

a window.

● Or there's the couple who thought they heard something moving outside in the night. The next morning police found 18-inch-long footprints in the deep snow — tracks that went around the house, but they started nowhere and ended nowhere. Just a circle.

● Or there's the young couple who saw a "rounded-off football" hover over their parked pickup truck one evening. They followed the bright orange object until it sped away. The next day they learned others had seen it, too, though from some distance.

Hillsboro's public obsession with strange things in the sky peaked about five years ago when the town was discovered by the Boston news media. Reporters did a few quick stories and then left town. A lot of the credit for that "discovery" goes to the late Bob Giglio, then a photographer for Hillsboro's weekly *Messenger*.

"From what I understand, he was the one who really got people going, really got things stirred up," said David Grossman, the *Messenger's* current publisher. "I got rid of him when I bought the paper."

But many in Hillsboro believe Mr. Giglio's interest led more to simply lifting the lid than stirring the pot. "People had seen things but were afraid to say anything before he came along," Karen Wilson said. "He made it all right to talk about it."

Hushed talk

The whole "flying saucer" business doesn't sit well with Mr. Grossman. He makes that very clear. He doesn't think it's good for the town. From his perspective, the talk about things in the sky all but dropped off when Mr. Giglio left town. "I said that should tell you something."

He tells a visitor that he hasn't heard anything about such things in years, hardly a word at all. And he obviously would like very much for his visitor to leave town with that impression, too.

Yet near the front door of the newspaper office, the visitor is pulled into a hushed conversation, right under the boss's nose. "Heard you were asking about things in the sky," offered Lynda Worcester. "Well, let me tell you what I saw on Saturday night. . . ."

Down at the Moose Lodge, the house is split. Half swear something's flying around up there; the other half thinks the first half is crazy. Yet even the non-believers have a story or two to tell.

"Remember old Ben talking about that time years and years ago when something come down the river?" begins a fellow called Pudge, the head skeptic. "Said it was flashing and buzzing, lights everywhere, not really on the river. Hanging over it. . . ."

The government's answer

All are reminded that the Air Force flatly denies ever tracking anything strange in the skies around Hillsboro and says that everything that has been detected has been explained. Even the skeptics chuckle at that. It seems that to some in Hillsboro the only things less believable than flying saucers are the official denials.

"You know, don't you, how the government had decided to deal with all this?" one woman said. "You heard about that new nuclear waste dump? Guess where they want to put it?"

In fact, the proposed dump site, one of a dozen now under federal

consideration, would cover much of the area where sightings have been most frequent.

"They're just gonna move everybody out of there," the woman concluded. "Poof. No more sightings. Conventient, huh?"

Someone else, now into the Hillsboro spirit, suggests that maybe the

government's really going to build a landing strip.

"That's crazy," a loud voice challenges from the rear.

Just why is it so crazy? the man responds.

"Because," the voice from the rear answers quickly, "them things don't need no landing strip."