

Woman in black a cemetery legend

Second in a series

"There is a story of a lady living there, and she haunts Stepp's ... and she is supposed to be sitting near her daughter's grave. People have said what she looks like: white, long hair, she's very old looking, she's not really ugly, she always wears black, she has a three-dot marking on her forehead." So states a legend collected by an Indiana University folklore student in 1972.

Among the stories about the Stepp Cemetery in the Morgan-Monroe State Forest are numerous variations about the woman in black. She is variously the wife or mother of someone buried there, and she stands watch over the grave of a deceased loved one or searching for the one who caused the death.

For the idly curious, neither motive is particularly comforting to the ghost-watcher on a dark night. Perhaps even more threatening is the version of the legend in which the woman in black is the widow of a man killed in the Civil War. She was "in a mental institution and the doctors wouldn't let her out,"



Looking back

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attend the funeral at Stepp Cemetery." Another version, probably related to the above, has her weighing 200 pounds, wearing a black hat and a chain around her leg, "where she escaped from a woman's institution."

Unfortunately, the statistics of those buried in Stepp Cemetery do not match the legends, but ghost stories sometimes have some fragment of fact and are embellished by the teller and re-teller. Here are a few possibilities for the origin of the woman in black:

Of the families buried in Stepp Cemetery there is that of David Hubbard, who was — according to the 1850 census of Monroe County — 20 years old that year. He and his wife, Amanda, lost three babies — Shillo, born 1857; and possibly twin daughters, Rebecca, 12 Jan. 1863,

and Bertha, 12 Jan. 1863. Both of the female infants were supposed to have died on Sept. 30, 1864. Amanda, herself, died in 1866, at the age of 31. Perhaps she roams the cemetery at night, mourning for her lost little ones.

Willis Hubbard, who owned land adjoining that of Reuben Stepp, lost two infants, M.C. (a daughter) age 1 month, deceased in 1856, and John, age 6 months, in 1857. The two babies were by Willis' second wife, E.J., his first, Rebecca, having died earlier. Could the ghost be E.J., seeking to comfort her babies if they cried in the night?

Actually, there are 17 infants buried in Stepp Cemetery. They belong to the Stepp, Hacker, Hendrickson, Wall, Farr and Madox families, as well as the Hubbards. The grim statistics bear evidence to the fact that in the mid-1800s doctors were helpless to cure such ailments as whooping cough, dysentery and influenza.

Another version of the legend contains a double tragedy. "The husband and black lady and baby

see **Woman, Back** page