sometimes they declared that there were several smaller lights visible and they could see a dark object, but it was too high in the air for any of them to detect the nature of its wings or tail, if it had any.

Some time before midnight the light moved out of sight in a northeastern direction. A cause for confusion was the phantom's habit of popping up again and again all around the state.

Steering southwesterly at ten o'clock on the evening of the 23rd, the "light" dropped in on Stockton, California. The *Stockton Daily Independent* carried accounts of citizens seeing a bright, swift light moving through the rainy, black-curtained sky. From the suburb of Lathrop, a Mr. Saguinette telegraphed that the light was growing rapidly brighter as it approached out of the dark sky in the north. He said that he would try to signal the airship to land. A nightwatchman in the area later gave testimony that the cigar-shaped silhouette, with smoke issuing from both ends, dipped low near the building he was patrolling, announcing its arrival with two loud booms. Because the guard was speaking about the grounds of the Lathrop State Insane Asylum, it took a bit of nerve for him to tell the tale to the *Independent* the next morning. The *Independent* was presented with another engrossing yarn when a steamboat captain turned up to demand the local Justice of the Peace prepare an affidavit dealing with a phenomenon that had disturbed his sleep the previous night (the 24th). In the document the Captain stated that he had been enjoying the slumber of the just, when about midnight his Chinese cook busted into his cabin yelling excited Cantonese gibberish. The cook grabbed his arm and dragged him out on deck to see something. There in the night sky was a flying cigar-shaped thing, high-tailing along, surrounded by a "shifting" light and accompanied by dull thuds. The Chinese man was terrified at the sight and jumped ship at the very next mudbank. A local Stockton citizen then stepped forward with his account. The *Independent* printed:

W. Bruce Harrison of the Farmer's Union also saw the "thing." It was on Thanksgiving (the 26th) night and he declares that the brandy in his mince pies was not strong and there was no sherry in the plum pudding sauce. He saw the lights out to the northwest of the city over the tules. He says it might have been *ignus fatuus* (swamp gas), but it was not a lantern tied to a wild goose, nor a paper balloon, nor a star hidden by the mists. He does

not pretend to say that the thing was an airship nor that it had people aboard, but he does declare that it was something which he had never seen before and something which he could not explain and would like well to have someone else try to.

As a crowd gathered around the *Independent* office, more reports were tallied. One townsman offered to pass the hat to raise funds for a trusted and sober member of the community to spend the night perched atop the highest church steeple (with one hand placed over his heart). Still, the disbelieving staff of the *Independent* remained skeptical, preferring to treat the idea of machinery challenging the clouds as absurd "dreams of Verne."

Big city newspapers gave news of some scattered airship sighting over the thinly populated western part of San Francisco (at long last), but a low level swoop over Market Street never materialized. The *Chronicle* continued to report the plight of Attorney Collins, harried by squads of "Baker Street irregulars," reporters, and outright cranks. "Airship" Collins, as he was now known among his detractors, changed his tune completely and denied ever having any knowledge at all of a fully completed aircraft. The Washington D.C. Patent Office sent disclaimers in response to a flood of mail inquiring if Collins had applied there; furthermore, the patriarchs in residence at the Smithsonian Institute refused even to comment on atmospherical apparitions across the continent.

The *Sacramento Record-Union* continued to call for an explanation, insisting that a dark object carrying an arc of light was an undeniable fact, but that its nature, whether natural or supernatural, remained in doubt. Whether or not it was due to the continued publicity, a few Sacramentoans observed a third overflight at two o'clock in the morning of the 25th, with the object rushing away to the northwest.

Also, on the 25th, the *Chronicle*, feeling it was time to ring down the curtain on the airship operetta, devoted a number of lines to the continuous recanting and latest woes of Dr. Benjamin, now nicknamed "Aluminum Benjamin," and "Airship" Collins. Up and down Market Street reporters polled passers-by as to their opinion, the *Chronicle* men finding the planets Mars and Venus vying for first place as an explanation for the "light" in the sky that had been fooling impressionable individuals. Dr. Benjamin complained to the press that he had to move to escape the curious, and that eating in public restaurants proved impossible because throngs would quickly gather to stare, giggle, and gesture at the windows of the establishment. He heaved his mind would soon become unhinged.

Collins opened the Wednesday edition of a leading newspaper to page sixteen and saw the result of his contradiction

—a huge cartoon of himself puffing on an opium pipe!

Waning credibility in San Francisco meant little to the wandering enigma. A perusal of newspapers of various localities elsewhere had the airship still on the prowl. Some accounts were old as well as new. J.B. Loser, who ran the Analy Hotel in Sebastopol, California, claimed to have seen a dazzling flying light while enroute to the County seat around the 22nd. C.T. Musse, who had some fruit orchards near Bowman, Placer County, told friends that he had witnessed a singular vision four weeks previous (October 25th) when he beheld:

...the prettiest sight that his eyes ever viewed
...[which] appeared to be three very bright lights
moving horizontally and easterly at a rate of perhaps one hundred miles per hour.

Mr. A.H. Thompson concurred by testifying that he saw the same aerial display which he described as:

...Three very bright and large lights appearing about eight feet apart, the forward one as being larger and brighter than the rest, and moving horizontally eastward rapidly and gracefully...
[in sight for]several minutes.

Under the heading "Santa Rosa Excited," the San Francisco *Call* printed a news dispatch that said:

...at 7:30 [on the night of the 23rd], a light appeared to be moving in an easterly direction, occasionally disappearing entirely from view with a dull red glow, only to reappear more radiant after a few seconds. It was impossible to see anything beyond the light, owing to the distance.

Also from Santa Rosa was this report:

On Saturday night [the 21st], just before midnight, several reputable gentlemen of this city saw a light moving in a southwesterly direction. It was first observed about two miles southeast of town, just above the Sacramento Valley. It moved quite swiftly and disappeared in the direction of Alameda County. This is vouched for by Charles Winters, a well-known merchant, and William Rohrer of the firm Rohrer, Einhorner, and Company.

