

## HAUNTED OHIO

Articles / On The Cover

**Date:** Oct 15, 2003 - 11:57 AM

Ghosts, Angels, Murderers, Deadly Epidemics and other Eerie Buckeye Tales and Haunts  
By Hollie Mondok

*There are places in Ohio where, in the dark of night, when the fog rolls in, ghosts appear.*

*There are times when the crickets are hushed, and the nearest car is miles away, when spirits can be heard.*

*There are nights when the moon is full, and the sky is cloudy, when restless souls roam.*

*Some are searching for peace. Some are screaming for vengeance. But they are always around in some form. They are GHOSTLY legends, and Ohio has its share.*

### **The Gore Orphanage/ Swift Mansion**

Down a winding road, lined with cornfields, at the bottom of a valley, the broken foundation of a building can be seen about 75 feet into the woods before the road dead-ends.

At first, it is quiet. Then, the faint sound of footsteps can be heard overhead and, perhaps, a creaking door. The distant sound of a crackling fire begins to grow louder and louder as the anguished screams of burning children can be heard wailing in the night.

Or so the legend goes.

Gore Orphanage has been a tale of terror for generations. For years, thrill-seekers have taken the sharp right turn onto Gore Orphanage Road in Lorain County to visit the remains of the building that once housed more than 100 children in the early 1900s. They go in hopes of finding the fingerprints of small children pressed onto the windows of their cars, or tiny, bloody footprints in the snow. Many claim to have seen the ghost of a child dressed in knickers walking across the road. There are said to be abandoned graves along the river that glow like embers in the night.

According to the oral history, a fire broke out in the orphanage one night. More than 120 orphans burned and suffocated as they slept. Some believe that the spirits of those children still roam the grounds today, crying in despair. Different causes of the fire have been recounted through the years, and some say the orphanage owners ignited it for the insurance money. Others say a villainous custodian burned the building down, while still others attribute the blaze to a boy who accidentally dropped a lantern on his way to the outhouse.

According to the few records that are still in existence, however, none of these details are true.

Mr. J.A. Sprunger founded the Light of Hope Orphanage in 1903, which trained orphaned children for agricultural work and housekeeping. (Townpeople called it "Gore Orphanage" because of its location on Gore Road.) The in-house print shop burned down in 1910 without anybody inside. Sprunger died in 1912. The orphanage was turned over to the Friends' Church of Cleveland, and went bankrupt. The children were relocated. One of the girls' dormitories is said to have burned between 1912 and 1930. Again, nobody was harmed.

The ghost story may actually stem from a Greek revival mansion built in 1841 by Joseph Swift. Nicholas Wilber bought it in 1865.

The Wilbers were a farming family from New York, but rumors quickly spread throughout town about séances



being held in the house on a regular basis. Wilber, himself, was thought to be the leader of a group of spiritualists, and his grandchildren were said to have supernatural powers. When Wilber's four grandchildren, aged two to 11, died within one week — January 13-19, 1893, during the height of a diphtheria epidemic) — neighbors began to question the causes of death, as well as the whereabouts of the bodies.

It was rumored the corpses were sealed in the fireplace, and their spirits were repeatedly brought back to the house during séances. Mr. Wilber helped to build the orphanage next door in memory of the deceased children. Mrs. Wilber allegedly went insane after the deaths. She reportedly set the table three times a day for the children. Townspeople would tell stories of going to the house after the tragedy to watch her take a lamp up stairs saying, "Time for bed, children, come on," and proceeding to tuck the children in for the night.

Mr. Wilber died in 1901, and the house was abandoned before the Orphanage of Light and Hope eventually bought it. It burned to the ground in the 1920s. It is said, though, that the bricks from its fireplace were built into another home, and the woman who lives there has heard screams coming from them.

It is the ghosts and screams of the Wilber children that some say haunt the site of the former Gore Orphanage/Swift mansion. One autumn, Sandusky resident John Jett decided to investigate the site for himself. He took his wife, sons, a tape recorder and a camera.

