

the HAUNTINGS in NEBRASKA

Encounters

with

the

PARANORMAL

PASSION for the PARANORMAL

Kathleen Gerber

A drive to senior Rachel Eckley's house during the Halloween season offers many treats, along with a few tricks.

"My family loves Halloween. Our love started with my grandma and grew from there," Eckley said as she sits in senior hall and reminisces about her favorite time of year. The Eckley's home transforms from an ordinary household to a spooky manor about five days before Halloween.

One of Eckley's favorite parts of Halloween is going to haunted houses. "My family goes to haunted houses every year; we drive there in our hearse," Eckley said.

Yes, that's correct. A hearse. For any who are unaware of what a hearse is, it is a vehicle that transports caskets, or coffins, from a funeral to the cemetery. It's not a typical family car.

"We have had the hearse for as long as I can remember. We get a lot of weird looks whenever we ride in it. My cousins and I always scare people driving behind us, because people don't expect to see a living person in the back of a hearse," Eckley said. After they finish driving the hearse to the haunted houses during the Halloween

season, it is strategically placed in the Eckley's front lawn.

The hearse is only one of the countless decorations draping the house and yard. The Eckley family loves Halloween more than any other holiday, and it shows in the decorations bestowed upon their home. From coffins and dummies to strobe lights and a graveyard scene, it is easy to see the passion this family has when it comes to Halloween. Which explains why all the Eckley's love going to haunted houses.

"I have been going to haunted houses with my family since I was about 4, so I've gotten used to them. I've never really been that scared; I just love the thrill of it all," Eckley said.

One haunted place that vividly stuck in her memory was Ball Cemetery, where she traveled this summer. Ball Cemetery is an old, small family cemetery located in Springfield, Nebraska; approximately 36 minutes away from Marian. The oldest gravestone in the cemetery dates back to 1869, and the majority of the graves are home to members of the Ball family. Many apparitions and unexplained phenomena have been reported in Ball Cemetery, such as voices, gravestones falling over and standing back up on their own and visitors clothing being tugged.

"It's really creepy being there. It is in the middle of nowhere and is so dark. The drive to the cemetery is probably the creepiest part because it is a long, winding road with no streetlights or anything," Eckley said.

Although Eckley and her family never witnessed any paranormal phenomena while at Ball Cemetery, she still felt an eerie vibe. While there, she took a few pictures and noticed something odd when she reviewed them later.

"In a lot of the pictures I took, there were all these orbs in them, it was weird," Eckley said. Orbs are often seen in photographs of haunted places, and many people believe that orbs are signs of spirits or paranormal energies. However, there is no scientific proof of this, and many people say it is just moisture in the air caught on film.

Is Ball Cemetery really haunted? No one knows for sure, but one thing is certain, it is eerie enough to scare anyone. "When I was there, I got a really creepy feeling. It was like I was unwelcome; it was a little scary," Eckley said.

