

BEYOND

THE SHADOWS



The existence of ghosts and spirits has intrigued man throughout the ages. Some are ardent believers, whilst others live with a strong skepticism. Which one are you?

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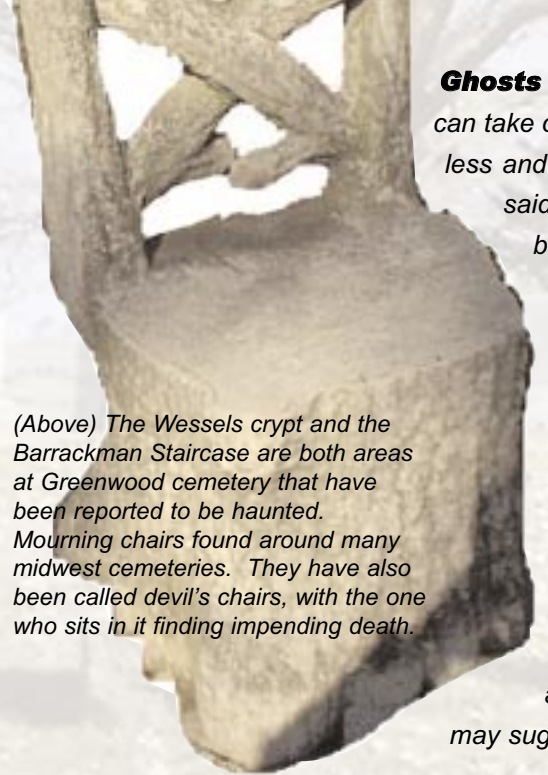
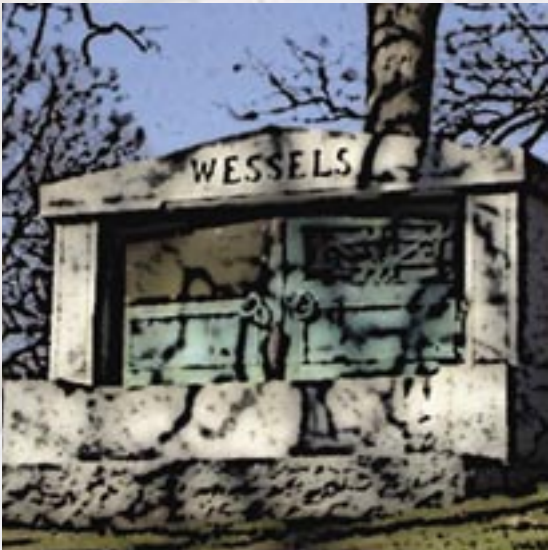
All my life I have held an arm chair interest in the afterlife. I loved ghost stories, especially those that were supposed to be real. When I was around five (we were still living in our Brooklyn flat on 62nd Street), I awoke one night and found my way into the living room where my parents were. With fists rubbing eyes, I recall the picture on the TV of the skeleton arising out of the bubbling water. The image stayed in the back of my mind for years to come and was released one night when I was 13 with a feeling of Dejavu whilst I was babysitting and watching Thriller Theatre (or was it Creature Features?) with Vincent Price in *House on Haunted Hill*. It indeed was an eerie feeling.

Up until then, I filled my ghostly pleasures running home from school to watch *Dark Shadows* and other classic black & white ghost films that came on TV. My sisters, cousins and myself tried to have séances and use the Ouija, but with no success. The closest I ever came to a real live haunting, was when we moved from Brooklyn to New Jersey in the mid-60's. My grandparents bought a 19th century house in Freehold, NJ, on Manalapan Avenue. At some point, the house had been converted into a two family dwelling. The upstairs was vacant. A large staircase rose to the second

