

I've scanned a few journal pages of a young man named Aloysius Masters for you. Mr. Masters was a member of a search party that combed through the forest for a number of days in the late nineteenth century, making several valuable, though largely unconfirmed and inexplicable, observations along the way.

Masters's journals were passed down through his family for years before being donated to the Museum by a great-great-granddaughter who was moving out of town and didn't want to carry much of the past with her. Hopefully, her loss will be your gain. —A

March 14, 1886

Back in town now. Spent the day out in the forest once again. Traveled several hours past the bone-white rock where we ended our search yesterday, but still to no avail. We fourteen able-bodied men, volunteers from about town who know the area and its peculiarities well, have not been able to find any sign that another human being has ever been in these woods at all.

It was tragic, yet not unsurprising, when that young girl became lost in the forest. It still disturbs me to the utmost degree, however, to think that the first group of men sent to search for her should disappear as well.

We, the fourteen members of the second search party, count our friends and brothers and sons amongst the lost, and we have found neither hair nor hide of them, and not of the girl herself, for two days now.

The only discovery of note thus far was that of a puddle of some viscous substance that none of us could rightly identify, which one man nearly lost a boot to when he accidentally stumbled into it.

Though I do not put much stock in the ghost stories used to frighten children in these parts, I still become deeply unsettled when I set foot into the forest. I feel as though a weight has been pressed upon my shoulders and a pair of eyes has focused on the back of my neck.

We will take up the search once again at sunrise. I hope that tomorrow's effort brings us greater success.

March 15, 1886

Mr. Robertson, who misjudged a step into that strange puddle, returned this morning with a pair of borrowed boots. He complained that even though he had hung his boots above the fire all night, they continued to be soaked with the strange substance he stepped into.

Near the end of the day's search, a member of our party called upon us to report that he had found a human tooth embedded into the gnarled stump of a white tree when he had attempted to set down to rest upon it. The men wasted almost an hour of daylight debating the tooth, half insisting it was indeed human while half swore it appeared to belong to an animal.

One young man named Thomas Gillard was frightened beyond belief by it, trembling like a leaf in a gale as he insisted that the witch had set her gaze upon us. I stayed silent, as I did not know what I believed.

We found nothing else of note, and when we returned to town it was with heavy hearts and slumped shoulders, especially once we spied curious children and wistful wives watching us return utterly empty-handed. We all went to our homes shaken and shamed. I am certain I will not be the only man tonight praying for some sign of the missing men.

March 16, 1886

Thomas Gillard refused to return to the wood today. When the thirteen of us came to collect him, we found that he had barred his doors and hung a cross in his window, and he refused to speak to any of us. We embarked without him.

Though we encountered neither monsters nor witches, strange events did occur during today's search. While I am by no means ready to join Mr. Gillard in his beliefs concerning witchcraft, I feel I must describe the day's events to assist my own understanding.

We began our day much the same as we always had, by spreading out in a formation intended to cover as much ground as possible. We left perhaps 40 feet between each man to properly sight any potential clues. I can recall with absolute clarity Mr. Josiah Johnson, our party's leader, standing to my direct left.

We came upon the large white rock once again and were about to set out from the stone when I noticed a faint sound. I listened closely to locate the source of the sound, and though it eluded me, it soon became apparent that the sound itself was that of a man calling for help. I turned to my left to alert Josiah, but saw another man instead. Mr. Johnson was now standing to my right, although I had not once veered from my course, nor had I seen another man cross my path.

When I attempted to alert Mr. Johnson and the others of the noise, no other man seemed able to hear it, though it was only increasing in volume and desperation. Despite this, the men swore to me that the forest was silent as the grave. It was then I began to hear the voice screaming out my name. I insisted that we follow it.

I must have seemed either quite sincere or quite desperate, because Mr. Johnson agreed to break from our planned course. From where we stood at the large white rock, we followed the stream toward the sound I heard. Almost as soon as we changed course, we came across a pile of dead rodents - ten or more. They appeared to have died fighting one another, as their flesh was torn to shreds. We walked two hours in that same direction, the smell of their rot seeming to linger with us long after we had passed them.

