



LEGENDS OF THE OZARKS

Ozark Ghost Stories
Collected by students in
Ellen Massey's Ozarkia
classes of Lebanon High
School.
Edited by Melinda Stewart

Maybe you can remember nights at sleepovers or campouts when someone would start up, "This is a true story," and then give an account of a bizarre adventure a friend, aunt, uncle, parents or grandparents had...or maybe you've had an experience which seemed strange. In any case, I'm sure everyone has heard at least one ghost story.

As far back in man's history as one wants to go, there have been tales of spirits, witches, or dark deep evils. These stories are usually handed down many times before they are forgotten.

Many stories have been told on dark, cool nights around the campfire, fireplace or potbellied stove when the only noises you could hear outside were the winds howling through the trees, an owl in a nearby tree and maybe a lonely coyote on a distant hill.

Usually the tale was about a place you would never be or a person you had heard of but didn't know well. Sometimes the stories dealt with a phenomenon that would take place just once. Once in a while you'd hear of one about witches or the devil himself.

The Grinning Stranger

The Oak Grove Schoolhouse on the Old Wire Road was supposed to be haunted by the ghost of a man who was hung there by Bushwhackers during the Civil War. One time four men riding by the schoolhouse on their way home from a dance, saw a grinning, bald-headed stranger peering out through the window. When they looked at him up close, they noticed the stranger had no eyebrows or eyelashes. The hillmen addressed the strange figure, but didn't get any reply. Finally one of the boys fired several pistol shots which smashed the glass of the window, but the stranger continued to grin at them through the broken panes. Then two of the boys kicked the door in and searched the school house, but the room was apparently empty. The two fellows who remained outside, however, could still see the smiling stranger, sitting just inside the broken window, directly in line with more than one bullet hole.

The Boarding House

This is an old tale of long time ago which is said to be true. It starts when a cowboy about thirty was going across state to Kansas. As he was riding along he began to get tired. When he spotted an old white streaked house up the hollow just about a half mile off he rode up and yelled. A little old fat woman came out. He asked her if she could put him up for the night. She agreed very kindly and yelled at her boy to come and put his horse up.

That night about eleven-thirty the cowboy got thirsty, and went to the well in his underwear for some water. Near the barn he heard the boy talking to his mother. "Well Ma, what are we going to do with this one? The back yard is full with the rest of the other boarders."

The young man turned white and ran for two miles to neighbors to tell them. They got the law out to the old streaked house, and sure enough, they found over a hundred skeletons in the back yard. He was sure glad he got thirsty.

Panther Claws

One dark night a man who had been visiting some sick relatives was riding home under the light of the moon. Since there had been rumors of a large panther roaming the country, preying on night riders, the man was a bit apprehensive, and so he rode a little faster. When he did this, he threw off the timing of the large cat which was getting ready to pounce upon him. When the cat jumped, he missed the man, but its claws sunk deep into the horse's flanks. The horse took out in a full gallop, with the man barely hanging on, and the cat stuck in its flanks. Fortunately, they were near home so the man jumped off the horse and ran in the house to load his gun. He came out of the house and shot the panther. The explosion knocked the cat's claws out of the horse's flanks and with a loud yell the cat took off into the woods.

The next day, the man's horse had no trace of the gashes of the cat's big claws. He later learned, however, that an old woman believed to be a witch, had been found shot to death, with the flesh and hair of a horse under her nails.

Mrs. Koofindig, Witch

In a small settlement near California, Mo., there was said to be a witch by the name of Mrs. Koofindig. She was always trying to get people to give her things. So anyway, one day Mrs. Koofindig came over to one of the settler's houses and asked the man of the house for one of his pigs. Of course, he said no.

The next day when the farmer came out to tend to his pigs, they were all lying dead in the pasture. Then the next morning he came out and all of his horses' manes and tails were knotted so that they couldn't be combed out. They had to cut them off. There was an old belief that to throw water on a witch would break the spell. Next day the farmer threw water on her, and when he got home all of the tail hairs were standing straight up on the ground signifying the breaking of the spell.

Another Mrs. Koofindig story is about a family that had a baby that cried and cried all night long. The Koofindig woman lived down the road from them. Big red spots started appearing on the baby every time it cried. It was said that getting a piece of clothing from the witch believed to be casting the spell and putting it under a fire would cause the witch pain. She would come and find where it was and try to get it back. So the family got the clothing and put it under the fire. Sure enough, she came down and asked for her clothing back. They told her to take off the spell. When she said no, they put another log on the fire. She started to scream and agreed. The spots never appeared on the baby again.

Woman in White

An older friend of mine who lives near Houston, Mo., tells this story. A neighbor's wife was in heavy labor with their first child when he and the neighbor went for a doctor. As they were traveling down the road they saw a woman dressed in white carrying a baby. The neighbor said, "We should turn back, my wife has died." When they arrived back at the cabin the woman was dead. They were told the woman had died at the exact time they had seen the woman dressed in white.

