

# The Last Ironworker Who Pulled the Spires Off Old Buildings in 1942 — Clean Transcript

---

The Last Ironworker Who Pulled the Spires Off Old Buildings in 1942 — What Was Inside the Orbs: Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-dB21AoScw>.

In the spring of 1942, a man named Cornelius Vance climbed the tallest spire in his city, 800 ft above the streets and began the slow work of cutting it down. He was 61 years old. He had been an iron worker for 44 years.

And by the time the war ended 3 years later, he had personally removed more than 200 spires, finials, and copper orbs from buildings across the eastern seaboard. The government called it a scrap metal drive. They said the country needed copper for shell casings, iron for tanks, brass for fittings. They said the spires were ornamental, that nobody would miss them, that the war effort demanded sacrifice from every rooftop in America.

But Cornelius kept a journal. And in that journal written in pencil, in the handwriting of a man who climbed iron for a living, he described what he found inside those orbs, crystals the size of fists, coils of wire wound around what he called hummingstones, liquids that glowed faintly in the dark of the orb's interior, glass tubes filled with substances he could not name. and in one orb removed from a courthouse in Pennsylvania, a device he described as a small engine that had no fuel, no battery, and no visible mechanism, but was still warm to the touch in 1942, despite the building being older than anyone alive. His journal was sealed by his family after his death in 1957.

It surfaced briefly at an estate auction in 2003, then disappeared again. Only photographs of 17 pages remain. And those 17 pages have raised questions that historians, engineers, and a growing number of independent researchers have spent two decades trying to answer. If you find stories like this interesting, the kind of history that does not appear in textbooks, hit that subscribe button before we continue.

New videos every week. All of them digging into the parts of the past that someone decided we should forget. Now, let us go back to the beginning. Cornelius Vance was born in 1881 in a small town in upstate New York.

His father had been an iron worker before him, and his grandfather had laid track for the railroads in the 1850s. By the age of 17, Cornelius was already working on high steel, climbing the frames of the new buildings rising in cities across the country at the turn of the century. He worked on courthouses, train stations, post offices, and cathedrals. He worked on the iron skeletons of buildings that the official record says were built between 1890 and 1925.

But Cornelius would later write something strange in his journal. He wrote that on more than one occasion his crew arrived at a construction site only to find the building already standing. The blueprints called for new construction. The contracts called for new construction, but the structure was already there, weathered, complete with the same address and the same footprint that the architectural plans described.

His crew was told to finish the work, add a few new beams, replace some windows, then take credit for the build. He wrote that this happened so often he stopped questioning it. He thought it was a quirk of the industry, a scam, maybe a way for contractors to bill the government for work that had already been done. But he noted the buildings always had certain features in common.

They had spires. They had copper orbs. They had ornate iron fixtures with patterns nobody he worked with could explain. And they had basements that ran deeper than any modern blueprint accounted for.

By 1942, Cornelius had spent four decades on these buildings. He knew their architecture better than anyone alive. So when the war production board issued orders for the systematic removal of ornamental metal from public buildings, Cornelius was one of the first men contracted to do the work. They needed someone who could climb, someone who knew the old construction, someone who would not ask too many questions.

He took the job. and what he found in the first orb he opened changed how he looked at every building he had ever climbed. The first removal happened in April of 1942 at a county courthouse in central Pennsylvania. The building was, according to its own cornerstone constructed in 1903.

Cornelius climbed the central spire and began the work of detaching the copper orb at its base. The orb was roughly 3 ft in diameter, made of hammered copper, with a small brass collar at its base where it joined the spire. He expected the orb to be hollow. Most ornamental orbs were.

Some had small time capsules, letters from the architects, coins from the year of construction. Cornelius had opened a few during repair work over the years, and that is what he had always found. This orb was different. He wrote that the moment he detached it from the spire, he felt a low vibration through his gloves, not a mechanical hum, something deeper.

He described it as the feeling of a cord being held just below hearing. He carried the orb down himself, which was unusual. Normally orbs were lowered by rope, but he wanted this one in his own hands. In a back room of the courthouse, with two other iron workers present, Cornelius cut the orb open with a hacksaw.

Inside he found a layer of what he called powdered glass, a fine crystalline substance that filled the bottom third of the sphere. Suspended in that powder was a coiled length of copper wire wound around a dark stone the size of a baseball. The stone was warm. He

measured it against his cheek and estimated it was close to body temperature despite having been sealed inside the orb for what was supposedly 39 years.

The wire was connected to nothing. There was no battery, no power source, no visible mechanism. And yet, when Cornelius brought the stone close to a compass he carried in his pocket, the needles spun in slow, deliberate circles. He bagged the contents.

He reported the orb as empty, and he took the stone home. This pattern repeated itself across more than 200 removals over the next 3 years. In a post office in Maryland, he found an orb containing a sealed glass tube filled with a faintly luminous liquid. The liquid moved on its own, swirling in patterns that did not respond to gravity.

He kept it in a wooden box in his cellar for the rest of his life. His granddaughter, who was interviewed in 1998 for a local newspaper article that has since been removed from the papers online archive, said the liquid was still glowing when she found the box in 1957. In a train station in Ohio, he found an orb containing seven small crystals arranged in a precise geometric pattern around a central hub of what looked like blackened iron. The crystals were each cut into a shape with 12 faces.

