



Legends and Lore of Illinois

Axeman's Bridge, Crete

Volume 3 Issue 12 December 2009

Written by Michael Kleen

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Axeman's Bridge recently collapsed.

FROM THE AUTHOR

This is the last month of 2009, and I can hardly believe it. "Axeman's Bridge" is the 36th issue of the *Legends and Lore of Illinois*. Who knew it would come this far? We have 12 more issues coming your way, and a lot more planned for the website, in 2010. Like the ghost stories themselves, the *Legends and Lore of Illinois* will keep changing, adjusting to the times. Our only purpose is to provide knowledge and entertainment to you, our readers. So if you don't find something about this publication useful, or would like to see something else included in each issue, please let me know! I would be more than happy to incorporate your suggestions.

I would like to have more live events next year. I enjoyed coming out to Danville in October, sharing stories, and meeting the fans. If you are a promoter or a business owner and would like to have me come out and talk about the *Legends and Lore of Illinois*, please contact me at thefallen2@gmail.com. This is a great subject matter for schools, libraries, cafes, or even pubs. Everyone enjoys a good ghost story! ✨

<http://trueillinoishaunts.com>

YOUR LETTERS

I have been out to the Ridge Cemetery and I was wondering with all the other weird things that occur why no one knows what happened to Amanda Hart??? Amanda Hart's stone on the right corner as you headed in, with the many Glicks. The stone has John Hart born July 31 1849 died Aug 9 1929 and Amanda Hart born August 9 1928 and no death recorded or nothing said to be buried somewhere else. This is a bad omen in its self.

In my many years of (Cemetery Hopping) the Ridge Cemetery has my attention now and all on its own. I found it without the internet and I had only been there once as a child with my father. It found me I think and now I am watching I will let you know what I find. I read the many articles on the cemetery and found nothing about Amanda???

— Kristy

Send us a letter! E-mail your questions or comments to: thefallen2@gmail.com

A QUICK AND DIRTY GUIDE TO AXEMAN'S BRIDGE

There is nothing peculiar about the concrete bridge along Old Post Road two miles east of Crete. If a motorist were to drive past, over the trickling waters of Plum Creek on a pleasant summer day, not much would alert this passerby to the Axeman's gruesome story. In the woods a few yards to the northeast, however, sits a rickety steel bridge, currently collapsed into the water. It is tagged with graffiti. For years, local teens imagined that this was the scene of a gruesome axe murder. The remains of a home hidden in the trees and the closure of the road leading to the steel bridge have only fueled the legend.

Although landmarks set the stage for this story, the exact history of the area is difficult to determine. According to John Drury's photographic history, *This is Will County, Illinois* (1955), David Harner was the first white settler of Crete Township, and a large contingent of ethnic Germans followed. Early on in the history of Will County, the thick timberland along Plum Creek was called Beebe's Grove. It was named after Minoris Beebe, who arrived in 1834 along with David Harner. According to an old county plat map, a man named William Vocke owned the property around Axeman's Bridge in 1909. I have been unable to determine when this bridge closed.

To my knowledge, there are two books that mention the legend of Axeman's Bridge: *Windy City*



Was this bridge the scene of a gruesome murder?



Cement blocks used as traffic barriers to close the old road.

Ghosts by Dale Kaczmarek and *Weird Illinois* by Troy Taylor. Both have competing accounts of the story, but neither is necessarily incorrect. In folklore, there is no "correct story," since the details change with every retelling.

In one version, told by Dale Kaczmarek, the Axeman (or Ax-Man) was a lonely old hermit who killed a pair of kids he caught trespassing on his property. Their friends, waiting safely on the road, had dared the two boys to run from one side of his bridge to the other. The version found on the Internet and related by Troy Taylor tied the Axeman's tale to the abandoned house in the woods. The man, who had a history of abusive behavior, chopped up his family and then set his house on fire. Online, others have added that the Axeman then murdered two sheriff's deputies who came to investigate the fire. When backup arrived, the police chased the murderer to the old steel bridge, where they shot him dead.

Since that time, some visitors have reported that their car has stalled on the bridge along Old Post Road, or that they have spotted the soft yellow lights of a house in the woods. Others have heard screams and the sharp ping of an axe hitting iron supports.

Old bridges and axe murders are staples of folklore, but rarely are the two combined. The legend of Axeman's Bridge is an interesting mixture of tropes that makes this location in particular so unique, and there is no doubt that people will continue to visit for years to come. ❄️

THE FALLEN INVESTIGATION FILE 036

"If you two don't knock it off, I'm turning this car around!" Mike threatened from behind the wheel of the wobbly Toyota Corolla as it sped down a rural avenue somewhere in Will County. The car's rusted frame protested against the near freezing temperature, and its paper thin tires tenuously gripped the icy road. In the backseat, Greg and Davin traded insults while Aurelia buried her forehead against her palm and rested her elbow on the passenger door. Emmer sat in the front passenger seat, reading a Tom Clancy novel.

