

San Diego Ca  
Union

Aug 21 1940



## New York Day by Day

by Charles B. Driscoll

(Title Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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My old Cleveland friend, David Dietz, has been writing about ball lightning in an entertaining manner, of late. This brings to mind a year's correspondence on the subject.

Several years ago I related in this column a story my mother told me as a child. When she was a young farm bride, recently from Pennsylvania, she was badly frightened by a thunderstorm and high wind in Butler county, Kansas, where she had come to live. As she looked out the front door of her little farm cottage, she saw a fluorescent ball of light, glowing redly, drop slowly out of the cloud, alight on a fence post, hop to the barbed wire, and roll along. The ball dropped off the fence and exploded with a mild puff.

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Before I saved the discussion off, I had 3000 letters from persons who said they had seen ball lightning. I think this is the largest parcel of testimony existing on the subject.

Strangely enough, the conservative scientists at Washington, when I last heard from them, were apparently in a daze. They didn't know whether or not to retreat from their ancient declaration that talk about ball lightning was all hooey.

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Nevada State  
Journal (Reno)  
Nov 2 1927

Evelyn Anderson, Faunie W.

# Ball Lightning

By C. B. DRISCOLL

Queer things are things we know little about. Odd-looking fish, tropical insects, head-hunters.

But there's a queer phenomenon of nature that I'd like to know more about. It is ball lightning.

Have you ever seen ball lightning? Do you personally know anybody who knows some one who has actually witnessed this phenomenon?

The scientific books now admit that there is such a thing as ball lightning, but they are quite generally in the dark about it.

So far as I know, nobody has ever photographed ball lightning. But occasionally, from widely scattered sources, one hears reports of the occurrence of this strange marvel of nature.

My mother used to tell of seeing a display of ball lightning during a heavy thunderstorm in Kansas. That was more than 40 years ago. I have heard of other persons who have seen ball lightning, and I have read of several instances of its strange antics, but I have never met any one else who has actually seen the phenomenon.

My mother described the thing she saw somewhat after this manner, if I remember the story correctly. In the midst of the driving rain, high wind and crashing thunder, she saw a fiery ball, which seemed to come out of the clouds, fall or roll through the air toward a barbed

wire fence, across in the road from the house in which my mother was living. The appearance of the glowing ball frightened the watcher, but she had already been through a Kansas tornado, so she was not too amazed by the seemingly impossible display of fireworks that was going on before her.

The ball seemed to hit the wire fence, and then to roll or bounce along it, striking the wire from time to time, and then seeming to bounce off.

Finally the strange object hopped off the fence and into a field, where it disappeared. All this occupied only a few seconds, I suppose, although other observers of ball lightning also have dwelt upon the apparently slow motion of the glowing object.

If any of my readers knows anything first-hand or at reliable second-hand about ball lightning I'd be pleased to hear the whole story. So little is known of this phenomenon that even the scientific societies are in need of all the data that observers can furnish.

There is such a thing as ball lightning, and there must be a good many persons alive who have seen it.

Emporia (ks)  
Gazette  
Dec 31, 1927

# The World And All

BY CHARLES B. DRISCOLL

Advices From the Front.

Mrs. E. C. Hamill, 1316 Elizabeth street, Brownsville, Texas, writes of an extraordinary instance of ball lightning display in Nevada, a few years ago. Two men were in charge of a power station, half a mile from the town of Rhyolite.

"One was looking after the machinery," says Mrs. Hamill, "and the other was at a typewriter. Suddenly they saw a ball of lightning rolling toward the power house on a power wire. When the ball reached the power house it blew the whole works to bits, and fire, following the explosion, did \$60,000 damage. The ball of lightning was seen to travel along the cable, before the explosion all the way from Carrara Marble Mines, 24 miles from Rhyolite, which is 60 miles south of Goldfields."

