

# ***Tall Tales and Folklore: Exploring Michigan's Traditional Stories***

**March 1 – May 6, 2017**

## **EXHIBIT PANEL TEXT**

### **Folklore: What Is It?**

The definition of folklore has changed over time. Early on it mainly referred to the artistic output of a particular culture, while today folklore (also known as folklife) includes all of the traditional beliefs and practices of a group of people who share a common bond. This bond could be, for example, the place they live or an ethnic heritage.

Folklore, then, reflects a group's culture through such traditions as how and what they cook, the clothes they wear and their spiritual practice, as well as the art they make and the songs they sing. The traditions are generally passed from one generation to another via the spoken word or by example. While folklore traditions evoke a sense of the past, their nature provides a continuity that can affect and shape the present.

Folktales, as the stories verbally handed down through the generations are known, make up one aspect of folklore. This exhibit will focus on the stories, including folktales, legends and myths, that pertain to those people who call Michigan home. The people of Michigan come from many different backgrounds, and over the years, their traditions have become incorporated into the folklore of our state. What brings them all together, however, is a connection with our shared home, this state of Michigan.

Sources: Hufford, Mary, "American Folklife: A Commonwealth of Cultures,"

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/cwc/index.html>.

"What is Folklore?" American Folklore Society, <http://www.afsnet.org/?page=WhatsFolklore>.

## **What Do We Mean by “Traditional Stories?”**

Traditional stories include folktales, legends, and myths, but just what are the differences? It might be easier to start with the similarities: The most important element of all these types of stories is the meaning. Unlike other stories that are intended to present facts, traditional stories are trying to convey an idea. While some traditional stories are based on facts, these are not as important to the storyteller as the meaning. Another common element in many stories is the presence of fantastic creatures and supernatural phenomena.

Although the distinction between folktales, legends and myths can be difficult to pinpoint, legends are probably the closest to fact-based stories, usually starting with an actual person or event. A legend then grows to include astonishing feats of accomplishment. Folktales move further away from fact, though they may start with a kernel of truth. These stories relay aspects of a particular culture’s traditions. Myths have little or nothing to do with fact and are spiritual and sacred in nature. They grew from a need to explain natural occurrences as well as the human condition, which is a phrase that refers to the various difficulties faced by humans during the course of their lives.

Sources: “The Fable, Folktale, Myth, Legend: Differences and Examples,” <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-fable-folktale-myth-legend-differences-and-examples.html>.

“Myths and Legends,” <http://myths.e2bn.org/teachers/info311-what-are-myths-legends-and-folktales.html>. “Fairy Tales, Folktales, Fables, Legends, Myths,” <http://www.vrml.k12.la.us/dozier2/fairytales/fairytales.htm>.

## **What Is an Urban Legend?**

In the context of traditional tales, the word “urban” signifies more contemporary origins for a story, reflecting the anxiety and sense of danger often associated with urban environments. By contrast, folktales and legends are considered to portray a simpler way of life from long ago. While folktales and legends are generally understood to be fictionalized stories, urban legends are told in a way that makes them seem true and plausible. Thus, the scenarios frequently include references to well-known locales and are often said to involve someone with whom the teller has a distant and tenuous connection, which lends an air of truth while making the story difficult to verify.

One of the earliest known American urban legends (a term that was not popularized until the 1980s) dates to around the 1940s. A teenage girl bought a dress (the name of a local store is often added here) to wear to a dance, but during the event she begins to feel unwell and then suddenly dies. The dress is revealed to be the cause of her death, having been purchased previously to clothe the corpse of another girl during her funeral, then subsequently returned. The formaldehyde used in embalming the corpse was said to have seeped into the dress and poisoned the unsuspecting teenager as she danced.

Sources: Brunvand, Jan Harold, *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*.

Brunvand, Jan Harold, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*.

Doyle, Charles Clay and Lara Renee Knight, "On the Term 'Urban Legend,'"

*FOAFtale News*, December 2005 (no. 63); <http://www.folklore.ee/FOAFtale/ftn63.pdf>.

### **Folktales: Unraveling Their Origins**

When people became intrigued by traditional stories and began collecting folktales, it was with little regard for their provenance (origin and background). By the time folklorists turned their attention to this aspect of folklore, much of this knowledge had passed away with the people who had retained it. In addition, the fact that the stories are primarily shared verbally means there were no written records available to document such details. The difficulties are further compounded by the fact that the themes involved tend to be universal, which can make tracing stories back to their point of origin nearly impossible.

While much of this knowledge has been lost, plenty of theories exist to try and place traditional stories in their proper context. Two competing theories to explain folktales' origins are monogenesis and polygenesis. In the monogenesis model, the tales all originated from a single source and spread naturally from that point. In the case of polygenesis, stories with particular themes are believed to have originated across diverse cultures at a certain point in their social development. Many other theories regarding the rise and spread of folktales have been proposed, but the debate over their true origins continues. As for urban legends, those frequently start as pop-culture memes that are repeated widely and over time until they become the stuff of myth.

Sources: Brunvand, Jan Harold, *Folklore: A Study and Research Guide*

### **Debunking Myths and Legends**

Folklorists mainly focus their attention on the themes present in folktales as well as how they are shared and travel, rather than the degree of truth in them. In more recent years, however, people (particularly those outside of the academic field of folklore) have begun trying to disprove various myths and legends, especially in the case of urban legends. The rise of the Internet and social media sites has allowed urban legends to go “viral” and spread the fear and apprehension with which they are often associated at breakneck speeds.

Busting these myths, while also attempting to poke holes in some pop culture memes, has become a popular pastime that has given rise to a number of websites as well as a television show. One of the earliest outlets to try and dispel these tales was snopes.com, which began in 1995. Founder David Mikkelson is an experienced professional researcher, whose meticulous efforts have been approved and referenced by both the academic community and the media.

Beginning in 2003, a television program called *MythBusters* (which aired until 2016) combined science with entertainment to popular effect. By performing experiments designed to mimic the details of urban legends, the hosts would determine whether a myth could be true.

Sources: Dégh, Linda, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*; <http://www.discovery.com/tv-shows/mythbusters/>;  
<http://www.snopes.com/info/aboutus.asp>.

### **Studying Myths and Legends**

The study of folklore began in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first researchers tended simply to collect and compile the folktales of their country in an effort to boost a patriotic sense of nationalism. Among the first of these folklorists were the German brothers Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm, who in 1812 published the first of seven editions of their book *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Folktales*). The continued compilation of stories, along with the collection of other folk-related crafts, led to the development of folklore archives, established to preserve folk arts before they became lost to a more modern, mechanized society.

Eventually, folklorists started to wonder how traditional stories arose, and they began trying to trace them back to a point of origin. Doing so, however, can be a difficult endeavor. One of the qualities of myths and legends considered by many scholars to be the most important—the oral tradition of spreading stories verbally—also serves to make studying and tracing such stories a challenge. Researchers also study the various themes presented, many of which appear to be widespread; common elements can be found in the tales of very different cultures around the world.

Sources: Brunvand, Jan Harold, *Folklore: A Study and Research Guide*.

Brunvand, Jan Harold, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*.

## **FAMOUS FOLKLORISTS**

**The Brothers Grimm** (Jacob, 1785 – 1863; Wilhelm, 1786 – 1859)

The eldest of six children to survive into adulthood, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were born just a year apart and were very close. After the death of their father, the young men became responsible for supporting the family, ultimately working as librarians and scholars of medieval German literature.

The brothers began to collect the German folktales that were told by the ladies in their circle of acquaintances. In addition to preserving the stories and supporting a sense of national pride, the pair believed they were contributing to the study of the German language. In fact, the first edition of their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Folktales*, 1812), containing 156 stories in two volumes, contained numerous footnotes and was never intended for children, although youngsters frequently played a large role in the tales themselves.

However, the universal appeal of the stories, coupled with growing interest in literature aimed specifically at children, led to the increasing popularity of the tales. By the time the seventh edition of the book was published in 1857, the brothers, now widely considered the fathers of the folklore movement, had included some Christian overtones and played down the more violent and distasteful aspects. *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (as the most popular English-language editions are known) has been translated into 160 different languages and is among the most-published books in history.

Sources: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm/article.html>;  
<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2015/marchapril/feature/how-the-grimm-brothers-saved-the-fairy-tale>;  
<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html#chronology>.

### **Henry and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft** (Henry, 1793 – 1864; Jane, 1800 – 1842)

In 1820, Henry Schoolcraft accompanied Lewis Cass, who was governor of the Michigan Territory at the time, on an expedition to Lake Superior. Two years later Cass appointed him the Indian agent in Sault Ste. Marie, where he would act on behalf of the United States government in dealings with Native American tribes in the area. It was here that he met his future wife Jane Johnston, whose mother was Ojibwe; Jane's Indian name was Bamewawagezhikaquay, meaning Woman of the Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky.

Through his wife's family, Henry Schoolcraft learned much about Native American society and became steeped in their myths and lore. In an effort to educate others about Native American life, Schoolcraft wrote memoirs of his time as an agent and, with the likely assistance of Jane on many of them, he published books describing native culture and mythology. These writings served as inspiration to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who used them as the basis for his epic poem *Song of Hiawatha*.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft was quite accomplished in her own right, writing poetry and other literary works, both in English and Ojibwe. Arguably the first Native American literary author, her work is often overshadowed by her husband's, though her contributions to the preservation of native myths and stories cannot be denied.

Sources: <http://alchetron.com/Jane-Johnston-Schoolcraft-1123642-W>;  
<http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/schoolcraft-henry-rowe>;  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/02015006/>;  
<http://rs5.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxmimss/eadpdfmss/2000/ms000003.pdf>; <http://thesoundthestarsmake.com/>;

### **Zora Neale Hurston** (1891-1960)

Compared to many African Americans at the time, Zora Neale Hurston's childhood was almost idyllic. She was raised near Orlando in Eatonville, Florida, the country's first all-black

incorporated township, surrounded by middle-class African Americans, unaware that the majority of blacks outside of Eatonville were subjected to segregation and Jim Crow laws. When her mother died, however, and her father remarried, tensions grew in the household, forcing Hurston to leave Eatonville and work a series of service jobs to support herself. But she managed to finish high school and go on to attend Howard University and Barnard College. While at Barnard, Hurston was mentored by anthropologist Franz Boas, who tasked her with measuring the heads of Harlem residents for a study aimed at debunking the field of phrenology, which used the size and shape of the head as an indicator of one's intelligence and character.

This was the first of several anthropological field studies undertaken by Hurston, including trips to Haiti and Jamaica. Perhaps most importantly, however, Boas also encouraged Hurston to gather the folklore of African American groups before it was lost. She spent the late 1920s and the 1930s collecting folktales and worked with Alan Lomax to record folksongs. Although best known as a literary author, Hurston drew upon her experience as an anthropologist and folklorist for inspiration in her writings.

Sources: <http://www.biography.com/people/zora-neale-hurston-9347659>;  
<http://chdr.cah.ucf.edu/hurstonarchive/?p= home>;  
<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2011/novemberdecember/feature/zoras-place>;  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/04/travel/04culture.html>;  
<http://www.zoranealehurston.com/about/index.html>;

### **Richard Dorson (1916 – 1981)**

In 1944, Richard Dorson joined the faculty at Michigan State University as a professor of folklore—then a fairly new field of study—and began laying the groundwork for a distinguished career. Much of the work Dorson did in Michigan was in the Upper Peninsula, to him a reflection of the country as a whole, given its ethnic diversity and associated variety of languages, customs, and occupations. He traveled widely throughout the UP, gathering legends, tales, and anecdotes that later formed the basis for *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*, an influential book in the field.

