

# When UFOs came to Iredell

By O.C. STONESTREET III

Simply put, the summer of 1992 was different. It started out just like other summers: School let out, kids came home from college, the weather was warmer, people took to doing more things outside.

It was to be exceptionally hot and dry that summer. The local fire departments had their hands full controlling grass and brush fires from the first week of July. Thermometers registered 104 degrees in Columbia, S.C. on July 20 and 96 degrees in Statesville on July 23. That same day, it was 99 in Myrtle Beach and 98 in Charlotte and Raleigh.

Very few homes then had air conditioning — something we take for granted 50 years later. But most houses did have front porches then, and in the evening people got out of their warm houses to sit on front porches to enjoy the evening air and perhaps catch a refreshing breeze while they perused the newspaper or snapped a mess of beans.

It is a safe bet that few Iredell folks were thinking about flying saucers.

Now, these flying saucers were not exactly new, the term having been coined in the summer of 1947, five summers earlier. Commercial pilot Kenneth Arnold claimed to have seen five shiny, pulsating objects cruising over the Cascade Mountains of Washington. In his words, the discs "flow like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water." Notice that he was describing the movement of the objects, not the appearance of the objects themselves.

Nonetheless, the name "flying saucers" was coined by the press, and it stuck. Now, five years later, flying saucer sightings were reaching epidemic proportions.

The first saucers of the season were reported in the local newspapers on July 17. Two airline pilots said that they had observed eight objects "glowing like red hot coals and traveling 3,000 miles per hour."

The things had zoomed past their aircraft when it had been over the Chesapeake Bay.

Two days later the papers said saucers had been spotted by an Elizabeth City, N.C., watchman. Mr. H.G. Lane said that he had spotted them on three occasions — two of them on May 12, three on June 10 and four of the things on the 18th of

July. He also mentioned that his radio had gone on the blink when saucers were in the area.

Seven to 10 "unidentified aerial objects" were seen in the vicinity of the Washington National Airport on July 21. Adding to their credibility was the fact that the objects were not only seen visually but were also observed on radar screens.

"This information," said the paper, "has been relayed to the proper Air Force authorities, and the Air Force is investigating the matter."

You bet they were. Remember that the Korean War was going on at this time. The Russians had the atomic bomb. Unidentified aircraft, if indeed they were some kind of aircraft, zipping willy-nilly over the Heart of Democracy was a situation that the U.S. Air Force took very seriously. An Air Force spokesman commented that the number of saucer sightings were already almost double the number reported the previous year.

The Statesville Landmark newspaper next told about how a mysterious object had raced across the heavens over Cleveland, Ohio, on the 24th of July. It made, so said the story, "... A flight of six speedy jets look like tired snails."

The Air Force, predictably, wrote this one off as a weather balloon. On the night of July 27, lights again visited the nation's capital. This time, they were seen from the ground, tracked on radar and chased by a jet interceptor. For some reason or other, the jet wasn't able to get near them.

It was just a matter of time until one of the things made an appearance closer to home. Two nights later, on the 29th of July, a "bright red glowing cylindrical object" was spotted over the North Carolina town of Goldsboro. The two married couples that saw it didn't know what it was, but said that the object definitely was not an aircraft.

The next day, the 30th of July, three speedy saucers were seen whizzing over central Indiana.

On Aug. 4, the local paper told the citizens of Iredell to report any saucers they might see to the local Civil Defense authorities. And 10 days later, on Aug. 14, things began to happen in Iredell.

The Daily Record recorded that Patricia Setzer and Charles Dagenhart, who lived near

Lookout Dam, saw saucers that came in from the east and then disappeared toward the north. Miss Setzer remarked that they left an orange "streamer" behind them, which she estimated to have been about two yards long and a foot wide.

About the same time and on the same night, some boys and girls were having a wiener roast at the home of Tommy Kerr on Caldwell Street in Statesville. According to Jim Lippard, John Roueche and Tommy Kerr, a saucer made an appearance at 8:05, returned at 9:05, and then returned again at 9:23.

The young men conceded the possibility that it could have been just one saucer making three appearances. "The boys," said "The Landmark," "described the objects as 'bigger than a softball, very bright, and two looking flat in the sky, the third one at an angle.'"

All the objects were reported as moving north to south. They estimated the objects as being between 75 to 100 feet in diameter. The boys didn't believe the light had been airplanes, but it was noted, "...As they moved a trail of light seemed to follow."

Meanwhile, here in Mooresville, two Cascade Street residents, Mrs. C.A. Major and Mrs. Buford Blanton, were taking in a breath of fresh air on the porch of Mrs. Blanton's home when a sudden light lit up the northern sky. It grew quickly into what Mrs. Major described as a "pinkish-purplish ball of fire," and quickly disappeared toward the south.