John E. Hinshaw, route 10, Emporia, Kan., writes that he had an experience with ball lightning about 51 years ago, when he was a boy, near Emporia. He was running toward a barn for shelter from a sudden shower, when a



ball of light, about the size of a hen's egg, dropped straight down in front of the barn door, and arose again before touching the ground. There was no noise and no damage, but a colt that was standing near was badly frightened, as was young John, who had been within a dozen feet of the fall of fire. Mr. Hinshaw adds that he has seldom mentioned the incident, because he had never heard of another like it. I suppose he has been afraid that people might think him queer for seeing such strange things.

Miss M. B. Stewart, Hotel Majestic, Chicago, writes that she saw ball lightning a good many years ago. During a thunderstorm a ball of fire passed through a room, from a window to a telephone. There was a report like a pistol shot when the ball reached the telephone.

All of these experiences add to our store of data about ball lightning, which is growing large. I am immensely interested in the variety of testimony. Hardly any two experiences were alike in all essential

points. The size of the ball of fire has varied from marble-size to the proportions of a large pumpkin. There's room for a few more testimonials in this scientific experience meeting.

Xenia (Oh) Evening Gazette Nov 12 1927

## The World And All

BY CHARLES B. DRISCOLL

### BALL LIGHTNING

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Sandusky Oh  
Register  
Nov. 27, 1927

Emporia  
Gazette  
Dec 1 1927

The World  
And All  
BY CHARLES B. DRISCOLL

## That Ball Lightning

By C. B. Driscoll.

Mrs. Alice K. Lowell, 4246 Greenwood place, Kansas City, Mo., writes a very interesting letter, replying to my recent quest for actual experiences of persons who have seen ball lightning. She saw ball lightning in Illinois, when she was ten years old. It was during a thunderstorm, when she had stepped to the open door to draw in a chair. She describes the ball as apparently about 10 or 12 inches in diameter, and says it seemed poised two or three feet above the step, as if ready to enter the house. She continues:

"Suddenly the ball raised and shot over the fence in a diagonal direction, rather slowly. Then there was a terrific crash, like an explosion. Mother saw my frightened face, and had begun to inquire the cause before the crash came.

"My parents said the draft through the house had attracted the lightning, and my standing in the partly open door had stopped the draft and the lightning, but I see in it the hand of Providence, as we had just had family prayers.

"At that time my mother told of a shoemaker she had known, who was mending shoes during a storm. A ball of lightning came down the chimney, out of the fireplace, rolled so close to the shoemaker that he could have touched it, raised and went through the window, where it broke out a pane of glass. The ball exploded outside the house. In that case the ball moved slowly, too.

"In a schoolbook I had when a girl it was called globular lightning, and there was a picture of a ship at sea in a storm, with several lightning balls playing about it."

This veracious account interests me greatly. The behavior of the two lightning balls described in this letter is strangely similar to the article. In each case the ball seemed to move slowly, and to move upward as well as downward. Now that I am reminded of the explosion, I recall that my mother also spoke of a loud cracking explosion when the ball disappeared.

There can hardly be a natural phenomenon more weird or more disconcerting to the astonished beholder. A good, healthy tornado, seen at close range, is probably just as terrifying. I have seen six of them, which ought to be about enough for one lifetime. But ball lightning is apparently much more rare than the tornado. The fact that one has never heard of it before seeing it often adds to the terror of the phenomenon.

I'd be glad to have further testimony to the terror of the phenomenon.

I'd be glad to have further testimony from eye-witnesses on this question of ball lightning, how it acts and how badly it frightens the witness.

### The Ball Keeps Rolling.

Evidence on ball lightning continues to roll in. With few exceptions, the incidents reported happened many years ago. This has caused me to wonder whether ball lightning has become more scarce during recent years, and if so, why. One correspondent has evidently thought of the same thing, and suggests that maybe the prevalence of steel in railway tracks, wires, and so forth, has had something to do with making this strange phenomenon more unusual now than in former times.

