



LEGENDS AND LORE OF ILLINOIS

Lakey's Creek, McLeansboro

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Contents

From the Author	1
Your Letters	1
A Quick and Dirty Guide	2
The Fallen Investigate	3
Book Review	6
Ghostly Games	7
Trivia	7

A Short Message From the Author

Firstly I would like to thank Brian and John for having me on Joliet Paranormal Radio a few weekends ago, despite all the technical difficulties. They are some of the few people trying to promote unity among the community of paranormal enthusiasts, and I applaud their efforts. It's too bad our hobby is overrun by shameless self-promoters, plagiarists, confidence artists, and various hacks of all shades. Although, to be fair, not much has changed since the 1800s in that regard. Every interest has its vices and its curses, and self-promoters seem to be one of ours.

That being said, this issue of the *Legends and Lore of Illinois* was exceedingly hard to write. I had to travel to McLeansboro twice because my first batch of pictures became corrupted somehow. Then, just about everything in the world happened to keep me from writing the issue. I hope that these setbacks aren't reflected in the final product.

Also, I'm glad that everyone seemed to enjoy our "Cemetery Z" video. It's nice to see that we still have a sense of humor. Maybe we will have the last laugh after all! ✨

<http://www.myspace.com/legendsandloreofillinois>
<http://www.youtube.com/Illinoisghosts>

Your Letters

When I was 12, 13, and 14 yrs. old, I went 2 basketball camp at Dave Darnell's camp in Eureka. Can't remember what college hall it was, but we all went there one nite 2 visit. Supposedly, there was a fire back in the day and a young girl died. The only thing left in the house that was recognizable was a portrait of the girl. She supposedly shuts off curling irons, and lights. The basement is creepy, but I was never told anything about that. I will say that every coach and local that I met confirmed the actions of this girl. I didn't see anything when visiting, but honestly I believe them all. Peoria is a breeding ground for all of this from what I've read. Hope you check it out.

—Kirstin

If you are a fan of the *Legends and Lore of Illinois*, we want to hear from you! Please e-mail your letters to:
thefallen2@gmail.com



The concrete bridge over Lakey's Creek.

A Quick and Dirty Guide to Lakey's Creek

The headless horseman of Lakey's Creek is quite possibly one of the oldest ghost stories in Illinois. Passed down as an oral tradition until John W. Allen put the story on paper in 1963, the mysterious man named Lakey, as well as his untimely end, has been immortalized in the folklore of Southern Illinois. Like Seaweed Charlie, this ghost story may be preserving the memory of an unsettling event in local history.

Long before a concrete bridge spanned the shallow creek 1.5 miles east of McLeansboro, a frontiersman named Lakey attempted to erect his log cabin near a ford along the wagon trail to Mt. Vernon. One morning, a lone traveler stumbled upon Lakey's body. Lakey's head had been severed by his own ax, which was left at the scene. According to legend, his murderer was never found.

But his story doesn't end there.

For decades after the murder, travelers reported being chased by a headless horseman that rode out of the woods along Lakey's Creek. "Always the rider, on a large black horse, joined travelers approaching the stream from the east, and always on the downstream side," John Allen wrote. "Each time and just before reaching the center of the creek, the mistlike figure would turn downstream and disappear." (*Legends & Lore of Southern Illinois*, pg. 59)

In the October 1973 issue of *Goshen Trails*, Ralph



Could this be the stump where the bloody ax was found? No.



A view of Lakey's Creek as it travels under the bridge.

S. Harrelson published research in which he claimed to have learned the historical personage behind the Lakey legend. In a history of Hamilton County, he discovered a single sentence revealing that a man named Lakey—the same man who gave his name to the creek—had indeed lived near the ford, but more tellingly, that he had been murdered by his son-in-law. After further research, Harrelson discovered that a man named Joel Leaky had owned a tract of land in that vicinity prior to 1824. "Leaky," apparently, was a variation in the spelling of "Lakey." "Joel could be, and probably is, the person for whom the creek is named," he concluded. ("History and Legend of Lakey," *Goshen Trails*, pg.13)

The tale of the headless horseman of southern Illinois has graced the pages of many monographs on Illinois ghostlore since its first printing in 1963. Among others, Lakey's ghost has appeared in Beth Scott and Michael Norman's *Haunted Heartland* (1985), Jo-Anne Christensen's *Ghost Stories of Illinois* (2000), and Chad Lewis and Terry Fisk's *Illinois Road Guide to Haunted Locations* (2007).

