

America's First Classic UFO Encounter
By Pete Hartinger Roundtown UFO Society, Circleville, Ohio
(As it appeared in the Fall 1996 Pickaway Quarterly)

ORIGINAL EDITOR'S NOTE: Pete Hartinger is a member of the Pickaway County Historical Society based in Circleville, Ohio. He is a lifelong resident of Circleville and a retired MSgt, Ohio Air National Guard

While a senior at Circleville High School in 1959, the students were asked in public speaking class to give a speech on a controversial subject.

I chose "Flying saucers" (as they were popularly called back then) because of my personal interest. In doing research, I discovered that a prominent Pickaway County farmer, Bruce Stevenson, as a ground observer, had an impressive flying saucer sighting in February, 1948. As part of the assignment, I interviewed Mr. Stevenson. I found him to be a very credible, honest person.

The following is an account described in the Circleville Herald March 1957 about his sighting which is considered a very historical event by ufologists.

After keeping his own story within his circle of friends and relatives for several years 'because nobody in those days seemed to consider flying saucers anything but jokes', Stevenson revealed full details of his experience to the Herald in 1952. That was the year of the big wave of UFO sightings, including Washington, D.C. overflights in July. Bruce's story led to widespread discussion here on the subject of 'saucers', and also attracted a fair amount of good natured kidding.

He felt so deeply on the subject that he still offered to "...swear on the Bible that I saw what I say I did." He felt this way: "They can believe whatever they want to believe, and I know what I saw on my farm that night."

"That night" happened to be a bitterly cold one in February 1948. Glancing out a window while taking a drink of water about 2 a.m., Stevenson noted a bright glow all over the vicinity of his farm buildings and hurried outside expecting to find them afire. Instead, he relates, he saw a large "flying saucer" gliding very slowly over the vicinity of his hog house and tool barn. "It was so close to the roof of the tool house that I was afraid it was going to knock off the forge flue." Stevenson said. "From where I watched it, it moved without a sound along the roof of the tool house. I'd say I was only about 100 feet from it. The moon was very bright and the ground was covered with snow, making it seem all the brighter." Standing in the Herald's front office one day recalling his memorable night, Stevenson said it seemed as though the 'saucer' was only about as far away as the balcony on the Elk's building directly across Court St. Stevenson has told his story many times over since he first unfolded it for the public in the Herald. He says he remembers very clearly how:

(a) the strange disc maintained its very slow speed and low altitude until it faded from sight far off to the farmer's left, while he stood in frank amazement, too startled in the brief interval to run and awaken other members of the household.

(b) the dazzling orange-amber glow which originally attracted his attention was suddenly reduced to a dull amber glow inside the dome of the saucer just a moment after he came outside and began watching the eerie visitor.

(c) the whole object was shaped much like a broad dinner plate turned upside down, with a deep sauce dish or cup - also inverted - as its dome.

(d) the dome was of something that looked like plexiglass and the broad edge - which was pretty wide - was of shiny silver, blinking or flashing all around the edge as though a silent propeller or something was whirling.

(e) the diameter of the base of the saucer looked about 60 feet, the silver edge about 12 feet wide, and the dome about eight feet, rising pretty steep from the shiny silver part.

(f) the position of the saucer did not permit a view of the under-section.

(g) a wide silvery brim section had little holes of some kind along the edge.

(h) and lastly, how within a mile or two of the Stevenson farm, there have been apparently authentic reports or saucers or strange lights in the sky at least twice since Stevenson had the experience "I'll never forget as long as I live".

In the 1957 news article, Stevenson, a highly successful farmer deeply respected for his personal integrity, denounced as "crackpots" those public spokesmen who scoff at the "saucer" reports without making a serious effort to study their validity (It still goes on today).

In a statement written on August 27, 1972, Edward C. McCann, former editor of the Circleville Herald wrote: "Before coming to Circleville and meeting the well known farmer, and during the 20 years that have elapsed since that time, I have been concerned many times with 'flying saucer' stories, but I feel the same today as I did after Bruce told - and often retold - of his sensational sighting. I believe that, in the general substance of his description, he actually saw what he claimed he saw."

Since high school I have continued to do research and investigate the UFO phenomenon. Without a doubt, Bruce's sighting can be referred to as a classic because of it being documented in several books on ufology (scientific term for the study of the UFO phenomenon). The time period, February 1948, is important because it happened just seven months after the famous Roswell, New Mexico incident of 1947 and other sightings occurring at that time.

Major Donald E. Keyhoe, a former Marine, was one of our country's earliest and most respected ufologists. He was also Charles Lindbergh's aide in the early years of Lindbergh's fame. Stevenson's sighting was the first of its kind in the nation or possibly in the world. I give much credence to this last statement because of his sighting reported in Keyhoe's book *Flying Saucers: Top Secret*. Keyhoe writes (in referring how close someone had come to a "saucer" without any bad effects) "...within 100 feet. We got the report through Professor Tom Haber of The Ohio State University. The sighting was made by his brother-in-law, Bruce Stevenson. He owns a big modern farm near Circleville, Ohio. The sighting was made in the early hours of February 1, 1948."

