

Ghost Hunter's Guide to Los Angeles

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By Jeff Dwyer



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To my wife and partner in many ghost hunts,
Darlene Dwyer,
always ready for an adventure.

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Introduction to Ghost Hunting

Who believes in ghosts? People from every religion, culture, and generation believe that ghosts exist. The popularity of ghosts and haunted places in books, television programs, and movies reflects a belief held by many that other dimensions and spiritual entities exist.

In 2000, a Gallup poll discovered a significant increase in the number of Americans who believe in ghosts since the question was first asked in 1978. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they believe ghosts exist. In 1978, only 11 percent admitted to believing in ghosts. Less than a year later, Gallup found that 42 percent of the public believed a house could be haunted but only 28 percent believed that we can hear from or mentally communicate with someone who has died. In 2005, a CBS News poll reported similar findings. Twenty-two percent of the respondents admitted they had personally seen or felt the presence of a ghost. Seventy-eight percent said they believe in an afterlife. A 2003 Harris poll found an astounding 51 percent of Americans believe in ghosts. As with preceding polls, belief in ghosts was greatest among females. More young people accepted the idea of ghosts than older people. Forty-four percent of people aged 18-29 years admitted a belief in ghosts compared with 13 percent of those over 65.

In October 2001, Home and Garden TV conducted a survey at its Web site. When asked "Do you believe in ghosts?" 87 percent of respondents said, "Yes!" Fifty-one percent indicated they had seen a ghost but only 38 percent would enter a haunted house alone at night.

Another channel, SciFi, recognized the phenomenal interest in

paranormal phenomena and launched a weekly one-hour primetime program on ghost hunting. SciFi also airs programs that investigate psychic abilities, reincarnation, telekinesis, and many other fascinating topics.

Even the major networks have begun to schedule programming that reflects their audience's interest in the supernatural. NBC broadcasts a weekly primetime drama that follows the experiences of a medium who communicates with ghosts in order to solve crimes, while CBS launched a dramatic series about a woman who acts as the intermediary between spirits and the individuals they haunt.

More than 2,200,000 references to ghosts, ghost hunting, haunted places, or related paranormal phenomena have been discovered through the Internet. Clearly, interest in these areas is widespread.

There is no way of knowing how many people have seen or heard a ghost only to feel too embarrassed, foolish, or frightened to admit it. Many ghost hunters and spiritual investigators believe a vast majority of people have seen or heard something from the other world but failed to recognize it.

The recent worldwide interest in ghosts is not a spin-off of the New Age movement or the current popularity of angels or the manifestation of some new religious process. The suspicion or recognition that ghosts exist is simply the reemergence of one of mankind's oldest and most basic beliefs: there is a life after death.

Ancient writings from many cultures describe apparitions and a variety of spirit manifestations that include tolling bells, chimes, disembodied crying or moaning, and whispered messages. Legends and ancient books include descriptions of ghosts, dwelling places of spirits, and periods of intense spiritual activity related to seasons or community events such as festivals or crop harvests.

Vital interactions between the living and deceased have been described. Many ancient cultures included dead people, or their spirits, in community life. Spirits of the dead were sought as a source of guidance, wisdom, and protection for the living.

Many believers of the world's oldest religions agree that nonliving entities may be contacted for guidance or may be seen on the earthly plane. Among these are visions of saints, the Virgin Mary, and angels.

Ancient sites of intense spiritual activity in Arizona, New Mexico, and Central and South America are popular destinations for travelers seeking psychic or spiritual experiences. More modern, local sites where a variety of paranormal events have occurred are also popular destinations for adventurous living souls. Amateur and professional ghost hunters seek the spirits of the dearly departed in Los Angeles's historic sites, Victorian mansions, old studios, and countless other places around the southland, including graveyards and the attic of your own home. Modern buildings, parks, theatres, and ships, such as the *Queen Mary* in Long Beach, also serve as targets for ghost hunters.

Throughout the past two millennia, the popularity of belief in ghosts has waxed and waned, similar to religious activity. When a rediscovery of ghosts and their role in our lives occurs, skeptics label the notion a fad or an aberration of modern lifestyles. Perhaps people are uncomfortable with the idea that ghosts exist because it involves an examination of our nature and our concepts of life, death, and afterlife. These concepts are most often considered in the context of religion, yet ghost hunters recognize that acceptance of the reality of ghosts, and a life after death, is a personal decision, having nothing to do with religious beliefs or church doctrine. An intellectual approach enables the ghost hunter to explore haunted places without religious bias or fears.

