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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A TRANSIENT SCIENTIFIC PHENOMENON AND LOCAL JOURNALISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GILDED AGE

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Abstract: In the United States, the nineteenth century was the halcyon era for local newspapers. These publications were the primary source of public information at a time when other periodicals and books had low circulation.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how local journalism in the nineteenth-century United States dealt with an occasion outside the boundaries of the commonplace: an unfamiliar natural phenomenon. My example is the total solar eclipse of 7 August 1869.

Editors and journalists of the time largely were unaccustomed to covering celestial events. Nevertheless, they sensed—correctly—an interest in the solar eclipse. Articles about the approaching wonder provided a diversion in a way that more usual fare (politics, crime, news relevant to agriculture) did not. The press decided that it was up to the task.

Newspapers are designed to be time-sensitive. However, such a newsworthy marvel as a total eclipse of the Sun presented the fourth estate with two problems, each involving one of two major functions attributed their product: alerting the public to future events and describing, for that public, events in the near past.

First, how was one to obtain printable information about the total solar eclipse ahead of time, with particulars of use to a readership, especially when virtually no one had seen such a thing before? Second, after the total eclipse, how was one to approach description of the phenomenon? This was a challenge because potentially everyone within a given readership had seen it for themselves. Local newspapers arrived at solutions to these dilemmas in a variety of ways.

A newspaper profits from circulation. Therefore, local news reflects local opinion. I conclude by positing how the plurality of the public viewed their experience under a totally eclipsed Sun.

Keywords: solar eclipse; nineteenth century USA; journalism; religious naturalism

"Well, it proved one thing ... and that is that the papers don't always tell lies." [attributed to] "an old lady" (*Journal*, 1869d).

1 INTRODUCTION

I think that there is little controversy in stating that, in the United States, the nineteenth century represented good times for the local newspaper. These publications were the primary source of public information at a time when other periodicals and books had low circulation. They were a single source for political, economic, and cultural news from beyond the reaches of word-of-mouth. Such a press was a window on the world for a day when truly mass media did not exist, and travel was expensive and time-consuming (Cottam and Orchiston, 2015).

The intent of this paper is to explore how local journalists of this still largely agrarian country, and its majority of isolated farms and communities, dealt with an event outside the boundaries of the commonplace: an unfamiliar *natural* phenomenon. My example is the total solar eclipse of 7 August 1869, the path of which spanned the width of the entire contiguous United States (see Figure 1).[1]

In the *post bellum* 1860s, a solar eclipse was an occasion of national significance. It was a passive interruption in the routine. Editors knew that their readership (especially in the case where that readership was to be found within the path of eclipse totality, a scenario that I will limit myself to) would be interested. Newspapers are expected to be time-sensitive. However, such a newsworthy marvel as a total eclipse of the Sun presented the fourth estate with two problems, each one involving one of two major functions of their product: alerting the public to future events and describing for that public past events. First, how was one to obtain information about the total eclipse ahead of time, with particulars of use to the readership, especially when virtually no one had seen such a thing before? Second, after the eclipse, how was one to approach description of the phenomenon in a timely manner? After all, potentially everyone within the readership had seen it *for themselves*. Gatekeepers of the printing press arrived at solutions to these dilemmas in a variety of ways.

