



Minnesota Hauntings

Ghost Stories from the Land of 10,000 Lakes

Ryan Jacobson



Minnesota Hauntings

Dedication:

For my brothers, Jason and Scott

A special thank you to everyone who willingly shared their ghost stories and who allowed me to put their tales into this collection. I appreciate your time and your patience. I would also like to thank the many people who gave me guidance and who pointed me in the right direction during the process of researching this book.

In some instances, names and locations have been changed at the request of sources.

Content Warning: This book contains several references to suicide and may not be appropriate for all audiences.

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10,000 Lakes**

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Introduction

BUYER: BEWARE. That's all I can say after the "terrifying tale" my sister-in-law told me. Katie is a huge fan of all things scary, so of course I gave her a copy of my first spooky book, *Ghostly Tales of Wisconsin*.

She brought it to her home outside Princeton, eager to devour its contents. But as she carried the book inside, her dog Lola "freaked out." The pooch glared at *Ghostly Tales*, angrily growling and barking. (Everyone's a critic!) Lola wouldn't stop yipping until Katie shelved the book. Good ol' Katie saw this as a sign. She immediately devised a theory that a ghost must somehow be attached to it. So when the lights in the vacant house next door started turning on and off at all hours of the night, Katie knew why.

It was the Ghost of the Book.

Eventually, Katie's copy of *Ghostly Tales* vanished. She couldn't remember where she'd left it, and she even began to wonder if her resident spirit had hidden it. But thanks to Lola, Katie solved the mystery a few nights later. She was awakened by the sound of Lola barking and scratching at the wall beside her bed. The dog had not acted like that since the first time Katie brought home *Ghostly Tales of Wisconsin*.

She turned on the lights—her husband, Mitch, was not pleased—and after a few choice words for Lola, Katie began digging around the floor near the wall. Much to her surprise, she located her missing book.

And once again, as soon as Katie put it away, Lola's barking ceased. Do I subscribe to Katie's Ghost of the Book theory?

Not really. (I don't think Katie does either.) But still, I suppose it's plausible. It's enough to make one wonder.

And so it is with most ghost stories. Personally, I think about 90% of them are questionable at best. But that still leaves 10% as true!

In *Minnesota Hauntings*, I present a balance between the state's best, most famous stories and newly researched ones that have never been published before. I feel it is important to note that, in some instances, I received the details as checklists of unexplainable occurrences rather than as narratives. Thus, while the information remains accurate, some of the scenarios (and characters) were reinterpreted for dramatic effect.

I can neither verify the validity of each claim nor the existence of supernatural beings, but I can assure you that the portrayals of the spirits in this book are as authentic as possible.

And will your copy of *Minnesota Hauntings* come complete with its own ghost? Well, I can give you no promise of that. Enjoy!



Spiteful Spirits

“One need not be a chamber to be haunted.
One need not be a house.
The brain has corridors surpassing material place.”

—Emily Dickinson

School Spirit

Bishop Patrick R. Heffron knelt at the altar. He knew vanity was a sin, but the hard-working man couldn't help feeling proud of his school, Saint Mary's College. He had founded it in Winona three years earlier, and by August 27, 1915, the college had become quite successful. Every aspect of Saint Mary's was running smoothly—at least, everything but the bishop's relationship with Father Louis Lesches.

Heffron recalled his recent communications with the 56-year-old priest. Lesches had demanded a parish of his own, an idea Heffron found almost unimaginable. In truth, the bishop held his colleague in low regard. He wondered about the man's mental stability, and he questioned both his competence and his devotion. The bishop believed Lesches would be more appropriately employed as a farmer, and he'd told him so—a comment that had sent Lesches storming away, mumbling curses under his breath.

“Enough of this,” Heffron whispered. He pushed all thoughts of the priest from his mind, reprimanding himself for dwelling on the negative. He focused instead on his prayers.

Thump, thump, thump, thump.

The bishop’s concentration was again broken, this time by running footsteps behind him. Heffron stood. He turned to see Father Lesches charging toward him, a frenzied look in his eyes.

