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They ain't afraid of no ghosts

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By Jesse Yeatman

Staff Writer

On a recent cool Saturday evening at Fort Lincoln in Point Lookout State Park, a half-dozen souls walked slowly in and out of the replica buildings. Following up on legends and rumors, the group, known as Southern Maryland Paranormal, was in search of spirits, not the alcoholic type.

"We're going to do a couple sweeps of the area and see if we find any temperature fluctuations, EMFs or EVPs," member Kim Hammond said. EMF, or electronic magnetic field, and EVP, an electronic voice phenomenon, are two indicators of potential spirits, she said.

The team tries to identify spirits through scientific means, they said. Hard evidence, combined with the feelings of the "sensitives" in the group, is the proof they seek.

"We consist of a couple of skeptics, a couple who want to believe and a few sensitives," Hammond said. The sensitives say they can pick up on a spirit's presence, possibly even communicate with it.

The group is very professional when preparing for an investigation. They draw up a game plan, complete with who will partner up for searches. No one ever goes out alone, Hammond said.

"Broomes Island is really the most I've ever picked up," sensitive Keri Lester of Mechanicsville said. A newcomer to the group, she was invited along on an investigation at a graveyard in Broomes Island.

"Something kept pulling me towards the cemetery," and then to a wooded path leading from the area, she said. Despite a "feeling of peace" while in the cemetery, the group decided to follow the path and came upon a clearing and a tree with carvings.

"Every single one of us felt something eerie. We wanted to get out of there," Lester said.

They were not the first to report mysterious activity at the church. A local myth reports that if a person walks around the cemetery three times they will hear children. Although they did not hear the children, the spooky feeling at the tree was enough to assure the group that something, or someone, else exists there.

The reasons are varied for joining the group. Some say they don't believe in spirits at all and are out to disprove their existence. Several of the members had paranormal experiences as children and are seeking to find some explanation as to why or what the experiences mean.

"Basically, we met through the Internet," Hammond said. The group has been working together about one year and has eight people who do field research. They are always looking for other members, whether skeptics or believers.

Buzz Hammond is a self-proclaimed skeptic. "I wonder frequently if I'm wasting my time. But without looking you won't find the answers," he said.

"I started this group because I wanted to know the truth. I couldn't do it alone so I wanted to surround myself with others who could help," he said.

Back at Fort Lincoln, Lester walked out of the enlisted quarters with a smile on her face. She said she felt a "young man, 20-ish, with blond hair and real thin. He was staying one step ahead of me."

Point Lookout is known for its hauntings, especially around the old Civil War fort and Point Lookout Lighthouse. Park managers over the decades have documented strange experiences and different paranormal investigative groups have visited the park over the years.

"If I feel something, I use my dowsing rods and that proves to me there is something there if I feel it cross them," she said. Lester claims the metal rods will move or vibrate ever so slightly if a spirit, or energy, passes through them.

Sensitives, such as Lester, are just one part of the investigation, said Lusby resident Steve who asked his last name not be used. "The sensitives are like tools. They're like our cameras or voice recorders, just another type of tool," he said.

The non-sensitives in the group use mechanical or electrical tools to try and corroborate what the sensitives pick up. Their tools are plentiful; from voice and video recorders to various thermometers, the gear covers many possibilities.



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Staff Photo by Jesse Yeatman

Members of the Southern Maryland Paranormal group ready their equipment at Fort Lincoln in Point Lookout State Park on a recent investigation. The group uses various equipment and makes some of its own to capture evidence of spirits.

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Kim Hammond, in front, leads paranormal sensitives Keri Lester and Lisa around the outside of a building at Fort Lincoln in search of spirits or other paranormal activity.

They don't own a Geiger counter, yet. He said that some groups do use the machines, which can pick up vibrations in the earth, but they are much too expensive for the fledgling group.

Steve said that he talks about his work with Southern Maryland Paranormal with friends and families. His mother, who is deeply religious, does not necessarily approve of it, he said.

"She thinks it is a bad thing to tamper with the spiritual world," he said.

He explains that they are not "conjuring up spirits," but instead only "detecting them."

"The energy is always here," Steve said.

The group likes to investigate at night. Some believe it is stronger when the sunsets or rises, or during nighttime, he said. For them, there are fewer outside distractions — car noises, people, etc. — at night.



"It's really a shot in the dark," to pick up on a spirit at a particular time and place.

He described what they are seeking as spirits, though he admits some give other names.

Bodies contain electricity, he said. "Where the energy goes when you die, nobody really knows," he said.

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