floor from the foyer. My parents and grandparents frequently talked about the spirit who resided upstairs. I didn't find this odd; I often heard talk of spirits. My grandmother used to tell us the story of the banshees who wailed at her brother Bernard's window at night. My great-grandfather nailed the window shut so they couldn't get in. One night they went to check on Bernard and found the window was open and Bernard's spirit had been taken away. He was only six years old. Anyway, this upstairs ghost made its presence known by footsteps and the smell of food cooking at odd hours. Lady, my grandparent's Doberman Pincher (who was trained as a guard dog for their restaurant), refused to go upstairs. I remember my father dragging her up the stairs only for her to fly down the stairs at a speed of light. Shortly, thereafter, my uncle and his family left Brooklyn and took up occupancy upstairs. Not a hint of a spirit again. As the years past, I met those who swear they had a brush with the paranormal. I enjoyed visiting old cemeteries (during the daytime) and loved old homes, especially those in New England where we now lived. Some of the cemeteries I've visited dated back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Ghosts and spirits continued to fascinate me, but I remained an arm chair believer.



A Celtic cross symbolizes faith & eternity. (top left) Lily of the Valley engraved in the headstone of the deceased is an emblem of innocence and purity.



(Above) The Wessels crypt and the Barrackman Staircase are both areas at Greenwood cemetery that have been reported to be haunted. Mourning chairs found around many midwest cemeteries. They have also been called devil's chairs, with the one who sits in it finding impending death.

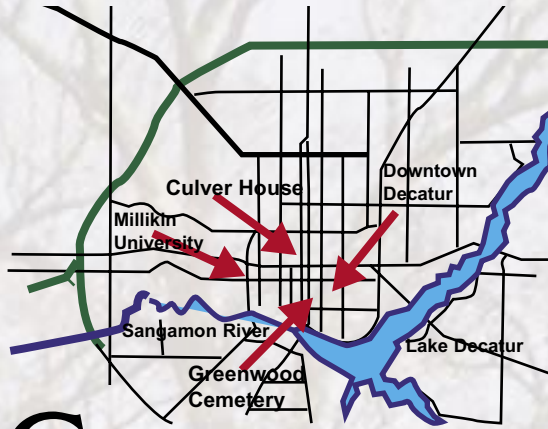
We moved to Decatur almost 12 years ago, and after a year bought a house in what was originally John's First Addition, near the center of town. We were the third owners, and it appears that I was disappointed. Several years ago, a friend introduced me to the Haunted Decatur legends, written up by Troy Taylor, a former Decatur resident and ghost hunter. My interest was immediately sparked and suddenly Decatur seemed to take on an all new charm. I became very intrigued with the history of a town that it seemed that prior to 1820, Native American Indians lived all around what we call Decatur. What we now see as a public burial ground only. Indians were very in tune to the portals of other plains, because of decay, the township had it other dimensions. This was their Holy Ground. What did they know? William Downing, a fur trapper, was the first to settle here in 1820, west of Greenwood Cemetery, which was later dubbed the name Hell's Hollow. More and more settlers came and the town we now know was established in 1829.

The oldest cemetery recorded in Decatur's history was King's Cemetery (S of W. Main/E. of Oakland) and the Common Burial Grounds that were adjacent to it. The King's land was entered into city records in 1830 by Amos Robinson, covering more then 2 acres. In 1839, the Common Burial Grounds were closed and the bodies were moved to the Greenwood area. The first burial in Greenwood was actually recorded in 1840, but parts of the cemetery grounds had been in use since before the time of Downing's appearance to this area. King's closed in the 1880's and the land was sold to the city. By 1890 most of the bodies buried there were moved to Greenwood, but many were forgotten. Over the years bodies have been uncovered when construction has been underway, most recently this past August with the construction of the Blue Phoenix (where the Blue Mill our town was used by the Indians as used to stand). A public mausoleum was built in Greenwood in 1908, but because of decay, the township had it torn down in 1967. Bodies were again moved all over Decatur, and those that went unclaimed were buried across from where the old mausoleum stood. Interestingly enough, the outline of the old mausoleum has withstood time and its foundation can still be seen today with a grassy outline. Can these souls really be at rest?

Ghosts are spirits of the dead without a body. They have no physical form, but can take on forms of clouds, people, animals and orbs of light. Most ghosts are harmless and will cause you no trouble. The difference between spirits and ghosts are said to be that spirits are someone who has crossed over, has been to the light, but has come back again. Ghosts, on the other hand, are someone who has crossed over but has not, or can not, go to the light.