B. M. Garth, of Strong City, Kansas, writes:

The discussion recalls to my mind something told me by my mother. About the year 1901, when she was living at Saffordville, Kansas, lightning struck the wire clothesline attached to the house. A ball of fire came through the door and landed on the floor. She swept it out into the yard with the broom, and there it remained, aglow for a moment, before disappearing. My mother was Mrs. T. E. Garth, and she has been dead for several years.

This letter recites about the closest contact with the fiery ball among all the instances related by my correspondents. Sweeping the lightning out into the yard with a broom is quite the most spectacular action related.

From Waynesboro, Ga., comes the

next testimony. Grace Maxwell Neely writes:

I was at Sunday school in the Sunday school building of the Independent Presbyterian church, Savannah, Ga., in the summer of 1893 or 1899, when I was 12 or 13. During a thunderstorm there was a frightful crash, and I saw a luminous ball, about twice the size of a baseball, float slowly through the high-ceilinged room, and disappear as suddenly as it had appeared.

The ball moved slowly, as in a slow-motion movie. No one was hurt, and no damage was done to the building.

My correspondents all speak of the slow movement of the bright ball. And no one has told of any damage having been done by it, I believe. Perhaps that may be explained by the circumstances that no one survives to tell the story when any damage is done by ball lightning.

I think these are remarkable recitals. They are worthy of attention on the part of scientists. You might be inclined to be skeptical about tales of balls of fire floating slowly through rooms and rolling about on wires and on the ground, if you heard such tales from only one or half a dozen persons, or from only one locality. I have them in my mail from all quarters of North America.

The more evidence, the better the case. I'd be glad to have further testimony on ball lightning from any of my readers who have seen it.

Dec 24, 1927

## The World And All

BY CHARLES B. DRISCOLL

### Some Letters.

At length we have a recent case of ball lightning reported. Heretofore I have feared that this interesting phenomenon may have gone out of style, because correspondents who reported cases to me had seen or heard of ball lightning a good many years ago.

Mrs. Harriett Graham Lewis, 6140 Greenwood avenue, Chicago, writes:

"About five or six weeks ago, between 7 and 9 o'clock, on the evening of a sultry day, there was a heavy electric storm. Storms fascinate me. I went to the window, threw up the sash, and watched.

There came a flash, an appalling crash, and the atmosphere in front of my window was full of whirling electric balls. Some were as large as oranges; others the size of a robin's egg. It was over in about two seconds. Yesterday a lady told me that someone else in our neighborhood had spoken to her about it. Many persons must have seen it. It was vivid and wonderful."

This letter differs from others I have had on this subject, in that the event was so recent, and in the size and multitude of the balls of fire seen. Usually there is only one ball, and it is generally described as being at least as large as a baseball, and moving slowly. Evidently there are different ways in which this phenomenon may manifest itself.

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From Brownsville, Texas, E. B. McCulley, a fire insurance man of the town of La Feria, writes:

"While I was employed by an oil company in the fall of 1908, I was driving from Wichita Falls to Electra on a night that followed a very hot day. There was a slight mist at midnight. At 2 o'clock in the morning I saw a ball of dull-colored fire, wavering, and gliding along a short distance back of me. The ground was rolling prairie. The ball disappeared alongside a wire fence.

"I tied my team and went back to investigate the phenomenon, but it receded and I could not catch

up with it. There was no rain, thunder or lightning. The ball of fire was apparently about 16 inches in diameter. There was no noise accompanying the appearance of this fire. I could find no trace of any thing that had been burned by the ball. My team was frightened, and I was compelled to tie the horses fast to keep them from running away. There was no house within 10 miles of the spot where these observations were made. I was about 17 years old at the time."

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Paul Repe, East Moline, Ill., writes that he saw ball lightning twice in the province of Moghilev, Russia, in 1891.

My readers who have written in have made ball lightning real and vivid. When I started this discussion I hardly expected to hear from more than one or two persons who had seen or heard of this rare phenomenon. I have heard from more than 20 intelligent witnesses. Possibly others will write in and add to the mass of first-hand testimony available of a subject that is but little understood by scientists.