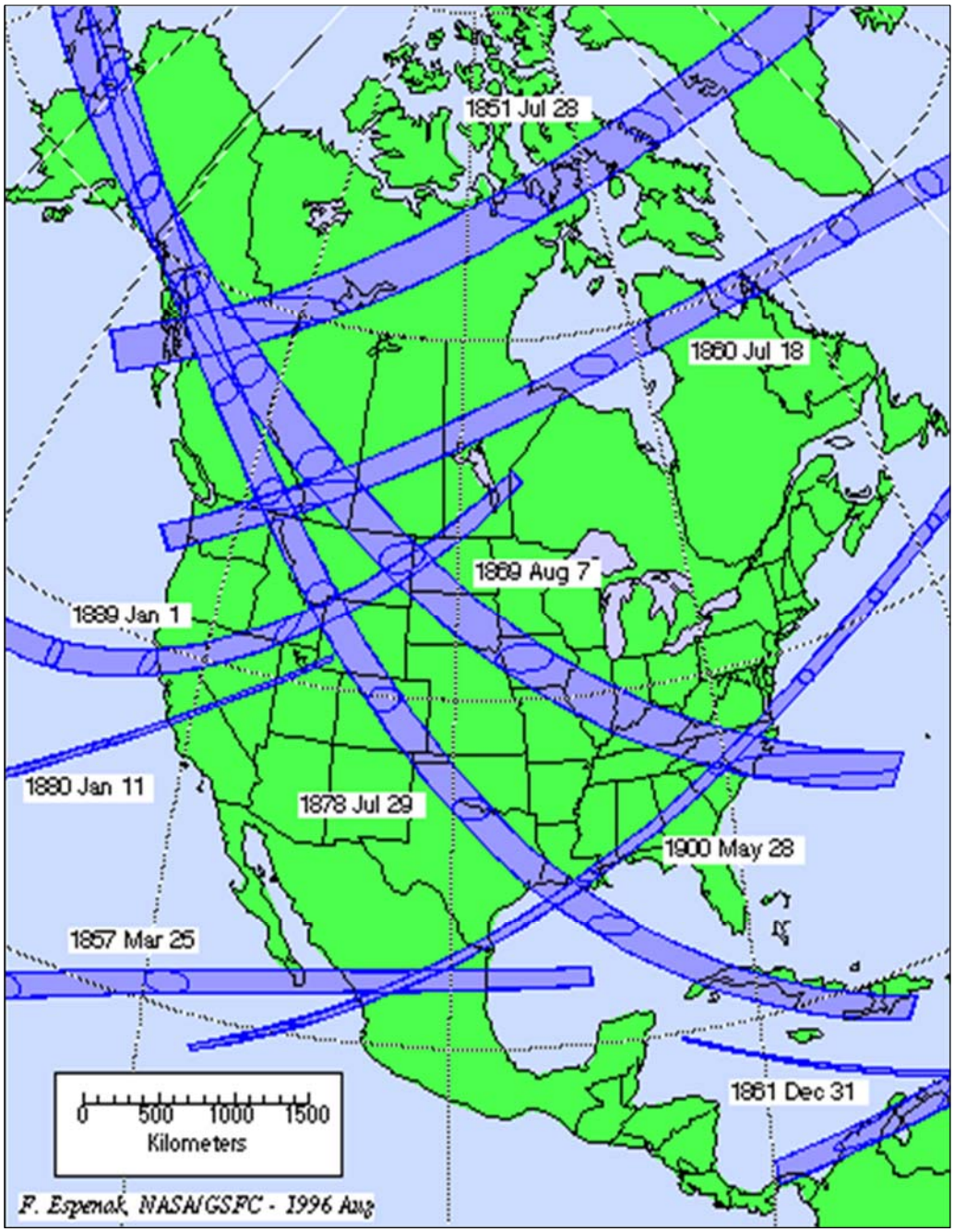

Figure 1: Map showing the path of totality for the total solar eclipse of 7 August 1869 (courtesy: eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov).

The material that I present below is composed of best examples of what was typically printed. It originates from localities spanning the entire path of this popular total eclipse (e.g., see Kent, 2019). Meanwhile, for locations of the 'home cities' of the various newspapers that are listed in this paper see Figure 2.

2 SETTING THE STAGE

Well before the total eclipse, newspaper articles about the approaching wonder provided a diversion in a way that political coverage, written in anticipation of the upcoming election, did not. So, we see, nestled in the columns between headlines describing a racially motivated "Murderous Riot on the Steamship *Dubuque*" (*Tama County Republican*, 1869b); local drownings; county land sales; church services; county fairs; the curse of public drunkenness; "Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins" (*Tama County Republican,* 1869a); advertisements e.g., velocipedes, a reward for finding a lost revolver, and cosmetics ("If You Would Be Beautiful, Use Hagen's Magnolio Balm" [*Daily Gazette*, 1869a]); and unabashed gossip, announcements of the forthcoming eclipse of the Sun.