Mike's eyes darted from the windshield to the rearview mirror. "Pay attention," he said. "I swear you two are like five year olds. I'm not going to explain this again."

Aurelia pinched Davin's arm to get his attention, and he yelled in surprise.

"This bridge we're going to is haunted by a man with an ax," Mike explained. "He allegedly killed his family before being gunned down by the cops."

"Do you have any evidence of this?" Emmer asked, never taking his eyes off the novel in his hands. "Any newspaper articles? Interviews? Channel 5 special reports? Court records?"

"No," Mike replied. "But we're hoping to get some evidence the old bridge is haunted."

"Good luck with that," Emmer muttered.

"Do you still refuse to believe in ghosts?" Greg



The modern bridge has been there for at least a decade.



Investigation File:
Axeman's Bridge
December 11, 2009
Time: 10:30 a.m.
Temperature: 28 F

Reported Sightings:

This old bridge over Plum Creek is said to be haunted by a man who murdered a person or persons with an ax. An abandoned property in the woods is given as evidence for the story.

Our Findings:

Our investigation was cut short by an encounter with something we all believed to be real. Aurelia, however, thinks we might have been transported to the crimescene described by the legend.

asked, momentarily abandoning his determination to make Davin's life miserable. "Even after everything you've seen? How do you explain what happened to you at Harrison Cemetery last month?"

Emmer snapped. "I don't know, *but it wasn't paranormal.*"

"Let's face it, Emmer will always be a skeptic," Aurelia said.

Greg laughed. "He's not a skeptic. He's paranormally-challenged."

Emmer put down his Tom Clancy novel. "I'll admit I've seen a lot of unusual things since I signed up with you guys," he said. "Most of it involves crap you do. But the other stuff can be explained by idiocy. You want to believe it so badly—it's your first explanation for everything. 'Oh, that light was a ghost,' instead of the hundred other things it could have been."

"But you won't even accept that as a possibility," Greg protested. "I don't believe in anything unless I see it for myself, and I *know* I've seen a ghost or two in my life."

The Fallen's Toyota shot past a side street, and Aurelia pulled out the large-print map of Illinois. "Shut up, everyone!" she shrieked. "Mike, I think you missed our turn."

"What?" Mike glanced over his shoulder, but the street sign was long gone. "Crap," he muttered. "I don't know where the hell we are."

"You just have to stop and turn around," Aurelia said in a tone usually reserved for scolding children.

Up ahead, an old man wearing a lumberjack hat stepped out to the end of his driveway to check his mailbox.

"Why don't we just stop and ask that guy?" Mike inquired rhetorically.

"It could be the axeman!" Davin shouted.

"You're drunk again, aren't you?" Greg snapped at him.

Mike gradually brought the vehicle to a stop next to the old man and signaled to Emmer to roll down the window. Emmer complied, and a burst of frozen air filled the Toyota's interior.

"Excuse me!" Mike leaned over and strained to look through the window at the man's weathered face. "Excuse me! Do you know how to get to Old Post Road?"

The old man inched up to the car and put a callused, leathery hand on the open window. "Did you say Old Post Road?"

Mike nodded.

"You aren't going there to mess around on that old bridge, are you? I would stay away from there, if I were you. It's dangerous there. Some of you might get hurt." The old man's lips curled into a smile.



This simple, iron bridge could not withstand the test of time.



Plum Creek runs under Axeman's Bridge.

"Thanks, we'll keep that in mind," Emmer said. "Could you just tell us how to get there?"

"Keep going straight. Then turn right as soon as you can." The old man began to step away from the car, but paused. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

The Toyota's tires spun angrily on the ice and gravel before they finally caught traction and the car jolted forward. Emmer quickly rolled up the window and Mike cranked up the heater. It only took a few more minutes for them to reach the intersection with Old Post Road.

"I guess we weren't really lost after all," Mike said as he turned the steering wheel. The car and its passengers entered an area of dense woods on either side of the road. Snow and ice hung from the barren branches, yet they seemed more foreboding than beautiful. After a few minutes, a newly paved, concrete bridge came into view. Mike pulled the Toyota over to the shoulder just before the aluminum guardrails poked out of the snow.

Doors slammed as The Fallen piled out of their vehicle and onto the road. Mike scanned the tree line, and his eyes fell on the twisted steel supports of a bridge upstream. "Looks like we found the right place," he said. "It kind of reminds me of Airtight Bridge."

"Yeah, but at least that legend was based on something that really happened," Emmer said.

