

UFOs!

Mysterious lights baffling experts

*There is more in heaven and earth, Horatio
Than is dreamt of in your philosophy.*

— Shakespeare's Hamlet

By **MICHAEL CLARKSON**
Standard Staff

The fact I couldn't identify the dancing orange lights the other night over Lake Ontario at Niagara-on-the-Lake put me in some pretty exclusive company. Harry Picken doesn't know what they are, either.

"What people are seeing cannot be explained away as physical phenomena," says Mr. Picken, an aeronautical engineer and president of Genaire Limited in St. Catharines, which produces high-technology components for the department of national defence. "There's nothing in science to match it."

The mystery lights definitely are not airplanes, he stressed, "because they move at incredible speeds and make 90 degree turns, moving in patterns that no aircraft could match."

Whatever the identity of these so-called UFOs, their viewing makes for interesting entertainment this time of year, when the nightlife at the tiny theatre community drops with the leaves.

Many people, from amateurs with their scrapbooks to newspaper and television professionals, have photographed and filmed the bright lights in the past few years. Up to 70 sightings have been reported by one person in a given night.

Their theories would fill a government blue book. The UFOs, they say, are anything from alien spacecraft to masses of bugs to ball lightning to uninvestigated sources of energy.

By most accounts they are sodium orange in color - similar to the lights on the Garden City Skyway, except darker - and often behave erratically, sometimes hovering for hours, then rocketing off at terrific speeds.

The majority of observers - about a dozen contacted by The Standard estimated the lights were from seven to 15 miles off the Niagara-on-the-Lake shore, near the middle of the lake and often below 1,000 feet in altitude.



HARRY PICKEN

Many observers say sightings are more frequent in the cool weather of fall and spring.

The two bright orange lights I saw Tuesday night hovered above the horizon, dancing in various directions, for 15 minutes, then disappeared.

I wasn't first on the scene. The wife of the first lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, wrote in her diary that she saw balls of light in the sky over the lake in 1800.

What on earth are they? "It's an unknown natural phenomenon, an 'energy event'," claims Hugh Cochrane, a Toronto writer. "Similar

to what people think of as ghosts and poltergeists."

"It could be a case of bio-luminescence - unusual cases of massed, flying insects," offers John Rossiter, a machinist and father of three, who lives in Fort Erie and is a member of the Northeast UFO Research Organization.

"There are other natural explanations," Mr. Rossiter said. "Lights could be amplified through moist air when the water is warmer than the cool air at night. Or maybe there are crystals in faults off-shore near Burlington that generate an electric field."

Newsmen, often a skeptical breed with their day-to-day exposure to reality, are puzzled. "There's something out there that isn't planes or ships," said freelance television cameraman Paul Kassay of Crystal Beach, who's filmed the lights twice. "I went out there to find a plausible explanation and I couldn't find one."

The veteran newsman said he watched with a 25-power spotting scope as some of the objects dove into the water.

"I think they're intelligently-controlled craft, probably alien," said St. Catharines resident Bill Nelson, a former Associated Press writer and newspaperman for 35 years, who belongs to the UFO group. "And the sightings have been escalating in recent years."

His theory is shared by UFO group member Malcolm Williams, 32, of Niagara Falls, who wants "to prove to myself that UFOs exist. I don't care what other people think." A movie company thought so much of his research into a possible UFO base under Lake Ontario, they used his name for a character in a science fiction flick about a starship invasion of Canada.

Mr. Picken isn't committing himself. "I'm not sure what it is out there, except it's there. The military isn't involved, otherwise I'd know about it (he has government secrecy clearance)."

Perhaps because of overpowering city lights, the phenomena isn't easily seen from the other side of the lake in Toronto and its suburbs. One who would like to see an alien craft is Canadian Football League commissioner Jake Gaudaur, a Burlington resident who's considering a drive to Niagara-on-the-Lake to see the lights.

"For years I've believed there are other beings, much more advanced than us, in the universe," Mr. Gaudaur, a former RCAF fighter pilot instructor, told The Standard.