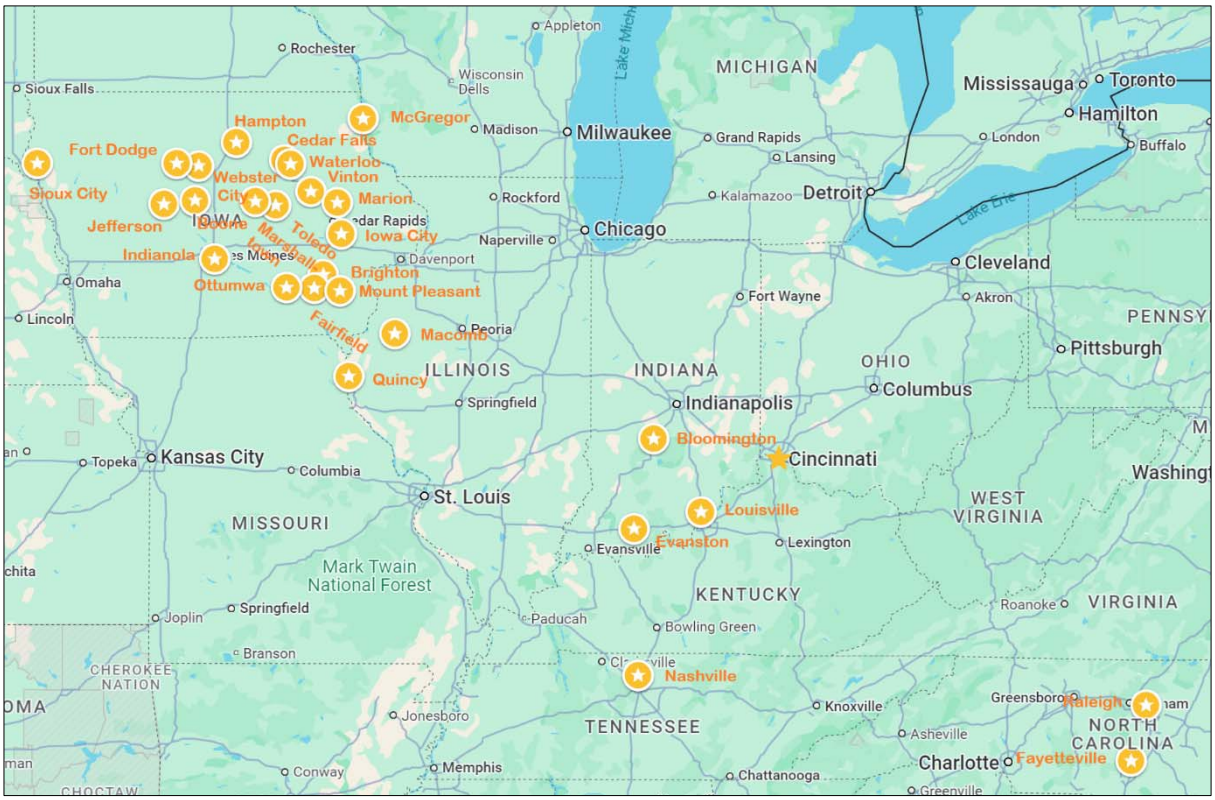

Figure 2: Localities mentioned in this paper (base map: Google maps; map modifications: Thomas Hockey).

A local newspaper printed optimistically, “All of our readers, of course, know that an eclipse is an obscuration of one of the heavenly bodies by the interposition of another …” (*Daily Gazette*, 1869a). Did they? This is politic, but is as unlikely to have been true then as it is today. Thus, the earliest reference to the total solar eclipse that was to come usually included a tutorial on what caused the phenomenon and some history about past observations.

Closer to the date of the eclipse, these publications typically composed stories expanding upon what a total eclipse of the Sun *was* with *when, where*, and *how* to see it. Sometimes the press filled space with enough eclipse-related *bon mots* that an overinformed “old lady”, perhaps the one quoted above, was initially “... afraid it would never ‘go off.’” (*State Democratic Press*, 1869b).

Print media began to prepare its readership for the 7 August 1869 total eclipse of the Sun as early as June of that year. Most paper editors started out understanding little of solar eclipses themselves. One hedged his bet: “The *proposed* eclipse ...” (*Progress*, 1869; my italics). They reprinted descriptions of what was to occur that appeared in other, often larger and more-urban papers, or had been distributed by experts.

“The best we have seen” (*Bee*, 1869) was that written by “Prof. White, of New York.” (*ibid.*). His summary appeared, word for word, quite often. Notwithstanding, I can find nobody by that cognomen who actually stood in the path of totality. Apparently, he was an armchair solar eclipse observer.

Thus reassured, the local press concluded that

> This exhibition will come off promptly at the advertised time. No postponement on account of weather. (*Reporter*, 1869).

Inevitably, misinformation was spread, as well, in preparing a readership for the “... one great event of the century ...” (*ibid.*). (We do not know where the Civil War fits into this hierarchy.) Examples include,

- Christopher Columbus predicted a solar eclipse and used the information to re-establish his authority over a mutinous crew. (e.g., *Times*, 1869). This tale about a *lunar* eclipse is a common ‘whitewash’ of Eurocentric history.
- The only two total eclipses of the Sun previously visible over large parts of the country were those of 1807 and 1831 (*State Democratic Press*, 1869a). Those witnessed by Hispanic settlers and Native Americans are ignored.
- “The Sun will rise eclipsed in the interior of Liberia ...” (*Boone County Democrat*, 1869).

