



Legends and Lore of Illinois

Winston Tunnel, Elizabeth

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FROM THE AUTHOR

If you have browsed the archives of the *Legends and Lore of Illinois* and noticed that it seems to be overly-represented by issues about cemeteries, you will love this year's issues because I planned them with that specific concern in mind. February's exploration of the forgotten Winston Tunnel is just a taste of things to come, with more abandoned places, roads, and foreboding woods on the horizon.

I first ventured to the Winston Tunnel south of Galena almost a year ago this month, after having read a few scattered articles about the place on the Internet. Articles, however, just do not do it justice. In order to experience the Winston Tunnel, you have to go there and see it



Nature slowly reclaims the Winston Tunnel.

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for yourself. Keep in mind that the actual tunnel is closed (and dangerous), but the adventure is in finding it to begin with. Like the characters in this month's Fallen story, it took me several hours to locate the entrance to the tunnel. There is a trail—but the quickest way is to climb the slope to your right (past the creek) as you come from the forest preserve parking lot. That leads to the old rail bed.

Visiting places like this is a great way to experience Illinois history firsthand. You don't have to be interested in ghost stories to enjoy this fascinating location!

YOUR LETTERS

In subsequent issues, we hope to print your letters commenting on what you have read. Only the best (shortest) letters will be published. Please e-mail your letters to trueillinois-haunts@blackoakmedia.org and we will try to publish them. Also, we will read your personal experiences, but we do not publish unsolicited experiences.

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A QUICK AND DIRTY GUIDE TO THE WINSTON TUNNEL

The entrance to the Winston Tunnel, covered with iron bars like a gatehouse in a medieval dungeon, sits deep in the woods several miles southwest of Galena near the tiny community of Elizabeth. It has been abandoned since 1971, and nothing but the rattlesnakes that make their nests in the damp and murky interior have ventured inside.

At 2,493 feet, the Winston Tunnel was the longest railroad tunnel in Illinois. It was built in 1888 for the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad, a line that ran from Chicago to Minneapolis, Omaha, and Kansas City. It took 350 workmen (and \$600,000) more than nine months to complete the tunnel. Shortly after, the Minnesota and Northwestern became known as the "Chicago Great Western Railway." At least one worker is known to have been killed during construction of the tunnel, which was so long a pump house had to be built to ventilate it. In fact, it is said that the ghost of this Finnish laborer still haunts the site to this day. Two engineers, one stationed at the east entrance and one at the west entrance, stood watch.

Today, the Winston Tunnel is not easy to find. The east entrance has been covered over with dirt and debris, and the west entrance is quite a walk. To get there, you must park in a gravel parking lot off Blackjack Road (County Road 8), a mile or so north of Rocky Hill Road. There is a trail that leads from



The ruins of a stately brick and plaster home sit near the trail leading to the Winston Tunnel.



A long trail ends at one entrance to this abandoned railroad tunnel. The opposite entrance is buried by debris.

the parking lot to a grassy clearing next to a creek. Do not follow this trail too far. The abandoned ruins of the watchman's house will be on your right. Just south of there, along the creek, there will be a large amount of concrete blocks and debris leading up the side of a steep hill. Believe it or not, these used to support a bridge that spanned the creek and the small valley. Head up the path located on the right side of these concrete blocks.

Once you climb to the top of the remnants of the bridge, you will face a long, straight trail where you will have to walk over the old wooden ties mostly hidden under the grass. In a few years, visitors will hardly notice that trail used to be a railroad bed. As you travel down the trail, slowly but surely a white sign will appear in the distance, seeming to hover in a small area of darkness. This is the entrance to the Winston Tunnel.

The old pump house is gone now. It was torn down in 2007, but the bricks used to build its walls still remain. The path from there is full of pitfalls, rusted steel supports, and rotting timber. It is very dangerous – if you go, make sure to wear jeans and good hiking boots. The opposite side of the embankment is much easier to navigate (if you can get over there). Seeing the entrance to Winston Tunnel is worth all the trouble. I would not recommend trying to get inside, but I'm sure some foolhardy souls have attempted it. The site is currently maintained by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and is subject to their rules and regulations. 🦋

THE FALLEN INVESTIGATION FILE 050

In front of the duo was an endless tunnel of darkness. Behind them, the tunnel entrance glowed almost unbearably bright, the bars that covered the opening only very briefly interrupting the sunlight. Greg and Davin slowly clawed their way forward, using the slippery cement wall as a guide. Davin clutched at Greg's shirt sleeve, but Greg, who was about a head shorter, brushed him off.

"I really think we should wait for the others," Davin said nervously. "Who knows what's down there? Not us, I'll tell you that."