Another important project during his time at Michigan State was documenting the tales of African Americans living in the southwestern part of the state, many of whom had migrated from the South, including James D. Suggs. Suggs shared close to 200 different tales accumulated throughout a rich and varied life, an “astonishing repertoire” according to Dorson. Dorson, who has been called the “father of folklore studies in the United States,” took a position in 1957 at Indiana University, where he later cofounded the Folklore Institute. As the director of the institute, Dorson would be credited with building folklore studies into a rigorous academic discipline, one he felt was rooted in history rather than the “fakelore” (a term he coined) of popular culture.

Sources: *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, edited by Andrew R. L. Cayton, et.al.;

<http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01172.html>

Ben-Amos, Dan, “The Historical Folklore of Richard M. Dorson,” *Journal of Folklore Research*;

[http://museum.msu.edu/s-program/mh\\_awards/awards/2003RD.html](http://museum.msu.edu/s-program/mh_awards/awards/2003RD.html);

### **Linda Dégh (1920 – 2014)**

Growing up in Hungary, Linda Dégh wanted to be an actress, but by the age of 16 she knew she would study folklore. Immersed in Hungarian folktales during her childhood, she was also influenced by the stories of the farm workers at her aunt’s estate, where she spent her summers. After receiving her degree, Dégh taught at a university in Budapest before accepting a position with the Folklore Institute at Indiana University, where she spent the rest of her career.

After arriving in the United States, Dégh’s focus shifted from the fairy tales she had studied in Hungary to the legends that surrounded her in Indiana. Unlike her fellow folklorists and perhaps drawing on her early hope for an acting career, Dégh was most interested in *how* an individual would tell a story rather than the content of the story itself. This led to an exploration of the perception of truth that lies in urban legends. Those, more than any other type of folktale, are sources for debate and discussion, turning *storytelling* into *storysharing*. As Dégh herself put it, “legends...treat universal concerns. They deal with the most crucial questions of the world and human life.”

Sources: Dégh, Linda, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*, 2001;

<http://www.indiana.edu/~folklore/memorialdegh.shtml>;

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0015587X.2014.985927>.

### **Jan Harold Brunvand (1933— )**

A highly-respected folklorist, who also happens to have Michigan connections, Jan Harold Brunvand was born to Norwegian immigrants in Cadillac and raised in Lansing, Michigan. While attending Michigan State University, Brunvand met Richard Dorson, who became his mentor. Brunvand spent a year in Norway studying the country's folklore on a Fulbright Scholarship, before enrolling at Indiana University, where he received a PhD in folklore. It was there that one of his courses prompted a fascination with proverbs and riddles that led to his first book, a narrowly-focused compilation of proverbs in Indiana literature.

A later book, however, would go on to be a bestseller. At the University of Utah, where he spent the bulk of his academic career, Brunvand was searching for a way to make a correlation between folklore and the current lives of his students. When he asked them to think about stories they had shared in their own lives, the idea of the urban legend was born. The subsequent book, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*, was published in 1981 to much acclaim, and was followed by *The Choking Doberman and Other "New" Urban Legends* in 1984. Brunvand would go on to make radio and talk show appearances and to have a syndicated newspaper column called—what else?—"Urban Legends."

Sources: <http://www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/jan.harold.brunvand.html>

Null, Elizabeth F., et.al. "The Journal's Editors," *Journal of American Folklore*; <http://people.com/archive/hear-hear-a-noted-folklorist-gets-at-the-root-of-rumors-vol-18-no-8/>;

### **Alan Dundes (1934 – 2005)**

Believing that folklore dealt with the "essence of life," Alan Dundes not only investigated folklore of the past but also contemporary tales that included urban legends, chain mail, and bathroom graffiti. Another graduate of Indiana University's Folklore Institute, Dundes went on to teach at University of California—Berkeley and later was the first folklorist to be included in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

While many folklorists focus their efforts on collecting stories, Dundes was concerned mainly with interpreting and analyzing folktales. To that end, he studied tales through a psychological lens, applying techniques from that discipline to help zero in on the “essence” at their core. This approach, which was criticized at times, often led to interpretations that recalled the work of Sigmund Freud, an early psychoanalyst.

Dundes can also be credited with expanding the view of the “folk” in folklore to include everyone. As opposed to the once prevailing idea that legends and tales were something of the past only shared among quaint country-dwellers, he stressed that we are all “folk.” Every time we share a piece of knowledge that was learned from someone outside of any formal schooling, we are engaging in folklore.

Sources: <http://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/just-in/2016-05-02/lord-lores-papers-famed-folklorist-alan-dundes-open-public>; [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2005/03/31\\_dundes.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2005/03/31_dundes.shtml); <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/alan-dundes-3283.php>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/02/obituaries/alan-dundes-70-folklorist-who-studied-human-custom-dies.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/02/obituaries/alan-dundes-70-folklorist-who-studied-human-custom-dies.html?_r=0).

### **Song Collectors: Ivan Walton, Woody Guthrie, Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger**

A song is essentially a story set to music and folksongs hold a unique and important place within folklore. So much so, that some folklorists devoted themselves to collecting and documenting only songs.

Born in Michigan, Ivan Walton (1893 – 1968) took a post as an English teacher at the University of Michigan, where he began compiling folktales and poetry of the Great Lakes region. Walton became fascinated by the references to songs sung by sailors on ships traversing the lakes and scoured the shores in search of old sailors who could provide even a snippet of a song. Walton spent nearly three decades collecting songs and painstakingly reconstructing the old ballads.

While Woody Guthrie (1912 – 1967) was not exactly a folklorist, he drew on his rural Oklahoma roots and his experiences traveling back and forth across the country to craft songs that reflected American folklife. A prolific writer until he was diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease at

the age of 42, Guthrie would remain hospitalized until his death. His legacy, however, has had lasting influence on subsequent generations of songwriters, musicologists, and folklorists.

Beginning at the age of 18, when he accompanied his father on trips to gather folksongs for the Library of Congress, Alan Lomax (1915 – 2002) spent decades tirelessly collecting regional American folksongs. Lomax spent a significant amount of time documenting folklife and songs in Michigan and worked with Ivan Walton during his time here. Without the work of the Lomax family, particularly Alan, the song archives at the Library of Congress that document the country's rich musical heritage would not exist.

Born to a musicologist father and concert violinist mother, Pete Seeger (1919 – 2014) had music in his blood. This, along with an interest in journalism and a collaboration with Woody Guthrie, led to a lifetime of collecting, writing, and performing folksongs. Unable to abide injustice, Seeger coupled his music with activism, using his songs to raise awareness of the plight of other people as well as to promote environmental causes.

Sources: Walton, Ivan H., and Joe Grimm, *Windjammers: Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors*, 2002

Spencer, Scott B., *The Ballad Collectors of North America: How Gathering Folksongs Transformed Academic Thought and American Identity*, 2011

<http://www.woodyguthrie.org/biography/biography1.htm>; <http://www.biography.com/people/woody-guthrie-9323949#folk-revolutionary>; [http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce\\_alanlomax\\_bio.php](http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_bio.php); <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/alanlomaxbio.html>; <http://www.peteseegermusic.com/about.html>; [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/arts/music/pete-seeger-songwriter-and-champion-of-folk-music-dies-at-94.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/arts/music/pete-seeger-songwriter-and-champion-of-folk-music-dies-at-94.html?_r=0)

## **The Northern Lights**

*“And the skies of night were alive with light, with a throbbing, thrilling flame”*

Robert Service, “The Ballad of the Northern Lights” (1908)

Legends and myths surrounding the Northern Lights (the common name for the Aurora Borealis) can be found in many cultures in the northern hemisphere, especially in places where the lights are most common, such as Canada, Iceland, Norway, and the Siberian region of Russia. The lights also occur in the Great Lakes area, including Michigan and in particular the

Upper Peninsula, so it is fitting that the people of our state would have stories to tell about the phenomenon.

According to native Algonquin myth, after his work was done, *Nanabozho*, creator of the earth, went to live in the north and there he lit his fires. As the fires reflect off the sky, the Northern Lights appear and serve as a reminder to his people that they are in his thoughts.

Finnish immigrants, many of whom settled in the Upper Peninsula, had their own explanation for the cause of the Northern Lights, known as *revontulet*. Their legends vary somewhat but all involve the arctic fox. In one story, the fox races through the north, going so fast that when his tail hits the snow, sparks fly up into the sky and create the lights.

Sources: "Legends and Folklore of the Northern Lights," <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/aurora.htm>.

"Northern Lights Folklore," <http://www.aurora-service.eu/northern-lights-folklore/>.

### **The Michigan Triangle**

Much like the Bermuda Triangle in the Atlantic Ocean, Lake Michigan boasts its own area of mysterious phenomena. Known as the Great Lakes Triangle and the Lake Michigan Triangle, this section of the lake is bounded by Benton Harbor and Ludington in Michigan, and Manitowoc in Wisconsin. One of the earliest recorded mysteries was the disappearance of the schooner *Thomas Hume* in May, 1891. The ship was caught in a squall and never reached port, but the subsequent search turned up nothing, and a reward offered for information about the ship went unclaimed. In 2006, the nearly-intact ship was discovered at the bottom of the lake.

In April, 1937, Captain George R. Donner vanished without a trace from his locked cabin aboard his freighter, the *O.M. McFarland*. The captain had gone to rest before the ship reached port, leaving instructions that he be awakened when they were near. Receiving no response to his knock on the captain's locked door, a crewman broke in only to find the quarters empty.

Northwest Airlines flight 2501 disappeared over the Michigan Triangle in June, 1950. The loss of 58 people onboard made it the worst commercial air disaster to that date in U.S. history. No distress call was received before the plane simply disappeared from radar; although debris and human remains were discovered, to this day the wreckage of the plane has not been found.

Sources: "Lake Michigan Triangle: Paranormal Activity on the Great Lakes," *Atlas Obscura*:

<http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/lake-michigan-triangle>.

Painter, Sally, "The Legends and Disappearances at The Michigan Triangle," *Top Secret Writers*, Oct. 16, 2015:

<http://www.topsecretwriters.com/2015/10/the-legends-and-disappearances-at-the-michigan-triangle/>.

Sparks, Kyle, "Special Report: Lake Michigan Mysteries," *WWMT*, Nov. 11, 2015:

<http://wwmt.com/news/local/special-report-lake-michigan-mysteries>.

## **Michigan Ghost Towns**

Often a symbol of a bygone industry or boom, ghost towns mysteriously dot the landscape of Michigan. In the Upper Peninsula, the once prosperous smelting town of Fayette still stands. The remains of the town are now a state park, demonstrating that Fayette has fared better than many!

Most ghost towns are simply abandoned. Still others have been wiped from the landscape entirely. Singapore (near Grand Haven) was once a thriving port town, but was eventually abandoned. The wood from the buildings was used to rebuild Holland after the Great Fire of 1871. Once the buildings were gone, the sand covered over the remains of the buildings and streets, so there are no longer any visible signs that a town once stood there.

In Macomb County, there are several ghost towns. Davis once stood at the intersection of 27 Mile and Romeo Plank roads. Just up the road at 22 Mile, the local Waldenburg bar, stands as a proud reminder of the forgotten town of Waldenburg. If you follow 22 Mile Road to Gratiot, you will find the original village of Chesterfield, now the Chesterfield Historical Village. Back in 1830, Macomb Corners Park on 25 Mile Road was the city of Macomb Corners. It was named after a revolutionary war general, Alexander Macomb. Van Dyke and 25 Mile Road in Shelby Township was once the village of Disco. Many others dot the map as well if you know where to find them!