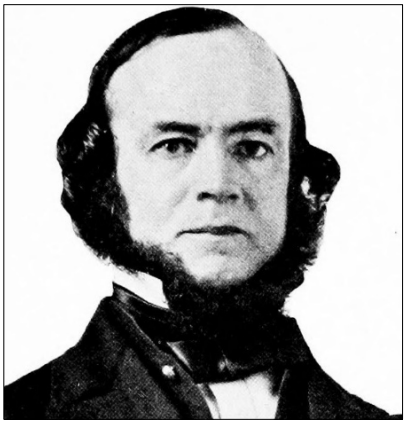

Figure 3: Commodore John Coffin (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_H._C._Coffin#/media/File:Professor_John_H._C._Coffin,_U.S.N._(1900)_(cropped).png).

This location is over seven thousand kilometers from the point in the Atlantic Ocean at which the eclipsed Sun *set*.

- Totality should be observed through a filter (e.g., *Boone County Democrat,* 1869). It is the partial phases before and after the total portion of a solar eclipse during which the eyes must be protected. Totality is the one time, mid-eclipse, when a filter is *not* required.
- Large stars will be observable in the daytime (*ibid.*). Stars have no apparent size—the authors mean bright stars.
- That of 1869 will be the last total solar eclipse of the century (e.g., *Daily Gazette*, 1869b). The next would take place in December 1870.

This last error can be traced to the United States Navy's Commodore John Coffin (1815–1890; Figure 3; Superintendent of the United States Nautical Almanac Office), who published a pamphlet, as a Supplement to the *Almanac*. It provided general advice for a public interested in seeing a total eclipse of the Sun. In a throw-away hyperbole, Coffin wrote that 1869's would be the last total eclipse to cross the United States during the century (Coffin, 1869). This statement was false, and that it was so would have been known to anyone at the Almanac Office who might have proofread the text.

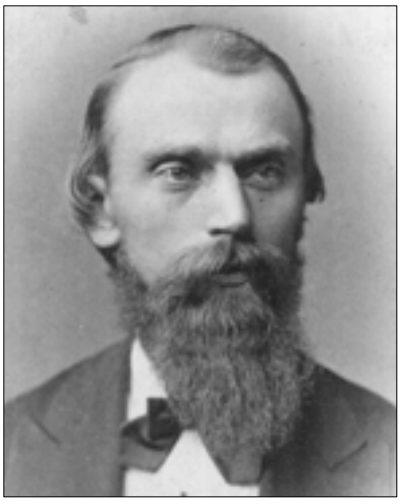

Figure 4: Professor Gustav Hinrich, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavus_Detlef_Hinrichs#/media/File:Gustavus_Detlef_Hinrichs_1868.jpg).

Still, the civilian bulldogs of erudition mostly got the eclipse right. The limitation of generic pieces about the total solar eclipse, composed elsewhere and reprinted, was that they did not always cover *site-specific* information such as, for a given locality, when the eclipse would take place:

> We have seen no general statement of the exact time at which the eclipse a week from Saturday will commence here ... it is impossible to tell how long the eclipse will be total here ... have your smoked glass[2] ready ... you will not have another chance this century. (*Republican*, 1869).

Eclipse circumstances of sufficient exactitude for anybody other than the professional astronomer were fully predictable and available well ahead of time beginning early in the century before last. The requisite information was to be found in an almanac by a person who knew how to read such a source, but almanacs were considered to be the truck of sailors and farmers.

Even if an almanac was available, this could happen: in Nashville, Tennessee, use was made of the *Cumberland Almanac*, a publication with a title that bespeaks of credibility. Lamentably, and unbeknownst to Nashville, all the times listed were for the national capitol in Washington (*Tennessean,* 2017).

It is plausible that no citizen of a small midwestern town had access to an almanac nor the expertise to make use of its tables and charts. He or she would have to rely on the authority of an astronomer. If no such individual passed by prior to the total eclipse of the Sun, this avenue for instruction was closed, too.

Still, the above-mentioned quote from the *Republican* (1869) with a plea of ignorance comes from an Iowa City newspaper. Professor Gustav Hinrich (1836–1923; Figure 4) from the University of Iowa was one of the few residents in the new state who could be called an astronomer, and he lived in this city. Why did he not supply the time? It may have been that he did not feel that informing the public was within

his purview.

Parenthetically, that last phrase in the above quote, “this century,” was in common usage. Indeed, for most locations on the 1869 total eclipse path, the wait time between such eclipses was to be much, much longer.