"We had some strange noises on the tape recorder and some ghostly images on some of the pictures," he said. "The strangest occurrence was a hand print in ash like that of a small child on the hood of my jeep. We photographed it, but it did not show up when it was developed. That seemed the strangest of all because it was physical ash. Some of it formed a small cloud when my wife blew on it."

### ***The Dark Angel at Maple Grove Cemetery***



#### **THE DARK ANGEL**

Will she unleash her murderous rage?

Drive down any of the narrow gravel paths that wind through Erie County's Maple Grove Cemetery, and you will be led to an eerie figure looming in the back corner.

Perched ominously under a tree, an angel stands over four graves in apparent sorrow.

She does not watch over the graves below her, as her head has been removed. She cannot guard them, as her hands have been sawed off. She cannot even fly away, as her wings have been clipped.

So she stands alone over the graves of Alice Fischer Humphreys and the Nuhns: Betty Clare, Lydia Fischer, and Conrad H., and keeps vigil.

But according to some that vigil is not always silent. The legend warns that this headless, wingless angel waits in stillness to unleash her murderous rage on anyone who dares to desecrate her.

Neither the Erie County, nor the Lorain County Health Department's Vitals Departments have any records (including death certificates) for Lydia or Alice, the two the statue is dedicated to. Betty Clare's death certificate only states that she was born pre-mature at seven months, and died three days later on June 18, 1918. She was buried on June 21. No cause of death is listed.

There have been people, however, who claim to know the details of the deaths, as well as those of the larger-than-life statue that hovers above the graves.

One legend claims that Lydia Fischer Nuhn killed her infant daughter, Betty Clare. Then, after several tormented years of guilt and sorrow over what she had done, she took her own life. The Fischer family had the statue erected over the graves. Stories of tearstains running down the angel's cheeks began to circulate, and some townspeople soon began to believe that the evil spirit of Lydia haunted it.

When livestock began showing up dead and mutilated, some locals once again focused attention on the statue. They said the hands and mouth of the angel appeared to be stained with blood. In order to quell rumors and stop the animal slaughter, authorities entered the cemetery and cut off the angel's hands and wings.

Supposedly, it worked. The strange animal deaths ceased. But the angel was now condemned to stand, flightless, in the cemetery. Outraged by the condition it was left in, it is believed that the angel now waits to unleash her fury on anyone who disrespects her.

A second tale says that during the cholera epidemic of the early 1900s, townspeople would place the lifeless bodies of their babies in the angel's arms for her to fly up to heaven.

Upon hearing the accounts, a local priest was so outraged at what he considered to be blasphemy that he convinced some townspeople that the angel was not carrying their babies off to heaven, but instead, stealing their souls and taking them to hell. Enraged, some grieving parents went to the cemetery and cut the hands and wings off of the angel to stop her demonic voyages.

The angel is said to have been consumed with rage, and now only seeks vengeance on any who harms it.

There are various stories told among friends and posted on the Internet of curiosity seekers who have gotten into accidents after desecrating the angel at Maple Grove Cemetery. According to legend, if a person were to respectfully leave a tape recorder at the base of the angel, it will speak. One Internet posting claims that after leaving flowers for the angel and walking away from his tape recorder, a man returned to find a woman's voice on the tape telling him, 'You will receive no harm.'

Maple Grove Cemetery groundskeeper Robert Berry said that people come to see the angel all day and night. One such person was Jesse Lockhart, founding member of the paranormal investigations group, IPSO. The Akron woman went to visit the statue with her partner.

"There is a definite atmosphere about the statue," she said, "although whether it's something real or just a feeling that's built up from having heard about it is hard to say. I had to do a double take when I first saw her. I was coming up on her from off to the side and behind, and the statue just didn't look right from that angle. It draws your eye somehow.

"When I got to her, she was exactly as described: hands sawed off, and

wings clipped. And the wings were definitely clipped. Not broken, not smashed, not damaged, but very meticulously clipped, the way you would with a regular bird's wing. But what bothered me most was her head. It looks straight down at the ground at a 90-degree angle that I would consider not to be humanly possible."