Sources: <http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/michigan/abandoned-places-mich/>

<http://www.exploringthenorth.com/fayette/town.html>

<http://www.exploringthenorth.com/mandan/mine.html>

## **Mackinac Bridge: Bridging the Divide Between Yoopers and Trolls**

The State of Michigan has an unusual geography due to the two large peninsulas that make up the state. For much of its history, navigation from one end of the state to the other was difficult at best, and often impossible. One had to travel by boat, board a ferry, or go out and around through other states to get to the opposite peninsula. The Mackinac Bridge changed all that!

The five-mile-long connector between the upper and lower peninsulas, known as the Mighty Mac, was the world's longest suspension bridge at the time of its opening in 1957 and is still the longest in the Western Hemisphere. More than four million vehicles cross the bridge each year, and up to 65,000 people gather at the bridge for the annual Labor Day Bridge Walk. The legendary bridge has been the scene of a number of deaths, including the lives lost there during its construction as well as the suicides of people jumping into the lake below. However, the Mackinac Bridge remains one of the most distinguishing features of our state, and has greatly improved tourism, commerce and travel.

Yoopers (the nickname for residents of the Upper Peninsula) and Trolls (Lower Peninsula folks who live "under the bridge") are now more connected than ever in history due to this monumental feat of engineering and construction.

Sources: <http://www.mackinacbridge.org/history/> <http://michiganradio.org/post/vocabulary-yoopers-trolls-and-fudgies> <http://www.mackinac.com/about/mackinac-bridge>

## **The Mysterious Paulding Light**

The tiny Upper Peninsula town of Paulding, Michigan, draws a steady stream of visitors thanks to an eerie light in the area that has fascinated sightseers for years. Also known as the Dog Meadow Lights, it is best viewed at night from a ridge above a small valley and through a break in the trees. The light varies in intensity and appears and disappears with no apparent pattern or cause, looking much like a lantern held aloft and floating through the landscape. Among the stories that have developed to explain the source of the light, the most prominent is the tale of a railroad switchman who was crushed to death one night as he tried to signal a train engineer. He is believed to continue his vain attempts from beyond the grave.

Engineering students at Michigan Technological University decided to investigate the light's cause and ultimately determined that car headlights coming over a hill on a stretch of US-45 provided the source. Their findings seem to be further corroborated by the timing of the first sightings, which began in the 1960s. It was at this time that US-45 was rerouted to its current path. Despite this evidence to the contrary, many people still subscribe to a supernatural explanation, and curious onlookers continue to make frequent visits to Paulding in order to experience the legend for themselves.

Sources: Carlisle, John, "Mysterious Light Draws Thrill Seekers to U.P. Forest,"

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/columnists/john-carlisle/2016/09/04/mysterious-paulding-light-upper-peninsula-michigan/89275134/>.

Goodrich, Marcia, "Just in Time for Halloween: Michigan Tech Students Solve the Mystery of the Paulding Light,"

<http://www.mtu.edu/news/stories/2010/october/just-time-for-halloween-michigan-tech-students-solve-mystery-paulding-light.html>.

"The Legend of the Paulding Light," <http://www.pauldinglight.com/>.

### **Defying Physics: Michigan's Mystery Spot and Gravity Hill**

Michigan is home to at least two of the world's many mysterious sites, where all is not as it should be. The first of these, the Mystery Spot, is located in St. Ignace in the Upper Peninsula. Back in the 1950s, surveyors discovered the unusual area when their equipment behaved strangely, resisting the laws of gravity. Within this area of about 300 feet, a plumb bob will pull to the east, though the ground appears to be level. An official Mystery Spot tourist attraction has been built here, allowing visitors to witness people grow shorter or taller depending on where they stand in a room and watch as someone sits on chair that improbably balances on a wall.

A similar phenomenon can be experienced on Gravity Hill in Benzie County. Near the intersection of Putney and Joyfield roads there is a spot where a vehicle placed in neutral will seemingly roll backwards up a hill! Some claim the church at the corner is drawing folks to come and worship, but others say there is a scientific explanation for both Gravity Hill and the Mystery Spot: optical illusions. In these areas, false horizons on the landscape trick the mind into believing that cars are rolling uphill and that people grow and shrink.

Sources: "The Mystery of Benzie County's Putney Road," <http://www.midwestguest.com/2010/10/the-mystery-of-benzie-countys-putney-road.html>

"St. Ignace Mystery Spot," <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/st-ignace-mystery-spot>

"Story of the Saint Ignace Mystery Spot," [http://mysteryspotstignace.com/about\\_us](http://mysteryspotstignace.com/about_us).

### **UFOs in Michigan: Are Aliens Among Our Tourists?**

The "U" in UFO definitely doesn't signify uncommon when it comes to sightings of unidentified flying objects in Michigan. According to an online news story reported by the FOX17 channel, our state ranks among the top ten in number of reported sightings since the 1950s with approximately 2,500 listed by the National UFO Reporting Center, an independent data-gathering organization, including some recent reports from the cities of Warren and Sterling Heights. Among the objects sighted are unusual aircraft that don't move in a predictable way, bright lights of varying colors that fade and/or vanish, and fireballs that shoot through the sky.

The Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), an American civilian organization dedicated to investigating UFO sightings, has a Michigan chapter (MIMUFON) headed up by long-time director Bill Konkolesky. According to Konkolesky, more than 80% of sightings can be explained, but among the rest is an experience of his own that occurred in 1989 near 18 Mile and Dequindre in Sterling Heights. He and friends saw a series of glowing lights or objects that behaved strangely before disappearing, but they never reported it for fear of being ridiculed. Konkolesky has some famous company among those who've witnessed this type of unusual phenomena, including presidents Carter and Reagan, astronaut Gordon Cooper, and Beatles legend John Lennon.

Sources: "Clawson UFO hunter: 'Something anomalous is going on,'" <http://www.dailytribune.com/general-news/20160413/clawson-ufo-hunter-something-anomalous-is-going-on>;

<http://www.nuforc.org/webreports/ndxIMI.html>

<http://mimufon.org/mimufon/>

"Released gov't UFO investigations include Michigan sightings," <http://fox17online.com/2015/01/21/released-govt-ufo-investigations-include-michigan-sightings/>;

### **Crop Circles: Alien Art or Hoaxes?**

According to the Independent Crop Circle Researchers' Association (ICCRA), an international consortium of people who study the phenomenon, since 1932 Michigan has had reports of 26

crop circle formations, with five of those appearing in Livingston County (Macomb County did not have any reported sightings). Crop circles are generally characterized by one or more perfectly round impressions that seemingly appear overnight in fields of cereal crops. The circles themselves can range in size from inches to hundreds of feet and can be as simple as a few circles or as complex as elaborate geometric designs.

Many people believe the circles are evidence of visits by extraterrestrials (people from another planet). This is often backed up by sightings of mysterious lights and UFOs (unidentified flying objects) in the vicinity. Skeptics, on the other hand, are convinced the formations are either the results of natural phenomena like weather patterns, or the endeavors of pranking kids or artists. Demonstrations have even been staged to depict how a circle might be formed, though this does not explain anomalies found in formations not shown to be hoaxes. Among these are deformities in crop stalks and other plant abnormalities as well as the presence of magnetic particles in formation soil.

Sources: BLT Research Team, Inc., <http://www.bltresearch.com/index.php>

Independent Crop Circle Researchers' Association, <http://www.iccra.org/index.htm>

“Michigan Crop Circles ‘No Hoax,’” <http://www.wnd.com/2003/08/20135/>

Radford, Benjamin, “Crop Circles Explained,” <http://www.livescience.com/26540-crop-circles.html>.

<https://reuther.wayne.edu/node/8334>

### **Larger Than Life: American Tall Tales and Folk Heroes**

Tall tales are wildly exaggerated stories of larger-than-life folk heroes. Many are set in the American frontier. These heroes tame the wilderness, or use their superhuman strength and size to carve out lakes and rivers, shape mountains and valleys.

Most tall tales, like legends, are based in oral tradition. Some stories are based on real people, but over the years, the details of their lives were embellished until they were almost unrecognizable, and their lives took on epic proportions. These characters include:

Davy Crockett – pioneer and U.S. Congressman, the “King of the Wild Frontier”

Daniel Boone – pioneer, explorer and frontiersman

Johnny Appleseed – who planted apple trees from Massachusetts to the Ohio Valley

John Henry – a mighty steel-driving African-American railroad worker

Mike Fink – a rowdy Mississippi River boatman

Other characters like Pecos Bill, the cowboy who tamed the Wild West, and Captain Stormalong, a New England sea captain with a giant boat, may be totally fictional. Stories were printed in newspapers and magazines until the character took on a life of its own, though some authors might say they were inspired by spoken tall tales and songs they heard in their youth.

Sources: Britannica (School) “American Tall Tales”; Osborne, Mary Pope, *Famous American Tall Tales*

### **Paul Bunyan: Legendary Lumberman**

The lumberjacks of the Michigan north woods were rumored to be taller, stronger, tougher than any normal man. Of course, they could also tell a tall tale or two. The legendary character Paul Bunyan is the biggest lumberjack of all. It’s said he was so big at birth it took five storks to deliver him. The stove used to cook his breakfast was so big, the cooks greased it by skating on it with bacon strapped to their feet.

Paul’s favorite companion was Babe, the Blue Ox. It’s said Paul found him buried in the snow, so cold that he turned blue, and the blue color stuck even after he warmed up. Paul and Babe were a great team, and when Paul needed to drive his logs to the mill, the pair could carve out a new river to the big lake in one day.

This version of the bigger-than-life Paul Bunyan was first documented in 1906 in an Oscoda newspaper. Later, the Red River Lumber Co. in Minnesota used an image of Paul Bunyan as its logo, and lumber companies pushed Paul Bunyan tales nationwide. However, some say Paul Bunyan was based on a real French-Canadian lumberman called “Saginaw Joe,” and oral stories focused on his expert knowledge and skill as a lumberjack, while the lumber advertisers centered Paul Bunyan stories on the tall tales of his size.

Sources: <http://www.history.com/news/ask-history/was-paul-bunyan-a-real-person>  
<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=Ny:True,Ro:0,N:4294963828-4294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS504>

## **Other Worldly Talents**

Throughout history, there have been people who say they have an extrasensory gift. Psychics say they can see the future. They may use tarot cards, one's palm, a reflective surface like a crystal ball, or the stars to give clients information. Mediums say they can "hear" the voices of the dead, or that they get a feeling when they touch items belonging to a person who passed away. During the Victorian era, trying to communicate with ghosts, or "spiritualism," became mainstream and people would get together for séances. The magician Houdini was intrigued by this idea, but discredited many mediums, exposing their tricks with his knowledge of illusion. In the 1970s and '80s, magician James Randi continued Houdini's work, targeting self-proclaimed psychics and faith healers.

Faith healers say they can heal illness or disability through divine intervention, often when they touch the sick person. While many touring faith healers have been exposed as swindlers, people from varied cultures do believe that prayers or touch can help heal sick people. One type of healer unique to Michigan is a bloodstopper. Tales were told in the Upper Peninsula of special individuals who could stop a cut or injury from bleeding simply by saying a special prayer. The power could be passed from one person to another, though once a bloodstopper had passed on the knowledge, he or she lost the ability.