Greg, who wore a ragged, olive green U.S. Army shirt from the Vietnam War with the sleeves rolled up, sighed in frustration. "Where is your sense of adventure? Why don't you get out of the basement every once and a while and live a little?"

"I am out of the basement," Davin grumbled. He jumped as his foot hit something long and thin—a branch that had been carried into the tunnel and deposited there during a heavy rain. "Man, there could be snakes in here and God knows what else."

"Snakes are cold-blooded, so they need to warm their bodies by being out in the sun," his friend replied. "I doubt we'll run into any in here."

"What? There are snakes that live in caves—" Davin was unable to complete his thought before several figures interrupted the light coming from the tunnel entrance.



A different view of the old house.



The top of a railroad bridge that once spanned this valley.

"Good, Mike and the others finally made it," Greg said and quickly turned to give his friends a verbal lashing for taking so long to get there. When he turned to face the tunnel entrance, however, he saw only the outlines of three figures, each about six feet tall and two feet wide. They seemed to be absorbing all light, like deep black silk. An icy chill ran down his spine.

Earlier that day, The Fallen had left their car in the parking lot at the entrance to the forest preserve and walked into the woods past the sign that read "WINSTON TUNNEL." A dirt path wound up and down the uneven, hilly terrain until it suddenly opened up to a long grassy field. A creek flowed along the right side of the field, and a steep, wooded ridge jutted out of the landscape just beyond it. Mike, Greg, Aurelia, Davin and Emmer paused to take in the scenery.

"Do you see the tunnel anywhere?" Mike asked as he unfolded a map and examined it. He alternated his gaze between the map and the valley several times and ended with a puzzled look on his face.

Aurelia tore the map from his hands. "Give me that!" she shrieked.

"What is that over there?" Emmer interrupted. He pointed toward several large blocks of cement near the creek. "Maybe this is the entrance that was sealed off?"

"No," Mike said. "That was on the other side... I think."

The group walked over to the creek and

examined the debris on the side of the ridge just beyond it. Aside from the blocks of cement, there were exposed rebar supports and a generous helping of gravel, but no tunnel.

“Let’s keep going,” Mike suggested. “This clearly isn’t what we’re looking for.”

Up ahead, the valley narrowed, the woods closed in, and the field turned into a path that led deeper into the forest preserve. After about ten minutes of walking, The Fallen spotted the ruins of a large house in the woods off to their right. It was constructed of timber and yellowish limestone blocks. Greg rushed toward it excitedly like a kid whose babysitter had taken him to a new park.

Mocking him, Aurelia sang, “Now don’t run too far!”

“We don’t have time for this,” Mike said. “We didn’t come here to see an abandoned house.” He was compelled to come along, however, when the rest of his friends voted with their feet and joined Greg in exploring the ruins.

After they had all settled down, Mike gathered them together. “We’re burning daylight,” he said. “We need to split up. Greg, go with Davin and see if we missed anything back by the creek. The rest of us will continue down this trail and see where it goes. Whoever finds the tunnel first will radio the other group.”

Everyone shook their heads in mutual understanding and set off in their respective groups. Because they did not have to go far, Greg and Davin reached their destination rather quickly. Nothing had



Nature has reclaimed much of the old rail bed, but railroad ties can still be seen sticking out of the grass.

changed—there definitely was not a tunnel hidden along the ridge. “Why do we always get the crappy assignments?” Davin complained.

“Speak for yourself,” Greg replied, examining the ridge. “Hey, how much you want to bet I can beat you to the top of this thing?”

A glance was all it took to signal the start of the race. The two friends scrambled to climb over the pieces of cement and up the steep incline. Greg reached the top first and jumped to his feet triumphantly. He hardly noticed the long trail that led from the top of the ridge straight back through the forest.

“Hey,” Davin said when he finally reached the top. “Look behind you. Doesn’t this look like an old railroad bed? I bet the tunnel is at the end of this trail.”

Greg smiled. “Screw those other guys, let’s get there first.”

* * *

Aurelia immediately sensed the presence of the shadow creatures upon approaching the tunnel. Without any hesitation, she proceeded to descend the steep embankment, avoiding logs, holes, and other hazards as she went. Leaves and loose dirt gave way under the heavy weight of her boots, and Mike and Emmer followed closely (if not more carefully) behind.

It was not long before the trio felt the cold, wet sediment in front of the tunnel entrance beneath their feet. Now only yards away, they could plainly make out



A pile of bricks is all that remains of the former pump house, which was torn down in 2007.

the quivering, Stygian shades against the bars. The shadows seemed to react to their presence by withdrawing further into the darkness. Greg and Davin were pressed up against the opposite wall, nearly out of sight.

