

# 'Scientific world admits there's some kind of phenomena out there'

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**NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE** — Everyone here knows the Shaw Festival is the biggest show in town. But lately, it appears to have some competition.

**Spectacular — and frightening — celestial shows have been luring some residents to the shores of Lake Ontario for a phenomenon that seems to defy explanation.**

The people are peering out onto the waters towards Toronto, its glowing skyline a scant 28 miles away. Overhead they see lights screaming across the night between Oakville and Oshawa and beyond.

They know those lights aren't planes. They shine too brightly, they make 90 degree turns and they move too fast. Experts have tried to offer explanations, but none really seem to make sense.

Besides, Niagara-on-the-Lake has its own expert, and he'll be the first to admit the lights on the lake are a mystery.

From his rambling turn-of-the-century home at the mouth of the Niagara River, Harry Picken tells of the UFO's he and his family and friends have been seeing for years.

Mr. Picken is not just any observer. He knows the skies. He's president of Genaire, a St. Catharines-based aeronautics firm. He's a member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and the Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute.

He was on loan to the Canadian government for aircraft design work during the Second World War and has served as a design approval representative for the Department of Transport for more than 30 years.

"We've seen so many UFO's out over the lake that we don't even bother to report them anymore," Mr. Picken said.

"These days, if we spot one my wife and I just go over to the shore to watch. We'll come home and usually not bother saying anything to anyone else."

But sometimes the word spreads. When there have been a cluster of sightings within a few days of each other, skywatchers — one even armed with a giant telescope on the back of his pick-up truck — flock to the town's lakeside golf course.

"They aren't planes," Mr. Picken said. "Aircraft have to be lit in a very particular fashion . . . and these lights are much too bright. Most are generating many hundreds of candlepower."

He pointed to a picture taken from the Niagara-on-the-Lake shore showing a lighted object making a 90 turn north over Lake Ontario, west of the CN Tower.

"That object is generating a tremendous amount of light," he said. "The only aircraft with that much light is one used for submarine patrol, and that's on the nose of the plane, so we wouldn't see it flying away from us."

The UFOs appear to follow the marine forecasts — in reverse.

"They're seen most often in the winter months when there are high waves on the lake," Mr. Picken said. "Usually conditions are such that nobody in their right mind would be involved in manoeuvres. Rescue would be impossible. Besides, through my work I have a good idea of the activities of the air force. It's not them."

The lights are always the

Falls machine operator, has co-founded a group called the Northeastern UFO Organization with about 50 members from Ontario and New York State.

He regularly makes the trek up the parkway to Niagara-on-the-Lake. With his camera on the seat beside him, he watches the skies after a fairly slow season. He says the light activity appears to be picking up.

Eric Taylor, a former policeman turned Niagara-on-the-Lake shopowner, has spent some evenings down by the golf course watching the sky show.

The lights can't resemble anything I've ever seen before," he said. "There are sometimes about half a dozen people that drift down to watch them."

"But personally, I'm a little fed up with the whole business. When I first came here and saw the lights, I thought we were

sure to get an explanation. But it hasn't come yet."

And Niagara-on-the-Lake's Lord Mayor, Wilbert Dick? "I have heard about them, but me, I've never seen the lights," he said with a bit of a chuckle, adding that matters more down to earth seemed to take most of his time.

same color, deep orange, and usually appear to be about halfway between Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Although there have been some sighting from Toronto, it's thought the city lights make observation more difficult.

It's been suggested the lights are simply a mirage Lake Ontario can create illusions, on some days, reflections and atmospheric conditions make the Toronto skyline that it seems only five or six miles away from the shores of the Niagara peninsula.

"These objects are not mirages," Mr. Picken said. "They move in a positive fashion as if controlled by some form of intelligence. And almost invariably their lights dim when aircraft pass overhead from Toronto."

He remembers one that swung over the town several years ago. It was the closest sighting and the centre core of the orange light appeared to be surrounded by a irregular ring of colored lights.

"I offer no opinion," Mr. Picken said. "But I do say there are certain things we don't understand."

Could they be extraterrestrial craft? He doesn't rule that out.

"It's like religions. The UFO thing attracts all sorts of quacks and fakes out to make money and sell books," he said. "But it's a fact that 60 per cent of the scientific world now admits we have some kind of phenomena out there."

Area citizens with roots not so firmly in the scientific world are also ready to admit there's something strange up in the skies.

Malcolm Williams, a Niagara

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