The San Francisco *Bulletin*, which had generally ignored the whole airship business, finally gave in and carried a dispatch from the northern section of California's great Central Valley:

At about 6:45 p.m. [on the 24th], a crowd which was standing on the corner of Walnut and Washington Streets [Red Bluff, California] noticed almost directly west of them what appeared to be a star; but which was moving rapidly in a southwesterly direction toward the mountains.

Dr. J.A. Owen, who was in the crowd, called to several others who were near, and the crowd watched the object till it went out of sight over the mountains. Mr. Chase says that it was going directly west, as part of the time when the ship was on this side of the mountains he could see the summit of the mountains above it, and he noticed that it was not going north or south, but appeared to be getting further away. Soon after the object had passed out of sight, a telegram from Chico was received stating that the object had passed over there a few minutes previous.

The *Chico Enterprise* confirmed the San Francisco *Bulletin's* account received from Red Bluff:

When first seen last evening, the light was a little south of this city and gradually traveled to the north with an irregular motion, finally disappearing behind the trees.

Parties who witnessed the strange sight from the Normal building [a small teacher's college now the site of Chico State College] perhaps had a better view of the phenomenon than anyone else in this city. To them the light appeared to be about the size of a ball, which threw rays of light from four or five different sides. From the elevated position on the Normal building, it could also be plainly seen that the mysterious object was moving, as though it were coming to the ground, and then rising high in the air, all the time pursuing its northward course.

The *Bulletin's* Red Bluff dispatch continued:

W.H. Huges, a carpenter, climbed to the top of the Red Bluff City Hall after it had disappeared and says that after making a few turns it came back over the mountains and a few minutes later again passed over this place. A telegram was a short time later received from Leesville saying that the strange craft had gone as far as that place...several people say not only was the light visible, but on the return trip, the body of the object was seen. The witnesses compared it in shape to an egg.

Again the *Chico Enterprise* confirmed the flight path of the mystery light. The light, or an object bearing a light, had retraced its flight path and flew by Chico once more:

...a bright light was seen west of this city, apparently at a distance of about six miles. The light was a whitish color, and had the appearance of an electric light.

Second Street was thronged with men, women, and children who had heard of the strange light, but had not before had the privilege of seeing it.

Elsewhere the *Placer Herald*, printed in Auburn, California, told its readers:

Several citizens...assert they discovered a brilliantly lighted barrel-shaped object passing over town Wednesday [November 25th]night. It was "away up in the sky" as they put it...[and] traveling very rapidly and had a sinuous motion up and down.

There were two items from the Hayward, California, area. A man named Webb told George Oakes, the editor of the *Hayward Journal* that the light was seen by him and his family over Hayward, traveling east toward Castro Valley, on Wednesday about 9:30. The spectacle must have been convincing, for a certain Fred Hoyt stated to Oakes that he probably saw, and chased on foot, the same leisurely floating enigma near Liedel Place close to San Lorenzo. Hoyt had fallen headlong into a ditch while running in pursuit. Still more. A story in the *Call* titled: "San Jose Startled," dated November 24th, stated:

(at)...eleven o'clock a bright light moving rapidly in the heavens toward Gilroy, was testified to by Eugene Barre, Dan Manning, and Jerre Sullivan, who are employees of the Sunset Telephone Company. About one hour afterward, others saw the same mysterious light moving northeasterly very rapidly, as if it were returning from the direction of Gilroy.

The airship business was also still making headlines in the Bay Area in regards to who was responsible for the construction of the craft. W.H.H. Hart, one-time Attorney General, convinced apparently by one of the dozens of local "airship inventors," stepped forward to claim that he was in secret communication with the mysterious genius, thus replacing Collins as the focus of attention. He said, "You know the idea is not now to get it patented, but to use it for war purposes [leveling Havana]."

Almost overlooked among the airship stories was a sad note from Oakland. John Griser had schemed since 1880 to perfect a contrivance for navigating the atmospheric sea. Laboring for years and existing in squalor, Griser's spare time and funds had gone into the building of a rickety, wood-framed airship behind his modest house near Lake Merritt. After a score of attempts to get his device off the ground, he believed he was close to success by the fall of 1896. When the newspapers began headlining stories of an airship already in the air, he went out to the shed in his backyard, took one last look, and then kicked sixteen years of work to kindling.

The *Call* at this time let the world know that four strong men had formed the "Mission Dolores Vigilance Committee" to track down and punish practical jokers who were using balloons. Apparently, this article was meant to intimidate the *Examiner*, which was sending aloft toy balloons to hoax airship believers and embarrass the *Call* and the *Chronicle*.

The *Call* had found the airship good front page stuff for over a week, with the lawyer, Collins and "Aluminum" Benjamin providing local excitement. Now Collins had washed his hands of the whole matter, and Dr. Benjamin had fled into hiding, leaving what personal effects he had behind in his apartment to be auctioned off. However, local curiosity still continued. As workers cleaning out Dr. Benjamin's apartment speculated on some copper dental fittings found, a few reporters still around, scribbled down the laborer's remarks that perhaps the metal was meant for bomb cases.

The San Francisco *Bulletin* and *Examiner* had been unenthusiastic all along and the *Chronicle* threw in the sponge on Wednesday, the 25th, when Collins recanted. The *Chronicle*, on the 25th, titled a special article: "Mars and Venus Under Suspicion," "Planets Stay Out Late at Night," "Airship Hunters Seek Them," and "Conjurer Collins Explains the Reasons Why He Didn't Do What He Did." And on the 26th, when the dispatch from Red Bluff and points north came in, the *Chronicle* carried it, but also included editorial opinion of a negative nature under the headings: "The Airship Craze Fast Fading Away" and "Star-gazing Has Ceased."

To keep some life in the *Call*'s new leadership, the paper needed two things: First of all, local airship news was essential; secondly, the *Call* needed an exclusive pipeline to the center of the mystery to keep the public plunking down their nickels for the latest revelation.