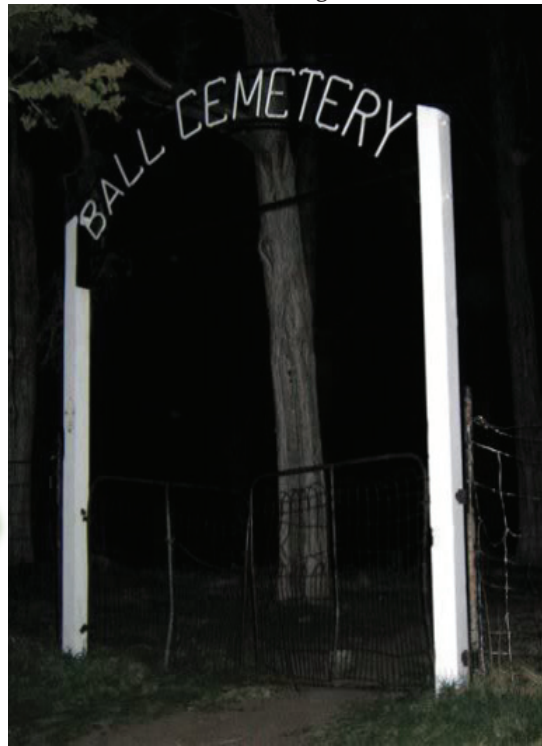


Photo Courtesy of Rachel Eckley

TEN SIGNS

that your house is

Lights turn on and off

1

Unexplained noises like footsteps, scratching, banging or whispering

5

6

Unexplained shadows

Items disappear and reappear

2 HAUNTED

Strange animal behavior

7

3

Feelings of being watched

8

Cold or hot spots in house

Handprints and footprints from nowhere

4

Objects move or levitate

9

10

Seeing an apparition floating around nonchalantly (If this is the case, you are **definitely** being haunted)

Graphic by MollyMisek

A taste of the UNKNOWN

KayleeAsche

If a juicy steak and golden mashed potatoes served with a side of ghost stories sound good to you, then Brother Sebastian's Steakhouse and Winery is the place to go.

This well-known restaurant, located on 119th and Pacific, is not only known for its steaks and wine; it is also known for its paranormal activity. Employees have witnessed doors opening and closing by themselves and candles, that were burnt out the night before, lit in the morning when the restaurant opens.

Senior Meghan Anderson has also witnessed some strange activity. She went there for a family dinner celebrating the engagement of her aunt and uncle. "A waiter was setting the table next to us and was lighting the candle when, all of a sudden, it blew out. He tried it

again but it blew out again. There was no air blowing or fans moving. So, he gave up with the candle and started to put glassware and silverware on the table and once he was done setting up, the glassware tipped over by itself. By this time, all the customers were gathered around the table watching this spectacle. My family was so freaked that we didn't even get to eat our food; we just got up and left after that."

These happenings are unusual because they are being done by a single individual: Mr. Bill Wolcott. He used to be a regular customer and dined at this hotspot every night for years. Even when he became sick with cancer, he had the food brought to him. Once he died, he chose his permanent residence to be the restaurant. Fact or myth? Visitors can decide.



The Morping Staircase at Hummel Park leads to this rickety old shelter. Inside this shelter resides evidence of devil worship and cult rituals through markings all over the walls. Photo by ErinReed.

NOT JUST A DAY CAMP: Hummel Park

KayleeAsche

For three months out of the year, Hummel Park is full of children singing, laughing and eating s'mores around a campfire. It comes alive with activities and games, and it seems like a fun, safe place. What no one else knows is what happens the rest of the year; those nine months when the park is supposedly deserted, except for a few visitors once in awhile.

The scary reality is that this park is not deserted. It's haunted. In fact, this seemingly ordinary park is said to be one of the most haunted places in the city of Omaha.

Park visitors have heard screams and cries coming from the park late at night. Many suicides have been committed near the eastern side of the park also known as the Devil's Staircase.

Devil's Staircase, once full of blossoming trees and colorful flowers, has long been replaced by steep cliffs and abrupt drop offs.

Another eerie place is located at the top of the park called the Morping Staircase. It was given its name because the number of stairs changes each time a person goes up or down it.

Juniors Rae Wilson, Cassie Thompson,

and Lauren Williams have tried the Morping Staircase a few times. "We go to Hummel just for the fun of it sometimes. We love going up and down the Morping Staircase and every time we count a different number of stairs. It is kind of creepy going there during their off season. There is a ton of graffiti everywhere, and there are bullet holes in the signs," Wilson said.

Not scared yet? Well, this creepy staircase leads to an old rickety shelter house which bears evidence of devil worship and cult rituals by the markings along the walls.

There have been paranormal investigations done by the Paranormal Research & Investigative Studies Midwest (PRISM) team and they have found some unsettling evidence. They have seen many orbs late at night and have also seen a human face apparition. They haven't found any disturbing audio clips yet, but they haven't done this investigation since 2004. Their website says it is still ongoing.

In the literal sense, things aren't always what they seem. What may seem ordinary usually isn't, especially when it's a place like Hummel.

What's your paranormal experience?