Sources: <http://www.thearda.com/learningcenter/religiondictionary.asp#F>

Dorson, Richard. *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*

## **Special Talents in the Natural World**

Others say they have power over nature. Dowzers, also known as water diviners, say they can find water, usually with the help of a tool, such as a forked stick, which moves and jumps when water is underground. Rainmaking is another talent. Rainmaking in Native American cultures combines tradition, prayers and dance, but American pseudo-scientists claiming to be able to send chemicals into the sky to induce rain were common in the early 1900s. There is a legend that a rainmaker employed by the city of San Diego was responsible for flooding in 1916.

Phrenology was another pseudo-scientific trend in the 1800s. Phrenologists said they studied the size and shape of a person's head, as a way to tell about their personality and intelligence.

The man who popularized Octagon Houses, like the one in Washington Township, was also a leader in the world of phrenology.

Legends also abound regarding nature's effect on people – namely, the moon. Traditionally linked to stories of werewolves and “lunacy,” it is still common to hear someone say, “It must be the full moon” to explain something odd or unexpected. Some modern studies have disproved a link between the full moon and erratic or criminal behavior, but the topic is still being studied. The full moon is also said to have an effect on animals and some hunters check the phases of the moon before deciding when and where to hunt deer.

Whether you believe that individuals with unique talents walk among us, or you are sure that people claiming special powers are frauds, stories of these otherworldly talents have persisted throughout the ages.

Sources: <http://geology.com/articles/water-dowsing/>

<http://daily.jstor.org/charles-hatfield-rainmaker/>

<http://climatekids.nasa.gov/rainstick/>

Dorson, Richard. *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/nature-and-environment/native-american-zmaz88sozgoe>

<http://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/do-full-moons-and-supermoons-really-affect-human-animal-behavior/61402994>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/lunacy-and-the-full-moon/>

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/life/home-garden/2016/10/27/octagon-houses-home/92855392/>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/spiritualism-religion>

## **Secrets of the Underground Railroad**

As a secret network of people that helped escaped slaves to reach freedom, it is not surprising that mysteries and legends surround the Underground Railroad. One such story leads to Detroit and two prominent African American businessmen. William Lambert and George de Baptiste were among the “conductors” ushering runaway slaves across the Detroit River to safety in Canada. Despite a close association with well-known leaders of the abolitionist movement, including John Brown, ironically the men were apparently discouraged from joining local, *white* anti-slavery organizations. Instead, according to an 1887 interview with Lambert in the *Detroit Tribune*, they created their own group called variously African-American Mysteries and Order of

the Men of Oppression. Seemingly the only predominantly black abolitionist organization at the time, the Order was so secret that the *Tribune* article contains one of only two mentions of it on record.

Another Underground Railroad mystery, which is much disputed, involves codes and symbols that may have been used at the time. Some researchers believe that patchwork quilt patterns were utilized by sympathizers to communicate with escaped slaves along the routes. According to these historians, the different patterns and colors used in the quilts signified specific messages that could be “read” when the quilts were strategically hung for viewing. In this way, the quilts would serve as secret signs alerting travelers of the conditions along the way.

Sources: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/lambert-william-1817-1890>;  
<https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/AccessMaterials/Bibliographies/UndergroundRailroad/Pages/default.aspx>;  
<http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1606271,00.html>;  
<http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/underground-railroad>;  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/274126?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/274126?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents);  
[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/02/0205\\_040205\\_slavequilts\\_2.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/02/0205_040205_slavequilts_2.html);  
<http://www.quilthistory.com/ugrrquilts.htm>

### **Joking Around**

“Toivo and Eino decide to head down to Motor City from Ishpeming. After they cross the bridge they see a sign that says ‘DETROIT LEFT.’ So they turn around and go home.”

You might be a Michigander if . . . you recognize a Yooper joke when you hear one. The joke above is a typical Yooper (resident of the U.P.) joke. It features Toivo and Eino, a Finnish pair who are often a stand-in for lovable, hapless characters. Many Yooper jokes are a type of folk narrative – a joke in short story form, like the one above. Jokes are folklore – they are spoken aloud in informal settings and have a lot of variation depending on the storyteller.

In the 1940s, folklorist Richard Dorson collected many dialect stories. In these jokes, the punch line stems from a misunderstanding that occurs due to someone’s failure to speak English, or recognize American idioms or culture. These jokes thrived in Michigan’s small towns, where immigrants lived in close quarters, despite their language differences. Here is an example:

“One Cousin Jack (Cornish miner) said to another, ‘Guess what’s in my lunch pail, and it starts with “H” too!’ ‘Happles?’ ‘Naw.’ ‘Horanges?’ ‘Naw.’ ‘Honions?’ ‘That’s right!’”

Dialect stories or jokes also poke fun at a “country bumpkin” not knowing how life in the “big city” works, and many Yooper (and Michigander) jokes play off these same stereotypes.

Sources: <http://www.mennonitewriting.org/journal/8/4/dialect-stories/#page1>

<http://www.usaring.com/yooper/yooper.htm>

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/55867/10-regional-words-waaaay-northern-michigan>

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/foxyfolklorist/folklorethursday-jokes/#sthash.fEE7rlf8.dpuf>

Dorson, Richard. *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*.

### **Tales and Terms of Immigrants to Michigan**

The stories and legends of Michigan come from many different ethnic heritages, just as the people of Michigan do! These tales can be linked to a specific cultural group.

Tales of the *chasse-galerie*, or enchanted canoe, are popular in the Upper Peninsula, brought by French-Canadian lumbermen. In the most popular tale, lumbermen make a deal with the devil to bewitch their canoe, allowing them to fly through the air, over the snow, to a party hundreds of miles away. They must return before morning in the *chasse-galerie*, or risk losing their souls forever!

“Feu Follet,” French for the English term “will o’ the wisp,” is a mysterious fairy light that appears just off in the distance, often over a swamp. Scientists today would tell us the lights are the result of methane gas or ball lightning, but the legends surrounding these lights warn us that the lights will lead travelers away from the path, to their doom.

A “lutin” is a French elf or fairy who rides horses all night. When a horse’s owner comes to hitch up his horse in the morning, he might find that his horse is already tired out, and its mane is hopelessly tangled from being wound up in the lutin’s hands all night.

Stories of “Petit Jean” or “Little John” originated in French Canada. This popular character represented an Everyman who is often underestimated, but triumphs over others by being clever and resourceful.

Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox are street-smart, human-like animals who come from the African-American tradition. Brer Rabbit stories are trickster tales, and their telling dates back to the days when Africans in the United States were enslaved. The stories were widely popularized in the late 1800s when they were collected and retold by a white Atlanta newspaperman as “Uncle Remus Tales,” and the stories traveled with African Americans as they migrated throughout the country.

A Cousin Jack is a Cornish or Welsh immigrant who emigrated to work in the mines. In *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*, Richard Dorson writes that “Cousin Jack” is a generic term for a good-natured fool, noted for his enduring love of pasties.

Tales of Tommyknockers came with Welsh immigrants. These little men are similar to trouble-making Irish leprechauns, but Tommyknockers are said to live in mines. Welsh miners in the Upper Peninsula would hear them knocking on the walls of the mine to warn the miners of an impending cave-in, or possibly show off a rich seam of ore. On a bad day, a Tommyknocker might hide your mining tools, but if you leave a pasty for the Tommyknockers, you’ll have a friend.

As new immigrant groups continue to come into our state, new folk stories are sure to become a part of our collective heritage.

Sources: Bonner, Simon. Encyclopedia of American Folklife <http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/folklore/will-o-the-wisp.html>

Kurian, George Thomas, ed. "Canada: Folklore and Mythology."

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<http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE39&Details.aspx&iPin=EWN>

Bickley, R. B. "Uncle Remus Tales." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. 26 August 2013. Web. 08 November 2016. C1199&SingleRecord=True (accessed October 7, 2016).

<http://www.wrensnest.org>, Blog posts “Everything You’ve Heard about Uncle Remus is Wrong” by Lain Shakespeare.

Dorson, Richard. *Negro Folktales from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and Calvin, Michigan*, 1958

Dorson, Richard. *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers* (reprinted by the U. of Wisconsin Press in 2008)

## **Murder and Mayhem in Michigan**

Tales of violence in Michigan go back to the state's earliest days. One of the most famous incidents was the Bath Township massacre in 1927. The first school attack in the nation's history, it is still the deadliest: 38 children were killed along with seven adults. A local farmer, fed up with paying taxes for the school, set a series of bombs under the school's floor. Luckily, only one detonated, and the bomber then killed himself. The harshest punishment he could have received was life in prison, since Michigan abolished capital punishment in 1846.

Other cases are famous for going unsolved. Jimmy Hoffa's disappearance is one well-known case, but the Oakland County Child Killer also made national headlines in the 1970s, and struck fear into the hearts of parents throughout the country. Four children were abducted and killed by an as-yet unknown person.

The 1945 assassination of state senator Warren Hooper is another astonishing cold case. Hooper was ambushed and shot just four days before he was scheduled to testify in a political corruption case. Who ordered and carried out the hit? Investigators never found out, but in a shocking twist, some of those accused were actually in Jackson Prison at the time! It was said they used the prison warden's car to travel and execute Hooper.

Sources: <http://bentley.umich.edu/news-events/magazine/a-michigan-murder/>  
<http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/opinion/columnists/judy-putnam/2016/05/18/putnam-evil-remembered-89-years-later/84276384/>

## **Bootlegging Legends**

It seems like every Michigander has a story about an ancestor who was a bootlegger. While it might seem impossibly common, we might all be right! According to the Reuther library, "seventy-five percent of all the alcohol smuggled into the United States during Prohibition crossed the border at the Windsor-Detroit Funnel. By 1929 rum running was Detroit's second largest industry." Smugglers dealt with a sympathetic police force, and the penalties for bootlegging were small compared to the profits. Enterprising rumrunners moved liquor in coats, boats and even by car when the Detroit River was frozen. Stories of cables running to boathouses along the river are true in a few instances, but the tales of a pipeline constructed between a Canadian distillery and Detroit are just rumors.

The Purple Gang, Detroit's most notorious organized crime gang, also flourished in this era. Some stories of the Purples have not been nailed down, such as the origin of their name. It is most often reported that a shopkeeper who was their victim gave them the name, saying, "Those boys are purple, like the color of bad meat." Other stories are true; their violent exploits in the Cleaners and Dyers war, Chicago's infamous Valentine's Day Massacre and the Collingwood Massacre were well documented in the newspapers and the courts.

Digging up the truth of the Prohibition era continues to this day. A 2013 archeological dig at the site of Tommy's Detroit Bar & Grill near Joe Louis Arena confirmed that a speakeasy existed in the basement of the building. Simple rumors or definite truth – bootlegging stories are something all Michiganders share!

Sources: <http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/g.../purple/1.html>

Kavieff, Paul R. "Murder in the Motor City." *Michigan History Magazine*

"Detroit dig uncovers hidden speakeasy." *Michigan History Magazine*

Subject Focus: The Windsor-Detroit Funnel: Prohibition in Detroit, Reuther Library,

### **Miracle-workers in Michigan**

What makes a miracle? These are stories of people in our state who are credited with creating miracles. In the 1940s and '50s, Prophet Jones was a famous minister at Detroit's Triumph Church with a reputation as a healer and fortune teller. He also hosted television and radio programs, and his charisma and talents made both him and his church very prosperous. He was often criticized for his lavish lifestyle and eccentric habits, such as wearing a gold earring in the ear that God spoke into.

