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

by **Jack and Lesley Montgomery** (Office Assistant, Dept. of Psychology, Western Kentucky University) <lesley.montgomery@wku.edu>

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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 combing 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*

The Shadowlands Presents: Ghost Hunting 101 by **David Juliano** — <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.theghosthunterstore.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 hunt and a ghost investigation; how to prepare for an investigation by obtaining official permission to enter a site at night (cemetery, church yard, 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.htm>). 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/> — 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

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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://hauntedlights.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 somehow 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 an 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 Villisca Ax Murder House in Villisca, 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.

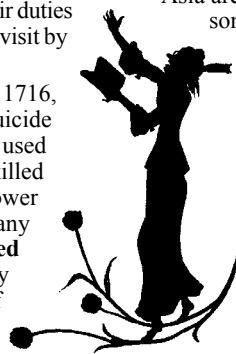
A relatively new feature to the site is the opportunity to vote “plus” or “minus” for a feedback entry, which helps prevent “lurkers” on the site from making cynical or sarcastic comments to the authors. After five people have voted against a particular comment, it is automatically hidden from view. 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 only 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 — Ditto for the **Ghost Adventures** site. This site features lots of advertising for **Zak, Nick, and Aaron**. To be fair, these two television celebrity groups are trying to earn a living with their ghost hunting. On the **Ghost Adventures** Website, you can Blog, **Facebook**, or **Twitter** to your heart's content, look at fan photos of the guys on their latest adventures, and even purchase a few t-shirts. The **Ghost Adventures** Website, unfortunately, is more about the **Travel Channel** than about actual ghost hunting.

Ghost Study — http://ghoststudy.com/new5/menu_tips.htm — **Ghost Study** is an accessible site, although this reviewer's aging eyes get really tired after reading through yet one more ghost hunting site with a black background and white or grey text! ☹ This site features Ghost Hunting Tips with the endearing 25-entry "The Ghost Hunter's Code (Credo)." The introduction states, "Find out what you really need to know in order to be a true ghost hunter. The list consists of 25 statements that all ghost hunters should take to heart. The CODE will protect you from harm and guide you on your quest. Commit it to memory, and it will serve you well." Adorable, and yet slightly annoying at the same time, this is clearly a Credo meant to appeal to dramatic young adults who are young enough to be this reviewer's grandchildren. Still, this site gives some good advice. A couple of samples include:

"Conduct yourself as a professional at all times. We always want to present ourselves as one in control. And that of course means around other investigators, victims of a haunting, and even to the ghosts themselves. Self-confidence and control will radiate like a beacon of light and thus serve as a shield of protection."

"Addicting habits can be contradictory to your ghostly pursuits. Examples would be heavy addictions to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, an abnormal sex drive, etc. These things in excess make you vulnerable and susceptible to attack. The attack stems from the entities attraction to your addictions and also because of your weakness. Mind-altering substances are particularly enticing to them."

It is worthwhile to include this site, if only to encourage young library patrons to follow a moral and honest path! Seriously, the site does have tips on how to hunt for ghosts, take photographs, record EVPs, and purchase equipment. Naturally, there are links to expensive ghost hunting equipment.

Spirited Ghost Hunting — <http://www.spiritedghosthunting.com/> — **Spirited Ghost Hunting** (in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio) has as their motto "We Believe That You Believe!" This site is a good example of your typical regional ghost hunting Website. It has an attractive layout with the usual black background, but this time the text is a glowing lavender color. A photo of an old castle at the top left of the page has a site directory immediately below, superimposed on what looks like a lavender waterfall coming from the castle's front garden. "Spirited," as the site monitors call themselves, is a non-profit group of ghost hunters searching for explanations for allegedly paranormal occurrences. They accept members from all over the U.S., although their main focus is regional.

The Spirited group seems to be open-minded and enthusiastic, not appearing to take themselves too seriously, as many local paranormal groups often do. Spirited has their own **Facebook** page with 531 "friends." Their site offers many video clips of investigations and EVPs on **YouTube**, as well as on the less accessible MP3 links. The page introducing its members has an attractive photo of each member, the investigation page includes a brief history of each location, along with photos and links to more EVPs when relevant. There are personal stories, links to friends' sites — all relevant to the ghost hunting theme — as well as news stories and articles, some discussing controversial topics within the ghost hunting community.

I was very impressed by this group, with its good attitude and professional layout of their online site. I would give **Spirited Ghost Hunting** an A+ as a paranormal investigative group and as the founders of this excellent Website. 🌿



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libraries, let me add that being able to go to its overloaded-with-books political science branch library and ask a question of its staff was a pleasure.

Being a slightly young baby boomer I can't dispute the finding that the technology of navigating the path to the virtual reference service desk puts me off. But I think I also share with the Millennials a distaste for the need to spend more than a minute telling my story. I want the answer, not an opportunity to talk (that is what this column is for). I refuse to read manuals and FAQ's — my "read my mind and give me what I want" attitude frustrates my wife continuously. Since that is not going to happen, I guess I will always be disappointed some of the time. Maybe if at the top of the screen there was a "Help, give me a smart human" button I would have a chance at information happiness.

The **OCLC** report is well worth the read. (At this point I have to divulge that as an **OCLC** Board member I am not exactly neutral and that I feel the need to plug the good things that **OCLC** does from time to time). The authors began their research with an even split in focus groups between users/providers and non-users. They then analyzed 850 randomly drawn transcripts of VRS sessions. Based upon the information obtained in these ways they created an online survey and conducted nearly 300 telephone interviews. They began their research with some fairly simple goals: What is happening with VRS? Is it worth improving and if so, how can that be done? I think they did well on both counts. Go to the **OCLC** Website and download it to your **iPad**. It can be read at the beach or, if you have not read it by the fall, at the next boring meeting you are attending. 🌿