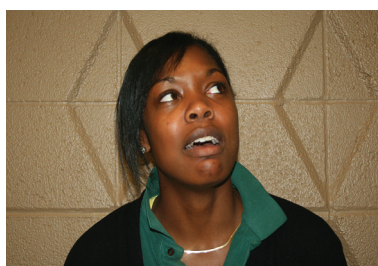


"When I was 10, I was at my aunt's house hanging out. When she left, I saw a little girl standing by the bedroom window. She has followed me periodically through my life."
-Shea Stromer, freshman

"I was home alone and both my two cats were on my bed with me, and I was doing my homework. In my peripheral vision I saw someone standing in my doorway. I got up to chase it and I kept seeing it turn the corners, but I couldn't catch up with it. Then it went down my basement but I didn't go down there to follow it."
-Elle Mostek, junior



"At my old house I was sleeping in this room with my sister, and my brother was there too. We were about to go to bed, and we saw a light that was floating in the air in the corner. There weren't any lights on, and there was no light coming from windows. We never slept in there again."
-Neeia Cooperwood, senior



"I always study in my basement and there's this door that just opens and closes by itself; there's no one there and there's no wind."
- Eileen Baca, sophomore



Graphic and Photos by AnnieDovali

The MYSTERY behind the MANOR

BeckyFuqua

In the early 1920s, the Hall family was a part of Omaha's top elite. When the stock market crashed in 1929, William Hall went mad and killed his wife Greta with an axe, chopping her up into pieces. A few days later, Greta's brother killed William with the same axe. The next night, Halloween, Greta's brother was found on the property with the same axe in his skull. This story is one of many on the long list of haunted happenings in Mystery Manor's history.

Mystery Manor was built in 1886 by a Danish immigrant, the only owner to ever live in the house. Since it was sold in the 1900s, it has served as everything from a brothel to a boarding house to an apartment complex.

The building was condemned in 1983 by the city of Omaha. It was at this time that the current owner bought the house and spent a year remodeling it into the haunted house it is today.

Matt Wood, the assistant manager of Mystery Manor, was kind enough to share some of the building's haunted history. According to Wood, there are between eight and 10 ghosts currently on the property. A floating head appeared outside William's second story study window, when there was no fire escape. No one has been able to explain how it happened. Also, a little boy has been known to come up to the actors, tug on their clothes and disappear. This has happened several times.

The most common paranormal activity has to do with tools being moved. Construction workers will put down hammers, and when they go back to pick them up, the hammer will be back in the storage room. A specific account was when a worker's hammer came out of his tool belt twice while working on the third floor. The second time it happened, he kept his hand on the hammer, but then two screwdrivers came out of his belt and flew out in front of him. He grabbed them, put them back into his belt, walked down the stairs and told Wood that the ghost on the third floor did not like him. He

refused to work on that floor again.

Another common story told by patrons is about the lady in blue. She is eighteen inches tall and is seen in the cave section of the haunted house. The problem is, no actor is dressed as a lady in blue. There is no explanation to who or what this is, and they are not quite sure whether or not it is a ghost.

Last November, the Kansas City Nightwatchers, a paranormal investigation team, came to investigate the house. Christopher Fleming, a ghost investigator from television who claims to be able to sense the paranormal, tagged along. Fleming went up into the attic and immediately felt sick. He asked if anyone had died in that room, because he could smell death, but no one was sure if anyone had died there.

This past August, the Nightwatchers returned, this time without Christopher Fleming, and again went up to the attic. They were talking, when all of a sudden, they heard this tapping sound coming from a trunk in the corner of the room. The Nightwatchers cautiously moved the suitcases that were on top of the trunk and listened. The knocking continued. Twenty minutes later, they went downstairs, grabbed Wood and had him listen to the trunk. Wood had them all move to the far side of the room. He could still feel and hear the knocking coming from inside the trunk. The men opened the trunk and found nothing inside. When the lid was closed again, the knocking started up. This went on for 90 minutes straight.

There are many more stories about Mystery Manor. For those who believe in ghosts, this could be a very scary place to visit. For those a little more skeptical, this is just another haunted house to enjoy during the Halloween season. Whatever the case, Mystery Manor is sure to please the crowds. The house is open for business through Halloween. It is then closed to all except the brave few who go on ghost investigations.