We will never know if Washington Irving's famous tale of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" affected the legend of Lakey's Creek. It is possible that German settlers carried the tale from New England to southern Illinois. Stories involving ghostly chases, such as Gottfried Bürger's *The Wild Huntsman*, were widely popular in the early 1800s. Then again, Lakey's black steed could have been sired right here in Illinois. ✦

The Fallen Investigation file 019

The summer sun created tiny mirages in the asphalt as The Fallen sped toward a concrete bridge just outside of McLeansboro. Manowar's "Return of the Warlord" blared from the speakers of their aging, dark blue Toyota Corolla, while the smell of tacos drifted from the backseat. Mike, who was behind the steering wheel as usual, eyed Greg, Davin, and Emmer munching down on a smorgasbord of hard and soft tacos in the rearview mirror. He cringed as bits of lettuce and cheese fell on the floor.

"If you guys don't knock it off, I'm going to turn this car around!" he threatened.

"Man," Greg replied as taco shell spewed from his mouth between words, "we're almost there. Look, there's the bridge. Isn't it?"

Aurelia, in the front passenger seat, inspected the crumbling map of Illinois that she gripped in her hands. "This is it," she confirmed.

Emmer cleared his throat. "What kind of ridiculous goose chase do you have us going on now?" he asked. "Zombies? Trolls? More things that only seem to happen when I'm not around?"

"A headless horseman," Mike said through clenched teeth.

Laughter erupted from the backseat.

"This is almost as bad as that Dug Hill trip last



Investigation File:
Lakey's Creek
July 11, 2008
Time: 1:10 p.m.
Temperature: 86 F

Reported Sightings:

Believed to be the ghost of a man named Lakey, a headless horseman has been seen riding along the creek in pursuit of travelers. This legend appears to be partially based in fact.

Our Findings:

Aurelia thought she sensed the presence of something from another world... and she turned out to be right. We also discovered the remains of a house that formerly sat next to the bridge over Lakey's Creek.

year," Emmer chuckled. "Southern Illinoisans sure do have an imagination."

"At least it's an interesting story," Greg interjected as Mike steered their Toyota off the road and onto a small gravel drive at the edge of a large field near the bridge. "But from what I remember, no one has seen this ghost in decades, so what exactly do you expect to find?"

"Evidence of some kind," Mike replied. "An old well. Some spectral horse dung. I don't know. Something."

"Here we go again," Emmer sighed as the car came to a stop and he swung one of the rear doors open. "First a mysterious astral portal, now this. In a sane world you'd be locked up at the funny farm."

"Well, luckily for me we got rid of those," Mike said with a grin.

"Will you two shut up already," Aurelia interrupted. "You're giving me a headache. If we're going to find anything at all here we need to concentrate. We don't want to screw up now with all the success we've had lately."

A view from under the concrete bridge.

"Yeah, that mirror thing really worked out well," Emmer said while rolling his eyes.

After a few moments, the five congregated outside of their car. Ahead of them on their right stood the concrete bridge over Lakey's Creek. On their left stood a small, wooded area. A narrow gravel road followed the tree line on the opposite side of the creek. Oddly, a fire hydrant poked its head out of the tall grass in the field in which they stood. A large mound of dirt and debris was also noticeable.

"It looks like there used to be a house here," Mike observed. "You can tell because of that pile of crap over there. This empty field and that fire hydrant are also suspicious."

"Thanks, Watson," Aurelia said. "I thought I was queen of the obvious here."

Mike shot her an annoyed glare, but he continued on as though he hadn't heard the insult.

"Do I have to remind you that Lakey's cabin was built in the 1820s, if it was even built at all?" Greg said. "It definitely wouldn't have had a fire hydrant, that's for sure."

Mike led the group closer toward the tree line and the pile of debris. Even through the abundant undergrowth, it was apparent there was a path that cut through the woods along the creek. "You're missing the point," Mike argued. "Think about it. There used to be a house here, right next to the creek. Lakey's Creek. Right near the ford where the headless horseman was last seen. If we could find out who lived here, we might be able to talk to them and ask them if



The road to nowhere leads behind Lakey's Creek.



Note: somewhere on every bridge is a plaque showing when it was constructed.

they ever saw or heard the horseman. Who knows, maybe the story itself originated here during some late night backyard bonfires."

"I guess that makes sense," Greg admitted. "So what do we do next?"

Before Mike had time to reply, Aurelia shouted from a few yards downstream. "Hey! I think I see something!"

Mike, Emmer, Greg, and Davin spun around just as a light flashed under the bridge. "I don't think we're alone," Davin whispered. Without hesitation, Mike motioned to Emmer and Greg to cross the road and come down into the creek bed on the other side of the bridge.

Mike and Davin raced to Aurelia's side. "What did you see?" Mike asked.

Aurelia rested her hands on her broad hips. "Something moved under the bridge. I'm not sure what it was, but I feel like something is out of place over there."