The ex-Attorney General, W.H.H. Hart, fortunately had come forward to replace Collins as a spokesman for another secretive airship inventor. A bearded, distinguished-looking gentleman, Mr. Hart, filled the bill as a convincing source of information. Or so it seemed. The mysterious airship

owner, Hart assured the public, would without a doubt demonstrate his craft in the daytime for all to see at some future date that he would soon announce.

The Call announced Hart as the new custodian of the aerial machine secrets on the 25th. On the 26th, the call carried a story that expanded on W.H.H. Hart's claims. The story was headlined: "The Mystery Again Seen at the Capitol." Without a close perusal, one would think the call was offering a new airship episode, however, the information was merely a retelling of the sighting over Sacramento the evening of November 22nd. The call had lacked the second ingredient vital to a front page treatment and that was some local aerial maneuvers by the elusive airship.

Luckily, the unidentified voyager of the air put in an appearance over San Jose at the south end of San Francisco Bay on Thanksgiving Eve, the 26th, in front of some excellent witnesses. The Call carefully gathered what information it had on hand and hit the streets on Sunday, the 29th, with a full page spread built around the San Jose sightings with statements by Professor Cross, Dean of the University of the Pacific, and Professor W.B. Worcester, two who saw the passage of the mystery light with their very own eyes. On the same page was a full statement over Hart's signature, again affirming the existence of an aerial invention, and stating that it would soon be perfected and dispatched to aid Cuban insurgents fighting their Spanish overlords.

A friend of Professor M.S. Cross, Professor H.B. Worcester, President of Garden City College, gave an account of what happened on the night of the 26th:

There was a small party at my house in East San Jose on Thanksgiving Day and it was prolonged until 7 o'clock in the evening. The company then retired to the front of the house to enjoy some music and I went into the rear yard to get a lantern. I happened to look up and saw several miles away, apparently about College Park or Santa Clara, a large light moving rapidly toward San Jose. In fact, I surmised it was the mysterious light which people had seen and which was said to be attached to an airship. In order to call the attention of those in the house to same, I ran around the house to save time and called out that the airship was passing. Everyone rushed out into the front yard.

Within the time it had taken me to run around the house the light had changed course from east to southwest and had traveled several miles and was in line with the southern portion of San Jose. The entire party saw the moving light go west, then turn south, and then change to the southeast.

We watched the light finally disappear behind the horizon.

When the ship turned to the southeast I could distinguish two lights, one behind the other. The single light first seen was about the size of an engine headlight and had more of the appearance of a large incandescent light than anything else. It was moving at the rate of from 60 to 100 miles an hour only a few moments before it had disappeared behind the horizon.

There were three things regarding the light which impressed me, viz.: its velocity, its regular movement and its apparent intelligent control...I have seen many fire-balloons, but the light I saw had none of the characteristics of such a toy. Its velocity was great for a balloon on such a still night and its movements too regular. The light was about 1500 feet high when first seen, and may have continued at that elevation, but it appeared to lower as it disappeared...the party consisted of Professor Cross, Dr. and Mrs. Allen, Colonel and Mrs. Moore, Miss Annie Chase, and Mrs. Worcester.

Professor Cross backed up his colleague:

I was visting at the residence of Professor Worcester and was called into the yard by him to view the airship. Whether it was in fact an airship, of course, I am not prepared to say, but certain it is there was a rapidly moving light in the heavens far too large and bright to be an electric street light. To my eye, it appeared to be about six inches in diameter. It was moving in a south-westerly direction and apparently at a high rate of speed.

The motion was not steady. It wavered and swerved, rising and falling slightly. The motion, however, was not that of a balloon. I have frequently watched balloons in the air, and the motion of this light was in no way suggestive of the manner in which I have always seen them behave. Moreover, it was a quiet night. What slight wind there was, I think, was from the south. Yet this light traveled rapidly in a southerly direction. As it left us, the light seemed to broaden. This suggested to us that there might be two lights which as the craft swung broadside to us, joined rays and gave the appearance of a wide streak of light.

Professor Worcester described the light's undulatory, bat-like flight, as suggestive of the "alternated flapping

of wings." That statement gave the *Call* the chance it needed, and it was not long before a farmer, John Bawl, was located to testify that he had discerned wings propelling the mystery object.

While the San Francisco papers continued to entertain their readers with personalities and gadgets, the mystery light began to shift its attentions elsewhere.

At Modesto, on the 26th, around 10:30 the cashier of the First National Bank, J.E. Ward, alerted his friends and neighbors to witness the passage of some flying lights thought to be the famous airship. Deputy Treasurer W.B. Bell, bookkeeper, C.P. Schafer, County Treasurer, W.A. Downer, and Armory L.J. Maddux joined Ward to see the lights float by at a great height in a northwesterly direction.

Also on the 27th, observers in and around the city of Woodland informed the *Woodland Daily Democrat* that bright and unusual lights were seen in the sky flying in a southwest direction around 10 P.M. Accounts mention that at first the display was believed to be a group of stars.

The strange light began to shift more and more to the south as telegraph dispatches followed its progress toward the Los Angeles area.

In Fresno, California, at 6:30 in the evening of the 25th, the airship was seen:

...traveling high up in the western horizon in a northwestern direction... [it was in sight from] two to seven minutes...[and appeared to be] several miles distant. It sailed toward the earth for a time and then took a sudden swoop upward. The light was not at all like a star, and its peculiar motion makes it altogether unlikely.

The light seems to be double as if there were one in front of the craft and one behind. The light was irregular as if it were being turned in different directions.

In Visalia, California, *The Weekly Delta* carried this about a sighting on the evening of the 26th:

...a number of people in the south part of town saw the vessel in the air and the sight created considerable excitement. E.O. Larkin testified that last [Tuesday] night about 7 o'clock Mrs. E.M. Jefferies came rushing over to his house exclaiming, "Come see the airship."

At first it seemed to be traveling a northwest-

erly course at an apparent speed of a train of cars in a straight line; then it moved upward, then downward, then to the right and again to the left, but all the time moving onward in its northwesterly course until it finally passed out of sight as if it had gone beyond the Coast Range mountains, and in the direction of San Francisco.