Lockhart and her partner took several pictures using a Mustek MDC-800 digital camera, and soon found something odd. Behind the statue, over its right wing, was a series of, apparently, small white explosions. Lockhart asked two photography experts how such an effect could occur. Both told her it might be possible with a long shutter speed and slight movement. Lockhart pointed out, though, that particular camera does not have a shutter.

### ***The Abbott Mausoleum in Milan***

Milan may be known to history buffs as the birthplace of Thomas Edison, but to ghost hunters it is best known as the final resting place of the Abbotts.

Wander off the main section of the cemetery, towards the murky green swamp, up to the cold stone door overgrown with vines, and peer in through the rectangular screen that has been peeled away from the crypt. People say you will find an empty old rocking chair, slowly rocking back and forth by itself between two decrepit wooden caskets. But be careful not to stay too long. Legend has it that if Ben Abbott catches you peeking, he'll chase you out of the cemetery, regardless of the fact that he has been dead for almost 150 years.



**ABBOT MAUSOLEUM**  
Why does the old rocking chair still rock?

The Milan cemetery sits on the corner of Broad Street and South Edison Drive in the picturesque Erie County town. But stories about one of its permanent residents are anything but quaint.

Set far back in the older section of the cemetery, where the tombstones are worn and barely readable, and most seem to lean, slightly askew, testifying to their years of slow movement in the night, a mausoleum has been built into the ground sloping to a small swamp.

The tomb is turned in the opposite direction of the other headstones. If someone were to walk straight out its door, they would step directly into the gloomy swamp. Vines grow wildly up the stone door, stretching to the name etched deeply in the stone above it: ABBOTT. It is almost hidden and easy to miss. Surrounding trees block it from casual view. But, it is said, that is the way Ben Abbott wants it.

Ben W. Abbott was born in the late 1700s, and died on May 6, 1854. According to legend, he murdered his two granddaughters and buried their bodies in his garden. When the children's bodies were later moved to the

family mausoleum, Abbott was said to guard their grave and his secret by chasing any who dare disturb the vault.

Todd Lavey buries bodies at Milan Cemetery. "The story goes that he killed the two children that are buried there," he said. "That's not true either. At that time, children died quickly of common childhood diseases. His two grandchildren died of one, and it was legal at that time to bury family at your house. The children were buried in the garden. When people bought the house, they had the remains dug up and given a proper burial."

Lavey added that Abbott and his wife are no longer buried in the mausoleum, but they do rest close by the site. He said the only objects in the crypt now are the two old caskets housing the children's remains and a rocking chair in which Abbott used to read stories to the girls.

Kate Freeman of Elyria had heard the macabre tales, and wanted to experience them herself. She traveled to the cemetery with her dog, Sam.

"When I first drove in [to the cemetery], I didn't think I was in the right place because I could not find the grave," she said. "I kept driving around in circles, and was about to give up."

Freeman did not give up, though, because of the strange way Sam was acting. "He was going crazy," she said. "He was running in circles and barking, but it wasn't like his usual bark. He sounded like he was scared, but trying to protect me at the same time. Then I found the grave."

Freeman said that between controlling the dog and her own fear, she could not approach the mausoleum.

"I just wanted to get out of there," she said. "The whole cemetery was normal, but that grave... there's just something weird about it."

### ***The CryBaby Bridge***



Hidden within a maze of country roads at the bottom of a valley near Doylestown is a narrow gravel turn-off with an old wooden sign reading "Rogues Hollow." It is dangerously steep and twisting until it takes you virtually straight down to Crybaby Bridge.

The bridge is slight, extending over a small stream, and is surrounded by trees. Legend has it that years ago a mother killed her infant child by tossing the baby into the creek. It is said that if a person stands on the bridge, the cries of the murdered child can be heard in the night.

With a past full of rowdy saloons, out-law hideouts, and horrific mining and mill accidents, Rogues Hollow is thought to be one of the most haunted sites in Ohio. Oldtimers tell stories ranging from the midnight ride of a headless horseman and dancing mining picks, to sightings of the devil himself. But the bridge is perhaps the most popular.