Up to the time of Stevenson's sighting, using the definitions of J. Allen Hynek (former chief scientific consultant to the U.S. Air Force) about close encounters, none had come that close. Other books have also told of Stevenson's experience. They are Jacques Vallee's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*; Lillian Crowner Desquin's book *Unidentified Flying Objects, Fact or Fiction?* describes the case in detail. It was her first investigative sighting report. She was also very impressed by his sincerity. Desquin investigated UFO reports for more than 40 years.

In later years, Stevenson still stuck to his story. Many local residents who are still living recall Bruce as being a very sincere, honest person. One of the earliest persons he told of his sighting was Jim Lemaster of Ashville. Lemaster worked for Stevenson in the late 1940s. Lemaster says that he has no doubt that

Stevenson saw something very strange. Lemaster was honored a few years ago by his many friends, relatives, and church members. Like Stevenson, Lemaster's honesty and sincerity speaks for itself. Bruce Stevenson passed away in 1976 at the age of 76. One of Bruce's daughters, Grace Richards, recently stated that an Air Force officer visited her father after the sighting was reported to the media in 1952. The visit occurred after the officer retired from the military. His job had been to investigate UFO sightings. He told Stevenson that his sighting report was the most detailed description ever recorded and that it was sent to other world governments.

Stevenson was also told that he was thoroughly investigated in the local area and that the investigators could not discredit his character, integrity or loyalty. No one in the community knew this was being done.

Grace told that her Dad wondered if the "flying saucer" was attracted to the hog house because of the new ultraviolet lights he had recently installed that shone through the windows.

Carolyn Stevenson, Bruce's wife, was interviewed recently and reported that she believed without a doubt that her husband told the truth on what he had seen. He retold the same story until he died. A few remarks she added were that Bruce, while watching the object, realized it was perfectly silent; he almost wanted to walk under a portion of it but then thought differently; and a sighting form was filled out for the U. S. Air Force and sent in. No official reply was ever received.

Since then, other sightings of UFOs in Pickaway County have given the Stevenson case even more credibility. Some have made the local Circleville Herald, including a sighting by fisherman in the early 1950s. This sighting took place close to where Darby Creek empties into the Scioto River. The strange light was seen at night hovering among some trees.

In May 1958, Lockbourne Air Force Base sent interceptor airplanes aloft to check on a large bright object traveling at a high rate of speed. A deputy sheriff saw the object from East Ringgold, the highest spot in Pickaway County.

Darbyville was the scene of a strange sighting in July 1972. A man and his wife were driving into Darbyville at night when they saw a UFO following their car. They excitedly drove to a house where they got the couple from inside to come out and see the object.

During a national wave of sightings in October 1973, Circleville had one of its own. Four witnesses, including two police officers, saw a light make strange maneuvers over the south end of town, before speeding off. All of the cases remain unexplained.

There have been other sightings of strange looking craft over the years that continue to this day. It is a conservative estimate that only one in ten cases are ever reported as the fear of ridicule still prevails.

Some of these cases which are known to the Roundtown UFO Society are as follows:

In February 1958, a strange looking craft was seen flying over Circleville late at night. Years ago a UFO followed a couple in their car from Northern Pickaway County to their home near Ringgold and then it hovered outside while they went in the house.

There have been strange interactions also with some UFO sightings. In October 1982, a local plant had a power failure while three witnesses saw a UFO hovering over the power transfer station. There have been different instances where there were car engine failures while a UFO was close by.

On April 2, 1984, two Chillicothe women were startled when a brightly lit circular object followed their car along Route 104 in Pickaway County. On April 2, 1985, strange lights were seen hovering near the ground before shooting skyward. There were seen by a couple driving east of Williamsport. On August 21, 1994, a large triangle shaped craft was seen flying over the county. It was also unidentified. In a couple of cases daylight sightings of strange craft have been seen over Circleville.

These are just a few of the county sightings that are known about. Hopefully, as the acceptance level of ufology increases, more witnesses will overcome their reluctance and report their sightings to the local group. It is important to collect this data and turn this data over to interested scientists. We want scientists to investigate the unexplained and not explain the uninvestigated. RUFOS does not have any predetermined notions of UFOs' origins. There could be a number of explanations. The society was founded in January 1989. Our hotline telephone numbers are 477-6252 or 332-1268. You can write to us at Roundtown UFO Society - PO Box 52 - Circleville, Ohio 43113.

There is no question that there is a UFO phenomenon and it has been around for quite a long time. Compared to the rest of the country, Pickaway County has had its share of unknown sightings with one of the earliest and most impressive occurring here. Also, Pickaway County has a connection with the famous Roswell, New Mexico incident of 1947; but, that is another story in the history of ufology for our country. -----

REFERENCES:

Circleville Herald articles: (Stevenson), August 2, 1952; August 7, 1952; October 6, 1952; March 28, 1957

"Flying Saucers: Top Secret" by Donald E. Keyhoe, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1960, hardback, page 144

"Anatomy of a Phenomenon" by Jacques Vallee, Ace Books, Inc, New York, 1965, paperback, pages 92 and 188

Edward McCann's statement (former Herald editor), August 27, 1972

"Unidentified Flying Objects, Fact or Fiction?" by Lillian Crowner Desquin, Aegean Park Press, Laguna Hills, CA, 1992, soft cover, pages 2 and 3

Roundtown UFO Society Newsletter, May/June 1995, pages 1, 2, 3

Personal Interviews

This and other articles similar to it can be found on the Roundtown UFO Society website at:

<https://roundtownufosociety.com/news.html>