Occasionally there *were* outspoken, local adepts. A summary of social occasions includes:

> Sunday evening Rev. Mr. Percival delivered an eloquent and beautiful discourse, rich with gems of thought, and clothed in almost poetical language, on the subject of the Great Eclipse religiously considered. The audience listened in breathless attention, as if fearful of losing a single idea out of this constellation of gems. (*Marshall Times*, 1869).

There is no surprise in the public learning about a forthcoming solar eclipse from the pulpit. The eclipse affirmed the natural theology popular at that time:

> A total eclipse, of the Sun, is so rare and surprising a phenomenon, and its occurrence can be correctly predicted many years in advance, to the very day, hour, and minute, and almost second, that all who come within its range will be compelled to acknowledge the unvarying nature of the laws for astronomy ... one of the greatest intellectual triumphs of true Christianity is to show that the laws of nature are intelligible to man only because the Lord has made us after His image and likeness ... (Safford, 1869).

In fact, this account was written not by a theologian but by Professor Truman Henry Safford (1836–1901; Figure 5), Director of Dearborn Observatory at the original University of Chicago (Rothenberg, 2014).

Meanwhile, there were homegrown celestial aficionados who became solar eclipse ‘experts’ to the limit of their ability. One newspaper reported:

> So it happened that a general enthusiasm on the subject was produced which manifested itself in much street conversation, interspersed with rather obscure jargon about the Penumbra, the Umbra, Mean Time, Local Time, Total Obscuration, &c., &c., which had it fallen on the ears of a casual visitor would have created the impression that this quiet country town was the seat of some great University and that all its doctors, lawyers, preachers, merchants, tradesmen and mechanics were learned professors or ambitious undergraduates … (*Eagle*, 1869c).

A consensus evolved that was passed on it print. For example:

> We know of no better place than the top of the steeple of the Catholic cathedral on Fifth street [Louisville, Kentucky]—one of the highest in the United States—but as comfortable seats are scarce up there, we would recommend any point in the city from which an unobstructed view of the Sun can be had. The middle of any street running east and west would do, if it were not for the danger of being run over by the cars. (*Evening Express*, 1869).

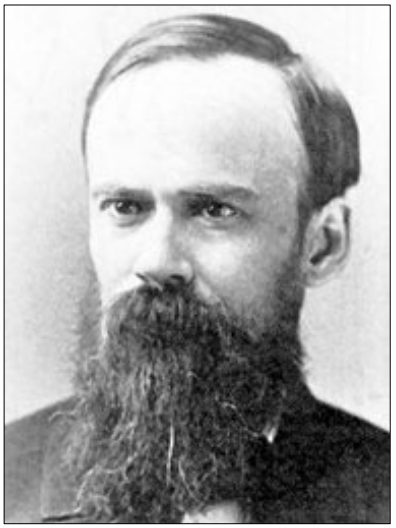

Figure 5: Truman H. Safford (u.wikipedia.org/wiki/Сафорд,_Трумэн_Генри).

Plans were made and shared:

> [At exactly the time calculated] … a party of gentlemen, including many of our citizens and several members of the press, and gentlemen from other cities, together with a party of observers from New York, who came prepared to make accurate observations, through the courtesy of Dr. Grissom of the Lunatic Asylum, were stationed upon the roof of that noble institution near our city, provided with smoked and painted glass, and other necessary instruments. (*Weekly North Carolina Standard*, 1869).

At this time the Asylum was a substantial building (see Figure 6). We do not know precisely what these “… other necessary instruments …” were.

Figure 6: The Lunatic Asylum, known officially as the Dix Hill Hospital, Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1872 (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Dorethea_Dix_Hospital.png).

The bourgeois of the towns and hamlets tended to remain there. This was also where the journalists who documented the eclipse were based. Therefore, we have a better understanding of townspeople's approached experience than that we have of the greater rural population:

> … and as the hour for the great obscuration, men, women and children sought elevated positions, even to climbing upon the roofs of the highest buildings … (*Courier*, 1869).

Of course, eclipse watchers in different places were to see different total solar eclipses. In the West, the phenomenon occurred high in the sky and interrupted the day. In the East, it was a horizon event and appeared as a premature onset of evening: "The Sun sets on the 7th at 58 minutes past 6, so the eclipse ends but a few minutes before sun set." (*Eagle*, 1869a).