“Louis, what are you—” Heffron began to ask.

Then he noticed the pistol in Lesches’s hand.

Boom! Boom!

The thunderous claps of gunfire echoed through the chapel. Bishop Heffron felt two piercing stabs: the first in his thigh, the second in his chest.

As Lesches hurried away, Heffron found the strength to give chase—but his injuries overcame him. Had Father Thomas Normoyle not discovered the wounded bishop moments later, Heffron may have died.

Instead, by some miracle, the bishop survived to testify against his would-be murderer. He reflected upon the man he had known for more than a decade, describing him as hostile, self-absorbed, and friendless. Also noted were the countless arguments between Lesches and another of his colleagues, Father Edward Lynch. In the most heated of moments, Lesches took to screaming a condensed version of the Bible verse, First Thessalonians 4:16. “And the lord shall come again, to the sound of trumpets!”

The case against Lesches was a slam dunk—it almost certainly would’ve been, even without Heffron’s testimony. Police had arrested Lesches mere minutes after the shooting, the gun hidden in the deranged

priest's travel bag. However, the murderous man was not put in prison. Instead, he was declared mentally unfit and sent 140 miles west to the Asylum for the Dangerously Insane in Saint Peter.

One might imagine that after Bishop Heffron lost his battle with cancer in 1927, and with Lesches still hospitalized, this bizarre saga would finally reach its conclusion. But the strange tale of Louis Lesches and Saint Mary's College had only just begun.

A Mysterious Death

By January of 1931, Lesches had proven himself to be a model patient. He was declared mentally stable and reportedly would have been freed, if not for a rather significant technicality: Lesches was still under the guardianship of the Diocese of Winona, so the new bishop, Francis Kelley, needed to sign off on Lesches's release. Kelley refused, sending Lesches into a rage.

Perhaps it was coincidence and perhaps not, but on May 15 of that same year, inside Saint Mary's Hall (the building in which Heffron had been shot), nuns discovered one of the most ghastly and puzzling scenes in Minnesota history. Father Lynch, the man whom Lesches had clashed with on so many occasions, was found dead in his third-floor room. His body—or rather his charred remains—lay upon the bed.

Strangely, there was almost no evidence of fire. Lynch's Bible was the only other item burned. Nothing else, not even the bed on which the priest's body rested, was so much as singed.

Even more strangely, while the Good Book lay in ruin, burned almost beyond recognition, a single passage within it was said to have remained untouched,

as if the mysterious flames had burned around it. That passage was First Thessalonians 4:16.

Father Lynch's official cause of death was listed as an electrical accident, but many believed that the only viable explanation was a supernatural one. According to legend, Lesches' spirit had claimed its first victim, even though Lesches himself was still among the living, a patient at the state hospital.

The Ghost of Heffron Hall

It wasn't until 12 years later, on January 10, 1943, that the former priest met his end. Lesches passed away from a heart attack at the age of 84, still a resident of the Asylum for the Dangerously Insane.

Almost from the moment of Lesches's death, Saint Mary's Heffron Hall—named after the bishop whom Lesches had tried to kill—reportedly became a hotbed of paranormal activity.

The phenomena began with phantom footsteps heard roaming the third floor, accompanied by the sound of a tapping cane. Several witnesses claimed that the papers on the community bulletin board waved as if caught in a gentle breeze, but there was no source of wind. An invisible presence sometimes kept students from entering the third floor, pushing them back into the stairwell with each effort to cross the threshold. The stories went on and on.

One of the most terrifying encounters on record occurred late one night in 1945. The third-floor hallway's stillness was shattered by the appearance of a shadowy, cloaked figure. The mysterious visitor stood before one of the doors and knocked.

Inside the room, Mike O'Malley and his roommate were awakened by the noise. O'Malley leapt out of bed and flung open the door, surprised to see the figure standing there.

Believing it to be one of the school's priests and trying to comprehend why he'd be at their door at that hour, O'Malley asked, "What do you want, Father?"

The stranger's frightening response was almost a hiss. "I want you!"