Then, as we neared a fork in the stream, we sighted a wisp of smoke in the distance, at an angle from our current course. It surprised us all, especially myself. I have been a resident of the town of Burkittsville for the better part of 20 years, and, with the exception of certain old wives' tales, there have been no accounts of anyone taking up residence this far out in the woods. We turned slightly to head toward the smoke.

We traversed three hours through ancient oak trees. I remember thinking the sound of the wind through the trees' leaves sounded not unlike the whispering of an old woman, and then I realized that I did not feel any wind upon my face. I was about to comment on the strange phenomenon of the wind to the other men when I spotted the cabin.

The home was a small structure in ill repair. The smoke we had seen lingered in a haze around the house, though we could not see its source.

We went closer to inspect it, which required us to navigate a very short stretch of hilled terrain. Our sightline of the house was interrupted by one of these hills, and when we managed to crest the hill itself and regain what should have been a direct sightline, the structure was gone. We searched the entire area, but not a single one of us could find any trace of the cabin again. The stream of smoke remained in the sky directly above where the cabin should have been.

Mr. Johnson insisted that the sighting of the cabin and the smoke must have been no more than a trick of our own minds, experienced by many men due to our desperation. Though I took a small delight in not being the only man glimpsing some sort of phenomena, I could not help but think enviously of Thomas Gillard sitting in the safety of his home.

March 17, 1886

Two members of our party vanished during our search. The first was Mr. Robertson, who seemingly disappeared into thin air half an hour after we crossed into the wood. Some other man turned to call for him, I do not recall who, and even that calling intensified to a frenzy, and soon the whole search party was running about searching for him. Some suggested he may have turned coward and headed home as Mr. Gillard had, but a moment later we set eyes upon a small bundle of sticks wound with a set of slime-covered boot laces.

Mr. Michaels disappeared shortly after. He volunteered to head back to town, to see if he could find Mr. Robertson. As it turns out, he never completed his journey. When the remaining eleven of us returned at the end of a fruitless day, it was to the screaming and hysteria of the town. Apparently, sometime during our excursion, someone had placed small, wooden effigies in the shapes of men on the doorsteps of Robertson's and Michaels's homes.

Though I did not know either of those men well, I am deeply affected by their strange and sudden loss. Mr. Gillard made the right decision when he chose to stay out of these woods.

March 18, 1886

Last night, I dreamt that I was alone in the woods in the dead of the night. As I stumbled around in the dark, I noticed two lights in the distance. They hovered among the trees for a long moment before being snuffed out, leaving me totally alone once again. I cannot help but believe them to be the souls of Robertson and Michaels, lost inside that labyrinthine wood. Or perhaps they were a pair of eyes.

I awoke this morning covered in sweat, with two small pinpricks upon the back of my neck. They continuously bleed no matter the amount of pressure that I place upon them. I tell myself again and again that it must be nothing other than a spot where I had picked myself upon a thorn or branch during yesterday's search.

After summoning all of my remaining courage, I joined the search party once again. We numbered five in total today, as half of the remaining men have refused to join us again.

