

In 1956, the Canadian Fireball Procession became the target of an intensive study by the American Meteor Society as reported in *Meteoritics*. Its investigator, Alexander D. Mebane, was extremely thorough in his 18-month analysis. He corresponded with 615 newspapers in towns located along the Chant Trace, requesting information from their files about events on the night of February 9 and the early morning of February 10, 1918. He interviewed weather bureaus in seven states, inquiring into any unusual observations on that date, questioned local historians and librarians, and advertised in Pennsylvania and New Jersey newspapers for personal accounts of still-living witnesses.

Although overcast skies limited visibility that night, and although results of Mebane's "extensive canvass were somewhat meager," he did succeed in multiplying the marvels of February 9 and 10, reporting that "... a certain amount of new evidence has been obtained, which, if it does nothing else, at least definitely serves to rule out ... [any] spaceship interpretation," which had been proposed over the years by Charles Fort, among others.

Back in 1913, without the precedent of rocket-boosters, space capsules, UFOs, flying saucers, or decaying satellites, several witnesses *did* liken the objects to man-made vehicles. One astronomer compared the Procession to "an express, lighted at night ... The lights were at different points, one in front, and a rear light, then a succession of lights in the tail." At Marshall, Michigan, one couple mentioned a plane. According to the *Marshall Chronicle*, "Miss Vera Murray and Carl Shnaitman, when returning to the city last night, reported that they had seen an airship going east."

Although Professor Chant's official opinion espoused natural, free-falling bodies, he too specifically mentioned airships: "To most observers the outstanding feature of the phenomenon was the slow majestic motion of the bodies; and ... the perfect formation which they retained. Many compared them to a fleet of airships, with lights on either side and forward and aft; but airmen will have to practice many years before they will be able to preserve such perfect order. ..."

According to Mebane, the Procession consisted of free-falling bodies, glowing incandescent from air friction: "members of clusters of closely related fragments originating from the partial or complete disruption of larger bodies." He hitched his conclusion to the personal interpretations of his witnesses. "None of those who saw the Procession at close range

described it as other than meteoritic in character ... [The] more favorably placed observers unanimously recognized the lights as incandescent meteorites. ..." Mebane disregarded the airship explanation by the Marshall, Michigan, newspaper because of the observers' extreme distance from the Chant Trace.

Later, NASA drew liberally upon Mebane's findings in formulating the theory about a large incandescent asteroid, spewing droplets from its molten surface, as a rationale for the February 9 phenomenon.

During his intensive investigation, however, Mebane made an astonishing discovery, of which he is rightfully proud. Ironically, it seems to testify *against* his own evidence for incandescent meteorites. He learned that there were not only one or two, but rather *three* separate sections to the Canadian Fireball Procession. The first appeared above the Great Lakes region about 9:00 P.M., February 9; the second passed almost unnoticed in the sleepy morning hours of February 10; the third appeared that afternoon.

Mebane is most definite, almost exuberant, about his discovery of the unreported appearance of the follow-up group of fireballs. As reported in *Journal of Meteoritics* Vol. 1, No. 4, 1956, "This fantastic spectacle, a 'Procession' in its fullest glory, was seen directly on the Chant Trace, but some 5 hours later than expected."

Still-living witnesses recalled for Mebane details of the heavenly pageant. Mr. Archer Keller, a resident of the Delaware Water Gap between Pennsylvania and New Jersey, remembered the awe-inspiring spectacle, and in Mebane's presence, "sketched a parade of meteors of gradually decreasing size, each size-class arranged in regular ranks except for the 'go-as-you-please brigade' of red sparks that brought up the rear."

Keller, reported Mebane, described how "the main body, which occupied more space than the full Moon, was definitely dark, surrounded by incandescent light very much like the corona of the Sun in eclipse ... There were 5 or 6 following meteors, about half the size of the leader, and in perfect alignment; they seemed to revolve as tho' geared together ... They flared and flamed, belching back exploding sparks and fire ... Then came another array, about twice as many, of half the size ... Soon the sky was filled with exploding sparks. ..."

Mebane found other witnesses to the second section of the Procession, confirming his discovery: a follow-up batch of "meteors" arrived