

## Airship Sighting

Mysterious lights were seen moving over San Francisco Bay on the night of November 23, 1896. Witnesses claimed that the lights belonged to an "airship" - a machine that had not yet been invented. The event was described in several contemporary newspaper articles, including this statement made by Adolph Sutro (paraphrased from a *San Francisco Call Bulletin* article):

"When I reached home one evening ... I found [my employees] in a great state of excitement, and when I inquired the reason of the agitation they told me of a strange spectacle they had witnessed a short time before. They told me that shortly after dark they had seen a strange, brilliant light coming in from the direction of the sea... As it approached the heights they saw that it was not over 500 feet above the ocean and was moving swiftly and with a slightly undulating motion...

"They watched it until it disappeared in the direction of the City and saw it turn toward the north just before it passed from view... I certainly think that some shrewd inventor has solved the problem of aerial navigation and that we will hear all about it within a short time. It would not be any more wonderful than the invention of the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph or the X ray, and it would seem that some one must hit on the proper appliances when so many smart men have been working on the problem." (24 November 1896)

Many similar "airship" sightings were reported across the world during the 1880s and 1890s.



**The San Francisco Call**  
VOLUME LXXX.—NO. 177. SAN FRANCISCO, TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 24 1896.

**THE APPARITION OF THE AIR.**  
Oaklanders Say Its Frame Was Like the Body of a Bird.

**ATTORNEY COLLINS' TALE SUPPORTED.**  
Another Lawyer Who Was Informed of the Alighting of the Flier.

**MOVING LIGHTS ONCE MORE MYSTIFY THIS CITY.**  
Dr. Benjamin Disclaims the Invention—Mayor Sutro's Testimony and That of Other Reputable Citizens Offered.

IRVING M. SCOTT—"An airship? Of course not. That's the last cruiser I bid for and lost. I've been wondering ever since what became of it."

Headline and illustration from the 24 November 1896 *San Francisco Call Bulletin* front-page article about the "airship" sighting.