Within half an hour, another object appeared, behaving in a similar fashion as the first and also eventually disappearing toward the south.

There was to be more: "Before the two skywatchers had decided to retire they had seen at least half a dozen similar mysterious swift-moving lights," the Mooresville Tribune reported.

A notice had appeared in the previous week's Tribune advising its readers to report "mysterious aerial occurrences" to Mooresville City Manager Mr. Robert Peck, who would, in turn, pass on such reports to the Civil Defense people. The next morning, Mrs. Blanton did just that.

Making a personal visit to the two ladies, City Manager Peck concluded that what the two distressed damsels had seen had been meteors. The Tribune concluded its coverage

of the incident with the following: "Meanwhile, both Mrs. Major and Mrs. Blanton are not convinced that what they saw Monday night were only meteors."

With the rains of the middle of August 1952 came relief from the sweltering heat. Million-dollar rains came at supertime.

Fall came in like the voice of reason, and with it things got back to normal. School buses rolled again. College kids returned to their studies. The weather began to turn noticeably cooler. People spent more of their evenings inside, and with all the rainclouds, one couldn't see that much in the night sky anyway. Everyone agreed that the autumn leaves were not as bright, not as colorful as usual, probably because of the long dry spell and unseasonable heat.

Thoughts of flying saucers were hauled off with the dead leaves.

Mooresville native O.C. Stonestreet III is a leading authority on Iredell County history.

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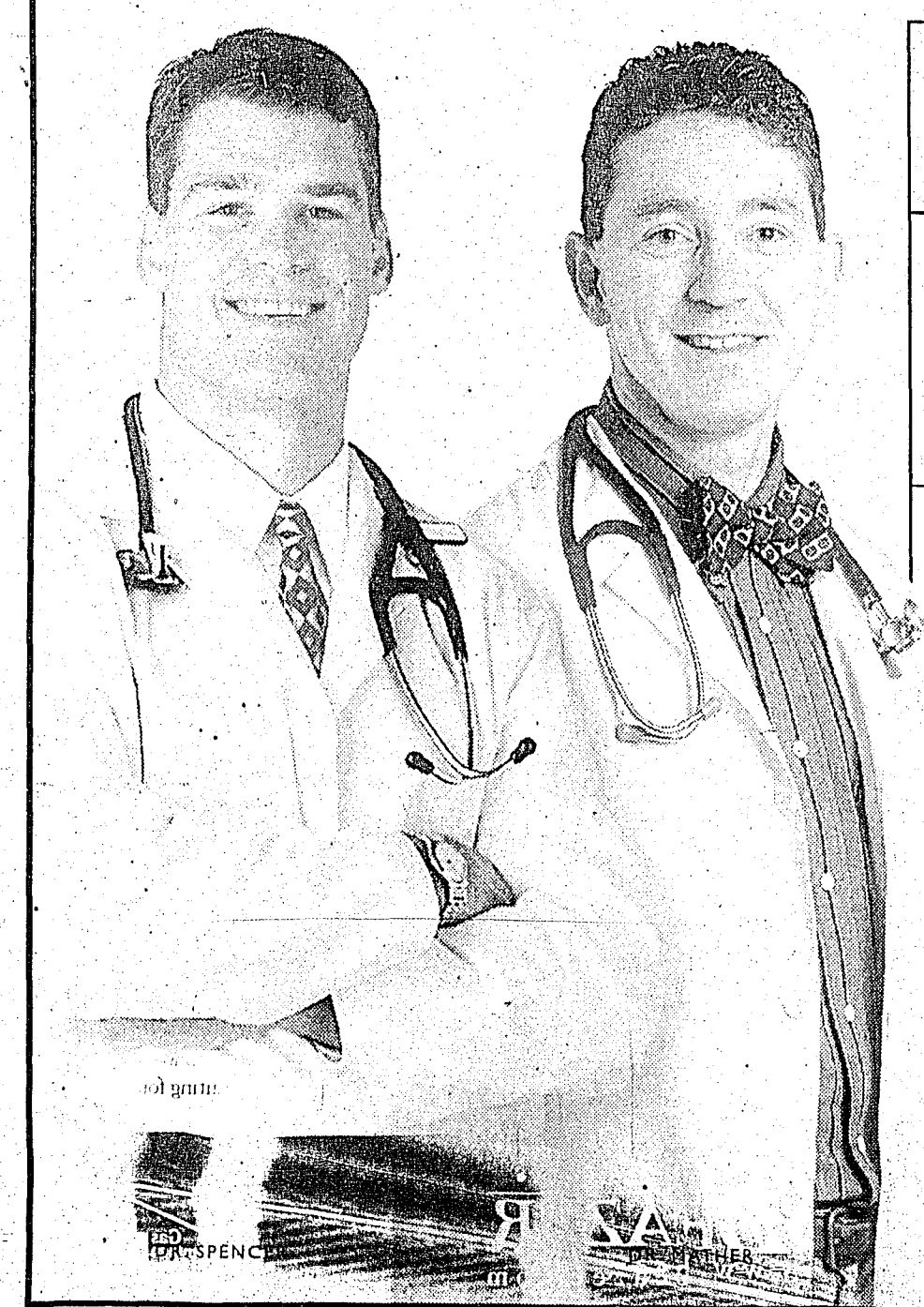
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## Capital roll call

A look at how our area's state legislators voted in Raleigh during the past week.