There are several kinds of spirits and ghosts. The **Earthbound** have unfinished business. They may not know they are dead. **Poltergeist** are the noisy and disruptive entities. Some speculate poltergeist may be caused psychokinetically by a living person who is filled with inner anger. It is also speculated that perhaps they are just the residue of a violent life.

Guardians are spirits that have chosen to stay and protect. These beings may have a lasting attachment to a human soul. Apparitions are the spirits that come back with a purpose. These spirits usually show up in a transparent human form. Apparitions can also be lost in what is called a **time slip**. They are not here to interact with the living and their presence may suggest that they live in another band of time.



Greenwood Cemetery has become a favourite walking place for my daughter and me. Not only is this old landmark rich in the city's history, but the confine within its fence gives me a sense of peacefulness and security. Mind you, I've not had the chance to venture off in there during the night. Do I dare ask for permission to do this? The part of Greenwood that always makes me feel as if I am being watched is down on the mounds below the cemetery to the west. It is here that Hell's Hollow bordered. It is also here where there is an underground tunnel that leads to the north east section, right under the cemetery. Where does it go? Why was it built? The closest I've gotten to the cemetery at night is sitting and watching from Lincoln Park Drive, outside the

south gate where the southern hill lies. Stories have been told of shimmering lights seen weaving in and out of the tombstones. Orbs perhaps? Spirits that are in search of their bodies; many buried on this hill had been reburied after the flood washed them away. Surely these flickering lights my daughter and I saw couldn't be fireflies ... in the autumn?

A visit on November 16th validated the lights in my mind. Whilst standing at the southern gate on Lincoln Park Drive with a Millikin student I'd met, we both saw such lights. A blue light, the size of a quarter, showed itself at a foot of a grave. Several more flickerings followed, but not as intense as the first one seen that evening.

Many of the graves in Greenwood appear lonely and desolate. They are in strange locations, sticking out of the side of hills or close to paved roads. Why would they be buried or left in such obscure places?

When driving through Decatur, I like to drive down Prairie and Edward Street so that we can bypass the Culver House. Perhaps we might catch a glimpse of his spirit somewhere. This house was full of tragedy and hauntings. The house was built right on top of an Indian burial site and when the house was being built in 1881, the Indian bones found whilst under construction were discarded. The project was abandoned and in 1901, John Culver picked up where Josiah Clokey left off. Could the tragedies that followed through the years have been an after effect of desecrating these Indian graves? Prior to condemning Culver House in 1988, a woman I know used to live in one of the apartments. She told me that during the time she lived there, she heard unexplained sounds and footsteps coming from areas where there shouldn't have been any sound at all.