The figure moved toward O'Malley, but the student did not back down. He swung his fist hard into the cloaked figure's jaw. Bones snapped, but the visitor was unhurt. Instead, O'Malley suffered substantial injury to his hand, as if he'd hit a brick wall.

With O'Malley writhing in pain, his roommate jumped to his aid. He reached the door and glimpsed the stranger's face just before it vanished. His description of the visitor matched that of Louis Lesches.

The Investigation

Following that frightful encounter, the phenomena in Heffron Hall reportedly grew more intense. Blood flowed from sinks and urinals in the bathroom. Students were chased by an invisible presence, the sound of running feet echoing behind them. And then there were the cold spots

By 1967, tales of the ghost had run so rampant that members of the college's student newspaper, *The Nexus*, organized their own formal investigation. They hoped to debunk the perceived myth, but their results shocked even them.

Setting up in Heffron Hall's third-floor hallway, the investigators' evening began rather uneventfully. But at 1:45 a.m.—the time of night Lesches had died 24 years earlier—their equipment detected some bizarre readings: The air temperature dropped significantly at one of their thermometers, and the cold spot began to spread in just one direction, east to west, at a rate of 100 feet in 30 seconds. It was as if an invisible presence were stalking the hallway, leaving a trail of frigid air in its wake.

Furthermore, photos and videos taken by the team were mysteriously blurred and distorted—enough evidence to convince many of the investigators that they had shared a brush with the paranormal.

Most Haunted

The school's eerie phenomena continued throughout the years and decades that followed, and in 1989, *USA Today* declared Saint Mary's College—now Saint Mary's University of Minnesota—the state's “most legendary haunted place.”

It is a reputation that holds firm, even today, as many believe the ghost of Louis Lesches still roams the floors of Heffron Hall, haunting the building named after a man whom he hated enough to shoot.

Phantom Lady

The dog sensed it immediately. That's what Anne Kuznar first remembered about the haunting, which lasted more than 12 years. In 1996, she and her then-fiancé Robert Baer moved into an old cabin-turned-house outside the east-central city of Cambridge. The peculiar happenings began almost at once.

"What's Yukon doing?" Anne asked, as she entered the living room.

Robert, who had been observing the pet for several minutes, shrugged. "I don't know."

The dog was a wolf-shepherd mix, and he seemed enamored with something in the far corner—a corner that appeared to be entirely empty. He paced back and forth, sniffing the air. Then Yukon sat, staring upward at the wall, whimpering softly. After a moment's hesitation, the dog stood on all four paws and repeated the ritual. Again and again.

It was only after Anne called the animal to her side that he ceased his peculiar pattern. But it wasn't the last time he acted in such a manner. Over the next several months, Robert and Anne frequently caught Yukon sitting at the corner, glaring at something only he could see. (Bizarrely, years later, the Baers' next wolf-shepherd dog, Grizzly, did the very same thing.)

During those same months, Anne also began to notice other strange phenomena. From time to time, she would walk through a spot so cold that it caused her to shudder, even on the hottest of summer days (and without an air-conditioner to blame for it). Unexplained noises echoed throughout the house, and small objects became "lost," only to be found days later in the oddest of places.

Perhaps most alarming was the disappearance of Anne and Robert's marriage license shortly after they received it. The happy couple had been planning to wed on August 17, 1996, but they could not do so without their license. They spent endless, panicked days searching every inch of their home for that vital piece of paper. It was nowhere to be found; Anne and Robert postponed the wedding until a new license could be issued.

Even after they exchanged their vows, the Baers' paranormal problems continued. In fact, the ghostly encounters grew more dramatic. One night, while Anne was lying on the couch watching television, a blur of movement caught her eye. She looked toward a window, which clearly reflected the room behind her, and she was startled to spy an unfamiliar woman standing beside the couch. Anne turned from the reflection and toward the spot where a stranger should have been. Surprisingly, no one was there.

