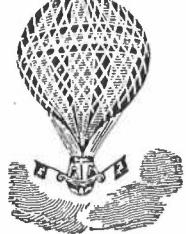


The Disappearing Balloonist of Hyde Park



We all have heard that what goes up must come down. But it didn't seem that way to the citizens of Hyde Park on July 4, 1873. On that day balloonist Frank K. King rose from the town fairgrounds, floated towards the north, and disappeared.

In the late 1800s, hot air and helium balloons were a favorite entertainment at county fairs and celebrations. So it was exciting but not unusual when the Hyde Park Fourth of July committee hired Professor King to cap off a day of speeches, parades, and horse races with a balloon ascent. At one o'clock in the afternoon, according to the *Lamoille Newsdealer*, the band played a fanfare, people cheered, mooring lines were cast off, and the courageous professor soared skyward. The balloon traveled north for about an hour, until it drifted out-of-sight altogether. And, though the spectators waited, it did not come back.

By next morning, neither the balloon nor its passenger had returned. Church bells rang and five hundred men from Hyde Park, Morrisville, North Wolcott, and Eden set out in search of King.



A daring ascent from the fairgrounds.

Toward the afternoon they located the balloon, empty of air and hanging between two trees. But there was no trace of King or his belongings. If he had fallen out before the balloon crash-landed, one man conjectured, his things would still have been in the basket. Where had he gone? The searchers combed the surrounding woods and still found nothing. All they could do was shake their heads in wonderment, as they folded the balloon.

Two days later, a tattered figure stumbled out of the woods, hungry, tired, and swollen from mosquito bites. It was Professor King and he had a story to tell.

After the balloon had drifted away from the crowd at the fairgrounds, a rainstorm struck. Wind blew the balloon two and a half miles high and the rain changed to snow. Snow stuck to the balloon and it began to sink, even though King threw his lunch and everything else overboard.

The balloon wobbled back and forth as it fell, finally landing in some woods. King climbed out, scared but unhurt, and began walking. Three days later he emerged from the woods, knocked on a farmhouse door, and was finally taken back to Hyde Park, where he was, in his own words, "welcomed with open arms." Whether or not he ever took another balloon ride, we leave to you to guess.

VOCABULARY

helium - a gas used to make balloons rise
ascent - a trip upward

fanfare - loud music that calls attention to something about to happen

mooring - a rope that holds something in place

to conjecture - to guess

swollen - increased in size