Wandering the Web -- Subcultures: Ghost Hunting: A Passion for the Paranormal

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**Wandering the Web — Subcultures:**

**Ghost Hunting: A Passion for the Paranormal**

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**Column Editor’s Note: There has been an explosion of interest in the paranormal and the phenomenon of so-called ghost hunting. In 2008, a survey conducted by the Associated Press and IPSOS reported a full 34% of Americans believe in ghosts and some form of ghost-related experience. Currently there is a plethora of hobbyist groups combining the woods and old abandoned houses, college campuses, office buildings, factories, graveyards, and even hotels and restaurants, looking for things that go bump in the night. In addition, it seems that almost every channel on cable seems to have a ghost or other paranormal content-related program on its schedule. Whatever your personal views on the subject of ghosts, be it a unique, still-to-be-understood aspect of reality or utter nonsense, pseudo-science, or mass delusion, ghosts are a serious topic of interest to our patrons. Here is a list of Websites recommended or critiqued by people who have more than thirty years’ combined experience with this type of investigation. — JM**

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**The Shadowlands Presents: Ghost Hunting 101** by David Juliano — [http://www.ghosthunting101.com/](http://www.ghosthunting101.com/) — This Website offers an introduction for beginner ghost hunters, using the standard quasi-scientific method of ghost research. This Website, like many others, is sponsored by a commercial entity in New Jersey — [www.ghosthunstore.com](http://www.ghosthunstore.com) — that sells the paraphernalia needed to study paranormal phenomena. The information offered is basic and of reasonable quality, and the advice would not lead anyone to behave in a foolhardy manner. Advice includes: basic terminology, such as the difference between a ghost and a ghost investigation; how to prepare for an investigation by obtaining official permission to enter a site at night (cemetery, churchyard, public park, etc.) and making a checklist of equipment, notepads and pens, first aid kit, etc.; safety tips (travel in numbers, alert the police prior to entering the site and bring photo IDs, scope out the site during the daytime for potholes or other physical hazards); as well as on-site preparation tips, such as gathering the group to say a short prayer for protection. As Mr. Juliano advises, “If we are wrong about [saying] these prayers at the beginning and end of the hunt and they are not necessary, then you wasted 14 seconds of your time. If we are right about them, you saved yourself from a lot of problems and grief.”

Mr. Juliano is the creator of “the very first paranormal Website on the Internet back in 1994, The Shadowlands. He is also the Director of South Jersey Ghost Research, which has been helping people with problem hauntings since 1955.” Mr. Juliano wisely states in his introduction to the site, “…I don’t encourage amateurs without any training at all to conduct ghost hunts. You need some idea of what you are doing before you go off into that graveyard or haunted building. I do recommend you contact an established organization near you and join them on a hunt investigation before you go on your own. I have many groups listed on my Local Ghost Groups page ([http://theshadowlands.net/ghost/groups.html](http://theshadowlands.net/ghost/groups.html)). I’ve created this page in order to give you the basics of ghost hunting in plain and simple talk and to provide that to everyone for free.” Hence, Ghost Hunting 101 is an excellent site to introduce modern ghost-hunting techniques.

**The Shadowlands — [http://theshadowlands.net/](http://theshadowlands.net/)** — On their Website introduction, Dave Juliano and Tina Carlson, founders of this paranormal and cryptozoological phenomena site, state, “Since 1994, The Shadowlands has been dedicated to informing and enlightening visitors on such topics as ghosts and hauntings, mysterious creatures such as Bigfoot and sea serpents, UFOs and aliens, and many other unsolved mysteries. We have provided general information on some subjects and a bit more in-depth information on others...While all of these subjects are laughed at or frowned upon by many, we challenge you to at least take the time to decide for yourself. We have included text files, video, sounds, pictures, eyewitness accounts, and more on the pages that follow. There is something for everyone here, so take the time to look around The Shadowlands, and stop back often. There’s always something new...”