Sometimes on its course the light would disappear for a moment as if behind some object, but it would emerge again as bright as ever. The same night it appeared over Hanford [about 20 miles west of Visalia]...the *Hanford Sentinel* says that the aerial visitor was seen by Will Mathewson and Mort Hornbea [who]...saw a great light at an angle of 45 degrees in the heavens....The light was not a bull's eye lantern because it was too high up; it was not the north star because it was too low down; it was not a comet because it had no tail.

The light was surrounded by a halo the prismatic beams of which so dazzled the eyes of the beholders the true form of the ship was obscured. The light was a reddish hue. Its course seemed to be from Bald Mountain, northeast skirting the boundary line between Kings and Fresno Counties, thence in and across the counties of Fresno and Madera toward Mariposa where it was lost to view in the horizon.

In Bakersfield, California, on the night of the 26th:

Several parties declare they saw the airship about 8 o'clock...in the heavens over toward Tejon. Mr. Goode, the fruit vender, was one of the parties. He declares that all he could see was a monster red looking light, while the others who saw it claim that something encased the light. Mr. Goode says his eyes are bad and in consequence he could not see as well as the others.

In Bakersfield again on the night of the 27th:

A. Hughes of Hughes Drug Store saw something against the western sky in the early evening.... "It looked like a great moving white looking light similar to a street electric light; not very high moving slowly south." Mrs. Webster said that on Thanksgiving [the 26th] she was driving home from Poso and saw it...."show blue and white lights. Seen through a telescope it looked like a balloon in construction as it glided slowly toward the south."

W.H. Sanborn and Robert Blodge confirmed the presence of something odd in the sky over the Bakersfield area on the night of the 27th, when they told the local paper. The *Daily Californian* printed the following account:

[They]...saw the mysterious light low in the southwestern heavens 7:30 Friday while looking out the back of McKelvery's store. They declared it moved out of sight in a short space of time and it also had a descending and ascending or undulatory movement. It was a very large, bright light. These gentlemen do not claim that it was an airship, but a mysterious moving light, and that's all.

A singular report among the last sightings around the state was that of the episode at Tulare, California, on November 29, 1896:

Over one hundred Tulareans positively assert that they saw the now famous airship that has been wandering around in different sections of the state. Those who saw it say it first appeared just west of town last evening about 7 o'clock, between the residences of E.T. Cooper and Mrs. C. Castle. It came down quite a distance, then went up and took a straight shot for Hanford [westward]. Red, white, and blue lights were seen in succession, but no part of the ship was seen. They seemed to have perfect control of the ship, as they moved it around in many different directions. It was seen from every section of the city, and many people watched it as long as it was in sight [fifteen witnesses named in the news account.]

About 35 miles south of Tulare the same night, there came this account:

Reports came from Delano that the airship was seen there Sunday night. The whole population turned out to gaze at the heavenly visitor and there is abundant assurance that if not a real airship, there is still something mysterious floating in the air.

The San Francisco *Call* notified citizens in northern California on December 1st, that the skies over Los Angeles had finally been visited. It seems that on November 30th:

...strange lights made rapid flights over the San Fernando Valley, in Los Angeles County. Last night the people of Los Angeles City were treated to the strange sight. Two fixed lights passed over the city at a high rate of speed and at a very

great distance from the earth. A third light that appeared to have all the characteristics of a searchlight in the hands of a skillful manipulator was also seen in conjunction with the two fixed lights. These passed according to reports from the northwest to the southeast, and two hours later they reappeared, passing from the southeast to the northwest.

The *Times* had ignored reports of strange flying lights in the air over Los Angeles on Friday, November 27th, but when there were more on the 30th, the paper published the previous accounts:

Last Friday evening numerous citizens of Los Angeles discovered a bright light in the heavens near the southern horizon. It was first observed about 6 o'clock and attracted the attention of many people who were on their way home. The most intelligent account of this particular appearance of the phenomenon is that given by Capt. Frank B. Taylor, United States Army, North Key West Street. About 6:30 Friday evening, Capt. Taylor was called out by a neighbor and his attention was directed to the light which was then near the horizon. To the naked eye the object seemed like a fixed star, although no scintillation was perceptible. Capt. Taylor brought out a field glass and made a careful observation. In describing the light as it appeared through the glass, he said: "The Light was apparent at a considerable distance perhaps fifteen or twenty miles through the glass it appeared pear-shaped or like a soap bubble when suspended from the pipe with the apex tilted a little to the left. About one fifth of the surface, on the left hand side, was dark and the remainder was very bright and covered at regular intervals with still more brilliant spots. It was up about 20 or 25 degrees in the heavens and appeared to be moving away in a southwesterly direction. I watched it through the glass for about ten or fifteen minutes. It finally disappeared apparently going toward the ocean. I did not think it was an airship. It seemed probable that it was some novel affair sent up by someone to impose on people. It might have been a fire balloon, although it hardly had that appearance. I could not see any indication of a car or any other attachment, though if there were anything of the kind, it probably would not have been visible.

On November 30, persons at Redlands, California claimed to have been the last to catch a glimpse of the brilliant

sky light that Monday eve. And at the other extreme end of the state, two gentlemen, E.G. Case, grand chief ranger of the Ancient Order of Foresters of the Pacific, and William Held, official stenographer of the local superior court of Ukiah, California, were on their way to Potter Valley, twenty miles north of Ukiah, when they encountered the "airship." About two miles from their destination at about 7:30 p.m., on November 28th, the "airship" passed so close to the double team of horses that the animals became panicky. The two men telephoned Ukiah from Held, California, with a short message that they had seen the "aerial wonder." They said it looked cigar-shaped.

A news dispatch from Anderson, California, told of something spotted near there on the 28th, about an hour after the report near Potter Valley:

...the aerial monster passed over Anderson last evening about 20 minutes past 8. Her citizens claim to have seen the stranger in its flight.