> Finally, there was this political warning:
>
> Our Republican friends in the county, who meet at 3 o'clock Saturday August 7, for the purpose of appointing delegates to the county Convention, will need to imitate "The Wise Virgins," and go with their lamps well filled, because the eclipse will cause total darkness to prevail over this county. Do not be found like the "Foolish Virgins" without oil in your lamps, but have them filled and well trimmed. (*Journal*, 1869a).

By the day of the total eclipse:

> In every parlor, at every dinner table, on every street corner, beside every counter, within every counting room, between drayman and steamboat-Captain, merchant and customer, lawyer and client, physician and patient, master and servant, mistress and cook, hostler and chamber maid the staple of conversation was the eclipse … (*Eagle*, 1869b).

3 AFTER THE FACT

In the afternoon on 'eclipse Saturday', "The Sun looked cheerfully down without a single thought of the humiliation he was about to suffer." (*Union*, 1869), and "… the whole population became astronomers for an hour or so." (*Pioneer and Home Visitor*, 1869b).

> When the moment came,
>
> … all business for the time was suspended ... [and] Every person of any considerable age in this county who was not unfortunate enough to be blind, viewed this wonderful phenomenon in the heavens. (Weaver, 1912).

But was the eclipse any longer 'news' when most newspaper consumers had had the same view as its journalists? The press might expend as little as 100 words on the post-event recapitulation. Other wordsmiths, though, struggled to find a unique 'hook.'

A very typical example of 'totality journalism' looked like this:

> At 5 minutes before 4 o'clock ... the contact of the Moon's shadow was first detected; a shout went up from the street below, and hundreds of eyes were straining through pieces of smoked glass, in the direction of the Sun. Slowly and steadily the shadow of the Moon covered the face of the Sun ... each moment now appeared more weird-like, more appalling. Suddenly from the far northwest, there fell upon the Earth a shadow so deep and dark that it seemed like thick black cloth hung from above and covering all beneath and behind it ... looking up, we saw that the eclipse had reached its total phase. The grandeur and sublimity, the wonder and all of the moment can only be imagined. (*Ledger*, 1869).

"Weird" was a common-place adjective used to describe the total eclipse of the Sun, as in

> A dark shadow hid the Sun, darkness like night, and yet unlike it, fell upon the Earth and pervaded the heavens, and the strange, weird appearance was greatly intensified. (*Tama County Republican*, 1869b).

There were publications that took a more religious approach to the total eclipse of the Sun:

> It seemed to speak directly to our spirits, with assurance of protection, of gracious mercy, and that Divine love which has produced all the glorious combinations of matter for our enjoyment. (*Gazette*, 1869).

But others dwelt on the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, "This great occurrence on Saturday last, was shrowded [*sic*] with gloom and a desolate foreboding …" The total eclipse "… portended evil …" (*Boone County Advocate*, 1869).

Sometimes a particularly parochial view might be circulated: "The observations made in Brighton [Iowa] … *will be made the foundation of a new theory regarding the corona*." (*Pioneer and Home Visitor,* 1869a; my italics).

On the other hand, newspapers did not fail to mention total eclipse expeditions to other locations. For example, the editor of a western Iowa newspaper wrote about the total solar eclipse as seen from Siberia (*Journal*, 1869b).

Sporadically, professional astronomers, who had traveled (usually from eastern cities) to observe the total eclipse of the Sun in the clear skies 'out west', provided a testimonial for the local press. Stephen Alexander (1806–1883; Figure 7), the first Professor of Astronomy at the College of New Jersey),[3] opined in the Ottumwa, Iowa, newspaper that

> The succession of phenomenon [*sic*] during the total eclipse of Saturday last, and which all could observe was very accurately that indicated in the Daily Courier of Friday. (*Daily Courier*, 1869).

Elsewhere we read,

> The parties of observers who have spent some days in the City of Mount Pleasant [Iowa], in preparation for, and prosecution of, their observations connected with the eclipse of the 7th, desire to express their sincere thanks for the kind reception with which they have met and the many facilities afforded them by the Mayor and Council of the city … (*Journal*, 1869c).

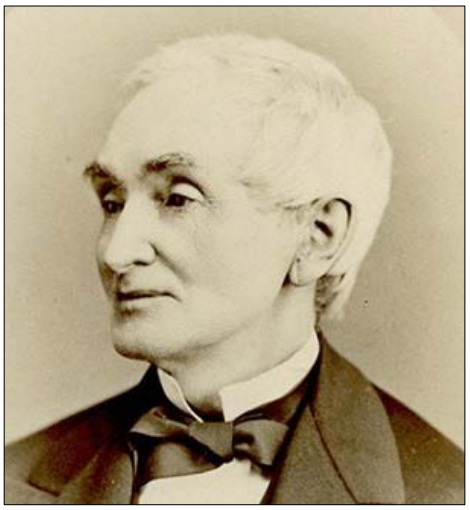

Figure 7: Professor Stephen Alexander (https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/stephen-alexander-and-alfred-scudder).