Lesley has been a fan of The Shadowlands Website for many years. Since the focus of this Wandering the Web article is the topic of ghost hunting, the reviewer of The Shadowlands site will narrow the scope to include only the Ghosts and Hauntings page. The originators claim it is the first Internet ghost site, created 17 years ago. With over 16,300 true stories submitted by readers of the site, visitors can spend hours gleaning information about what it is like to live in a haunted house, chilling experiences with a variety of ghostly paranormal events and sightings, and friendly advice regarding how to deal with unsettling phenomena. The site provides a Haunted Places Index for potential investigations in the United States and international locales and a link to add your favorite haunted place. The continued on page 84
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Ghosts and Hauntings page also features a podcast that you can join and links to paranormal, metaphysical and a site that offers “Protection for Ghost Hunters and People in need.” The Shadowlands offers an excellent venue for people needing a safe place to relate their personal experiences or to read about others’ experiences with paranormal phenomena.

Haunted Lighthouses, Legends, and Lore — http://hauntedlighthouses.com/haunted5.html — Many people have a fondness for stories about haunted lighthouses. There is something particularly eerie and melancholy about lighthouses. Prior to modern automation with the U.S. Coast Guard personnel needing to service lighthouses on an intermittent basis, the lighthouses required constant daily maintenance. In the old days, lighthouse keepers were pretty much slaves to their job. They only got a few hours sleep before having to trudge up the vertigo-inducing iron staircases with heavy oil cans to replenish the lamp fuel, trim the lamp wicks, polish the lenses, and make sure the rather primitive mechanics were in working order. The early lenses rotated by a weight-driven clockwork assembly and needed to be wound by lighthouse keepers, sometimes as often as every two hours. Lighthouse keepers worked in a regimented environment, wore military-style uniforms, were required to fulfill their duties by following strict regulations, and could be fired if a surprise visit by their supervisors uncovered a minor procedural infraction.

Since the first lighthouse was built in the United States in 1716, a fair number of lighthouse personnel have committed suicide — some perhaps driven insane by the gas from the mercury used to reduce friction in the machinery, and some may have killed themselves because of the monotony of being stuck on a tower in the middle of nowhere for weeks at a time — and many died from the hazardous working conditions. The Haunted Lighthouses, Legends, and Lore Website offers a variety of paranormal lighthouse-related stories, including tales of sightings of drowning victims; the apparitions and screams of suicides and murdered spouses or keepers who were killed by lighthouse assistants with whom they had a bad working relationship; auditory phenomena of footsteps eternally climbing the old lighthouse stairs or children playing in their daddy’s office; noises of food being prepared in the lighthouse kitchen; incidents of lamps having been polished overnight by phantom hands; a nosy deceased keeper’s wife rummaging through a bathroom cabinet; protective ghosts waving lanterns, observed from passing ships; and phantom lights still seen shining from long-decommissioned lighthouses. One story even relates the experience of some lighthouse visitors having their fifth of scotch somewhere consumed by the ghost, who replaced their sealed bottle with Lake Michigan water! These spooky and sometimes poignant stories offer an intriguing glimpse into the social history of days gone by.

Haunted Lighthouses, Legends, and Lore is an attractive site, with the eight pages of stories linked to the main page in an accessible drop-down box, fun links to lighthouse news articles and a YouTube clip, a Haunted Lighthouse Bookstore offering ghost stories and lighthouse ghost books for sale on Amazon.com, and a handy complete listing of haunted lighthouses in the U.S. and Canada. This site is highly recommended for fans of seashore hauntings, as well as those interested in reading about the unusual twist on our early maritime history.

American Hauntings — http://www.prairieghosts.com/ — is the working site of Troy Taylor. Mr. Taylor is the famous and prolific author of superb books and the founder of the American Hauntings Ghost Tours Company, offering overnight stays at such evocative historic locations as the Villa Sca Axl Murder House in Villa Sca, Iowa, the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield, Ohio, and the Lemp Mansion in St. Louis, home to the ghosts of several suicides — the former owners of what was originally the largest brewery in St. Louis.