The Catholic Church is currently investigating miracles attributed to two priests from Michigan and thoroughly examining the evidence in these cases to ensure there are no scientific explanations. The first priest, Bishop Baraga, who was known as the Snowshoe priest, converted Native Americans and translated the Bible into written Ojibwa. Long after his death, a woman with a tumor on her liver came to his tomb in Marquette to pray. She also touched Baraga's stole, which had been preserved, to her abdomen. The tumor disappeared.

The second priest is Father Solanus Casey, who served at the Franciscan Capuchin church in Detroit in the 1920s and '30s. Part of his ministry was to celebrate the Blessing of the Sick every Wednesday. During his time, he gained a reputation for being able to heal the sick with his blessing, and over the years, hundreds of people have attributed their miraculous recoveries to Father Solanus. The church where he served is now a place of pilgrimage.

Sources: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/venerable-solanus-casey/>  
<http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/faith-and-character/faith-and-character/father-solanus-casey-and-his-favors.html> ; <http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=49921>

LIFE magazine, 1944, Nov. 27

### **Hearing the Word of God: Prophets in Michigan**

What happens when God speaks to you? For these charismatic leaders, sharing their prophecies meant they gained followers and made an impact on history. However, their unusual teachings put them at odds with others of their day, and their personal lives were often touched by drama, tragedy and mystery.

James Jesse Strang claimed to be chosen by God to lead the Mormon Church after Joseph Smith's death. His visions caused him to move his sect in 1848 to isolated Beaver Island in Lake Michigan. There he declared himself king by divine right, tried to enforce polygamy, and allegedly buried gold on the island that has never been found.

Ellen Gould White, a founder and prophet in the Seventh-day Adventist church said she received a vision from God encouraging followers to take strict care of their health. This led John Harvey Kellogg to set up his disciplined Battle Creek Health Sanitarium.

Benjamin Purnell called himself a "Messenger of God" when he founded the House of David religious commune in 1903. He too set strict rules for his followers, including celibacy, vegetarianism, no alcohol and tobacco, and no cutting their hair and beards!

The Nation of Islam was founded in Detroit in 1931 by Wallace Fard Muhammad, a man shrouded in mystery. He founded his church by going door to door, teaching where he was

welcomed. No one knows when or how Fard came to Detroit, and in 1934 he disappeared and was never heard from again.

Where some people see God working through his faithful, others see humans taking power for themselves, or suffering from mental illness. How would you recognize a prophet?

Sources: <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/02/18/nation-islam-comes-home-detroit-convention/80558080/>

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/columnists/john-carlisle/2016/11/13/house-of-david-benton-harbor/93069448/>

[http://www.strangstudies.org/James\\_Jesse\\_Strang/](http://www.strangstudies.org/James_Jesse_Strang/)

## **REAL-LIFE LEGENDS**

### **Harry Houdini**

Harry Houdini was a legendary escape artist. His performances combined brilliant technical conception, great physical strength, and highly dramatic presentation. Houdini also had an interest in séances and communicating with the dead. With his knowledge of showmanship, he worked to debunk many spiritualists, exposing how they fooled customers. On a 1926 tour stop in Montreal, he was assaulted in his dressing room. The stomach blows -- which he had invited as a test of his legendary strength -- aggravated a case of appendicitis. Houdini performed the next day and again in Detroit, where he finally went to the hospital. His appendix was removed, but infection had set in, and he died in Detroit on Halloween. His wife, Bess, conducted séances on Halloween for several years, trying to contact her late husband.

### **Charles Lindbergh**

Many people are unaware of Lindbergh's ties to Michigan. Born in Detroit—his mother was from a prominent family—Lindbergh later spent time consulting at Willow Run. He is legendary for being the first person to complete a transatlantic solo airplane flight, but the tragic 1932 kidnapping and murder of his young son, despite paying the ransom, created a different kind of legend. The crime rocked the nation, and the trial and execution of the kidnapper was called the “trial of the century.”

## **The Kelloggs**

Rumors surround the founding of the Kellogg's cereal company, but this basic fact is true: Cereal flakes were an accident! Wheat flakes and corn flakes were created in the kitchen of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's Seventh Day Adventist health sanatorium, and after a few years, John's brother, W.K. Kellogg took over selling cereal as a separate business, leading to years of legal disputes between the two.

## **Elijah "The Real" McCoy**

This African-American railroad man from Michigan invented a self-lubricating cup for railroad cars, making trains cheaper to run and safer for the workers, who no longer had to jump off the train to oil it. His invention worked so well that railroad workers would demand "The Real McCoy" to make sure they were getting quality workmanship. The phrase stuck, even if we forget where it came from!

## **Rosie the Riveter**

"Rosie the Riveter" is legendary for the can-do spirit she displayed during World War II, but who exactly was "Rosie"? The most famous "Rosie" today is the image on the "We Can Do It" poster, originally created for Westinghouse Electric, which didn't employ any riveters. A popular song in 1942 was called "Rosie the Riveter," which is where the phrase originated. It was based on an actual riveter named Rosalind. Norman Rockwell and Hollywood both used the phrase (on a magazine cover and film, respectively) and long after the war, the name "Rosie the Riveter" has stuck for any woman who cast aside her fears to work for the war effort!

Sources: Barber, Sally. Myths and Mysteries of Michigan

[http://www.mlive.com/opinion/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2012/05/80\\_years\\_later\\_lindbergh\\_kidna.html](http://www.mlive.com/opinion/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2012/05/80_years_later_lindbergh_kidna.html)

<http://blackinventor.com/elijah-mccoy/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/02/us/famed-riveter-in-war-effort-rose-monroe-dies-at-77.html>

<http://www.charleslindbergh.com/timeline/> ; <http://www.kellogghistory.com/history.html>

## **The KKK, Black Legion and Militias: Deep Roots in Michigan**

Considered a stronghold for the Ku Klux Klan, Michigan has a history of militias and other civilian groups who arm themselves in support of an ideal. The Black Legion, a splinter group of

the Klan was founded in Michigan, and many other groups like the Michigan Militia operate in the state. While most groups are peaceful, civilian organizations, others are not.

An organization surrounded in mystery and evoking an impression of prejudice and violence, KKK recruiters took advantage of the growing auto industry in the early 20th century when white and black southerners traveled north for jobs, as did many immigrant Catholics. In those days, the Klan was anti-black as well as anti-Catholic, believing both groups posed a threat to the American way of life. The group held significant political power, and had an estimated Detroit membership of 35,000 in 1925.

White supremacist sentiment led members of The Black Legion to commit crimes during the 1930s, including the murder of a young unemployed autoworker in the city of Detroit named Charley Poole. Many Legion leaders were imprisoned for the crime, and the group's activities exposed, effectively wiping them out.

While their mysterious clandestine meetings and hooded garb eventually began to lose popularity, some remnants of the Klan still remain active today. Gun culture and racial divides continue to fuel militias and other civilian groups in support of their political and societal beliefs.

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[http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2012/02/retrospectives\\_the\\_klu\\_klux\\_kl.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2012/02/retrospectives_the_klu_klux_kl.html)  
<http://michiganradio.org/post/look-history-kkk-michigan>  
<http://patch.com/michigan/fenton/racist-tweets-stir-michigan-town-where-kkk-grand-dragon-once-hosted-cross-burnings>; <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/03/31/why-militias-love-michigan.html>

### **Jimmy Hoffa: The Mystery Endures**

On July 30, 1975, Jimmy Hoffa, the former Teamsters union boss, disappeared from the parking lot of the Machus Red Fox restaurant in Oakland County, and was never seen again.

Hoffa went to work at the age of 14. Early on, he organized a union at a grocery store where he worked on the loading dock. He joined the Teamsters, and rose to be union president by 1957. Hoffa made several enemies over his decades in Teamsters union leadership, and even spent a

few years in jail. In 1964 he was convicted on charges of jury tampering, bribery, and misusing union pension funds. His sentence was commuted by President Nixon in 1971, under the requirement that he not work with the union until 1980. At the time of his disappearance, Hoffa was fighting that restriction. Was his effort to get back into the union the cause of his disappearance?

Although Hoffa was declared dead in 1982, several investigations, most recently in 2013, failed to uncover his body. While most people assume that he was murdered by organized crime bosses, the exact circumstances remain unclear. Both Frank Sheeran and Richard Kuklinski confessed to Hoffa's murder, however others have also been implicated. Rumors swirl that his body was cremated, buried, washed away in the Detroit river, or placed in the trunk of a car that was crushed and shipped to Japan. We may never know with certainty what happened that day, or the extent of Hoffa's influence and mob connections. His disappearance remains one of the great mysteries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Sources: Godfrey, Linda. *Weird Michigan*. <http://www.biography.com/people/jimmy-hoffa-9341063#mysterious-disappearance>

### **Monsters of the Great Lakes**

Are there monsters that swim in the depths of the Great Lakes? Legends say yes!

Bessie, also known as South Bay Bessie, is said to be a monster in Lake Erie. Most of the Bessie sightings have occurred off the coast of Ohio beginning in 1793. Bessie is said to be a snake-like creature about 40 feet long. The legend of Bessie inspired The Great Lakes Brewing Company to name a beer after her – “Lake Erie Monster.”

Pressie is said to be a serpent living in Lake Superior. Over the years there have been many sightings of Pressie who has been described as a snake-like creature with humps that rise above the surface of the water. Pressie was first seen in 1894 off the coast of Whitefish Point. She has been spotted near Pictured Rocks, off Sugar Island and near Point Iroquois as recently as 1981.

The best sighting was in 1977. A hiker named Randy Braun spotted a creature in the water by the Porcupine Mountains, near the mouth of the Presque Isle River in Lake Superior which is how Pressie got her name. Randy was actually able to get a picture of the fabled “creature.”

Sources: <http://www.northernontario.travel/algoma-country/the-lake-superior-dragon-and-other-stories-of-great-lakes-monsters> ; <http://wrkr.com/michigan-cryptozoology/>  
<http://cryptomundo.com/bigfoot-report/pressie-the-lake-superior-monster/>  
<http://cryptidchronicles.tumblr.com/post/26501197906/pressie-the-lake-superior-sea-serpent>

### **Lighting the Lakes**

The state of Michigan has more lighthouses than any other state. Throughout the course of its history, Michigan has had 247 lighthouses. Currently, there are 129 still standing, but less than 100 of them are active. Some have become museums, and others offer unique overnight lodging for guests.

Mystery and history surround these remote beacons. There are many phenomenal and heroic stories of lighthouse keepers, and of hauntings and strange sightings in and around many of the lights.

Seul Choix Lighthouse on Lake Michigan is considered to be haunted. Captain Joseph Townsend, a keeper in the early 1900's, reportedly died in the lighthouse during the winter and his body was kept in the basement waiting for the thaw. People have reported the smell of cigar, a man peering in the windows and footsteps. Whitefish Point Lighthouse, on Lake Superior, has lost its light only once. Unfortunately, it was during a storm, resulting in the loss of the Edmund Fitzgerald and its 29 crew members. Many families lived at the lighthouses, with the husband and wife acting as keeper and assistant keeper. There are even stories of the wife taking over the position upon her husband's death in a remote area.

Sources: <http://www.exploringthenorth.com/seulchoix/seul.html>  
<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/famous-michigan-lighthouses-4823.html>  
<http://www.coastalliving.com/travel/top-15-haunted-lighthouses/haunted-lighthouses-seul-choix-point-lighthouse>  
<http://www.michigan.org/lighthouses/>

## Loss on the Lakes

There are over 6,000 shipwrecks and many lives lost in the Great Lakes. Every tragedy has its own story. On July 24, 1915, the excursion boat *The Eastland* was boarding employees of Western Electric and their families for a fun day in Michigan City, Indiana, when things went horribly wrong. The combination of too many people aboard and the fact that many were gathered on one side of the boat for a photograph caused it to tip over. *The Eastland* capsized next to the dock trapping the passengers. There were 844 people lost that day, including 22 families. This is the largest loss of life on the Great Lakes.

