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## Local haunts When it comes to ghost hunting, Southern Maryland has plenty to offer

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By CAROL HARVAT

Staff writer

Afraid of things that go bump in the night, or do unfamiliar sounds and sights bring out curiosity?

Numerous paranormal happenings or unexplained experiences, dating back to the 18th Century, have been documented in Southern Maryland. Some people may automatically disclaim unexplained phenomena, while others have pursued eerie sightings and sounds using technology and scientific minds, coining the term "ghost hunting."

An insurgence of paranormal hunting shows have crept up on several television channels over the past few years and some Southern Marylanders have taken up a fascination with the world that lurks beyond the grave and not just around Halloween.

Investigating

strange noises

Many Southern Marylanders know the story of "The Blue Dog" and will tell of sightings or howlings of a ghostly dog. Several variations of the story exist, and the Blue Dog Saloon in Charles County carries on the centuries-old tale through its name.

As the legend goes, a peddler named Jack exchanged goods for gold along the Potomac River and he was beaten along with his dog and robbed on a February night during the Revolutionary War. Jack's dog, which was so gray it looked blue, fought the robbers with Jack until they both died. It is said a rock, known as Peddler's Rock in Rose Hill, is stained with their blood and many people have reported seeing a blue dog in the Rose Hill area and heard howling on February nights.

Sightings of a blue dog in Rose Hill date back to the Revolutionary War era, and according to [www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com), George Washington and Civil War General Joseph Hooker reported seeing a blue dog in the region.

Whether legend or history, reports and interest in paranormal investigations in places that are referenced in history have risen like a fog on a cool morning.

One historic spot in Charles County, Dr. Samuel Mudd's House, has experienced its own hauntings, and last Saturday patrons were invited to participate in an actual ghost investigation along with Patrick Burke, who considers himself a "student of the paranormal for more than 35 years."

Mudd, who was accused of being a Confederate sympathizer, set the broken leg of President Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, at his home after Booth shot Lincoln. Burke said he and other investigators on his team have experienced the presence of Confederate soldiers in the home.

"I'm a sensitive. I can see things at any given time," Burke said.

Ghosts are earthbound, they have not left, and spirits cross back and forth, Burke explained. Burke, who said he grew up in a haunted house, has been actively investigating paranormal experiences for 12 years.

Burke has investigated the Mudd house several times using infrared digital recorders, electronic equipment to record sounds called EVP (electronic voice phenomena) and a medium, someone who is a "sensitive" and able to contact those who are no longer alive. Burke approaches ghost investigations in a scientific manner, he said, using his equipment to record at the scene, and he has a person whose title is "science officer" keeping the scientific method intact and logging any incoming data so the investigation is not breached.

During past investigations at the Mudd house, Burke said he has gotten to know and has called out the spirit of Edman Spangler, who was convicted of being one of Booth's co-conspirators.

"I call him Ed," Burke said. Burke said he has witnessed "Ed's" interaction with Union re-enactors he set up on an investigation, and one New Jersey re-enactor felt "physically a hit in the chest."

"We feel the energy again and again. We get a lot of apparitional sightings and background EVP [at the Mudd House]," he said. A medium also felt a presence when she was climbing up the stairs to the attic and one time she "couldn't physically lift her leg," Burke said.

Burke, who published a book titled "Battlefield Guide to Ghost Hunting," has been asked by The History Channel to film a



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Staff photo by DARWIN WEIGEL  
A cemetery in Broomes Island on Church Road has been  
sited for paranormal happenings.



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demo episode for a show and he has already written 13 episodes.

"This is the last step to have a pilot series," Burke said. The show, which he has titled "Ghost Soldiers," is based on ghost investigations on battlefields or historic events, he said.

Invisible touch

Burke's passion evolved from a hobby, much like Kim Hammond, who teaches a College of Southern Maryland class on ghost hunting.

Hammond said she, too, had paranormal experiences as a child, and her experiences piqued her interest in studying ghost hunting.

Hammond has seen an increase in the interest for ghost hunting in the area. It's possibly because of all the TV shows on the subject, or because there are more people who live here, she said.

