



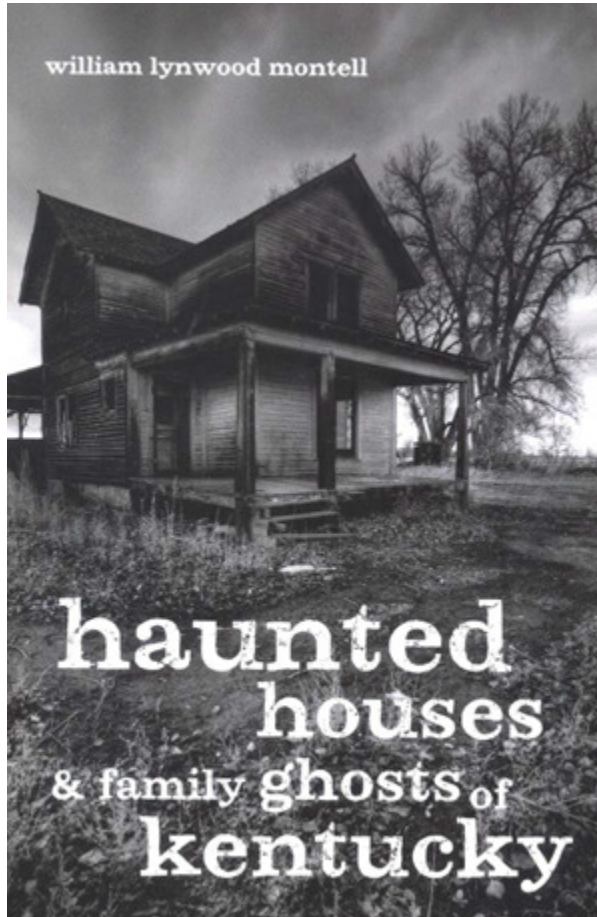
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DAILY NEWS

Most will find 'Haunted Kentucky' intriguing

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"Haunted Houses and Family Ghosts of Kentucky" by William Lynwood Montell. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014, 312 pages, \$19.95.



"A woman whose husband had died a few months back was outside working on her home in Warren County," William Lynwood Montell writes in "Return of Dead Husband," one of the eerie stories told to him in "Haunted Houses and Family Ghosts of Kentucky," which has just been published in paperback. "She lived in a rural area and had a few acres of farmland. While she was working, she noticed a blue glow coming from one of the fields, so she decided to get a closer look to see just what it was."

"She was astonished to see her husband standing in the middle of the field with an electrical blue aura surrounding him," Montell continues. "He looked exactly as he had always looked, and he spoke to her. He asked her how she was doing and then called for their dog that was by the woman's side. When the dog walked over to the man, he got a shock and ran back to the house. The man and woman talked a while longer and then he disappeared. She hasn't seen him since that happened."

Who among us has not encountered something that seemed to defy our ability to explain or understand

it? I believe the universality of that kind of experience is one of the reasons most readers would find "Haunted Houses" so intriguing. On one level, we know how the world operates and we are confident in our ability to distinguish the plausible from the impossible. We tell ourselves there is always a rational explanation for everything when we stumble upon the truly inexplicable. And perhaps that is true. But at the same time, all of us have had things happen to us that frustrate our best attempts to make sense of or otherwise explain away. It is exactly this human quality Montell taps into with this little treasure trove of thought-provoking and sometimes unnerving vignettes detailing various encounters with the unknown.

As Mack McCormick aptly noted in the press release that accompanies this release: "At a time when technology exerts an increasing influence over our lives, perhaps the idea of the unknown and intangible still has the potential to capture our imaginations and, occasionally, make us want to pull the covers over our heads." No kidding. One of the first thoughts I had while I was reading "Haunted Houses" was relief that my counselor didn't have this resource when he was telling ghost

stories around the fireplace years ago at church camp. I probably wouldn't have gotten any sleep the entire week I was there.

“Haunted Houses” is extensively researched, with eleven pages of notes at the conclusion of the main text. The book is divided into two major sections. “Part 1: Haunted Houses,” consists of 194 relatively brief anecdotes centered around various (typically antiquated) dwellings within the commonwealth; “Part 2: Family Ghosts” is made up of 67 similarly succinct stories dealing with different entities and manifestations. I particularly liked how Montell supplements the story-telling with a few strategically situated illustrations that help to stir the imagination.

Montell is also clear on his approach to writing the book: “These narrative accounts are printed here verbatim from four main kinds of sources: those spoken into a tape recorder; those taken down on notepads in shorthand version and then reworded as closely as possible to the way they were originally told; those written and submitted by the narrators, some of them by email; and those that appeared as newspaper accounts. I sought to retain the original form of the story; thus I never changed the wording so as to falsify the story or change the story’s intended message to the listener.”

This exquisite volume is chock full of little gems like the following, which has been intentionally condensed from the version you will find in the book:

“Our family moved to the small community of Rich Pond here in Warren County from Murray back in 1965,” Montell notes in “The Church Register,” a story told to him by one of the local contributors. “My parents had just purchased our first home. The old house they bought had not been lived in for several years and needed a lot of work to make it livable. After living there about eighteen months, strange things began occurring. From time to time, I could hear singing as if it were at a distance, or as if someone has a radio turned down real low. Believe it or not, this went on for several years. Then one night I was awakened by a strange feeling. I raised up in bed and saw the figure of a man dressed in a long black coat, bow tie, and high collar, standing at the foot of my bed. He was also holding an open book. He didn’t say anything. I closed my eyes because I was frightened. When I opened them, he was gone. This same occurrence went on for several years. When I became an adult, I visited the courthouse in Bowling Green to trace the deeds of the old place, and learned that the property belonged to the Rich Pond Episcopal Church South from 1885 to 1934.”

Montell is a professor emeritus of folk studies at Western Kentucky University, where he taught from 1969 to 1999. He is the author of over twenty books, including “Ghosts across Kentucky,” “Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South,” *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky*,” “Tales from Kentucky Lawyers,” and “Reminiscences and Reflections: African Americans in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland Since the Civil War, which he wrote with Wali Kharif.

I enjoyed “Haunted Houses” immensely and my sense – you can call it a sixth sense if you like – is that you will too. Pick up a copy at the local Barnes and Noble Booksellers; just don’t start reading it on a night when you have to get up early the next day.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*