*The Carl D. Bradley* was used as an ice breaker through the Straights of Mackinac. In 1957, it underwent repairs, and in 1958 it ran aground twice. It is believed these events contributed to structural damage to the ship. On November 18, 1958, the ship was traveling during a strong storm. The ship broke completely in half. Only two crew members survived, 39 were lost. *The Carl D. Bradley* lies 360 feet under Lake Michigan and the two halves of the boat are 90 feet apart.

*The Rouse Simmons* – known as “The Christmas Tree Ship” – was a schooner that carried Christmas trees. It is unclear exactly what happened on November 22, 1912. *The Rouse Simmons* was taking evergreen trees from Thompson, Michigan to Chicago when it sank. A total of 16 lives were lost.

Sources: <http://www.eastlanddisaster.org/history/what-happened>  
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/eastland-disaster-killed-more-passengers-titanic-and-lusitania-why-has-it-been-forgotten-180953146/>  
<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hundreds-drown-in-eastland-disaster>  
<http://wisconsinshipwrecks.org/Vessel/Details/541?region=MidLakeMichigan>  
[http://www.lakeeffectliving.com/Jun13/Shipwrecks-Carl D Bradley.html](http://www.lakeeffectliving.com/Jun13/Shipwrecks-Carl_D_Bradley.html)

## Le Griffon: The Great Lakes' Oldest Shipwreck

The 300-year mystery that still baffles shipwreck enthusiasts and historians alike is that of the legendary *Griffon*. Of the approximately 5,000 shipwrecks throughout the Great Lakes, this one is the oldest story and perhaps the most elusive. The first ship to ever sail to the upper Great

Lakes never returned from her maiden voyage. Despite many searches and possible sightings, the wreck of the brigantine has never been proven to have been found.

Originally built to haul furs, the construction of the ship was overseen by the legendary explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier: Sieur de La Salle. The ship set sail from Niagara on a course for Michillimackinac in August, 1679. She never returned which launched hundreds of years of speculation, mystery, searches and failures to get to the truth of the demise of *Le Griffon*.

The bow sculpture, a carving of the mythical half lion-half eagle creature, is thought to have been successfully recovered from the wreck, although some still have doubts. No one has actually ever found the entire ship, and there may not be much of it left after 300 years at the bottom of Lake Michigan.

Sources: <http://fox17online.com/2014/12/27/its-the-holy-grail-of-ship-wrecks-the-only-artifact-brought-back-from-the-ship-wreck-exclusive-interview/>  
<http://www.historymuseum.ca/virtual-museum-of-new-france/the-explorers/rene-robert-cavelier-de-la-salle-1670-1687/>

### **Gales of November**

*“They have drowned full many a midnight ship with all its shrieking crew.”*

-Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

Weather affects our lives every day, but sailors on the Great Lakes have a certain aversion to one particular fall weather pattern. Called the Gales of November, the phenomenon produces dangerous winds and storms that have claimed the lives of hundreds on the lakes. Caused by temperature changes as the cold air from Canada in the north travels over the relatively warm Great Lakes, the mixture produces unpredictable weather that makes sailing conditions very tricky. The temperature difference causes extreme low pressure and high volatility. By December, however, the lakes have cooled down, so the effect of the northern air wears off.

Legendary November storms have downed famous ships like the Edmund Fitzgerald and the Daniel J. Morrell in recent times, as well as an unknown number since sailors first started navigating the Great Lakes. One of the worst, the Great Storm of 1913 claimed the lives of 235

people, sank ten ships and crippled 30 others. On Lake Huron alone, eight out of 18 ships battling the storm sank, resulting in the loss of 178 lives. This is only one storm of the many that have tragically affected ships on the lakes.

Sources: <http://www.themorningnews.org/article/the-gales-of-november>  
[http://www.mlive.com/weather/index.ssf/2014/11/the\\_gales\\_of\\_november\\_what\\_are.html](http://www.mlive.com/weather/index.ssf/2014/11/the_gales_of_november_what_are.html)  
<http://www.seagrant.umn.edu/superior/facts>

### **The Edmund Fitzgerald: The Legend Lives On**

Immortalized in song by folk singer Gordon Lightfoot, the tragedy of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* has been retold since 1975 when the ill-fated ship sank in Lake Superior. The famous ship went down in the lake during the Gales of November that cause unpredictable and dangerous weather patterns.

The *Edmund Fitzgerald* was victim not only to rapidly changing weather, but also winds estimated at 80 m.p.h. with 25-foot waves. The *Fitz* and her crew of 29 sank on the evening of Nov. 10, 1975, 17 miles northwest of Whitefish Point on eastern Lake Superior. Though the ferocious storm was the cause, the exact details of the sinking have never been determined. The bell of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* was recovered and is on display at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum. A replica of the bell inscribed with the names of the lost lives stands as a further memorial at the Mariner's Church in Detroit. The *Fitzgerald* remains one of the most legendary shipwrecks on the Great Lakes.

Sources: <http://www.shipwreckmuseum.com/edmund-fitzgerald/the-fateful-journey/>  
<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/11/10/40-years-ago-edmund-fitzgerald-sank-lake-superior/75503300/>  
[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2003-11-03/news/0311030117\\_1\\_edmund-fitzgerald-gales-lake-superior](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2003-11-03/news/0311030117_1_edmund-fitzgerald-gales-lake-superior)  
[http://shipwreckexplorers.com/shipwreck\\_details.php?ID=31](http://shipwreckexplorers.com/shipwreck_details.php?ID=31)

### **Petroglyphs: Amazing Monuments**

Michigan is home to some unusual monuments that leave many folks scratching their heads. One odd construction is Stonehenge of Nunica. Fred and Pam Levin had the scale replica of England's Stonehenge built on their property in 2005. While the monument in England, which is

approximately 2,500 years old, is made of actual stone, Nunica's is really Styrofoam covered with stucco and paint to simulate stone.

The Underwater Crucifix near Petoskey in Little Traverse Bay is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives on the water. The 11-foot cross with the five-foot figure of Christ is made of marble and was originally crafted as a grave-marker, but it was damaged during shipment. Purchased at an insurance sale, the crucifix was first submerged in the water off the coast of Charlevoix to commemorate a Michigan diver. It was relocated to its current site and rededicated in the mid-1980s.

Right in the middle of Michigan's "thumb," the Sanilac petroglyphs are a rare occurrence in the Great Lakes region. Hundreds of years ago local Native American tribes carved the petroglyphs into a mound of sandstone near Cass Lake. Hidden for many years under dense vegetation, the carvings were rediscovered in 1881. Believed to be markers intended for future generations, the site was designated a state historic park in 1970 in order to help preserve the petroglyphs.

Sources: <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/09/rare-petroglyphs-michigan-provide-link-native-american-past/85652460/>; <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/03/05/underwater-cross-petoskey-little-traverse-bay/24432341/>;  
<http://www.grandhaventribune.com/frontpage/2013/01/18/Stonehenge-in-Nunica>;  
[http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/03/underwater\\_memorial\\_for\\_deceas.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/03/underwater_memorial_for_deceas.html);

### **The Turtle and the Island: Stories of Mackinac**

There are several versions in Native American mythology of the origin of Mackinac Island, but what most of the stories have in common is the turtle. This steadfast, gentle beast offers up his broad back as the foundation upon which the patch of earth would rise. He may also have given his name to the island as many believe the word Michilimackinac (from which we get Mackinac) was derived from the Ojibwe word *mishimikinaak*, meaning large turtle.

The turtle cannot create the island by himself, however, and needs the help of some friends. Various water animals attempt to dive to the bottom of the lake in order to bring up some earth from which the island will grow. One by one the loon, the beaver, and the otter try to swim through the watery depths to retrieve the soil without success. Finally the tiny muskrat

decides to make the dive, but he is met with scorn from the other bigger, stronger swimmers. Ignoring their disbelief, the muskrat disappears into the water. The others expect him to reappear empty handed after a short period, but just as they give up hope of his return, the muskrat emerges. Though he is near death, he clutches a small clump of earth. Placed on the turtle's back, this bit of soil grows and grows until Mackinac Island is born.

Sources: <http://www.angelfire.com/in2/ITV/lore2.html>;  
<http://www.nanations.com/ottawachippewa/earlieshistory.htm>;  
<http://www.ourstoryworld.com/2012/03/05/native-american-myths-28-the-legend-of-mackinac-island/>  
Wargin, Kathy-jo, *The Legend of Mackinac Island*.

### **Mastodons and Mammoths: Where Did They Go?**

No one really knows what caused the extinction 10,000 years ago of mastodons and mammoths, but their remains continue to be uncovered in Michigan. In fact, as recently as 2016, the remains of a mastodon were discovered in the Thumb area, comprising the most complete skeleton found in the state since the 1940s.

Mammoths are more closely related to modern elephants than mastodons, but they are only occasionally found in Michigan. Arising in Africa some five million years ago, mammoths gradually made their way across Europe and Asia to North America. Mastodons, however, originated in North America and are even older than their mammoth cousins, having been traced back 25 to 30 million years ago. Given their long-standing and widespread presence here, the mastodon was chosen as Michigan's state fossil in 2002.

A common element in the evolution of both mastodons and mammoths is their mysterious disappearance about 10,000 years ago. One theory suggests that early humans hunted the animals to extinction. Indeed the mastodon remains found in the Thumb appear to show signs of human interaction with the bones. Others believe the animals might have contracted tuberculosis from neighboring humans, which decimated their numbers. Another popular theory is that as the Ice Age declined and the climate warmed up, mastodon and mammoth numbers declined as well.

Sources: <http://dinosaurs.about.com/od/otherprehistoriclife/ss/10-Facts-About-Mastodons.htm#step7>

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/10/151007-woolly-mammoth-michigan-extinction-humans-science/>  
<http://phys.org/news/2016-10-team-recovers-michigan-mastodon-skeleton.html>

### **Legend of the Sleeping Bear**

Michigan may seem an unlikely place for sand dunes, but these uncommon geographic features offer a unique attraction. Called cliff, or perched, dunes, the hills of sand were formed as lake levels fell over time, coupled with strong winds that blew sand from the exposed cliffs up onto the plateau.

In the case of the Sleeping Bear Dunes, however, a Native American legend explains their formation in another way. A mother bear and her two cubs lived across Lake Michigan near the shores of Wisconsin. One day a forest fire (or a famine) forced the bears to make the grueling swim across the lake to safety.

The cubs do their best to keep up with their mother, but as night falls, the exhausted youngsters fell further and further behind. The next morning mother bear arrived alone and exhausted here on the other side of the lake. Hoping for a sign of the cubs, mother bear looked toward the water and collapsed, eventually falling into a sorrowful sleep. She remained there year after year, mourning the loss of her cubs, slowly becoming one with the land as the sand covered her. To ease her despair, the Great Spirit, Manitou, created two islands to mark the spots where the brave young bears disappeared, and mother bear is able to gaze upon North and South Manitou Islands forever.