### N.C. House

HB1068 — Adult Care Homes (Conference Report): Directs the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a quality improvement consultation program for the purpose of improving care in adult care homes. Introduced by Rep. Edd Nye, D-Bladen. Adopted 101-0. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

HB1301 — Petroleum Cleanup (Concurrence Vote): Clarifies that land-use restrictions and recording of those restrictions is required in the office of the register of deeds in cases of leaking underground petroleum storage tanks. Introduced by Rep. Pryor Gibson, D-Montgomery. Adopted 107-1. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

HB1431 — Car Property Tax Credit: Prevents double taxation of motor vehicles which have a change in tax year because of a change in registration. Introduced by Rep. Joe Hackney, D-Orange. Adopted 113-0. Sent to the House for consideration. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

SB14 — Election Rewrite (House Version): Establishes new rules for elections officials counting official ballots, canvassing votes, determining results in case of a tie, ordering recounts, handling protests and ordering a new election. Introduced by Sen. Wib Gulley, D-Durham. Adopted 110-3. Sent back to the Senate for concurrence. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

SB109 — Require Experience for Death Penalty Cases: Requests that the North Carolina Supreme Court to adopt rules establishing minimum standards for defense attorneys, prosecutors and judges handling capital cases.

Adopted 108-3. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Frank Mitchell. NO: Mitchell Setzer. SB904 — Mortgage Lending Act (House Version): Establishes criteria for persons acting as a mortgage broker, mortgage lender, and creates a licensing requirement for mortgage brokers that will be

managed by the N.C. Banking Commission. Introduced by Sen. Wib Gulley, D-Durham. Adopted 99-0. Sent back to the Senate for concurrence. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

SB1002 — Campaign Finance Enforcement (House Version): Permits the State Board of Elections to seek civil penalties of three times the amount of an illegal contribution from donors making or candidates accepting illegal contributions. Introduced by Sen. Wib Gulley, D-Durham. Adopted 78-7. Sent back to the Senate for concurrence. YES: Mitchell Setzer, Frank Mitchell.

### N.C. Senate

SB206 — Tourist Directional Sign Program (Concurrence Vote): Establishes the Tourist-Oriented Directional Sign program within the Department of Transportation to create signs that display business identification and directional information for tourist-oriented facilities or for classes of business or facilities that are tourist-oriented. Introduced by Sen. Aaron Plyler, D-Union. Adopted 48-0. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

SB723 — Unsecured Checks to Secure Loans (Concurrence Vote): Requires disclosure and warning statements on unsolicited checks, when cashed by the recipient, obligate the amount of the check plus interest and fees. Introduced by Sen. Stan Bingham, R-Davidson. Adopted 48-0. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

SB842 — Business Entities (Concurrence Vote): Establishes new types of legally recognized business entities and establishes procedures for businesses entities to change their legal status with the Department of State. Introduced by Sen. Dan Clodfelter, D-Mecklenburg. Adopted 48-0. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

HB115 — Public Conflicts of Interest (Senate Version): Permits public officers of towns with a population of less than 15,000 to enter into contracts with the town as

long as the contracts do not exceed \$12,500 for medically-related services and \$25,000 for other goods and services in a 12-month period. Introduced by Rep. Rex Baker, R-Stokes. Adopted 47-1. Sent back to the House for concurrence. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

HB1068 — Adult Care Homes (Conference Report): Directs the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a quality improvement consultation program for the purpose of improving care in adult care homes. Introduced by Rep. Edd Nye, D-Bladen. Adopted 41-0. Sent to the governor for approval. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

HB1188 — Voter Rolls (Senate Version): Allows county boards of elections to withhold voter record information in cases of domestic abuse protective orders. Introduced by Rep. Dan Blue, D-Wake. Adopted 48-0. Sent back to the House for concurrence. YES: Cal Cunningham, Jim Forrester.

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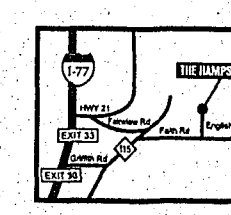
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