Mike tried to take the lead, but Aurelia shoved past him again. “Get out of my way!” she shouted. She drew a quartz crystal from her purse and tossed it at the shadow that was closest to the entrance, hitting it dead on. The crystal seemed stuck for a moment, suspended in midair while the shadow drained away. After a few seconds, it clattered to the ground. Its once translucent pink surface was now black as coal.

The other two shadows seemed to be confused and drew closer to each other until they were nearly fused into one large mass. Then, without warning, Aurelia fell backwards into the muck at the bottom of the embankment, as if pushed by an unseen force.

As Aurelia crawled over the wet sand and rocks to get out of the way of the psychic attack, Mike pulled a pouch filled with kosher salt out of his pocket. He grabbed a handful of the salt and threw it at the shadows. Like a shotgun blast, the tiny pellets tore a hundred holes in their shimmering, atramentous ectoplasm. They promptly dissolved.

Greg and Davin rushed to the hole in the iron bars that covered the tunnel entrance, desperate to escape. Mike, Aurelia, and Emmer, however, were eager to get *into* the tunnel. They carefully squeezed through the gap in the bars and tried to reassure their friends that the threat from the mysterious interlopers was gone.

As soon as the reassuring was over, however, Aurelia decided that a thorough scolding was in order. “Why didn’t you wait for us?” she demanded. “We agreed that we would meet at the tunnel *before* we went in.”

Mike, also irritated by his friend’s recklessness, gave Greg and Davin the evil eye as he carefully located and then wrapped a cloth around the tarnished quartz. “Let’s take this back with us and analyze it. It might be useful again someday.”

“Does anyone want to explain to me what just happened?” Emmer said with a nervous laugh. “I couldn’t see what was going on from back there. You guys act like you saw something—was it a snake?”

“Unbelievable,” Greg said. “You were standing right there and you still missed it. Didn’t you see

those shadow people that Mike and Aura just got rid of? I mean, they weren’t bothering me, but Davin was terrified.”

Emmer shook his head. “Shadow people? Give me a break. You know your eyes start to see things that aren’t there when exposed to, oh, a pitch-black tunnel for several minutes, right?”

“We weren’t seeing things—” Davin began to protest, but he knew it was hopeless.

“Come on and help,” Mike said. “Get the camera and start filming what you can. We need to get as much data as we can before someone else comes along and reports us to the park rangers.”

Shaking off their strange encounter, The Fallen set to work exploring the area around the Winston Tunnel, but none of them—even Emmer—was willing to go much farther into its cavernous and foreboding interior. ✨



Near the tunnel, the sides of the former rail bed become steep and covered with dangerous debris.

FALLEN CHARACTER PROFILE: MIKE

Age: 25
Height: 5'6"
Weight: 168 lbs
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Brown

Role: Fearless Leader
Year Joined: Founding Member
Investigations: 46

Skills

Tracking: 42%
 Stealth: 33%
 Research: 49%
 Driving: 38%
 Humor: 15%
 Computers: 35%
 High Magic: 46%
 Scrounge: 32%
 Navigation: 18%
 Streetwise: 32%
 Dark Arts: 51%
 Investigation: 59%
 Deception: 34%

Attributes

Strength: 07
 Perception: 06
 Endurance: 05
 Charisma: 05
 Intelligence: 07
 Agility: 05
 Luck: 04

Favorite Bands

Manowar, Mercyful Fate, Savatage, Children of Bodom, (old) Metallica, ICP, Bad Religion, Symphony X, Amon Amarth, Fintroll, Ensiferum, Svartsot, Turisas.

History

Along with Greg, Mike was one of the founding members of The Fallen. Greg and Mike met in high school and became fast friends. Citing a mutual interest in the paranormal (as well as a mutual exclusion from even the lowest rungs of the social ladder), they decided to form the group after an ill-fated trip to New Orleans in which they vanquished a vampire at the behest of the vampire's half-breed daughter.

Mike and Aurelia have an even longer and more sorted history. They were friends at a very young age, before Aurelia was sent off to a reform school. She became nothing more than a figure in his reoccurring dreams, until more than ten years later, Mike and Aurelia were reunited at St. Sebastian's College, where they decided that their fates must be intertwined.

Always searching for truth, Mike has been known to go to great lengths to acquire even the most obscure knowledge. He has developed a healthy distrust of any authorities and is prone to believing the fantastical over the mundane.

Mike has been steeped in the occult since birth, and spent most of his life studying the darker side of history. This has been both a help and a hindrance, since he is eager to attribute almost everything to a supernatural origin. The other members of the group often have to steer him back to reality. Despite this flaw, he remains the group's compass and often determines what will be investigated.