Sources: <http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/bearlegend.html>;  
[http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/perched\\_dunes.htm](http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/perched_dunes.htm); <http://leelanau.com/dunes/dunes/the-legend-of-the-sleeping-bear/>; [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/GIMDL-GSA87M\\_302421\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/GIMDL-GSA87M_302421_7.pdf)

### **The Petoskey Stone: Legendary Fossil**

What we've known as our state stone since 1965 isn't actually a stone at all but a fossil. Petoskey stones are the fossilized remains of coral that lived in the warm shallow waters that covered Michigan some 350 million years ago. The stone takes its name from the area around the city of Petoskey, where it is generally found. The city in turn is named for the son of a Native American woman and her husband.

After being made an honorary member of the Ottawa tribe, a French fur trader married the daughter of one of the tribe's chiefs. In 1787, as they awaited the birth of their child, the couple began the journey from what is now Chicago to their summer hunting grounds on the northern shore of Lake Michigan. One morning, just as the sun was beginning to rise, the woman gave birth to a son who was given a name that meant "rays of dawn." The boy grew to be an important and respected person in the area, and it was his land that became the town of Petoskey, which was derived from his name. It is fitting, then, that our state stone looks like a network of suns projecting rays of light.

Sources: <http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/petoskystone.html>; Wargin, Kathy-jo, *The Legend of the Petoskey Stone*; [https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u263/2014/PetoskyStone\\_0.pdf](https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u263/2014/PetoskyStone_0.pdf)

### **Mysterious Mound Builders**

Long before the Algonquin tribes, there was another society that called the upper Midwest home. Two thousand years ago this group of people lived in small village complexes and thrived by hunting, planting, and trading. Then they disappeared, leaving behind intriguing man-made mounds and other earthworks, including those located in Grand Rapids and at Fort Wayne in Detroit. Some mounds took on shapes, at times looking snake-like; the mounds themselves were often set off by earthworks, such as berms and hills, that had geometric shapes. Initially thought to be used for fortification, it was discovered that the mounds were actually used for burial.

Frequently referred to as the Hopewell—a name derived from that of the gentleman on whose Ohio land the mounds were first documented—the mound builders were also likely copper miners.

Among the artifacts found at mound sites were items formed from copper. Such items may have been used as trade goods; shells indigenous to Florida have been found, indicating the Hopewell had contact with groups from great distances. This contact may provide a clue to the disappearance of the Hopewell, who may have simply dispersed and been absorbed into other contemporary societies, leaving the mounds as a testament to their sophisticated culture.

Sources: [http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/hopewell/who\\_were\\_hopewell.html](http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/hopewell/who_were_hopewell.html);  
[http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/indian\\_trails.html](http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/indian_trails.html);  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/g/genpub/1265156.0001.001%3Frqn%3Dmain%3Bview%3Dfulltext>;  
[http://seekingmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/mitten\\_hopewell.pdf](http://seekingmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/mitten_hopewell.pdf).

### **The Serpent and the Panther: Great Lakes Water Gods**

Native American tribes have many spirit gods, so it is not surprising that the tribes that call the Great Lakes region home would have water gods who figure prominently in their sacred mythology. In addition to imps, sprites, and mermaids (and –men!), the lakes were home to two evil beings who required offerings such as beads and tobacco to help ensure the safety of travelers who otherwise could suffer the wrath of the lake serpent and the water panther.

It was Misiginebig, the giant horned serpent and sworn enemy of the creator, Nanabozho, who was responsible for the Great Flood, which he started as revenge for being shot by Nanabozho with an arrow. Even when the water was frozen, unwary travelers crossing the lake could fall into the clutches of Mishipeshu, the water panther with scales and a grasping tail, who could cause the ice to crack and open up beneath them. However, both the serpent and the panther could be put in their place by the Thunderbirds, who shot lightning bolts from their bows.

Sources: <http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/aborig/fp/fpz2f31e.shtml>  
<http://www.native-languages.org/misiginebig.htm>  
<http://www.native-languages.org/water-panther.htm>.

### **Song of the Sands: The Beach at Bete Gris**

The isolated beach along the southern shore of the Upper Peninsula's Keweenaw Peninsula is remarkable not just for the views of Lake Superior or for the nearby wetlands that are home to some intriguing plant and animal species. What amazes visitors the most is the sand, or more precisely the sound the sand makes. Said to be the mournful song of a Native American maiden who lost her love, researchers believe the sound is produced as the sand grains vibrate against each other, with the size of the grains determining the pitch. Because a great deal of sand is needed to make the sound, tourists who take home a jarful hoping to hear it sing again will be disappointed.

A further mystery surrounds the name Bete Gris, which is a misspelling of the French *bête grise*, meaning “gray beast.” Some think the name derives from the smoke that rolled across the area when Native Americans burned off bogs nearby. There are others, however, that say the name stems from sightings of a great gray beast seen roaming the beach and wetlands.

Sources: Godfrey, Linda S., et al, *Weird Michigan*; <http://www.livescience.com/24268-singing-sands.html>;  
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/10/121031-singing-sand-dunes-physics-science-whistling/>;  
Pohlen, Jerome, *Oddball Michigan: A Guide to 450 Really Strange Places*;

### **The Underwater Circle: Lake Michigan’s Ancient Secret**

Some 40 feet below the surface of Lake Michigan near Traverse City, a college archaeology professor accidentally discovered an unusual grouping of stones in 2007, when he and a colleague were using sonar equipment to search for shipwrecks. At nearly 300 feet across its outside perimeter, the stones recall the ancient Stonehenge structure in England and lie in a featureless underwater landscape.

Believed by some to be the work of ancient hunter-gatherers who lived at a time when the lake had not yet formed, research into their origins is ongoing. Scientists have developed some theories about the stones’ use, however. Some believe they had a ceremonial purpose, while others think the stones were used to dam up a river for ease of fishing. Adding to this mystery is what appears to be a carving of a mastodon on one of the stones. Researchers do not yet understand its significance, but mastodons were prevalent in ancient Michigan until their extinction 10,000 years ago.

Sources: [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-02-08/news/0902070444\\_1\\_stones-mastodon-archeologists](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-02-08/news/0902070444_1_stones-mastodon-archeologists)  
<http://www.collective-evolution.com/2015/12/24/are-these-remnants-of-a-9000-year-old-stonehenge-at-the-bottom-of-lake-michigan/>  
<http://www.zmescience.com/science/archaeology/stonehenge-under-lake-michigan-3125445/>.

## **HAUNTED PLACES**

### **The Holly Hotel**

The Holly Hotel is on the corner of Martha Street and Broad Street in the city of Holly, Michigan. It is considered to be the most haunted historical building in the state and one of the most haunted places in the United States.

There have been many strange occurrences at the Holly Hotel that have been reported by workers and guests over the years. There are several ghosts believed to be “living” in the hotel. The most popular ghost is Mr. Hirst, the original owner of the hotel. It is said that people have heard him laughing and smelled his cigar smoke. The ghost of Nora Kane also seems to be roaming the Holly Hotel. Her picture hangs in the main dining room and she has been known to appear in photographs, especially of weddings, taken at the hotel. Ms. Kane had a love for music and can be heard singing or playing the piano. People have also been able to smell her flowery, sweet perfume. There is also a mischievous ghost that likes to run up and down the halls and play in the kitchen, especially with the meat cleaver.

Sources: <http://michiganhistory.leadr.msu.edu/the-historic-holly-hotel/> ; <http://hollyhotel.com/ghosts.html>  
<http://www.graveaddiction.com/hollyhot.html> <http://www.hauntedplaces.org/item/holly-hotel/>

### **Fright at Fort Wayne**

Although Fort Wayne, located in Detroit, has never seen battle, it is still rich in history and lore. Military personnel passed through the fort between 1845 and 1973. During the Civil War the fort became a volunteer instruction camp. Later the facility grew to accommodate chaplain training schools, quartermaster warehouses, and offices. The area is now considered haunted by many locals as well as tourists who come to visit the historic buildings searching for encounters with the unknown.

Wayne Miracle, owner of Metro Paranormal, has toured and investigated Fort Wayne for years. It is Miracle’s opinion that one of the creepiest places in Fort Wayne is the Visitors Center which was built in 1903 as a recreational facility for soldiers. He hosts regular tours throughout Fort Wayne which have been known to sell out because of the ghostly voices and eerie footsteps spectators witness. Women have reported seeing legs underneath the center’s bathroom stall door, but no one is inside when they open the door. Miracle has also reported witnessing lights flickering off and on, and shadows passing in the bathroom while the facility is closed for business. Do you dare to brave the Visitors Center in Fort Wayne after dark?

Sources: <http://nightraindetroit.com/2010/10/27/haunted-detroit-historic-fort-wayne/>  
<http://mpitoddk.wixsite.com/metroparanormal>

<http://www.historicfortwaynecoalition.com/index.html>

<http://www.michigan.org/property/historic-fort-wayne/>

### **Cloaked in Black to Feed the Needy**

In Trenton Michigan during the war of 1812, the spirit of the Monguagon Ghost was born. A young British Soldier named Muir took a bullet to the head on the battlefield. The story goes that his soul escaped his body to visit his true love, just one last time. On that warm summer night, he appeared in Marie's boudoir with a request from the grave – that his massacred body be retrieved from the thicket from which it lay before enemy hands have a chance to desecrate it. As Muir left, he touched Marie's hand.

Hoping her evening with a ghost was a dream, Marie was shaken when she woke and found proof that Muir had indeed visited her from the grave; left with a strange dark mark where he'd touched her hand. Determined to grant his gruesome request, Marie and her servant, traveled to the battlefield and buried Muir's body. From that day, on Marie wore a single black glove to cover her mark.

Marie would dress in a black beggars robe every year on the anniversary of Muir's death; going door to door begging for food to feed the poor. To this day the people of Trenton believe Marie still wanders the city in a hooded black cloak and gloves begging for alms.

Sources: [https://books.google.com/books?id=8Rv64wjttnoC&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq=Monguagon+ghost&source=bl&ots=raJmE\\_pft3&sig=PYtyc3Yx7nKyO-McBCcMOLJtxpc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjNkrqwvpvPAhUo74MKHcmtDzwQ6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=Monguagon%20ghost&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=8Rv64wjttnoC&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq=Monguagon+ghost&source=bl&ots=raJmE_pft3&sig=PYtyc3Yx7nKyO-McBCcMOLJtxpc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjNkrqwvpvPAhUo74MKHcmtDzwQ6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=Monguagon%20ghost&f=false)

Godfrey, Linda S., *Weird Michigan*

### **Campus Hauntings**

Colleges and universities are no strangers to hauntings and unexplainable occurrences. From Olivet College to Sienna Heights University and more, stories abound of things like ghostly apparitions and odd shadows on campus.

Theta Chi Fraternity house at Oakland University has had many ghostly incidents. The house, which is an old mansion, had a fire in the early 1900's in which several people died. The

fraternity brothers have reported strange figures in the night, especially in the attic. They claim the figure has red eyes and angrily stares at them, then disappears.

Students at the University of Detroit – Mercy have reported eerie happenings at Marion Hall. They claim that the ghosts of nuns haunt the hall. When inside Marion Hall you may experience chills, the feeling of being watched and hear doors locking.

Michigan State University has many places with stories of unusual hauntings. Many of the halls around campus have experienced paranormal activity. Students have seen strange ghostly figures in and around the elevators at Holmes Hall. Both Williams Hall and Hubbard Hall have had appliances turn on and off by themselves, also footsteps and laughing have been heard in deserted hallways. Mayo Hall is said to be haunted by Mary Mayo herself. The locked fourth floor is said to contain a “red room” that was once used by students for satanic rituals.