Aurelia didn't mention it, but she began to feel nervous. She could tell there was something wrong, but

she couldn't put her finger on the problem. As the group neared the path in the woods, she felt a subtle shift in the atmosphere. Suddenly, a house stood about fifty yards past the tree line, and the bridge, which had been collapsed into the creek moments earlier, appeared to be structurally sound. Aurelia couldn't contain her feelings any longer.

"Did anyone notice that house appear over there?" she asked.

"Hasn't it been there the entire time?" Davin replied.

"Uh, no."

Mike, Greg, and Emmer all threw Aurelia puzzled looks, but before she could respond, the group heard blood-curdling screams coming from the dreary, white house. The Fallen bolted into action. Greg readied his cane while the quintet plowed off the road and into the pristine snow of the timber.

Suddenly, a woman burst from the screen door. "He's going to kill my babies!" she yelled frantically.



Time stands still along Old Post Road...

In what must have been minutes—but seemed like seconds—The Fallen closed the distance between them and the panicked woman. She immediately collapsed into Davin's arms. "Help!" she gasped. "He's going to kill them!" Her face was sweaty and smeared with grease, and her hair was tangled.

Mike only had to nod, and Greg and Aurelia were at his side. Mike cursed. "What the hell is going on?"

"I swear to you, this house was *not* here when we pulled up," Aurelia said.

"Doesn't matter," Mike replied. "We'll figure that out later. Now's the time to act."

Greg brandished his cane like a club, and Aurelia led the way into the small house. She tore aside the screen door and shot up the small set of stairs into the kitchen. She couldn't have picked a more opportune time: a man with an ax stood over the cowering figures of two children. He was about to strike, but had been distracted when The Fallen came pounding through the door.

Aurelia picked up the first thing she saw—a black rotary phone—which she tore off the wall and hurled at the would-be murderer's head. It landed with a sickening crash and he crumpled to the linoleum. The two children, cheeks stained with tears, dashed past The Fallen and out the back door.

Mike gripped Aurelia's shoulder. "We better get out of here before the cops come," he said.

Outside, the two children, overcome by emotion, embraced their mother while Emmer and Davin looked at each other and shrugged. Neither one could explain what happened.

After a few moments, Mike, Aurelia, and Greg joined them. Mike ran up to Davin and Emmer and drew them in close. "We gotta go, now," he whispered. "Forget the investigation. Aurelia just bashed some guy's head in over there." He didn't need to say anything more.

As The Fallen retreated back down the old road and out of the woods, Aurelia looked back at the woman and her children. "Thank you," she heard the woman say, just before the three of them, along with the dirty white house, vanished.

"That guy must have been the son of the old man we ran into earlier," Mike remarked as he got into the car. "I might have imagined it, but they looked a lot alike..." ❖

INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER ANNE BUCKLEY

Jennifer is the editor in chief of KILTER and creator of Gothic Art Chicago. She is also an artist and photographer currently residing in Chicago. GothicArtChicago.com is an events website and myspace page for the fine arts and music events for the Chicago Dark Art, Fetish, Gothic & Industrial community.

What inspired you to organize Gothic Art Chicago and create KILTER?

I felt the Chicago underground dark arts and music scene needed to be more intertwined. I thought starting an event website that was also a database of Chicago artists and musicians was a great way to make that happen. I had wanted to publish a magazine for years, which is also something Peter Propaganda wanted to do. In April of 2008, we began having meetings and our first issue was released in mid October of 2008.

Other than the quarterly journal, what events do you sponsor or support?

Gothic Art Chicago organizes art exhibits at different local galleries including Framing Mode Gallery, The Nineteen Hundred and One Gallery and Burkhardt's Underground. We are also behind club events at Lucky Number like Dark Sounds every odd Friday, as well as various special events that you can find out about on gothicartchicago.com. We sometimes have art installations at nightclubs during different events which is another way to bring art and music together.

Do you believe Chicago has a vibrant underground scene?

It does, and there has been a bit of a gothic renaissance. DJ Scary Lady Sarah has been able to fill the Metro with people from the age range of 18 to 40-something for many years at her bimonthly event, Nocturna. Peter has had a number of larger events. The Wax Trax Era! parties fill the Kinetic Playground, and his regular fetish nights that he does with Mistress Xena are always well attended.

If you could change one thing about Chicago's art scene, what would it be?

I think that there is a lot of talent in Chicago. The main thing I think would improve the scene is if artists took time to promote themselves, their art, and the shows that they are in. This is one of the services that Gothic Art Chicago is providing for our affiliated artist, but we can't do it all for them. When you look back over art history, people like Dali and Munch were not only talented but vehement self promoters. This is an important part of their success and mystique. No one will support your art if they don't know about it.

What appeals to you about the darker side of American culture?