The Death Staircase

My grandmother also told me this story of a big white house in Plad. The oldest thing in this house is a long, curving staircase. They moved there on a clear spring day in about 1903. The house had a sense of a cool breeze down the staircase, but they didn't think much about this. That night they went to bed early. Then about midnight there came a thud at the top of the stairs and it ended at the bottom of the staircase. Everyone got up to see if someone had fell. It was unexplainable.

The next night the same thing happened. It was repeated the following night, only on the third night everyone gathered around the bottom to wait and watch. So as midnight approached, they heard it at the top. What was it coming down those stairs? They didn't see anything. They could feel a cool breeze coming down until it hit the bottom.

The following day they went to the former owner and told him of the happening. The owner explained that it had been happening for a year now. "About a year ago last month," he began to explain, "there was a young boy about nineteen who ended his life on that staircase." So could it have been the boy, for this phenomenon was never cleared up. To my grandmother's knowledge that ghost is still jumping off that staircase.

The Miller's Wife

A friend of mine told me this story. In a small town that she was raised in, there was a man who ran a mill. During the busy season he would work late. Since his wife was getting tired of it, she cast a spell on his mill and placed a curse in it to foul up one of the grinding wheels. Every night for week the mill stopped. The miller was telling his friends about it one day, and one of them knew a lot about witchcraft. They were both there when the mill stopped, and the witch expert noticed a cat with its paws on a little wheel. The man hit the cat with a knife which stuck in his paw as he ran off. So, anyway, when the owner of the mill came home that night and told his wife what happened, she got very pale. He looked at the sheets on the bed and then at her hand. It was bleeding from what looked like a knife wound.

That Sunday Night

My great great-grandfather told me this story of when he was in his late teens, back in 1896. It was Sunday night, a night for church. The old brown church was about five miles through the woods by wagon, so they always took along a basket of food to eat on the way. Only him and his brother were going to church. They had to start out about five o'clock for the seven o'clock services. So off they went after their mother had packed their food. As they approached the church they could see nobody else around. When they went in the oil lamps hadn't been lit, and the stove was still cold. There wasn't no church that night.

As they were walking home on the old road, they were wondering why there hadn't been church. Behind them they could hear someone riding up the road on horseback. The hoof beats came closer and closer. They stepped on each side of the road, but the horse never passed, just the sound. They looked at each other in the moonlight, stepped into the road, and didn't stop running until they hit Blue Ridge, which is about two miles from where they started. They could never figure out what mysterious rider rode past them that night.

The Ball of Fire

This is a story my dad told me about what happened to him and a friend. They had been working all day in the woods cutting logs. It was just getting dark when they finished and started the six miles down and up the hollow to home. It would take a while to travel this far with a horse and wagon. They were talking about what they were going to do with the money they earned cutting logs.

The horses started fretting a little, but they thought it was probably some wild animal. They approached the forking in the hollows to go up what is called north hollow, when from away back of them came what seemed to be a ball of burning fire. It seemed to be following them. When it got close, the horses began to rear and buck. The men got off the wagon to settle the horses. Both ducked their heads by the horses' necks just in time to see the object whizzing right above them. It was never explained. Maybe it was a meteorite, and maybe it wasn't.

The Unknown Visitor

This is a true story told to me by my grandmother. It takes place down by Plad, Mo., around 1920. She lived in a two-story white house with an old shed in back. Lowell, my great uncle, was off in Buffalo and was not expected back until Sunday. It was a usual Saturday night, with supper already eaten. The whole house made it to bed around eight o'clock, for there was lots of work to be done the next day. My grandmother slept by the fireplace in the living room. She was half asleep when she heard a horse come up. Then the saddle hit the porch just like her brother always did when he unsaddled and set it on end. The figure came and stood by her bed, but didn't utter a word. "Lowell, your bed is fixed, so go on to bed." The figure moved on up the stairs to his room.

The rooster started their awakening so my grandmother helped her mom fix breakfast. Everyone showed except Lowell. She went to the bottom of the stairs and called, "Lowell, you come on down for breakfast now." There was no reply, she went on up to the room. The bed hadn't been slept in and there was no sign of Lowell. About noon Lowell came riding in. When questioned he said he had spent the night in Buffalo. Grandma turned white. What did she talk to that night?

Stump Ghost

This story was passed on three generations by a grandfather to a son and then to his son. Jimmie Morrison told me the story about his grandfather.

This man was walking home from church one real dark night. He always carried a pistol. He was on a path and not too far up the road he thought he seen something dark. He thought it was either a man that was going to jump him, or maybe an animal. So he yelled, knowing that if it was a man, he'd stand up and acknowledge himself, and if it was an animal, the yelling would scare it off. He yelled about three or four times, and no one stood up or no animal ran away. So he took out his pistol and emptied it in the black object. It never did move so he walked on up to it, and he found out that the black object was an old black tree stump!



