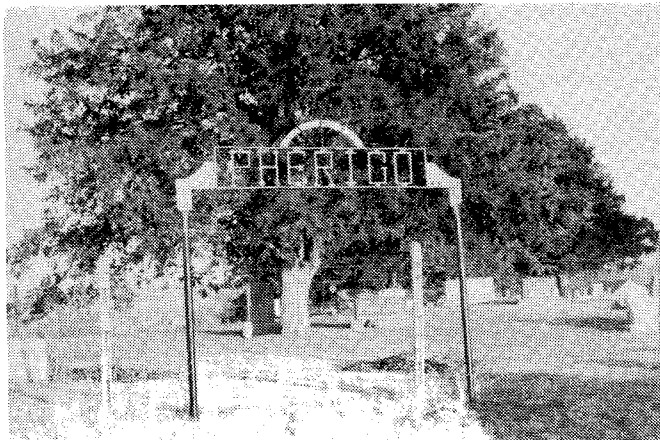


# GHOSTS IN NORTHEAST MISSOURI

By Karla Tade

The area south of Unionville is known for its many legends and tales of folklore. Most of the older citizens of the community can recall millions of legends and tales that originated through the years. "Once you get him started, my uncle will talk for hours telling story after story," says Scott Collins. Scott's grandparents live south of Unionville where his father grew up. Scott, however did not grow up in Unionville, which was all the more reason for his grandfather and uncles to keep him entertained with tales and legends of the past.

"Most of the stories took place along Highway 129. There was a little one room schoolhouse there called the Lone Star School. Not too far down the road from the Lone Star School is the Pherigo Cemetary. As you go on up Highway 129, you can see eight or nine older houses along the stretch of highway. It's fairly straight for a ways, then it forks to the right. There is a house which sits on this curve. To this day, you can go up 129 and, from a distance of a mile or two, it looks like this house is sitting right in the middle of the highway! Now if you hit it at just the right time of day, (about dusk), there appears to be a light on upstairs." The house is vacant and is now used as a hay storage so it would be very unlikely for anyone to be inside. Many "ghost stories" have originated from this "haunted" house. Some people say the light belongs to a mysterious old man who just disappeared. No one knows if he died or where he went. Now that he's gone, however, many people think he inhabits the house.



Many of the legends are about strange deaths. Although many that are told always get exaggerated and stretched out of proportion, the legends about any kind of death have never been changed. There were a large number of strange deaths that occurred within 10 to 20 years in the Unionville area.

One weird occurrence that happened ended in three deaths. There were three middle-aged brothers who were out coal mining one day. When their work day was over and they were ready to go home, they went down into an older mine to have a look around. This mine was known to be a safe one; there had never been any complications with it.

Meanwhile, the families of these three brothers were beginning to worry about them. The sun went down and still they did not return. Finally, the wives of the three men got

together and sent a couple of men out to find them. They found the three men dead in the old, *safe*, mine.

Here is another legend of death. One time this little boy, about twelve or thirteen years old, died . . . or so they thought. At this time, they didn't do any embalming of the body. So the family of the deceased held the wake in their own home the following evening. The wake was more or less a social occasion for the whole community. Everyone attended the wake to eat and visit. If you were attending a wake, you would view the body first, then begin to visit. At this particular wake, the casket was placed in the living room. Later on in the evening, when everyone was seated in the dining room talking, one boy got up to get something more to eat in the kitchen. By this time, it was dark outside so no light came in through the windows. The only light in the living room was the light which streamed in the doorway from the dining room and cast shadows all around. As the boy passed the living room door, he glanced in and saw someone's shadow on the wall. The boy, who was supposedly dead, was sitting up in his casket.

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Probably the strangest story of all happened after a middle-aged man and his wife had eaten supper. The wife was finishing the dishes in the kitchen. When she walked into the living room she saw her husband sitting straight up in a hard wood chair holding a gun which was pointed at the door. She didn't know what to think. At first, she thought he was going out of his mind. So she called some of his friends. They got together and decided to try to get the gun away from their friend. While some of them were waiting to rush the front door, some others went in a window in the back of the house. When they made their way to his chair, one man grabbed him by the shoulders and the gun dropped out of his hand. The man fell over on the floor. He had shot himself to death.

These legends and tales are only a few that have been circulating around the southern part of Putnam County. Many legends, such as the death legends, have been around for many years. There are a lot more tales and stories, however, more stories accumulate each day. The pastime of storytelling seems to grow and grow from generation to generation. It is something that you never get tired of no matter what your age may be. Sometimes the storytellers get just as excited as the listeners! Even though the telling of legends and tales is fun, it also has an educational value. All of these so-called "scary stories" are a part of folklore and a part of the history of that particular area.