"You didn't notice anything more specific than that?" Davin demanded. "These hunches of yours aren't very helpful. Remember the time you thought you sensed something at Chesterville Cemetery, and it turned out to be woodpeckers?"

Aurelia crinkled her brow and dug her fist into Davin's ribs. Davin's knees buckled and he barely held himself upright as he gasped for breath.

"That's enough, you two," Mike hissed. "You're

acting like a bunch of children."

"Humph!" Aurelia exclaimed and turned her back on her friends.

On the other side of the road, Emmer and Greg quickly moved into position. The duo hugged the side of the concrete bridge so that they couldn't be seen by whatever was lurking in the shadows. A recent drought had reduced the creek to a trickle, exposing a wide swath of sediment on the creek bed. For a few moments, the two heard only the rustle of water and the chirp of nearby birds. Then, suddenly, the sound of stones grinding together alerted them to the presence of a being with obvious, physical existence.

Emmer and Greg exchanged nods and sprang into action, simultaneously jumping down into the creek bed. Their assault elicited a sharp cry of surprise from what looked like a teenage boy wearing baggy shorts and a Far Side t-shirt. The boy lost his balance on the loose sand and fell into a pile of gravel. A can of spray paint flew out of his hand and fell into the creek.

Both Greg and Emmer broke out into laughter. "It's just some dumb kid," Emmer shouted to Mike,



Just can't get enough pictures of flowing water?

Davin, and Aurelia, who had finally arrived at the opening on the other side of the bridge.

"He's a litter bug too," Greg added with a wide grin. "We better call Al Gore."

"Yo, who you callin' dumb, fool?" the kid spat at them. "This is my turf. I be taggin' this shizzle."

"Someone's watched a little too much MTV," Mike added. "Listen. We're The Fallen, and this location was the scene of an intersection of the astral and physical plane. So that means it's our *turf*."

"Wh...what?" the kid stammered. "Yo, you been huffin' or some shit?"

"No, he's always like this," Emmer sighed. "I just ignore him now. Anyway, we don't care what you're doing. We thought you might be someone else."

"Something else to be exact," Greg added with emphasis.

"Yo. Yo. It's cool. I be just leaving. Peace out, yo." The kid pulled himself to his feet and carefully stepped out from under the bridge, leaving his can of spray paint behind.

"Hey, go read a damn book!" Greg shouted after him.

"I thought gangsta posing was out and girl-pants emo was in," Mike asked Davin, who shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know?" he replied.

The Fallen waited for the kid to be out of sight before they reconvened along the road on the downstream side of the bridge.

"Let's get back down to business," Mike said as he pulled a digital camera out of the pocket of his cargo shorts. "We'll take pictures of the area as usual. Davin, you're on for the video. Aurelia, try to see if you sense anything else. Greg, audiotape. Emmer." He paused.

"I'll just go with Greg," Emmer said before Mike had time to finish his thought. "I doubt we'll find anything else here, but I'll go through the county records when we're done and try to find out who owned this property last. Who knows, maybe they *can* help us."

Mike nodded and went to work, while Emmer and Greg exchanged skeptical glances. "Do you really think we're going to find anything?" Emmer whispered.

Greg shrugged his shoulders and pulled out the tape recorder. "We might as well try," he replied. ♣

Book Review

A book of this magnitude was long overdue. Filling in a wide historiographical gap, Deborah Blum has masterfully retold the story of the birth of spiritualism and the scientific pursuit of “psychical research.” Along with Raymond Moody’s *The Last Laugh*, this book is required reading for any aspiring investigator of the paranormal.

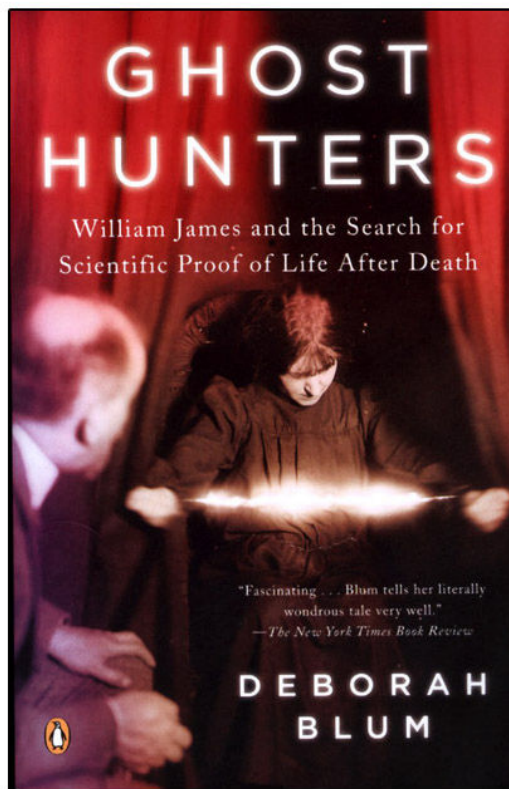
The cast of characters in *Ghost Hunters* reads like a who’s who of late nineteenth and early twentieth century luminaries. Blum, however, leaves no one out of her narrative. Scientists, theologians, performers, mediums, lovers, poets, working class families, and con men all share the same stage. Biographic surprises lurk behind every page. Even those familiar with the renowned father of pragmatism, William James, are usually ignorant of his role in the investigation of paranormal phenomenon at the turn of the previous century.