Sources: <http://www.onlineschoolscenter.com/50-haunted-colleges-campuses/>  
<http://www.hauntedplaces.org/state/Michigan>

### **The Blue Lady**

Legend has it that the Blue Lady of Denton Road’s fate came chasing after her in the form of her enraged husband who caught her in the act of adultery. Infuriated, he chased her down to the Denton Road Bridge, with their baby clutched tightly in her arms. But despite pleas for mercy, he husband ended her life and the fortune of the child remains a mystery. The locals have reported sightings of her glowing blue image wandering in the night, lending her the nickname “The Blue Lady.” Her baby’s tiny little footprints have been spotted on the top of cars and its faint cries have been heard in the darkness.

Denton Road, which runs through the cities of Denton and Canton, Michigan, hasn’t been the same since the birth of the Blue Lady Legend in the 1960s. For a while, teenagers would prank unsuspecting spectators looking to meet the legend at nightfall by scaring them off with a faux supernatural experience. But despite angst inflicted by the town’s teens, passersby have continued to visit the legendary Denton Road. In fact, many have claimed to witness phantom lights that spring out of nowhere, while others have even alleged to be chase by them.

Sources: <http://michigansotherside.com/haunted-denton-road/> Godfrey, Linda S., *Weird Michigan*

### **Cemeteries: Sites of Unsettled Sleep**

Ghosts or supernatural activity are often reported in cemeteries, and are generally attributed to the dead who are buried there. Oakhill Cemetery in Battle Creek is the home of “Weeping Mary”. A statue resembling the Virgin Mary reportedly cries real tears on Sundays at midnight. Nunica Cemetery in Grand Rapids is considered one of the most haunted cemeteries in Michigan, and has been the source of numerous ghost sightings and stories dating back to 1883.

In Hillcrest Memorial Park Cemetery in Jackson is the gravesite of “Little Mary,” a seven-year-old girl who died in the late 1800s. After Mary was buried, her mother woke screaming one night that Mary had been buried alive. The mother insisted that Mary’s grave be dug up, and when that was done, scratches were found inside the coffin. People claim that you can still hear Mary crying and scratching.

Sunset Hills Cemetery in Flushing, Michigan is famous for its statues, the most well-known being “Crack the Whip.” It is a bronze statue of eight children playing the old-fashioned game. It is so realistic that one of the children is missing a shoe which can be found off alone in the grass. Some people say you can even hear the children laughing.

Sources: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/71288712@N00/340224244>  
[http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/10/ghost\\_hunters\\_flock\\_to\\_nunica.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/10/ghost_hunters_flock_to_nunica.html)  
<http://theshadowwatchers.blogspot.com/2009/07/legend-of-crying-mary-debunking-myth.html>

### **Restless Confinement**

Confinement of the criminal and the mentally ill is a common practice that has long taken place in Michigan’s prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Prior to the opening of Kalamazoo Regional Psychiatric Hospital, those afflicted were locked in attics, cellars and log pens or placed in jails. In 1906 the hospital eliminated the use of all forms mechanical devices used to restrain patients, for example cuffs, camisoles and cages. It is believed that the use of such devices may have contributed to the unrest of many souls bound in hospitals.

Eloise Psychiatric Hospital, located in Westland, began as a poor house but later transitioned into an asylum. Now closed, explorers of the hospital's ruins have reported discovering jars of human body parts and witnessing a woman dressed in white gallivanting about the quarters. Others have reported hearing peculiar groans and screams throughout the remaining grounds.

Michigan State Prison, also known as Jackson State Prison, has experienced many alleged cases of the paranormal. People have reported witnessing doors opening and shutting, mysterious screams and pipes banging. There are also accounts of individuals being inexplicably shoved. Perhaps being trapped behind prison bars led to an eternal state of unrest for these souls.

Sources: <http://www.kpl.gov/local-history/health/kph.aspx>  
<https://roadtrippers.com/stories/michigans-most-haunted-prison-has-an-insanely-dark-past?lat=40.80972&lng=-96.67528&z=5> ; <http://hauntedusa.org/eloiseasylum.htm>

### **Who You Gonna Call?**

The practice of ghost hunting is believed to have begun as early as 100 AD in Rome. Currently, there are approximately 140 paranormal societies in Michigan alone, a number of which are based in Macomb County. Many use high tech equipment, such as electromagnetic field (EMF) detectors, digital cameras, digital thermometers and night vision scopes to hunt ghosts.

At first, Kat Tedsen and her sister Bev Rydel were skeptical of the ghost stories they heard while researching their book series *Michigan Vacation Guide*, but when they began hearing them repeated, they took it on themselves to research the claims. Now a professional ghost hunter, Tedsen travels around the state investigating tales of hauntings, which are documented in a new book series, *Haunted Travels of Michigan*.

Brad Blair and Tim Ellis, cofounders of the Upper Peninsula Paranormal Research Society (UPPRS), investigate supernatural encounters, including reports of ghosts, unidentified flying objects, and Bigfoot sightings. While many of the experiences turn out to have plausible explanations, others aren't as easy to prove. The UPPRS investigated a reportedly haunted brewery that was once a boardinghouse for sailors. An exchange was caught on tape when one ghost hunter called out "Were you a bootlegger?" and the response heard sounded like the

word "Captain." Apparently, a member of the family who formerly operated the home was an actual captain.

Sources: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/08/31/michigan-upper-peninsula-ghost-hunters/71475956/>; <http://www.ghosm.com/equipment.htm>  
<http://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/The-History-of-Ghost-Hunting> <http://www.hauntedtravelsmi.com/>

## **MONSTERS**

### **Melon Heads**

Tales of melon heads are considered urban legends. Since the 1960s, people near Saugatuck have scared each other with stories of humanoid creatures with small bodies and big, round heads that roam the woods. One rumor is that they are the descendants or spirits of children who were treated at a hospital in the nearby Felt Mansion (now a museum and historic home). Stories of melon heads also occur in Ohio and Connecticut.

### **Wendigo**

Wendigoes (or windigo) are part of Algonquin Native American mythology. A wendigo is an evil man-eating spirit, but a wendigo can also possess a human, perhaps as a punishment for selfishness. Once possessed by a wendigo, the only escape is death. Wendigoes are described as giant, monstrous, and icy cold. They are starving, never satisfied, always searching out new victims to consume.

### **Black Squirrels**

Black squirrels are not a myth, though these mutant grey squirrels are rare. Among the entire US, the Lansing-Detroit area is one of only five places where they live. They are not malevolent, though some people find the black squirrels creepy. One legend surrounding black squirrels is that they were introduced on purpose in Battle Creek and Lansing in order to eliminate other types of squirrels. A

Sources: Godfrey, Linda, *Weird Michigan*

[http://statenews.com/index.php/article/2003/08/FACT\\_or\\_FICTION](http://statenews.com/index.php/article/2003/08/FACT_or_FICTION) <http://www.native-languages.org/algonquin-legends.htm>

## **Nain Rouge: The Red Dwarf of Detroit**

The Nain Rouge is one of the most unique stories associated with Detroit. The Nain Rouge (French for red dwarf) is a type of goblin who first appeared in an 1883 book of French tales by Marie Caroline Watson Hamlin. She wrote of a fortune teller who warned Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, founder of Detroit, that the Nain would appear to him, and to appease it. Seven years later in Detroit, the Nain appeared to Cadillac, who struck it rather than appease it and heed its warning. Cadillac died fortune-less in relative obscurity.

According to legend, the Nain has appeared in the city several times just before disaster strikes, including:

- 1763, before the Battle of the Bloody Run
- 1805, before a fire that burned most of the city
- 1967, before the riots
- 1976, before a crippling snow storm

This short imp with “blazing red eyes,” is said to look like a child with red fur and sharp teeth. Modern scholars have suggested that today’s conception of the Nain Rouge may be mingled with the mythical Native American trickster Nanabozho.

The Nain Rouge is often considered evil, but whether the Nain is just a warning of impending doom, or actually the cause of the doom itself, is unclear. What is clear is the lasting legacy of this unique creature. The Nain Rouge is central to the annual Marche du Nain Rouge, founded in 2010, which takes place in Midtown. People gather to drive the creature from the city, like a scapegoat. You may also come across his image as a character in books, or on the labels of specialty beer and wine.

Sources: Godfrey, Linda. *Weird Michigan*.

“The Legend of the legend of Detroit’s Nain Rouge,” MetroTimes, by Lee Devito (2016)

[www.Marchedunainrouge.com](http://www.Marchedunainrouge.com)

Hamlin, Marie Caroline Watson, *Legends of le Detroit*.

## **The *Loup-garou* and the Dogman: Michigan's Native Werewolves**

In legend, werewolves are people who turn into wolves by the light of the full moon. Stories of shape-shifters, or people who can take the form of an animal, appear in both European and Native tales from long ago as well as modern pop culture such as *Teen Wolf*, *Twilight* and *True Blood*. Michigan has its own spin on werewolf history.

Detroit's French history has given us stories of the *loup-garou*, the French word for werewolf. In the 1883 book *Legends of le Detroit*, there is a story of a man who desperately wanted to marry a young woman, but she was studying to become a nun. The man became a *loup-garou* to carry her off, but he was turned into stone in the garden of the church. In another story, a *loup-garou* carried off a young bride on her wedding day. Her devastated fiancé spent the rest of his life tracking the werewolf to kill it.

Northern Michigan's Dogman is a different take on this folk creature. While lumberjacks told stories of seeing a creature with a dog's head on a man's body as far back as the early 1800s, sightings of the Dogman have continued into modern times. Steve Cook, a Traverse City radio DJ, accidentally became a collector of Dogman stories. His song about the Dogman played on the radio as an April Fool's Joke in 1987, but scores of people called in to report their own encounters with the Dogman. This half-wolf, half-man, can run on all fours or walk on two legs, and the creature seems to be some of both, rather than a man who turns into a wolf.

Sources: Skinner, Charles. *Myths and Legends of our own Land*.

Hamlin, Marie Caroline Watson. *Legends of le Detroit*

<http://www.michigan-dogman.com/>

## **Bigfoot: The Forest Ape**

The legend of Bigfoot is alive and well in Michigan's forests. Described as a tall, hairy ape-man, Bigfoot is said to live in wooded, rural areas, far away from people. He is a solitary creature, who rarely approaches humans. In fact, this type of creature is reported across the world. Sightings in North America are most common on the Pacific coast from northern California up through western Canada, where he is known as Sasquatch. He is called a Yowie man in Australia, Almas in Siberia, a yeti or abominable snowman in the Himalayas. He is most often called Bigfoot in the U.S., east of the Mississippi.

The Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization (BFRO) tracks and investigates reports of Bigfoot and lists Michigan encounters on its website dating from the early 1900s through 2016. (Macomb County is one of the few counties with no reported sightings.) Many people have a feeling of being watched before they see, hear, or smell Bigfoot. According to BFRO, about 10-15% of reports include an overpowering stench. Other reports describe noises unlike any other animal or human they've heard. Still others describe actually seeing a large hairy ape-man, walking on two feet.

Scientists don't believe in the existence of Bigfoot, citing a lack of evidence. Most reports are considered hoaxes or just mistakes. Hair samples from "Bigfoot" are most commonly from brown bears, an animal whose preferred habitat very closely mirrors the range of Bigfoot sightings. But for those who have encountered the forest ape personally, there is no doubt in their mind that they have met the reclusive Bigfoot. Will you be the first to spy Bigfoot in Macomb County?

Sources: [www.BFRO.net](http://www.BFRO.net)

Godfrey, Linda, *Weird Michigan*