It was first observed from the corner of East Center and Ferry Streets by a reputable citizen noticing a peculiar light to the west. He called the attention of others to the seeming phenomenon, and quite a crowd collected. It was generally conceded that this must be the long-talked-of airship. Its course was south to west, and the lights soon disappeared in the south. The light was large and brilliant and seemed to move in a steady course.

The reports of regular flights over California cities by an airship had an unnerving effect on a Mr. H.W. Herne of Portland, Oregon. A loner and an eccentric, Mr. Herne became depressed at the frequent reports of a successful airship. According to neighbors, Herne "became violently excited over the airship stories and declared one of his ideas was stolen in its makeup." Barricading himself in his home and refusing food, the brooding recluse was finally hauled off to the insane asylum by authorities.

The San Francisco *Call* squeezed a final drop of ink out of the controversy by attacking its arch rival, Randolph Heart's *Examiner*, maintaining that the two Hearst papers, one on the west coast and the other on the east coast, had engaged in a two-faced game. The *Call* knew Hearst tightly controlled the editorial policies of both the *Examiner* and the *New York Journal*, and it appeared the airship business had been enlisted to do battle in the young journalist's attempts to draw readers away from other newspapers. Hearst's San Francisco paper, the *Examiner*, warred against the *Call*'s big headlines about mysterious airships by vigorously blaming the aerial visions on people who were under

the spell of the Roman god Bacchus, while Hearst's New York *Journal* back east excited New Yorkers with sensational tales of powered balloons zipping all over California. Leaving nothing to chance, Hearst had artists on the *Journal's* staff sketch picturesque impressions of the airship right down to the wiring on the rudders. The *Call* printed selected excerpts from both Hearst papers for side by side comparisons. Though the California airship was being widely publicized, only one sighting of something similar was made outside of California.

On November 24, 1896 the following occurred in the State of Washington:

Last Tuesday night the operator of the airship is believed to have visited and explored the top of Mount Tacoma (Rainier). Tuesday night druggist George St. John closed his drugstore on Pacific Avenue at 11:30 and went home. He reached his residence on Tacoma Avenue fifteen minutes later and soon retired. It was a beautiful moonlight night and the window curtains a few feet away from the bed were up.

Just about 12 o'clock Mrs. St. John saw the strange light and called her husband's attention to it. It appeared to be high up in the heavens east of Mount Tacoma and moving in a southeasterly direction. The distance from Tacoma must have been at least fifty miles. They watched the heavenly stranger over an hour. They first saw it through a north window in their room but after a while they could see it through a window several feet further south without having changed their positions. This proves that the airship traveled a long distance during the time they were watching it.

Mr. St. John says that vari-colored lights were shot forth in all directions. They were emitted from each end and both sides. Sometimes the light at one end or one side would be cut off. Some of the lights were white, others red, blue and green. These four sides were distinctly visible. When all the lights were shining the aerial monster seemed incased in a brilliant glow, having the appearance of a powerful electric searchlight. The size then seemed to be that of an arc light. It flashed often sending the various colored rays shooting out from the center in every direction like spokes in the hub of a wheel. Sometimes it had a waving motion and swayed back and forth in its course, being varied by frequent dartings.

The moonlight was not strong enough to permit

a distinct view of Mount Tacoma, but the airship was seen to approach the neighborhood of the mountains at what seemed to be its exact height, and dart hither and thither as if an exploration was in progress.

The identity of the "airship," mysterious skylight, or whatever it was, remains a mystery. Though nearly everyone in the year 1896 insisted that the mystery object was either a hoax, a natural phenomenon, or an actual flying machine of some timid inventor, one gentleman of that Victorian age, a man we know only by his initials "W.A.," conducted his own inquiry into the airship riddle and then wrote the editor of his local paper about the results of his personal investigation. Here is his singular conclusion, one that no one else thought to propose. Mr. "W.A." penned:

...there is nothing improbable about our recent Airship visitor. The only doubt that can arise is as to the origin of this particular messenger.

In my investigations of this subject it would seem that this visitor is from our neighboring planet Mars. We know from the evidence of scientists and astronomers that Mars is many millions of years older than this Earth. It is but reasonable to consider that the inhabitants of our planetary neighbor are more advanced in the sciences and have more knowledge of the use of great scientific power than the denizens of the Earth. Many thousands of years of experience have given them the perfection of invention which would appear marvelous to our making.

The Lord Commissioner of Mars had evidently sent one of his exploring expeditions to the younger but larger world.

The Airships are constructed of the lightest and strongest fabrics and the machinery is of the most perfect electrical work.

Aluminum and glass hardened by the same chemical principles that form diamonds contribute the chief material of their most perfect Airships.

When in use these vessels at a distance have the appearance of a ball of fire being operated by the electric current generated on such vessels.

The speed of our Martian ships is very great and can be registered to the rapidity of a thousand miles a second.

In fact, with the Martian ships space is almost annihilated. These aerial craft can so adopt their

