

## Close Encounters of a Kind

Is it possible that a cigar-shaped spaceship descended over the tiny town of Aurora, Texas (pop. 237), and crashed into Judge J.S. Proctor's windmill? And that a tiny spaceman was buried in the Aurora cemetery?

That was the tale sent to newspapers in nearby Dallas and Fort Worth one April day in 1897 by a local correspondent named S.E. Hayden. It was generally ridiculed at the time, and most citizens of Aurora still scoff. "Hayden wrote it as a joke and to bring interest to Aurora," says Etta Pegues, 86. "The railroad bypassed us, and the town was dying."

But UFO stories, told and retold, sometimes acquire a life of their own. Over the years some of the faithful have been trekking to Aurora to search for the small spaceman's grave. "Sometimes they take souvenirs, and a couple of years back somebody stole the spaceman's tombstone," says H.R. Idell, the town marshal, referring to a big rock with a mysterious-looking crack in it. "But mostly folks just poke around in the ruins."

Mrs. Pegues is scornful. Says she: "People wish so hard the story was true they really start believing it. Why, the judge never even had a windmill."