A few weeks later, Robert awakened in the middle of the night to the scare of his life: The ghostly figure of a woman stood at the foot of his bed! He tried to sit up; he tried to raise his arms and legs—he couldn't move. Robert was paralyzed. He couldn't even call for help. He felt as if heavy weights were pressing against every inch of his body.

The frightening sensation lasted less than a minute, but to Robert it seemed an eternity. At last, the specter faded away, and Robert was free to move again. He did not return to sleep that night.

Spooked by their uniquely disturbing encounters, the Baers began investigating the history of their property. While their research provided no real leads, Robert and Anne came to believe that a woman must have lost her life on their land before it was homesteaded.

Believing the ghost had done its worst, the couple chose not to sell their home. But they did redecorate. Together, Anne and Robert lifted their large, heavy TV off the trunk it had rested on since they first came into the home. Next, they prepared to move the empty old trunk. On a whim, Anne flipped it open and peeked inside. There, at the bottom of the trunk, sat a lone piece of paper: the missing marriage license.



Murderous Intent

The trouble started in 1986, the year the renovations began. It was the year they removed the false ceiling inside St. Paul's historic Fitzgerald Theater, discovering an additional balcony—and a note that was addressed to an old stagehand, Ben. Most believed the latter discovery awakened the deceased employee's spirit and that, for some reason, Ben's ghost wasn't happy.

Andy Wolter couldn't help but reflect on this as he and his coworker, Tom, carefully stepped into the work area backstage. A narrow flashlight beam was all they had to guide them through their dark surroundings.

Andy admired the Fitzgerald Theater's rich history. Built in 1910, the World Theater (as it was called in the 1980s) was St. Paul's oldest remaining theater. It was perhaps best known as the site of Garrison Keillor's radio program, *A Prairie Home Companion*, since 1981. But right now, in the darkness, the only thing on Andy's mind was Ben. Andy noticed Tom's flashlight shaking

ever so slightly, and he wondered if his coworker was experiencing similar thoughts.

There had been rumors of a dark, shadowy figure roaming the premises—a figure that many witnesses claimed had faded in and out of existence before their eyes. Plus, an antique bottle of muscatel repeatedly disappeared, only to turn up hours (or sometimes days) later in the most unlikely of places.

Andy, himself, had experienced similar phenomena: His work tools kept moving to spots where he knew they shouldn't be. The man had also walked through several of the random cold spots that so many others complained about. And, of course, even Andy knew that unexplained cold spots in the middle of otherwise warm areas were signs of a haunting.

"Let's get this done and get out of here," Tom said.

Andy nodded, even though his colleague couldn't see him. Together, they continued forward.

Whoosh! Andy felt a sudden, forceful wind against his face. It was followed by a thunderous *clap!* Something large and heavy had passed inches from where he stood, landing directly between the two of them.

"What was that?" Tom exclaimed.

"I don't know," answered Andy. "Something fell."

Tom spun and shone his flashlight at the object. A sizable chunk of ceiling plaster lay crumbled and broken at their feet. Andy gasped, realizing with horror that he had been one step away from certain death.

Tom aimed his flashlight upward. Instinctively, Andy's gaze followed. He wasn't sure what he expected to see—a gaping hole in the ceiling, perhaps—but what he witnessed instead haunted him for years to come.

On the catwalk more than 60 feet above him, the light's beam illuminated the outline of a hazy, dark figure.

For the briefest of moments, Andy contemplated the almost unfathomable idea that a person had tried to kill him. But then the mysterious shape disappeared, fading into nothingness like a cloud of mist. It hadn't been a person at all.

"Did you see that?" yelled Tom.

Andy nodded again. "Yeah, but I don't believe it."

The two men turned once more to the chunk of plaster between them.

"Did that thing really just try to murder us?" said Tom, his voice quivering.

"Maybe it was a coincidence," Andy replied. "Maybe a ceiling piece randomly broke and fell."

Tom bent down, examining the debris more closely. After a moment's pause, he turned his gaze toward Andy, shaking his head.

"It can't be," said Tom. "This is plaster."

Andy stared back at him, quizzically. "So?"