The Legend of Deadman's Creek

As far as I can remember, people have been afraid to go around or even near Deadman's Creek. The legend goes back to when people were first coming into these parts. Because it was the highest ground around, they had to get here through a riverbed. Many times they would be robbed or killed by outlaws who would leave the settlers' bodies to rot.

Well, many years later after people were settled in their homes, they began to hear sounds from the riverbed. So they sent one of the men of the town to see what it was. When he came back he was as white as snow, and after they finally got him settled down, he told of all the ghosts flying around, and how there were wagons all over the place with blood pouring from the dried up riverbed.

Well, he died that night. Since then not one person has gone near that place, and on certain nights when the wind is cool and the moon is behind the clouds, you can still hear the ghosts of Deadman's Creek.

A Washday Ghost

This is a true story. It all started right after my grandpa and grandma were married. They moved in this old house that people thought was haunted and no one would live in. But Grandpa didn't believe in ghosts. My grandpa always liked moving in old houses just to prove that they weren't haunted.

On this particular day my grandfather decided to go to town. My grandma had washed and had spread the clothes over fences and the big cedar trees in the front yard. She had spread a white sheet over a smaller one which stood directly in front of the house.

It was dark when Grandpa had got back from town. That night after he rode up, he got off his horse and took it in the barn as he usually did. But as he was coming out of the barn and heading to the house he stopped. There it was in his front yard. A ghost! The house really was haunted! How was he going to get to the house? The only way was to go right past it no matter what it was. As much as he hated to, he

finally started on. When he got closer, it seemed to be jumping in all directions. Then as he got real close, he began to laugh, for finally he realized that it wasn't really a ghost, but that Grandma had washed that day and hung her sheets on the cedar tree to dry.

The Wood Chopping Ghost

Travelers of long ago tell the tale of a wood chopping ghost. The travelers would be camped out overnight on their journey near a run down old mill and sometime in the middle of the night they would be awakened by the sound of someone chopping wood from the nearby trees. The constant chop-chop-chop would ring from the darkness keeping them awake. The wood chopper would pause for a moment and the travelers would hear a sound like the ax being sharpened on a grindstone, then the chopping would begin again.

The Baby And The Serpent

A baby was sitting in a field supposedly amusing himself among the weeds by

playing with a rattle. The baby's mother heard the baby laughing and had no idea of the horror she was about to face. She took a moment to check on the child and was shocked to see the baby playing with a huge rattlesnake.

The mother rushed to the barn, grabbed an ax and returned to where the baby and the serpent were at. The mother killed the snake with one chop. However, the baby slowly lost its strength and died only a few weeks later. To this day the sound of a baby's rattle haunts the field on warm summer nights.

Guardian Animals

Several stories exist about animals that guard family homes or buried treasures once the animal has long since been dead. There is a meeting house that is haunted by a horse belonging to a Civil War soldier. The soldier was shot off the horse in the meeting house. (Why a horse was in the meeting house, we don't know.)

Since that time, people say the sound of a horse can be heard walking into the building and is followed by

the sound of a thump. The thump, of course, the sound of the soldier's body falling. The hooves then retreat, but nothing is seen to explain the sounds.

Ghostly dogs have reportedly chased boys down old Missouri roads late at night. When the boys try to run the dogs off with their whips, the whips merely pass through the ghostly dog's body.

There is the story of a ghostly horse and buggy clacking across an old covered bridge accompanied by fog misted lights, and a headless dog that roams the Ozarks woods that has been seen by many a hunter.

Ozark Superstitions!

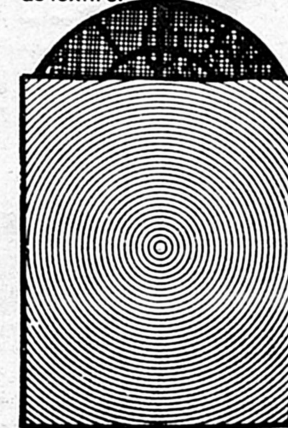
If you look down into a well on Halloween, you will see the image of the person you're going to marry.

Horses and dogs can see ghosts, and so may the horse's rider if he will look straight forward between the horse's ears.

It's bad luck to carry a stray cat into the house.

Foxfire Ghost

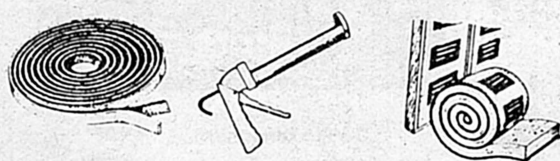
A stranger came into town and was bragging how brave he was, but the townspeople knew something that would make anyone's hair turn white. They told this man a story about a Civil War soldier that was killed in a battle near town, and every night at that place you could see his brass buttons on his uniform gleaming from the road. So the man went out to see if the wild story was right and saw what seemed to be the brass buttons, but upon closer examination, he saw that it was really some kind of plant that glowed in the dark. Today we know this as foxfire.



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