Other names crop up to startle the reader. Alfred Russel Wallace, the forgotten coauthor of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, Charles L. Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*), and even Samuel Clemens were all members of the British Society for Psychical Research.

Blum was very adept at laying bare long forgotten antidotes of history. In *Ghost Hunters*, she approached her brilliant and influential subjects as they were; as human beings who experimented with narcotics, believed they had attained enlightenment under the influence of nitrous oxide, fell in love with their test subjects, and traveled to other continents to interview and test mediums and self-professed psychics of all shapes and colors.

She also weaved a detailed picture of a field of research constantly under siege by fellow scientists, journalists, and subjected to unending embarrassment caused by fraud and suspect conclusions at a time when England was ground zero in the battle between science and faith.

In the United States, William James led the charge at the helm of the American Society for Psychical Research, but his investigations seemed no more fruitful than those of his British counterparts. By 1886, Blum



Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*. Non-Fiction. ISBN-13: 978-0-14-303895-5. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006.)

wrote, “their annual report... had degenerated into a list of exposures of professional practitioners.” (pg.117) Their experiments dismantled spiritualist claims one after another, and many members began to conclude that mental illness lay at the heart of ghost sightings.

Finally, one medium, who claimed to have received messages from deceased British Society for Psychical Research member Richard Hodgson, ultimately boosted their morale. In one message, the spirit of Hodgson revealed the name of a woman who he had proposed to years earlier, but who had spurned his advances. William James contacted the woman, who, to his surprise, confirmed the story. This new phenomenon, known as cross-correspondence, continued to yield remarkable results, results that were not easy to dismiss as mere coincidence. James hesitantly concluded that, as evidence of an afterlife, that was as close as they were likely to get.

As a journalist, Deborah Blum failed to document her sources as thoroughly as a historian would demand. Never-the-less, her years of experience writing about science has given her the ability to weave a wonderful narrative without getting bogged down in technicalities and jargon. When it comes down to it, *Ghost Hunters* is both entertaining and informative, which is a rare combination these days! ♣

Ghostly Games

This section is designed to put fun back into the craft of "ghost investigation." Most of these ideas will have nothing to do with poking around with an EMF detector and thinking you've detected a ghost when you're really just standing under a power line.

Game #7: A Recipe for Evil... Sandwiches.

When no one is looking, some members of The Fallen enjoy cooking cutesy, Halloween related treats. Here is a recipe for coffin sandwiches that we ripped off of Kraft Food, Inc. and made slightly more vile.

Ingredients

- 2 slices of sourdough bread
- 3 slices of processed swine
- 1 slice of stinky cheese
- 1 Tablespoon ketchup
- 1 leaf of red-lettuce
- Chocolate frosting

Instructions

Cut the bread into a coffin shape using a coffin template (trace the template onto a piece of cardboard and cut out) and a sharp knife. Layer with sliced meat, cheese, ketchup and lettuce. Write "RIP" down the front of the sandwich with the frosting. Spear the sandwich with a little plastic sword toothpick to hold it together (if you like pirates). Makes 1 serving. ✦



Lakey's Creek as it winds through the desolate woods.



A campsite in the woods near Lakey's Creek.

Trivia

Tough questions will be asked in this section. It is up to you to uncover the clues and determine the solutions. Sometimes you will find the answers buried in the current issue; other times you will need to go to the location itself. The answers to this month's questions will be posted in next month's issue.

1. What are three of the alternative spellings for the name "Lakey"? (Yes, we said three...)
2. In what year was Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" published?
3. According to Trent Brandon's *Book of Ghosts*, what type of ghost is the headless horseman?
4. In which county does the town of McLeansboro lay?
5. In what year was the bridge over Lakey's Creek constructed?
6. What type of weapon was used to decapitate Lakey?
7. Who turned out to be Lakey's real murderer?

Go out and explore, and good luck!

Answers to last month's questions:

1. *The Horrific Vision, or the Instant Scar.*
2. 1859.
3. *An FH-1 Phantom.*
4. *Northwestern University.*
5. *Sheridan Road.*
6. *True.*
7. *The 1960s.*