

# Debunking ghost stories about the 'Warlock seat'

The 1920s in America brought a wave of sentiment for conservation of our forests and wildlife areas before they fell prey to "progress." The Indiana legislature initiated a program of buying up parcels of land for state forest preserves. The Marion Township area — with its depleted soil — was an ideal choice for the state's conservation efforts. The majority of the parcels of land that make up the Morgan-Monroe State Forest were purchased by the state between 1929 and 1935.

Many of the stories about the Stepp Cemetery, that became surrounded by the forest, arose after automobiles became common and young people became more mobile. Their fertile imaginations transformed the image of the perfectly ordinary cemetery into a sinister place.

Take, for example, the tree that was cut down by a relative of some who are buried there. After the tree was felled, it looked like a crude chair. It was a harmless enough creation — perhaps a place for a



## Looking back

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visitor to pause and meditate.

But in the imaginations of curiosity seekers and partying teenagers the stump became a macabre thing — a place where something eerie and evil lingered. It came to be known as the "Warlock seat," and the ghost stories about it — each more improbable than the last — attracted curiosity seekers and, unfortunately vandals.

No matter that there was no teenage girl murdered and mutilated in the vicinity. The ghost storytellers would have their hearers believe that the girl's mother roamed at night, looking for her daughter's murderer. Despite the fact that the stories didn't match

the facts of the lives of those buried there, they multiplied.

It was also said that the woman in black nightly unearthed her baby and held it in her arms while sitting on the Warlock seat. Another legend connected with the seat was that whoever sat in it would die a year later.

Among the many stories and their variations was one that concerned a young man who was supposed to have been killed by a falling tree when the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was working in the forest. That legend did not include the tree stump, but borrowed the woman in black as the young man's unhappy mother.

In one of the variations that did incorporate the innocent stump, the woman was mourning the loss of a child, killed by a car. According to that version, she was the one who had the tree stump made into a seat.

It was even said by some of the young storytellers that there was a

curse on the seat. The woman in black was variously living in a cave or a cabin near the cemetery or nowhere in particular.

One teenager claimed that after sitting in the Warlock seat, his car wouldn't start. Others said that the "woman" put cold hands around their necks.

Unfortunately for the cemetery, the stories attracted vandals to the place. — and — their mischief — tombstones broken or carried away — caused a lot of unhappiness among the survivors of those buried there. They have come to resent the notoriety of the little cemetery, because it brought successive waves of vandalism and time-consuming work to repair the damage.

There never were any ghosts at night in Stepp Cemetery. There are only the sounds of the night — little creatures scampering across the carpet of dry leaves and the creaking of trees fallen against each other. And the only shades in that place are delicate traces of moonlight filtering through the trees.