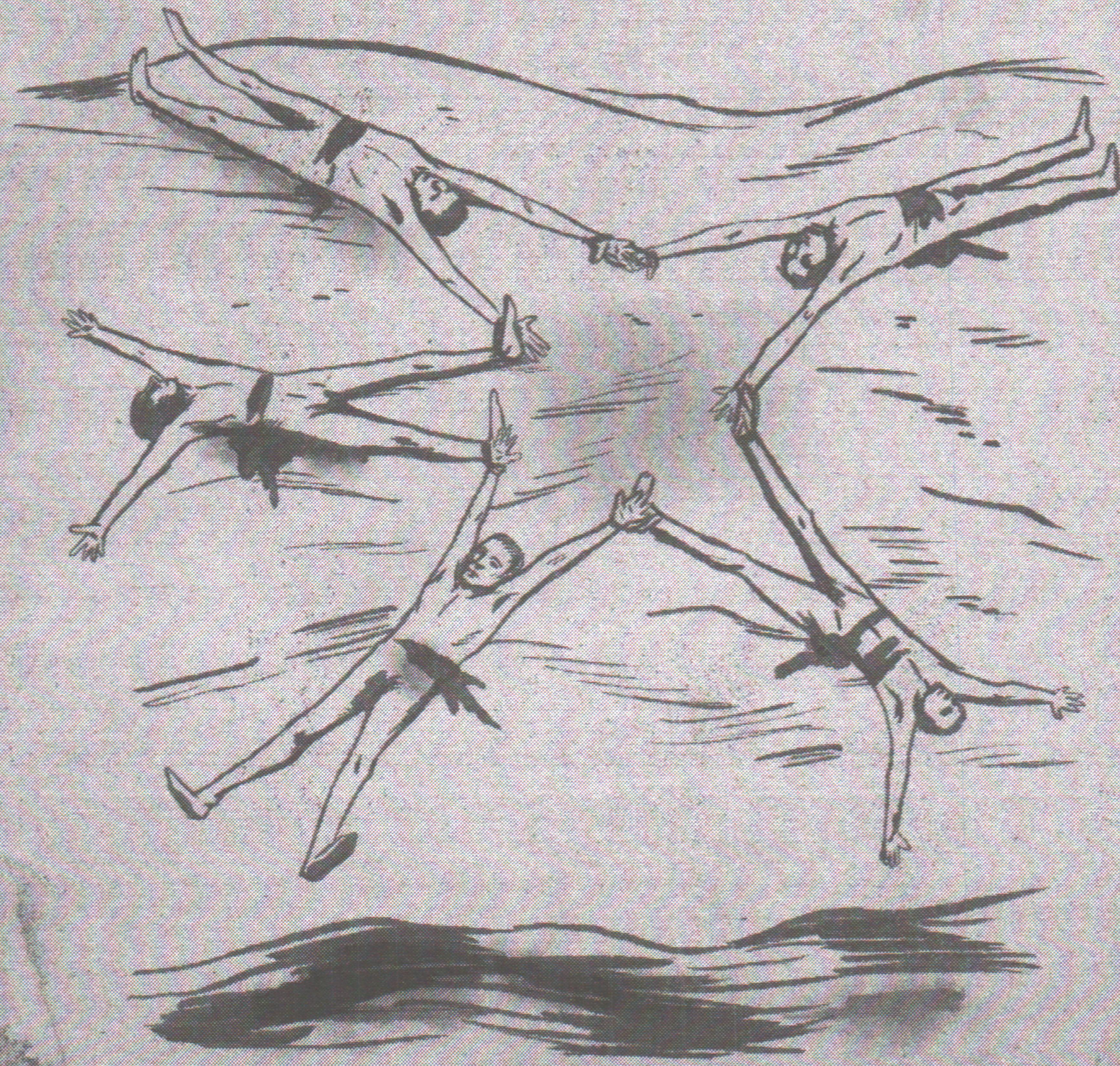
About three hours into the day, Mr. Johnson claimed to have caught sight of a bootprint. My hopes were momentarily lifted, and I ran to see his discovery. However, I tripped on the way over and hit my mouth on a rock that lay on the forest's floor, biting my tongue as I fell. My mouth filled with blood, which soon began to dribble out onto my clothing. I soon realized that the rock had knocked one of my front teeth out of my mouth, although I could not find it anywhere on the forest floor. Perhaps I swallowed it in my confusion and pain.

To add insult to injury, it soon became apparent that there had been no bootprint on the ground after all. The men did what they could to aid me, but we decided to call the day's search short, as we deemed it unwise to separate and allow me to return to town alone. We returned minutes before sunset, although there should have by all account been hours of daylight remaining.

March 22, 1886

I have waited several days to collect myself, and I feel as though it is time that I recount what our party discovered on the seventh day of our search. We did indeed find the missing men from the first search party, but it was in no condition any man should be found. I would not wish the violence that was inflicted upon them even upon my worst enemy.

We discovered them by the same large, white rock we saw on our very first day of scouring of the woods. They were long dead, and had been butchered like animals, all laid out upon the rock in some unnatural formation that I can only assume be some form of Satanic glyph, as it matches the symbols drawn onto their bodies in intermingled blood.



The authorities have arranged a search for a madman or men and posted guards on the road to town. The guards are to remain there at all hours, but something tells me the perpetrators will elude their grasp. Something tells me they cannot be grasped at all.