Tom shone his flashlight upward once more. "The ceiling—it isn't made of plaster," he declared. "This piece came from nowhere."

Both men hurried out of the backstage area. They refused to work there, in the dark, ever again.



Deadman's Hill

He had made it as far as Minnesota—a farm outside Willmar to be exact. The escaped slave, “Marcus,” had been on the run for weeks, perhaps months, but he was out of places to hide. A bounty hunter had caught up with him at last.

Ever since Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, escaping to the North was not enough. Bounty hunters were allowed to pursue runaways all the way to the Canadian border, to capture them and to return them to their “masters.” Marcus dreamed of living the rest of his life as a free man in Canada, but his greatest hopes were on the verge of being dashed. He was beaten and bloodied, his foot chained to a fence post. However, he wasn’t about to give up. Marcus would either live as a free man or die trying.

He patiently waited, well into the night, until he felt certain that the bounty hunter was asleep. When the time was right, Marcus sprang into action. Summoning

his remaining strength, he quietly struggled against the thick, wooden post—pulling, pushing, and lifting. It loosened. Marcus strained even harder. At last, the post came out of the ground.

The runaway tasted freedom once more. He began to flee, dragging the heavy post behind him. But luck worked against the unfortunate man. The clanging of his chains awakened the bounty hunter; Marcus's last, desperate flight was stalled.

This time, he refused to surrender; he fought back. A terrible struggle ensued. Marcus may have stood a fighting chance, if not for the chain that confined him—and if not for his captor's sword. The escaped slave was mortally wounded in the battle. But before he died, Marcus turned the weapon against its owner, striking the bounty hunter with a fatal blow to the head. The next morning, the farmer who owned the land opened his front door to the surprise of his life. "Lord have mercy," he cried. "Ellen, get out here!"

Marcus's lifeless body, still chained to the post, lay sprawled near the front porch. Behind him, a crimson-stained trail led to the top of the nearby hill.

The farmer and his wife cautiously followed the bloody trail. At the end of it, they came upon the dead bounty hunter. They buried him there, dubbing the site Deadman's Hill. The family also dug a grave beside their home for Marcus, planting an American Elm to commemorate the spot. But while Marcus's body was laid to rest, his spirit thirsted for vengeance.

"Honey, have you found my gloves yet?" the farmer complained. "It's been three days."

“I’ve looked everywhere,” his wife replied. “They’re not here. Did you check the barn?”

“Yes, and I can’t—” He stopped suddenly, staring at his missing gloves, neatly stacked atop the kitchen table. “Where in the world did these come from?” the farmer muttered. “They weren’t here a second ago.”

Mysteriously, the gloves became the first of many items to disappear from the house, only to turn up days later in strange locations or in places that had already been checked.

One night, as darkness descended upon the Willmar farmland, the family’s situation grew much worse. The hard-working couple lay in bed, ready for sleep, when they noticed a faint echo in the distance.

“Do you hear that?” the farmer asked. “Yes,” his wife whispered nervously.

Upon first listen, the noise was indistinguishable. But slowly and steadily it grew louder—as if its source were drawing closer.

The terrifying noise became two distinctly separate sounds. With a sudden, chilling horror, the farmer recognized them: the dreadful moans and the rattling chains of a ghost; it was approaching from the top of Deadman’s Hill.

Against his better judgment, the farmer leapt to the window. But the instant he gazed outside, toward the now-notorious hill, the frightful noises ceased. Nothing—and no one—was there.

That alone would be enough to scare away even the bravest, most resolute of people. However, this was far from the worst that Marcus’ spirit had planned. It was out for blood.

Years later, during an especially snowy winter, the phantom returned again. A sharecropper working the land disappeared. A search party gathered to locate him, but they found much more than they bargained for.

“Help, I need help!” one of the volunteers shouted. “Up on the hill. I—I—I think I found him.”

The others gathered with the man atop Deadman’s Hill. Together, they stared in stunned silence at the savaged remains of their missing neighbor. He had been brutally murdered, his head nearly chopped off.