He wrote that he had never seen a stone cut so cleanly. The angles were too sharp, the faces too smooth. He suspected they had been grown, not cut, though he could not say how. In a cathedral in Virginia, he found an orb containing what he could only describe as a small device no larger than a man's fist made of overlapping rings of copper and brass with a single dark gem at its center.

The rings rotated independently when he held it. They moved on their own slowly in opposite directions. He estimated the device weighed less than half what its size suggested. And in a county building in northern Pennsylvania, an orb that contained something he wrote about only once and never mentioned again.

He called it the engine. It was small enough to fit in his palm. It was warm and it was running. He described the engine in only a few sentences.

He said it had no moving parts that he could see. He said it produced a low vibration that he could feel through the bones of his hand. He said when he set it down on a wooden table, the table itself began to hum, and a glass of water sitting beside it rippled in concentric circles as if a stone had been dropped into it from above. He kept it in his cellar wrapped in oil, locked in an iron box.

His granddaughter remembered the iron box. She remembered her grandfather telling her when she was 8 years old that she was never to open it and that one day she would understand why. She never opened it. When she went looking for it in 1957 after his death, the box was gone.

Her uncle, the banker, claimed he knew nothing about it. 2 days after the funeral, two men in dark suits visited the family home and asked questions about her grandfather's wartime souvenirs. They left without taking anything. They never came back.

The official explanation for these objects, when researchers have raised the question over the decades, has been consistent. The orbs contain time capsules. The crystals were decorative quartz. The humming stones were load stones, naturally magnetic rocks that were popular in the late 19th century.

The glowing liquids were almost certainly radium-based paint which was used on watches and instruments in the era and was known to glow for decades. These explanations cover some of what Cornelius found. They do not cover all of it. Radium does not stay warm.

It does not rotate compass needles in slow deliberate circles. Load stones do not generate enough magnetic field to do what Cornelius described. And no time capsule, as far as the historical record shows, was ever placed inside the ornamental orb of a public building during the construction era of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Cornerstones, yes.

Sealed boxes, yes, but not orbs 800 ft in the air, accessible only to iron workers willing to climb. So, what were those buildings and who put those objects inside them? This is where the questions begin to outpace the answers. In the same decade that Cornelius Vance was removing spires across the eastern seaboard, hundreds of other iron workers were doing the same work in other parts of the country.

The War Production Board's records, what remains of them, document the systematic removal of ornamental copper, brass, and iron from public buildings in every state. The official total runs into the hundreds of thousands of tons. Some of that metal went to munitions plants. The records confirm it, but the records also show significant quantities of material were shipped to facilities in New Mexico, Tennessee, and Washington state during the same period.

Facilities that at the time were not yet publicly known to exist. Facilities that would later be revealed as part of the Manhattan project. The official story is that this metal was used for shielding, for wiring, for the infrastructure needed to build the first atomic weapons. And that is almost certainly true for most of it.

But Cornelius wrote in his journal in an entry dated November of 1944 that one of his shipments was intercepted by men in plain clothes who were not soldiers and were not from the war production board. They took the entire shipment, including three orbs that had not yet been opened. They gave him a receipt with no signature and no agency name. He never saw those orbs again.

He never learned where they went. His journal entries grow shorter after that. He continued working until the end of the war, then retired in 1946. He did not climb again.

He did not speak publicly about what he had found. He raised his grandchildren, tended a small garden, and according to his family, sat for long hours in his cellar with the box of objects he had kept. He died in 1957. The objects were inventoried by his eldest son, who was a banker and not a believer, and most of them were sold or discarded over the following years.

The journal survived. The 17 photographed pages are all that remain of the inventory itself, but the buildings remain, too. If you walk through any major American city today and you look up, you will see them. Stripped spires, empty bases where orbs used to sit, iron collars with nothing above them.

Most people do not notice. Most people have never been told to look. But the architecture of the late 19th century, the courthouses, the train stations, the post offices, the cathedrals, almost all of them once carried something at the top. And almost all of them are bare now.

The question is whether what they carried was decorative or whether it was functional, whether the spires were ornaments or whether they were components of something larger, whether the orbs were time capsules or whether they were sources of something the modern world does not have a name for. Tesla wrote in the same decades these buildings were rising about the possibility of transmitting electrical energy through the atmosphere without wires. He believed the earth itself could be tuned. He believed that resonant structures placed at specific points on the landscape could draw power from the air.

He spent his final years pursuing this idea and he died in 1943, the same year Cornelius Vance was halfway through his removal contracts. Tesla's papers were seized by the government on the day of his death. They have never been fully released. What was released was redacted, fragmented, and incomplete.

Cornelius's journal was sealed by his family, then disappeared, then surfaced briefly, then disappeared again. The 17 pages we have are not enough to draw conclusions, but they are enough to raise questions that the official record has never answered. What was inside the orbs? Who built the buildings?

And what happened between 1942 and 1945 that required the systematic removal of a specific category of ornamental fixture from a specific category of building across a country at war with two distant enemies? The man who climbed those spires kept a record. The record survives in fragments, and the buildings, stripped and silent, still stand on the corners of every old American downtown, waiting for someone to look up and ask why their tops were taken. Cornelius Vance was the last iron worker of his generation to do that kind of work.

By the time he retired, the men who had trained him were dead, and the men who replaced him would never climb the old structures because there was nothing left at the top to remove. He had taken it all down himself, one or at a time, on government contracts that paid him by the pound. He kept what he could. He hid what he kept.

He wrote down what he saw. And then he stopped climbing and he never explained why. If this story raised questions you have never seen answered, you are not alone.