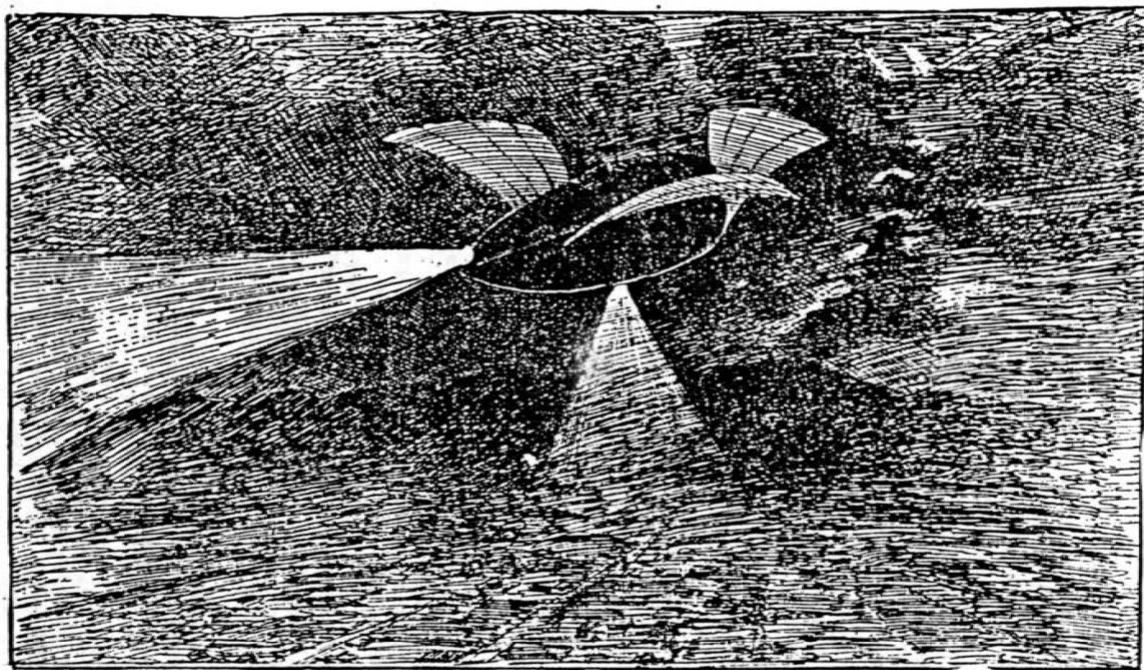
course that when they desire to rest they can anchor within certain degrees of latitude and wait for the revolution of the Earth, for resistance to bring any particular locality desired much nearer then without the necessity of any aerial navigation.

On Mars, all the great electrical power is converted by the waves of the ocean, thus making electricity a common utility for everything necessary for the arts, science, manufacturing, transportation, etc.

It is supposed that the Lord Commissioner of Mars is sending out this Airship seeking to establish at least telegraphic or telephone communication between the planets.

It is probable that in a short time his ambassador will make a call on the President. Perhaps they are delaying until McKinley assumes the administration of affairs on the theory there may be more advanced ideas in his head.

The End



The Great Airship That Is Startling the People of Many Cities. Drawn From
Descriptions of the Inventor's Attorney, George D. Collins.

SAW THE MYSTIC FLYING LIGHT

Oaklanders Who Believe
an Airship Hovered
Over Them.

Say That They Saw a Dark
Body Above the
Gleam.

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

OAKLAND OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO CALL,
908 Broadway, Nov. 24.

Some one must be operating an airship in this portion of the State. Twice within the past six weeks it has been seen by reliable residents of Oakland, and on each occasion it has presented the same appearance.

Six weeks ago a young lady was riding a wheel on Telegraph avenue, when she saw a strange-looking object in the sky. It

College, it appeared to descend gradually, but regularly, as though under control, and it disappeared in the direction of San Francisco. Of course too dark and the machine was away to distinguish anything like or to bear any sounds such as we in Sacramento. But there is no mind that it was an airship with electric lights and well man.

Another witness to the visit of ship is Selby Yost, a motorman on the Piedmont road and a member of the Oakland Guard. He was a little behind and was taking his car toward the trying to recover the few minutes behind. As he passed Thirtieth little boy stood in the road and "Jee whiz, what's that?" The pilot heard it and immediately looked direction in the sky toward which was pointing. They had no idea of seeing the airship.

"When I looked ahead," said to-day, "I was mystified, and I well confess I was. I didn't like to myself that I had suddenly gone but really for a moment I did my senses had deserted me. There were all reached out to look over those inside wanted to see what the side were gazing at; so when questioned me to stop the car that it all took I was practically forced them. They got out in the looked up at the airship, the surprised crowd I ever saw in my life it was, sure enough, right over traveling on at a good rate, with blazing away, and the most looking thing I ever saw."

"Airship or anything else, it most remarkable-looking object, at a loss now to convince myself actually saw it. It was altogether wonderful sight, and nobody could made me believe that I would such a thing. It was perfectly not only I but all the passing and watched it till it disappeared. I think it must have landed."



The Mysterious Flying Light That Hovered Over St. Mary's College, Oakland, and Then Started for San Francisco. It Is Exactly Like That Described by Sacramentoans, and Similar to the Cut Published a Few Days Ago in "The Call" From a Description Furnished by One Who Saw It.



MR. HUNTINGTON'S VIEW OF THE AERIAL FLIGHT

EVOLUTIONS IN MIDAIR.

Peculiar Performance of the Aerial Visitor Above Oakland.

OAKLAND, Cal., Nov. 24.—Oakland was beside itself to-night with excitement. For over two hours a large light attached to something was seen cruising over the city, and back again. The report was started was to be seen, and people began to congregate in the

SANTA ROSA EXCITED.

People Willing to Swear the Light

Had Huge

SANTA ROSA, Cal.,

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Additions for the second edition:

Airship sightings nearly ceased with the onset of the inclement weather of Winter, nonetheless during this period something of significance did take place. The excitement moved east. The California excitement of 1896 became, in 1897, the excitement of America's heartland.

Reports:

"MERCED, Cal., Dec. 1 --Merced was treated to a visit last night by the airship that has been provoking so much discussion. A bright, red light appeared in the sky to the west of the town about 8:15 o'clock. Observers at first thought that it was a particularly bright star, but as they watched it the light grew larger and brighter and other lights showed themselves on the mysterious visitors. It came in from the west, circled to the north over the town, and seemed to rest in its flight about over the center of the business portion of Merced.

"Among the observers of the phenomenon were T.M. Edmuns (the Wells-Fargo agent) and J.B. Olcese (a prominent Merced merchant). Mr. Olcese noticed it as he was on his road home, and called the members of a dramatic club, who were rehearsing in the opera-house, to see the lights. At that time the flying wonder was headed for the north and was rapidly passing out of sight, the watchers keeping it in sight until it had grown to be quite a small speck in the heavens.