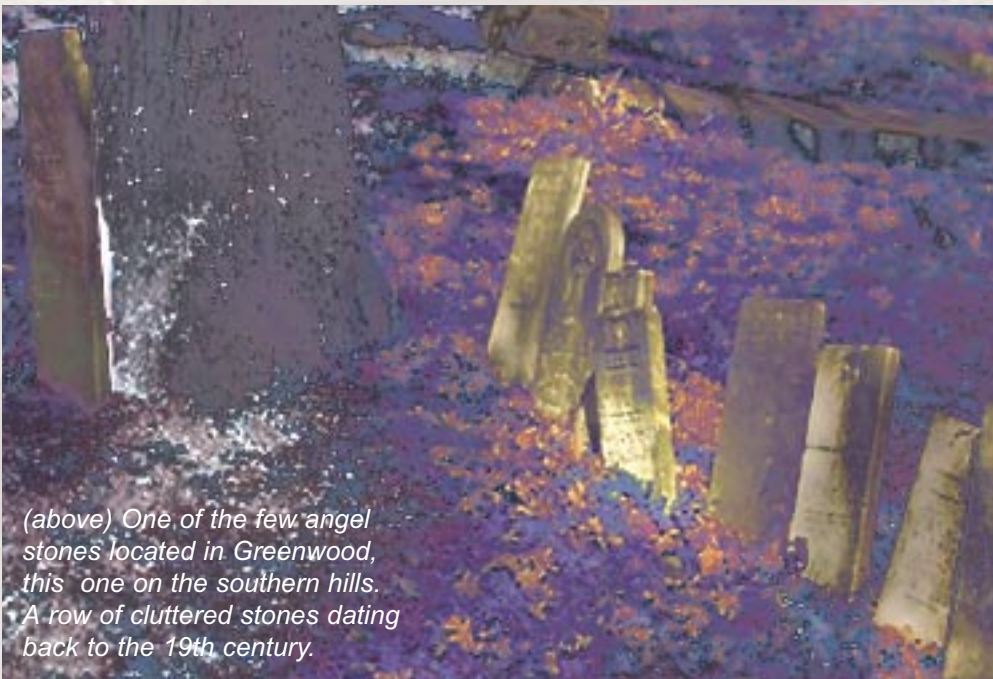


*(above left) Headstone monument at Greenwood.
(below) Haunted?? Huff mausoleum, Culver House, and at the bottom of this clearing, the site of the old public mausoleum at Greenwood.*



My sister-in-law, Mary, has worked at *The Dinner Belle* in Fairview Plaza for almost 14 years. She has been sharing her ghost stories with me for years. She has felt cold spots, the cold brush of a hand walk down her arm, pots and pans rattling, sounds of footsteps when no one else is around, the smell of an unidentified floral fragrance and the uncanny feeling of someone watching her. From what she recently told me, some of those working at the adjacent Walgreen's have also felt an unseen presence during off hours as well. The owner claims that there must be a logical explanation, but on occasion reluctantly succumbs to the notion that perhaps there is something unseen that calls *The Dinner Belle* home. Although I have been to the restaurant on occasion, I have

never been there during the opening or closing of it. In writing this article, I decided that it was time I was. On Monday, November 12th, I planned to visit and stay after hours. Would this ghostly presence pay us a visit? I arrived right before closing with a compass, a digital and 35mm camera. Compasses have been used in detecting electromagnetic energy with a certain degree of accuracy. A compass can direct one to spirit energy. A spinning needle can be evidence of a paranormal presence. After the customers all left it was time to check out the place more thoroughly. The compass indicated a lot of activity in the storeroom where most of the presences have been felt over the years, along with the kitchen and part of the dining area. We concluded that, unfortunately, most of the unusual readings in the storeroom were on account of an excess of electrical or magnetic activity by the furnace and electrical box. In the kitchen area and the dining room, the needle was off 30-35 degrees for no apparent reason. Nothing unusual showed up on any of the photos. A fruitless visit? I doubt it. One visit doesn't rule out fourteen years of unexplained occurrences.



(above) One of the few angel stones located in Greenwood, this one on the southern hills. A row of cluttered stones dating back to the 19th century.

The universe is indeed a very complicated domain with the heavens filled with unexplainable phenomena. There are portals, wormholes and dimensions of time that we have no concept of. Perhaps I shall never have the unique opportunity to witness an anomaly of this magnitude. Then again, one never knows. Perhaps we must continue to look beyond the shadows.

What are the metaphysics of a spirit or a ghost?

Orbs are the most common kinds of ghosts that will be found in photographs. They are usually round balls of white light, but may appear in other colours as well. Their size varies. One theory says that orbs are the energy of the spirit.

Ectoplasm is also another common form that ghosts and spirits take. In this form, they appear as a translucent fog or mist. These are also common in photographs. Again, this is considered spirit energy and can be in countless shapes, sizes or colours. Sometimes, this phenomena is caused by weather conditions.

Vortexes are an interesting anomaly. They are not considered ghosts, but instead a portal into another dimension, perhaps a way that spirits travel. Vortexes are not common on film and are usually large in size and colour.

Apparitions are every ghost seekers dream. They are usually seen only by eye as it is very rare to catch an apparition on film. These are the spirit energy of the human form. Seeing an apparition can be scarier than seeing any other type of ghost, but yet, are said to be the most interesting.