This was written by Professor James Watson (1838–1880) from the University of Michigan.

Like every other human experience, the total solar eclipse was the subject of literary humor, from the ribald:

> A couple ... who insisted upon viewing the eclipse through the same glasses, were so delighted with the affair, that they continued to gaze long after the Moon had taken its departure, and at midnight ... they were still investigating. (*North Iowa Times*, 1869).

To the more subtle:

> Mr. J.S. Moore took a photographic view of the Sun during the total obscuration on Saturday. He could not get his camera sufficiently near the Sun to take

> a life-size view, and will be obliged to enlarge the view taken if he has a picture worth inspecting. (*Tama County Republican, 1869*b).

Or with some pathos:

> Last week two or three parties bought tickets for the eclipse, of some irreverent wag, and came several miles to town to see it. They stood around until it began to grow dark, waiting for the "show" to come in, and then started home, denouncing the whole thing as a "... Republican swindler," originated by the Radicals to get a crowd to their convention. (*Freeman*, 1869).

Two themes come together in the following satirical passage:

> The hole in the Moon observed during the eclipse, is supposed to be caused by the tunneling of one of the mountains for the purpose of building a Railroad. The Board of Supervisors up there are [*sic*] under arrest for refusing to ley a tax to pay off the Railroad bonds. (*Register*, 1869).

We are left to guess that some local politics is being lampooned.

More obvious political satire appeared, too:

> Before the next [total solar eclipse] comes off all of the present population of Kentucky—except perhaps a few babies that have already had the measles—will pass away. The generation which comes after us may see another [total eclipse of the Sun], unless Radicalism should abolish all such things by a seventeenth amendment to the Constitution ... (*Evening Express*, 1869).

Occasionally, type-setting led to odd juxtapositions:

> As the Moon began to move away … the flood of light rushed out again, as if glad to escape from a forced imprisonment, and revealed the Sun as gradually as it had covered it up. (*Daily Journal*, 1869).

This was directly followed by:

> At Shakopee, Minn. Two girls aged 15 and 16 years, daughters of a Swede named Anderson, each gave birth to an illegitimate child within a day or two of each other ... (*ibid.*).

And, without carriage return appears:

> Hon. O. A. Allen died to-day in the Insane Hospital, at Sommerville ... The eclipse here was obscured by clouds. (*ibid.*).

Between celebration and sorrow, there were wonders reported:

> Last evening we were shown an egg at D. W. Miller's grocery store, which is decidedly a curiosity. The egg was laid by one of a quantity of chickens belonging to Mr. J. T. Bradford, on the last Sunday evening, and has a very correct delineation of the eclipse of the Sun of Saturday last upon its surface. The side upon which it appeared is partially flattened. The portion representing the eclipse seems partially imbedded in the shell, while around the edges diverge representations of light as seen when the Sun was in its total phase. It is not the work of art, nature, as it is often the case, seemed to have done the work. That hen was badly frightened in those dark moments. (*Herald*, 1869).

In an attempt to take a unique spin on a topic that was becoming well-worn after the total solar eclipse had passed, one newspaper undertook this bit of speculative science fiction:

> Few people trouble themselves to think what the effect would have been if the eclipse of Saturday had lasted any length of time, and the sun been blotted from the heavens. [Natural] Philosophy declares that not only would a horror of darkness cover the Earth, but the moisture of the air would be precipitated in vast showers to the Earth, and the temperature fall to a fearful point of cold, nothing less than two hundred and thirty degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. The Earth would be a seat of darkness, and more than Arctic desolation. Nothing could survive such freezing cold a moment more than one could live in scalding water. In three days after the cooling process began nothing created would be alive but the monsters that wallow in deep ocean, and the eyeless reptiles that make their haunts in the caves which penetrate far under ground [*sic*]. The thought of this possibility cause[s] a shudder even yet, though the danger is passed. By the by, was there not clearly a perceptible and unusual dampness and stillness in the atmosphere during the eclipse? (*Journal*, 1869c).

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Very soon it was all over. "All quiet this week on—the eclipse will not appear again ..." (*Gaz-*

ette, 1869).

Most local newspapers approached the 1869 total eclipse of the Sun as a positive event. One even declared that "The eclipse on Saturday was a success …", almost as if the circumstances of it were a function of its observation (*State Democratic Press*, 1869b).