"Some skeptics scouted the idea of its being an airship, and maintained that it was a large star, but the light was too large and brilliant for that. Others stoutly declared that it was a balloon sent up by some practical joker, but the light was visible too long for such an explanation. What served to attract the greatest amount of attention was the peculiar quality of the light, which did not present the characteristics of the ordinary electric light or of the gas lights that people are accustomed to. Many who were inclined to be skeptical beforehand are now firm believers in the existence of this wonderful and mysterious visitant." 1.

"RENO, Nev., Dec. 3 --Reno has been favored with a visit of the much-talked-of San Francisco airship, unless some of the reputed citizens have wheels in their heads.

"A strange light was visible floating about in the western heavens last evening about 7 o'clock, and was seen by several gentlemen of unquested integrity.

"Prof. N.E. Wilson, professor of Chemistry, at the University Experiment Station, saw a strange light over the Mackey and Fair mountain southwest of town, and to use Prof. Wilson's own language: 'A light as large as an electric arc light, I saw over the Hackey and Fair mountain last night about 7 o'clock; it seemed to be moving toward town and shortly disappeared over the mountain.'

"'I would not like to say,' said Prof. Wilson, 'that it was an airship, but it was something very phenomenal. My wife saw it at the same time as I did.'" 2.

About 160 mileseast of Reno at Battle Mountain came this report on December 12th:

"A strange light appeared above the horizon almost north of here the other evening and traveling in a westerly direction and after some time disappeared from sight. It was not a meteor because it raised too straight from the earth, and it was not a lightening bug for this is not the right time of year, but in all probability it might have been the new comet discovered by the Lick Observatory. If it was neither of these what could it have been? Dear people we do not want to unstring your nerves but it must have an 'airship.'" 3.

About 60 miles further east at the Nevada city of Elko came this report on December 12th:

"Editor Booher of Elko also seems to 'have 'em' in a mild form. He says: 'About 50 people of Elko were out watching a 'strange light' the other evening. The light seemed to rise above the horizon almost north of here and after rising far into the air traveled in a westerly direction and in about two hours disappeared in the west. It was not a meteor they say, for it raised too straight from the earth, and it was not a lightening bug for this is not the right time of year. It was not a bullseye lantern because it was too high up, and it couldn't have been a balloon because it traveled too steady and fast and remained visible too long. What was it then? Good people we do not want to startle you, but it must have been an 'airship'.'" 4.

The above mentioned report was the only one until February, 1897, when Nebraskans began to sight strange lights in the eastern part of the state. From that point on, the airship excitement really took off with reports coming in a wide area, from states like: Kansas, Texas, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, and Indiana.

While the trend was west to east, a few scattered stories appeared in the eastern press as early as December 1896 (outside New York) which probably set the stage for the big flap that peaked in April, 1897. An example:

"MILWAUKEE, Wis., Dec. 6 --(Special) --Milwaukee tonight has a sensation similar to that enjoyed by Sacramento two weeks ago. Its people, or at least a considerable portion of them, believe that they saw a flying machine floating over the bay about 4 o'clock this afternoon.

"It was first sighted by Herman Nunnemacher, a millionaire who boards at the hotel. He was seated in his room at the Pfister Hotel, and happened to look out over the lake, he was astounded to see what looked like a flying machine floating over the bay high in the air and moving up against the wind. He happened to have a field glass handy, and looking through the same saw something that appeared to him to be a man working the wings of the air craft.

"Satisfied that it really was a flying machine he put on his hat and rushed out. When he got on the street he could no longer see it and came back, supposing it had passed over the city on the way to the north pole. Ten minutes later he saw it again. This time he was sure and dashing down to the lobby of the hotel he shouted: 'It is here again. It is a flying machine.'

INDEX

A

Airship File. p.31.
Alameda, Calif. p.12.
Allen, Dr. (?). p.20.
Anderson, Calif. p.25.
Auburn, Calif. p.17.

B

Bakersfield, Calif. pp.22-23.
Barre, Eugene. p.17.
Barwick, Sgt. p.7.
Battle Mountain, Nev. p.29.
Bell, W.B. p.21.
Benjamin, Dr. (?). pp.10,14,18.
Berkeley, Calif. p.10.
Blodge, Robert. p.23.
Booher, Mr. (?). p.30.
Briggs, F.E. p.4.
Brown, Colvin. p.7.
Bullard, Thomas E. p.31.
Bulletin, San Francisco. pp.12,15-16,18.

C

Call, San Francisco. pp.3,9,11,15,17-19,21,23,25-26.
Carleton, Mr. (?). p.12.
Carragher, Edward. pp.6-7.
Case, E.G. p.25.
Castro Valley, Calif. p.17.
Caverly, E. p.3.
Central Electric Street Railway. p.11.
Chase, Mr. (?). p.16.
Chase, Annie. p.20.
Chico, Calif. pp.16-17.
Chico Enterprise pp.16-17.
Collins, George D. pp.10-12,14,17-18.
Comet. p.1.
Contra Costa Gazette. p.7.
Convers, H.S. p.32.
Cooper, E.T. p.23.
Copeland, Rev. H. p.8.
Cross, Prof. M.S. pp.19-20.
Cuba. p.19.
Curl, R.L. p.4.

D

Daily California, Bakersfield. p.23.

Dates:

29 March 93. p.32.
31 March 93. p.32.
20 September 96. p.1.
21 September 96. p.1.
25 October 96. p.15.
17 November 96. pp.1-3.
18 November 96. p.3.
19 November 96. pp.3-4.
20 November 96. pp.4-5.
21 November 96. pp.6,10,15.
22 November 96. pp.8,10,15,19.
23 November 96. pp.10-11,13,15.
24 November 96. pp.11,13,16-17,26.
25 November 96. pp.14,17-19,21.
26 November 96. pp.13,18,21-22.
27 November 96. pp.21-24.
28 November 96. pp.7,25.
29 November 96. pp.19,23.
30 November 96. pp.23-24.
1 December 96. pp.23,29,31.
3 December 96. p.29.
6 December 96. p.30.
12 December 96. pp.29-30.
1897. p.29.
February 1897. p.30.
April 1897. p.30.
1982. p.31.
1983. p.31.
Davidson, Prof. George. p.4.
Delano, Calif. p.23.
De Long, T.P. p.4.
Downer, W.A. p.21.