Personal experiences are told to friends in schoolyards, at slumber parties and in Internet chatrooms. Photographs of the bridge with ghostly apparitions are posted on American Ghost Society Ohio Yahoo Club's photos page.

"Growing up around here [Canal Fulton], I always heard stories of the haunted bridge," Mary Ryder said. "So I drove there one night. I don't know how the bridge is made. Maybe it has something to do with it, but I heard something. And I've never heard it before on any other bridge."

Ryder described the sound she heard as her car slowly rode over the bridge as loud, distinct and melancholy. It was a long, droning moan.

"It wasn't just a sound in the night," she said. "It was kind of scary, but really sad."

### ***Sandusky's Cholera Cemetery***

On a small, green plot of land next to the Sandusky Amvet Junior League Baseball Park before Harrison Street dead-ends into West Adams, a graveyard sits with the title "Cholera Cemetery" almost proudly displayed across its entrance's archway. Though only three gravestones inhabit the cemetery, more than 400 bodies are entombed in its earth.



**CHOLERA CEMETERY**

They buried the living with the dead.

Rumor has it that not all of the souls were lucky enough to have died before being interred. In the rush to bury the victims, many who were too sick to speak up or move were also tossed into the cold ground, covered with the countless corpses of their families, friends and neighbors.

Gasping for breath, their lungs were only to fill up with dirt and the rotting stench of death. Too weak to dig their way out, these unfortunate creatures were forced to helplessly accept their inevitable deaths. These are the souls that many claim to have found wandering aimlessly through the living world they are no longer members of, in a vain attempt to get revenge for their ghastly, untimely deaths.

The cholera epidemic in the mid-1800s hit Sandusky hard. The small town was the most important port on Lake Erie's south shore, and seafaring men from other regions are thought to have brought the disease there. When 19 cholera victims were thrown overboard a ship sailing to Detroit, the bodies washed up in Sandusky. The townspeople, thinking them shipwreck victims, buried them, but the disease spread quickly.

Sandusky's worst year for the plague was 1849. It was reported that as many as 37 people died on a daily basis and there was great difficulty finding men to bury the dead bodies. More than half of the town's population fled or were killed by the sickness. The 69 worse days of the plague (between July 1 and September 7) saw more than 400 deaths. A

burial ground that had been used to receive the Protestant burials became known as the Cholera Cemetery, as victim's bodies were buried there in mass graves.

An article was published in the July 9, 1884, issue of the *Cleveland Evening News*, titled "The Asiatic Scourge/Its Terrible Ravages in Sandusky in 1849 Recalled by a Nurse/How People Died by the Hundreds and were Buried Coffinless, in Trenches." In it, the nurse claimed, "Wagons passed through the streets every morning, and carried the dead, coffinless, to the trenches for burial. So great was the haste to move the bodies that many were doubtless buried alive."

The graveyard was abandoned soon after because people were afraid of the infectious disease possessed by the buried bodies.

By 1853, its fence had become so dilapidated that cattle got into the cemetery and disturbed the graves. In 1884, a list of the cemetery's legible tombstones was made, and in 1893 the land was cleared of them. The cholera trench was never opened, however, and the bodies were not removed. The ground was plowed and used for hog slaughter, until the deceased's relatives began to object.

By 1909, children were playing on the grounds, climbing trees and building bonfires on graves. A section was being used as a chicken yard, until the deceased's families again protested.

By 1924, the grounds were finally renovated and a monument to those who gave their lives during the cholera epidemic was erected.

It is now an Erie County Historical Site, but people still whisper of the ghosts of those who were buried alive and repeatedly treated with disrespect and reckless abandon over the years. These are the spirits people claim to have seen, wandering through the cemetery at night, searching for peace.

---

This article comes from The Cleveland Free Times  
<http://www.freetimes.com/>

The URL for this story is:  
<http://www.freetimes.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=382>