

Out of the Archives

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Washington's Most Haunted Places

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October is here, and I couldn't go a whole newsletter without a tribute to Halloween. Apparently, there are literally thousands of places in Washington purportedly haunted. This article will cover all of them.

No it won't.

This article will talk about three popular haunted Washington places. Surely, several famed dwellings of conjure are not on my list, but I need to have something to write about next Halloween, right? And I should preface by saying I do not believe in ghosts or paranormal activity of any kind—but I really want to. So I will listen to almost any story – regardless of its outlandish nature – as an excuse to escape reality for a moment, relish the goosebumps, and rethink my beliefs for a brief moment.

Countless stories have left me unpersuaded so far, but I haven't given up hope.

Unpersuaded, not uninspired. Though I'm convinced someday I will come face-to-face with a ghost and come away still bearing reluctance, saying things like, "There's obviously an explanation for that," or, "Maybe I should stop consuming copious amounts of caffeine on an empty stomach because I'm starting to see things." Classic first-stage denial, I suppose. I hope my cynicism isn't so stubborn I would call my own eye-witness encounter a load of malarkey. Someday I will find out. Maybe.

Until then, I'm left to read (and write!) articles on the internet, watch any-and-every horror movie with at least a 5-out-of-10 rating on IMDB, and I can always visit any of the haunted places on this list! Actually, no, don't do that. Most haunted places are on private property and trespassing is definitely still an arrestable offense.

Let's start with the haunted place I have heard about with the greatest frequency:



Northern State Mental Hospital – Sedro-Wooley, built in 1909

The history of Northern State Mental Hospital plays like a scary movie. It began as an unorthodox institution. In those days, to be an "unorthodox" mental institution meant patients were treated like humans. The facility utilized programs like job skills training and other things that didn't cause extreme pain or distress. The man responsible for the humane conditions, Dr. James Doughty, lasted through the 1940s before age steered him to retirement.

In 1950, a man called Dr. Charles Jones was appointed as Doughty's successor. He was in fame's upswing, hailing from Steilacoom, as he played a role in modernizing medicine with a radical new procedure: the transorbital lobotomy. Northern State quickly took up rampant electroshock therapy and lobotomy practices. In some years the hospital "discharged" as many as 250 more people than the number of people who actually walked out of there. A field rests somewhere

on the property littered with thousands of unmarked graves.

Visitors have found their way into the halls of the desolate wings of the hospital, and it's not just said to be creepy, but multiple sightings report an apparition of a little girl who wanders the building, usually playing with a red ball. There is always a man following the little girl around, seemingly looking for her, but can never find her. In a certain room of the hospital, multiple thrill-seekers have reported the ghost of a nurse pushing a man in a wheel chair.

In 2006, a team of paranormal investigators went in to study the property. They didn't find a little girl, her stalker, or a nurse pushing a man's wheelchair. However, they did take an infrared photo of a dark hallway, capturing a mysterious pair of bare legs. With how long the shutter was open, a living person's legs would have been blurry, but these legs were clear and appeared to don a patient's gown.



Black Diamond Cemetery – Black Diamond, est. c. 1880

The city of Black Diamond was once home to a community almost entirely made up of coal miners, as the town's name would imply. The mines closed decades ago and the town found new local fame for its baked goods in the 1970s, and these days mostly consists of Seattle and Bellevue software commuters.

While there might not be any more miners employed in the city, several of them still lay to rest in Black Diamond's famous namesake cemetery. The headstones date back to the 1880s, marking graves for residents from all over the world, at least one Civil War veteran, and a number of workers who fell victim to tragedies in the mines.

The legends from Black Diamond Cemetery are pretty consistent. You can't hear anything about this cemetery without stories of fog and swinging lanterns shining through the mist, or a whistling sound. The tale says the lanterns belong to the living-dead miners who haunt the grounds, and a white horse wanders the tombs on foggy nights.

Puget Sound Ghost Hunters, a local paranormal investigation team, [did a report in 2010](#), which ruled out a number of possible explanations for the appearance of the lanterns, but didn't find any evidence of anything supernatural. Several other small groups have conducted independent searches to no avail.



Maple Valley Highway – hwy 169, runs from Renton to Enumclaw

This one may not be as famous as the others, but it sings a different tune than the natural ghost fable breeding grounds that are forsaken insane asylums and graveyards. This is a haunted road, as if a dark, icy, fog-laden highway with a couple big turns isn't dangerous and scary enough as it is. Highway 169, between Renton and Maple Valley, comes with three separate oft-told stories, and you can visit the road without trespassing!

First, residents who live off Maple Valley Highway, near the Cedar Grove exit where there is a guard rail, have attested to driver sightings of a tall, dark, skinny man who flies across the highway, startling drivers. Some accounts report the man can fly at pace with moving cars, and some claim multiple encounters.

Then, there is a stretch of the highway often coated with thick fog (some say the fog is unexplained) and just as you get to the curve in the road where the fog clears, suddenly you see a young girl on the side of the road. She's looking for something—several people claim they have stopped and attempted communication with the girl and sometimes she actually responds. The teenage spirit is searching for a locket she lost in a car accident when she died in this very spot, on this very road, several years ago.

The last story is very short. There is an old, creepy house on a hill, visible from the highway. Sometimes at night passersby can see the whole house light up. The residence hasn't had electricity in decades.