Students are either drawn to her class because they experienced something and they are seeking answers and want to know how to deal with it or they want to learn more about investigation techniques, Hammond said.

After teaching her students the ins and outs of how to capture and document a paranormal experience using electronic equipment, Hammond takes her students to Point Lookout State Park to participate in a ghost investigation.

Many paranormal experiences have been documented at Point Lookout and in the lighthouse, she said. During the Civil War era, Point Lookout was a prisoner of war camp where thousands of soldiers died and are buried. Many people believe that their ghosts still haunt the area. Numerous reports have been documented stating that people have seen men dressed in Confederate uniforms and lighthouse keepers have seen and heard unexplained happenings over the past two centuries.

Some of the guards have reported paranormal experiences there, Hammond said.

Burke, too, said he is familiar with the paranormal activity at Point Lookout.

"The very first EVPs were collected at Point Lookout. It's really fascinating," he said.

At a ghost hunting forum that Burke hosted last month at The Greenwell Foundation in St. Mary's County, several of the guests spoke up and said they have experienced some type of energy at Point Lookout. One guest mentioned that her car battery was drained and others spoke of problems with their cameras and feelings of a chill in the air. Burke explained that in order for a spirit or ghost to appear they need to use the energy fields that are around them. Whether it is energy from batteries or from the warmth of the air, he said, they use energy to show themselves.

Along with investigating familiar sites, Hammond said she has also received calls to investigate homes in Calvert and Charles counties, where residents have experienced something unexplainable. Hammond said she recorded some EVPs and some video of a spirit in some homes, but said she does not disclose the homes that she investigates.

"I prefer quieter investigations. That's when you seem to get more...and chances are greater for you to see something. Quiet observing is the best, it truly is," Hammond said.

Hammond spoke about investigations at Chapel Hill Cemetery in Port Tobacco and said, "I definitely think something is there."

The old parish next to the cemetery is one of the oldest churches in Southern Maryland, she said.

Hammond heard of the legend of a graveyard on Broomes Island Road. The story states that if one were to walk around the graveyard three times, a fog will roll in, but she said, "I did a little bit of research, and it's an urban legend," or rural legend, as the case may be. Some Web sites have also spoken of a ghost named "Blanche" that haunts the graveyard.

See it and believe it

Workers at Sotterley Plantation in St. Mary's County have talked about and shared spooky or creepy incidents, from hearing voices, witnessing lights suddenly turning on or off and singing or crying, said Carolyn Hoey, its education director. Hoey decided to collect the stories of unexplained happenings that people experienced in the mansion and created the Legends and Lore Tours that will run on Nov. 7 and 8. Hoey, who has worked at Sotterley for 10 years, said she has experienced things that have "scared the living daylights out of me."

During a paranormal investigation of the mansion a noise got Hoey's attention and then she said "a black mass seemed to try to embrace me." Hoey said she has heard about names being called out when no one is in the mansion, and maintenance employees have reported smelling coffee and bacon.

Sotterley Director Nancy Easterling said, "A million of those things have happened here...creepy or spooky."

And it seems a million creepy things have happened for centuries around Southern Maryland, and those who would like to delve into the spirit world can do so in their backyard.

An organization called The Atlantic Paranormal Society, or TAPS, is a sort-of clearing house for those seeking information about ghosts or ghost hunting. TAPS chapters are appearing all over the country, and Southern Maryland has had its own chapter for several years called Southern Maryland Paranormal. Southern Maryland Ghost Hunters is another paranormal investigation group that focuses on the traditional Southern Maryland haunts.

Numerous Web sites tell of the legends and sightings of the unexplained, and a book titled "Weird Maryland" by Matt Lake catalogs a host of ghostly happenings around the state.

Whether it's a curiosity, for hobby-sake or for the adrenaline rush of feeling a shiver up the spine, Southern Maryland registers on the Richter scale of creepy places where paranormal things are happening.

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Staff photo by CARRIE LOVEJOY  
Patrick Burke sets up a video camera at the Dr. Samuel Mudd House. Burke and some of his associates have held ghost hunts at the house several times.

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