E

Edmunds, T.M. p.29.
Elko, Nev. p.30.
Ellis, C.H. p.9.
Everette, Frank. p.10.
Examiner, San Francisco. pp.11-12,18,25.

F

Fleetheart, Mr.(?). p.8.
Fresno, Calif. pp.21-22.

G

Garden City College. p.19.

Garriety, Col. (?). p.12.
Gilroy, Calif. p.17.
Goode, Mr. (?). p.22.
Gough, Isaac. p.6.
Griser, John. p.18.

H

Haines, Mr. (?). p.8.
Hanford, Calif. p.22.
Hanford Sentinel. p.22.
Harrison, Bruce W. p.13.
Hart, W.H.H. p.17-19.
Hatton, George. p.12.
Havana, Cuba. p.17.
Hayward, Calif. pp.10,17.
Hayward Journal. p.17.
Hearst, William Randolph. pp.11,25.
Held, William. p.25.
Herne, H.W. p.25.
Hoboken, N.Y. p.2.
Holmes, Melvin. p.12.
Hooson, Mr. (?). p.12.
Hornbea, Mort. p.22.
Hoyt, Fred. p.17.
Hughes, A. p.22.
Huges, W.H. p.16.

I

Illinois. p.30.
Indiana. p.30.
Iowa. p.30.

J

Jefferies, E.M. p.21.
Journal-American, New York. p.11.

K

Kansas. p.30.
Kirby, Rev. John. p.8.
Knights Ferry, Calif. p.8.

L

Larkin, E.O. p.21.
Lathrop, Calif. p.13.
Leesville, Calif. p.16.
Lick Observatory, Calif. p.1.
Livermore Herald, Livermore, Calif.
p.8.
Los Angeles, Calif. pp.21,23-24.
Loser, J.B. p.15.
Lowry, R.L. pp.2,4-5.
Lusk, Charles. p.1.

M

Maddux, L.J. p.21.
Madera, Calif. p.22.
Mallory, Walter. p.9.
Manning, Dan. p.17.
Mars. pp.18,27-28.
Martinez, Calif. p.7.
Mathewson, Will. p.22.
Mc Kinley, President William. p.28.
Merced, Calif. pp.29,31.
Milwaukee, Wis. p.30.
Modesto, Calif. p.21.
Moore, Col. (?). p.20.
Morris, Dr. Amiel. p.7.
Mt. Hamilton, Calif. p.1.
Mt. Tacoma, Washington. pp.26-27.
Musse, C.T. p.15.

N

Nebraska. p.30.
New York, N.Y. pp.2,30.
New York Journal. pp.25-26.
Nunnemacher, Herman. p.30.

O

Oak Park, Calif. p.3.
Oakes, George. p.17.
Oakland, Calif. pp.9,12,18.
Oakland Tribune. p.9.
Olcese, J.B. p.29.
Owen, Dr. J.A. p.16.

P

Perrins, Prof. (?). p.1.
Piedmont, Calif. p.12.
Placer Herald. p.17.
Portland, Ore. p.25.
Potter Valley, Calif. p.25.

Q

R

Record-Union, Sacramento. pp.3-4,6,
8,10,14.
Red Bluff, pp.16,18.
Redlands, Calif. p.24.
Reno, Nev. p.29.
Rison, S.H. pp.5-6.
Robinson, Deputy Constable (?). p.12.
Rodda, W.J. p.9.
Rohrer, Williams. p.15.
Ryan, Frank D. p.7.

S

Sacramento, Calif. pp.1-2,6,8,10,19.

Sacramento Bee. pp.3,5.
Saddle Rock Restaurant. p.6.
Saguinette, Mr. (?). p.13.
Saint Mary's College. pp.9,11.
Sanborn, W.H. p.23.
San Francisco, Calif. pp.1,4,15,23,32.
San Francisco Chronicle. pp.4,6-7,11, 14,18.
San Jose, Calif. pp.1,19.
San Leandro, Calif. pp.9,12.
San Lorenzo, Calif. p.17.
San Rafael, Calif. p.11.
Santa Clara, Calif. pp.10,19.
Santa Rosa, Calif. p.15.
Schafer, C.P. p.21.
Scott, George. p.2.
Seal Rocks. p.1.
Sebastopol, Calif. p.15.
Shelly, M.F. p.4.
Smithsonian. p.14.
Snider, Mr. (?). pp.2-3.
South Dakota. p.30.
St. John, George. p.26.
Stockton, Calif. p.13.
Stockton Daily Independent. pp.5,13-14.
Sullivan, Jerre. p.17.
Sutro, (?), Mayor of San Francisco. p.1.
Swift, Prof. (?). p.1.
Swinerton, Cartoonist James. p.11.

T

Tagus, Cali. p.5.
Taylor, Capt. Frank B. p.24.
Tejon, Calif. p.22.
Texas. p.30.
Thompson, A.H. p.15.
Tiffany, Superintendent (?). p.11.
Times, Los Angeles. p.24.
Tulare, Calif. p.23.

U

Ukiah, Calif. p.25.

V

Venus. p.18.
Visalia, Calif. pp.5,21-22.
Vogel, J.H. p.2.

W

"W.A.," Mr. (?). p.27.
Walter, Brother (?). p.9.
Ward, J.E. p.21.

Washington D.C. Patent Office. p.14.
Washington Post, Washington D.C. p.32.
Webb, Mr. (?). p.17.
Webster, Mrs. (?). p.22.
White, Nick. p.8.
Wilson, Miss (?). p.9.
Wilson, Prof. p.29.
Winters, Charles. p.15.
Woodland, Calif. pp.7,21,96.
Woodland Daily Democrat. p.21.
Worcester, Prof. W.B. p.19-20.

X

Y

Yost, Selby. p.9.

Z

Zemansky, Iacob. p.6.