The overall view that newspersons provided of a total solar eclipse was that it was a source of *amusement*. In Mount Pleasant this was put in explicit perspective:

> Two notable things visited our little town on Saturday last—the eclipse of the Sun and Forepaugh's Menagerie and Circus.[4] This singular conjunction was not anticipated long before, and we never expect to witness the like again. The people's attention was diverted. Some preferred seeing the eclipse, others, the larger share, the show. (*Journal*, 1869c).

Yet the total solar eclipse of 1869 proved that there was a population of Americans interested in experiences of a more cerebral nature. This interest merely had to be stirred and directed—mostly by local newspapers and also magazines (see Cottam et al., 2011). Beginning just a few years later, the demand was to be tapped by another format of transitory intellectual entertainment, the Chautauqua Movement.

5 NOTES

1. From Iowa (statehood in 1846) to North Carolina (statehood in 1789).
2. Now known to be an unsafe means by which to filter the Sun's brightness.
3. Now Princeton University.
4. Originator of the three-ring circus, Adam Forepaugh (1831–1890) was Phineas Barnum's (1810–1891) major business competitor.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

David DeVorkin is well-known to *JAHH* readers for his scholarship in the history of astrophysics, and I am delighted to be able to join in celebrating his many achievements. He also has had an equally successful career as a communicator of science, in his role as curator at one the most visited museums in the United States (the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum). The subject of this paper was chosen for its illustration of early attempts to make humankind's amazing astronomical accomplishments available and palatable to the public.

Finally, the author wishes to express appreciation for the work of more than one hundred, mostly anonymous, local journalists and editors herein surveyed. The names of nearly all of these individuals are absent from a by-line or a publication masthead. Their recognition lies in the fact that some of the newspapers, to which they contributed, continue in print today.

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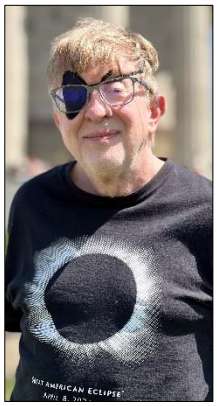
Professor Thomas A. Hockey (shown here preparing to observe the total solar eclipse of 8 April 2024) graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [BS] and then New Mexico State University, with its first-ever-conferred Interdisciplinary PhD. (Astronomy + History of Science). While at New Mexico State, he and NASA award-winning advisor Reta Beebe demonstrated that the color of Jupiter's Great Red Spot is not unique. Hockey went on to resolve the controversy about who wrote the earliest published account of this famous planetary feature and to construct the first catalog of Great Spot sightings; it is used to address the question of whether the Spot has been in continuous existence since the seventeenth century.

On the faculty of the University of Northern Iowa, Hockey studied historical artwork depicting all Jovian spots. He established criteria by which to estimate whether the feature was of endogenic and exogenic origin. This analysis is applied as a starting point in searching for record of planetary impact pre-Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9. So far, no artifact unambiguously meets these criteria.



Thomas Hockey perhaps is best known as the founding Editor-in-Chief of the multi-volume and multi-edition *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers* (Springer 2007, 2014, and forthcoming). The work of hundreds of authors and editors, more than fifteen-hundred (acknowledged) references so far suggest that it has been a go-to resource in the astronomical and history-of-astronomy communities. In 2017, Hockey was presented with the biannual Donald E. Osterbrock Book Prize by the American Astronomical Society's Historical Astronomy Division. A related project is the "Biographical Calendar of Astronomy".

Most recently, Hockey published *America's First Eclipse Chasers* (Springer, 2023). It is the first attempt to deconstruct a single astronomical event, as experienced by all segments of society. He appeared on National Public Radio's [USA] "Morning Edition" to discuss eclipse history.

Hockey has had a career-long interest in the discovery of Pluto and how the historiography of this event shaped the philosophy of astronomy. He produced the only first-person (Clyde W. Tombaugh) history of the event, videographed on locations at which episodes described in the narrative took place. (It is curated by the American Institute of Physics, Center for the History of Physics.) Along the way, he dispelled several myths associated with Tombaugh and the trans-Neptunian planet search.

Hockey is a former Chair of the American Astronomical Society's Historical Astronomy Division and the American Astronomical Society's Task Force on Historical Designation. He is a member of the American Astronomical Society Working Group on the Preservation of Astronomical Heritage. He received a Herbert C. Pollock Award for historical research in astronomy. Asteroid (25153) is named TomHockey.