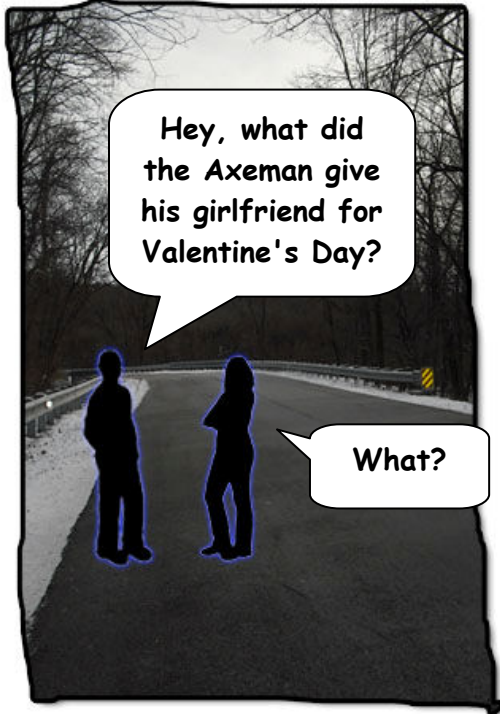
As a child I loved the artwork of Stephen Gammell and the Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark series. When I was 12, my brother gave me the entire collection of Edgar Allan Poe for Christmas. Ever since then I have been attracted to the macabre.

What kind of submissions is KILTER looking for, and where can our readers find out more information about GAC or your publication?

KILTER is always accepting art commentary, music reviews, interviews, poetry, short story submissions, articles of local interest, as well as art and comics. We also have meetings that we organized through meetup.com for writers and artists to attend and discuss what will be in the next issue of the magazine. For more information go to:

www.gothicartchicago.com,
www.kiltermagazine.org &
www.meetup.com/gothicartchicago. ✦

Legends and Lore of Illinois Presents: The Axeman Cometh



Your Letters Continued...

Recent comments on our Youtube video "Cuba Road":

I live by this road. The road is small, dark and in some places hilly. I have never seen any ghosts or anything from stories that I have heard of. One time I was driving by the cemetery doing 45mph. A car pulled out of nowhere and was gaining on me kind of fast. I was starting to get a little scared, but then I saw the blue and red lights. I got a ticket for doing 15 mphs over the speed limit in wet conditions. \$125.

— "buickman85"

I was driving down there the other day, i saw a ghost playing poker in the middle of the street, he told me i was a shmuck.

— "wdcft1"

i went there 1 am today and there was only a deer and raccoon and a cat, we had to stop and let someone go pee in a bush, that was the scariest part! oh and we went down a second time and there was a whole Mexican family just walking down the road right next to the cemetery. It wasn't that scary though...

— "Johnnyboy414"

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PARANORMAL 101

Buried Treasure

Chaplan, Michael. *The Urban Treasure Hunter: A Practical Handbook for Beginners*. Square One Publishers, 2004.

Henson, Michael Paul. *America's lost treasures*. Jayco Publishing, 1984.

Jameson, W.C. *Buried Treasures of the Great Plains*. August House, 1998.

Jameson, W.C. *Buried Treasures of the Ozarks*. August House, 1990.

Lassiter, Charles R. *Midwest Gold Prospecting*. By the author, 2006.

Marx, Robert F. *Buried Treasures You Can Find: Over 7500 Locations in All 50 States*. RAM USA., 1993.

Ok, so buried treasure isn't exactly *paranormal*, is it? As a matter of fact, if one is going to go out looking for lost gold based on a 100 year old story passed down from one person to another, that guy or gal must at least believe in the helping hand of lady luck. Add to that the fact that many stories about buried treasure are accompanied by a ghost or two, and I would say this qualifies as falling within the same scope.

I used to love reading about lost treasures and people who found diamonds along the Florida coasts, and the *Goonies* was one of my favorite movies as a kid. You don't have to go all the way to Florida to look for treasure, however. The Midwest has its very own legends! ♣



An old paint can points to past human habitation.



Evidence of a structure sits in the woods near the bridge.

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. According to Trent Brandon's *Book of Ghosts*, what type of ghost is the Axeman?
2. In which section of which township is Axeman's Bridge located?
3. Who owned that property in 1909?
4. Who owns the property today?
5. What was the name given to the forest along Plum Creek?
6. In Troy Taylor's version of the Axeman's tale, what happened to the murderer's house?
7. In Dale Kaczmarek's version, how many children did the Axeman kill?

Go out and explore, and good luck!

Answers to last month's questions:

1. Browning Township.
2. A Lonely Lurker.
3. 1907.
4. Andrew and Elizabeth Harrison.
5. 1845 and 1846.
6. Orange and White.
7. Midnight.