Similarly, a hired hand was later killed in almost exactly the same spot. In both instances, the only clue left behind was a trail in the snow. It was as if the murderer had appeared out of thin air and had dragged something large and heavy away from each victim—before disappearing at the bottom of the hill.

Today, Deadman’s Hill remains one of the most notorious haunted spots in the state. While no other victims have been reported, few people dare to venture onto the haunted hill alone—fearing that Marcus’ spirit may once again reenact the battle that took his life more than 150 years ago.



Haunted Homes

“An idea, like a ghost, must be spoken
to a little before it will explain itself.”

—Charles Dickens

New House Nightmare

The home was beautiful, the location even better. Newly constructed and safely tucked within a private, secluded cul de sac, it was everything Ashley and Mike Howe wanted their place to be. They eagerly purchased it and moved into the Lakeville home, south of the Twin Cities, in August of 2005. Neither thought twice about the adjacent cemetery—at least, not until it was too late.

The Howes' first day as homeowners was long, tedious, and hot. They spent the morning with pens in hand, tackling an almost endless stack of papers and official documents. The couple then labored, throughout the afternoon and well into the evening, carrying furniture and countless boxes into their new house. By eight o'clock, the arduous task of unpacking had begun, and by midnight, the exhausted couple was in bed.

Both believed that sleep would come easily, and both slowly drifted out of consciousness, their eyes closed, memories of the day fading, fading, fading.

Crash!

A loud noise rang from the basement. The thunderous clang rattled the bedroom windows. The couple's dogs barked ferociously. Ashley and Mike bolted upright in bed.

"What was that?" the woman exclaimed.

Mike stared at her wide-eyed. "It sounded like something tipped over below us. Only louder."

He jumped out of bed, and he rummaged around the room, searching for anything that might pass as a weapon. He decided upon a small wooden lamp, clutching it tightly like a club.

Mike snuck out of the bedroom and cautiously crept downstairs. He searched the entire basement, room after room. He found exactly what he expected: nothing. The Howes hadn't yet moved anything into the lower level; the basement was completely empty.

That first bizarre occurrence might possibly have been rationalized, explained away, or even forgotten, except it was only the beginning. The dogs began acting up—running around the house and barking wildly—at all hours and for no apparent reason. The bedroom lights inexplicably flickered on and off. And in two separate instances, Ashley heard an eerie, distant voice calling her name when she was alone.

On a particularly sleepy Saturday morning, Ashley was awakened when her husband's alarm clock buzzed to life. While Mike rose out of bed and groggily staggered into the bathroom, Ashley thanked her luck that she wasn't the one scheduled to work.

She rolled onto her side, facing the wall, with every intention of returning to sleep. Much to her surprise, Mike rejoined her. She felt him snuggle up beside her and wrap his arm around her waist. Ashley loved when



NO

ARE



ALONE

About the Author



Ryan Jacobson is an award-winning author and presenter. He has written more than 60 titles from comic books to Choose Your Path adventures. He prides himself on writing high-interest books for children and adults alike, so he can talk picture books in kindergarten, ghost stories in high school, and other fun stuff in between. Ryan greatly enjoys sharing his knowledge of writing and book publishing at schools and special events. When he isn't working on books, Ryan likes to build LEGO sets, play board games, and try new restaurants. He lives in eastern Minnesota with his wife and two sons.

Feel the Chill of Minnesota's Spookiest Stories

What college is “Minnesota’s most legendary haunted place?” Where did a ghost reportedly murder two victims? How has a haunted hutch predicted several deaths? Minnesota is among the most haunted states in America, and this collection of stories presents the creepiest, most surprising of them all.

Horror fans and history buffs will delight in 21 terrifying tales about haunted locations. They’re based on reportedly true accounts, proving that Minnesota is the setting for some of the most compelling ghostly tales ever told. The short stories are ideal for quick reading, and they’re sure to captivate anyone who enjoys a good scare. Share them with friends around a campfire, or try them alone—if you dare!



Collect the Hauntings,
Horrors & Scary Ghost
Stories series for even
more frightful fun.

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