This site features ghost books, tours, haunted overnights, and events. According to his biographical page, “Troy Taylor is an occultist, supernatural historian, and the author of 79 books (http://www.prairieghosts.com/whitechapel.html) on ghosts, hauntings, history, crime, and the unexplained in America. He is also the founder of the American Ghost Society and the owner of the Illinois and American Hauntings Tour Companies. Taylor grew up in Illinois. Raised on the prairies of the state, he developed an interest in ‘things that go bump in the night’ at an early age and as a young man, developing ghost tours and writing about haunts in Chicago and Central Illinois...” In 1996, Taylor organized a group of ghost enthusiasts into an investigation team, and the American Ghost Society was launched, gaining over 600 members in the years that followed. The organization continues today as one of America’s largest and most honored research groups... Mr. Taylor has appeared in documentary productions for TLC, The History Channel, A & E, Discovery Channel, PBS, CMT, and in various network programs and news shows.

An avid fan of Mr. Taylor’s historically-based ghost hunting books, Lesley highly recommends a perusal of this Website to get an idea of materials that are available to potential ghost hunters. Mr. Taylor’s writing style is informative and interesting, and he succeeds in adding dignity and solid background research to a field that all-too-often falls victim to using local folklore and unfounded urban legends as “evidence” for paranormal phenomena. If you have the time and money, his investigative tours are renowned, selling out months in advance.

Your Ghost Stories — http://www.yourghoststories.com/ — is your one-stop-shopping site for literally thousands of true ghost stories, submitted by readers from all over the world. In this reviewer’s opinion, the submissions from South Africa, India, and other countries in Southeast Asia are the most unusual and horrifying tales. Submission of personal stories is quick and easy, and Lesley has never received a single pop-up or unsolicited advertisement after being a contributing member for over three years.

A relatively new feature to the site is the opportunity to vote “plus” or “minus” for a feedback entry, which helps prevent “lurkers” on the site from making cynical or sarcastic comments to the authors. After five people have voted against a particular comment, it is automatically hidden from view. The vast majority of visitors are extremely kind, compassionate, and give positive feedback when a story relates an especially frightening experience or haunting. This is supposed to be a “safe site” for one’s true encounters with the paranormal, and it is amazing how many people around the world will lend friendly advice and encouragement to anonymous authors thousands of miles away.

Your Ghost Stories has published 8,127 ghost experiences, listed under Latest Hauntings, ghost stories in alphabetical order, chronological order, by categories — Ghost Hunting, Ghost Tours and Haunted Hotels, Photographs/Videos/EVPs, etc. — and by countries and states in the U.S. A directory lists 51 ghost tours and haunted hotels, also by country and state, a store with DVDs for sale online, and a link to a New Age store.

Your Ghost Stories does give visitors an opportunity to discover possibilities for ghost investigation sites; it also provides insight into social psychology and cultural beliefs of others around the world.

Ghost Web — http://www.ghostweb.com/ — Sponsored by the International Ghost Hunter’s Society and Drs. Dave and Sharon Oester, this site offers free membership, with 11,950 current members. These published international authors are paranormal researchers who “seek to understand all things paranormal.” With 9,000 free photos and 1,000 free EVPs (Electronic Voice Phenomena, usually captured only on playback of a recorder when those present did not hear any noise or voices), Ghost Web appears it will provide hours of entertainment for those interested in all things paranormal. Please note: Ghost Web is cheesier than some other sites reviewed in this article, with its gaudy graphics, poorly designed layout, and non-functioning photograph links. This reviewer attempted to view the photographs and only got messages about the page not being available and many, many links to outside advertisements. Drs. Dave and Sharon Oester seem to be using this site mainly to sell their books.

The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS) — http://www.the-atlantic-paranormal-society.com/ — No directory of ghost hunting Internet locations would be complete without including the TAPS page. Naturally, this is primarily an advertisement for all things related to TAPS and the famous celebrity group’s promotion of various products and their television shows. You can sign up to Twitter with Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson, peruse the official TAPS events calendar, purchase TAPS clothing, subscribe to TAPS’ magazine, etc. There is a link to articles, which features many articles on paranormal topics and a directory of the TAPS family in other states, which could be useful to ghost hunters.

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Ghost Adventures — http://www.travelchannel.com/TV_Shows/Ghost_Adventures


Spirited Ghost Hunting — http://www.spiritedghosthunting.com/

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