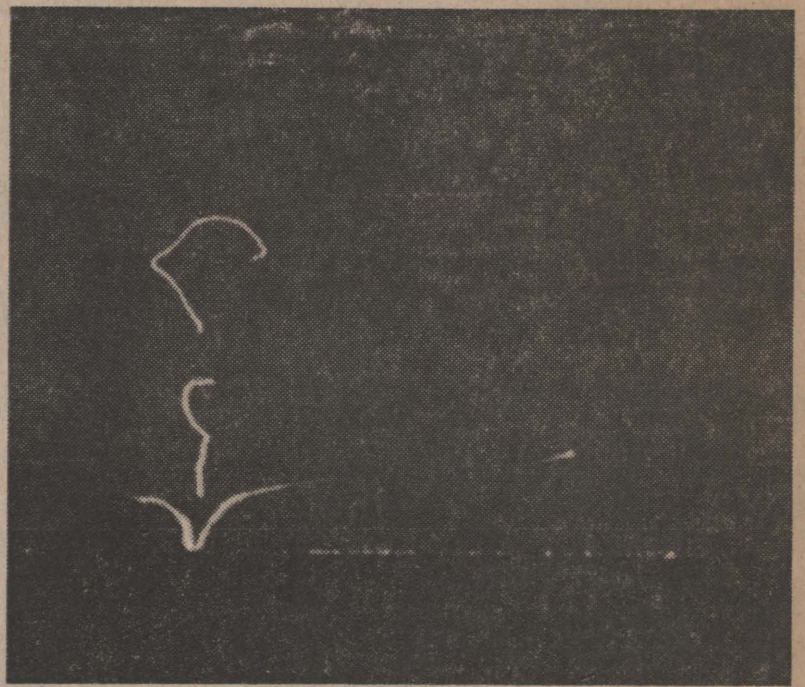
A recent U.S. Air Force study revealed that only 3 per cent of reported UFO sightings are inexplicable or have no known terrestrial cause. The remaining 97 per cent were attributed to cloud mirage, weather balloons and aircraft landing traces.

The bold research being conducted by people like Malcolm Williams, Bill Nelson and John Rossiter has coaxed UFO seers to come out of the closet. A 27-year-old man told The Standard he saw two oblong objects with a blue glow hovering over hydro lines at Dorchester and Mountain roads in Niagara Falls on Labor Day weekend.

"I was a skeptic before, but now I'm digging into the subject of UFOs. I want to know more," he said.

Whether anybody will ever find out is open for debate.

"Maybe," says Mr. Rossiter, "it's like Aborigines trying to understand how television works."



There's no marquee for the night lights above Lake Ontario at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Some people say these lights couldn't be from airplanes because of the incredible speeds they reach and the 90 degree turns they make.

— Photo by Bill Nelson



The long line jutting south in Lake Ontario from Toronto, seen in a 1975 satellite photo, has UFO researchers buzzing. Authorities believe it could have been the result of faulty satellite transmissions or a mistake by the publisher.

— Photo courtesy Earth Resources Observation System

Photo produces puzzler

Is it a UFO base or a satellite error? A publisher's faux pas or sandbar?

Nobody seems to know the identity of the strange object on a photo of Lake Ontario taken in 1975 by the orbiting U.S. satellite Landsat.

If it's physically there, the straight object would be up to 20 miles long and one-quarter to one-half mile wide, starting from near Toronto Harbor and moving directly south toward Grimsby.

"I haven't seen the photo, but there is almost certainly nothing fitting that description in the lake," said geology professor Peter Peach of Brock University. "Satellite photos, transmitted piecemeal, are often wrong."

Bob Bukata, head of spectro-optics for the Canada Centre of Inland Waters at Burlington, said extensive ship

surveys are conducted periodically in the lake and nothing that big has ever been found.

Coastal engineer Carl Fricberg, of Toronto, said it could be a turbid water mass, of clay and silt mixed by wave action, that has detached itself from shore.

A member of the Northeast UFO Research Organization has his own speculation. "It could be an underwater facility built by aliens," said Bill Nelson. "I have a feeling our government knows about it, but they're not saying anything."

The publishers of the book in which the photo appeared, Photo-Atlas of the United States, were not available for comment since the company has gone out of business.