The greater frequency of ghost manifestations in the Los Angeles area, as evidenced by documentary reports on TV and other news media, reflects some people's open-mindedness and widespread interest in ghostly experiences. Ghost hunting is becoming a weekend pastime for many adventurous souls. Advertisement of haunted inns, restaurants, and historical sites is commonplace. It is always fun, often very exciting, and may take ghost hunters places they never dreamed of going.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Chapter 1 of this book will help you, the ghost hunter, research and organize your own ghost hunt. Chapters 2 through 6 describe several locations at which ghostly activity has been reported. Unlike

other collections of ghost stories and descriptions of haunted places, this book emphasizes access. Addresses of each haunted site are included along with other information to assist you in locating and entering the location. Several appendixes offer organizational material for your ghost hunts, including a Sighting Report Form to document your adventures, lists of suggested reading and videos, and organizations you may contact about your experiences with ghosts.

GHOST HUNTING IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA

The very word *ghost* immediately brings to mind visions of ancient European castles, foggy moors, and dark, wind-swept ramparts where brave knights battled enemies of the crown or heroines threw themselves to their death rather than marry the evil duke. The fact is that ghosts are everywhere. A history based in antiquity that includes dark dungeons, hidden catacombs and graveyards, or ancient ruins covered with a veil of sorrow and pain is not essential.

Indeed, Los Angeles and the surrounding communities have all the ingredients necessary for successful ghost hunting. The region has been populated for 200 years with people from a variety of cultures who experienced tremendous changes in their lives. These include the arrival of Spanish colonists in 1771, military campaigns of the Mexican period (1820-46), the gold rush of 1849, the oil boom of the 1890s, and earthquakes, fires, and other disasters of the 20th century.

Throughout the southland's history there have been countless opportunities for the spirits of the dearly departed to feel a need to stay on. There are many old hotels and restaurants, neighborhoods, forts, barrooms, Spanish missions, movie studios, and ships inhabited by ghosts who can be seen or sensed. These lost souls are often the result of violent or unexpected death, often at an early age. These unfortunate people passed with great emotional anguish, leaving their souls with a desire for a completion of their life's objectives or a sense of obligation to offer protection to a particular place. Some ghosts remain on the earthly plane to provide guidance for someone still alive, or for revenge.

Los Angeles has had its share of criminal activities and social injustice.

This has produced many disadvantaged, used, abused, and forlorn people who remain with us after their death. Their souls seek lost dreams while they remain attached to what little they gained during their difficult lives. Many ghosts, harboring resentment, pain, a sense of loss, or a desire to complete their unfinished business, still roam the darkened halls of Victorian mansions, hotels, theatres, neglected cemeteries, modern buildings, and many other places throughout the region that are accessible to the public.

WHAT IS A GHOST?

A ghost is some aspect of the personality, spirit, consciousness, energy, mind, or soul that remains after the body dies. When any of these are detected by the living—through sight, sound, odor, or movement—the manifestation is called an apparition by parapsychologists. The rest of us call it a ghost. How the ghost manifests itself is unknown. There seems to be a close association, however, between aspects of the entity's life and its manifestation as a ghost. These include a sudden, traumatic death, strong ties either to loved ones who survived the entity or to a particular place, unfinished business, strong emotions such as hatred and anger, or a desire for revenge.

Ghosts differ from other paranormal phenomena by their display of intelligent action. This includes interaction with the living, performance of a purposeful activity, or a response to ongoing changes in the environment. Ghosts may speak to the living, warning of a foreseen accident or disaster, giving advice, or expressing their love, anger, remorse, or disappointment. They may try to complete some project or duty they failed to complete before death. Some ghosts try to move furniture, room decorations, and the like to suit their preferences.

Some ghosts appear solid and function as living beings because they are unaware they are dead. Others appear as partial apparitions because they are confused about the transition from life to death.

Occasionally, paranormal activity is bizarre, frightening, or dangerous to witnesses. Objects may fly about, strange sounds may be heard, or accidents happen. This kind of activity is attributed to a poltergeist, or noisy ghost. Most authorities believe that a living person, not the

dead, causes these manifestations. Generally, someone under great emotional stress releases psychic energy that creates subtle or spectacular changes in the environment.

Noises commonly associated with a poltergeist include tapping on walls or ceilings, heavy footsteps, shattered glass, the ringing of telephones, and running water. Objects may move about on tables or floors or fly across a room. Furniture may spin or tip over. Dangerous objects such as knives, hammers, or pens may hit people. These poltergeist events can last from only a few days to a year or more. Discovery and removal of the emotionally unstable, living agent often terminates them.

HAUNTINGS

Hauntings and apparitions may not be the same thing. In fact, some professional ghost hunters and parapsychologists make a clear distinction between these two kinds of paranormal phenomena. They share many of the same features in terms of what witnesses see, feel, or smell, but a haunting may occur without the presence of a spiritual entity or consciousness of a dead person. People have reported seeing the pale, transparent images of the deceased walking in hallways, climbing stairs, or sitting in rocking chairs or seats in airplanes, trains, buses, and restaurants. Some have been seen sleeping in beds, hanging by a rope from a tree, or walking through walls. Most commonly, a partial apparition is seen, but witnesses have reported seeing entire armies engaged in battle. Unlike ghosts, hauntings do not display intelligent action with respect to the location. They don't manipulate your new computer, and they do not interact with the living.

Hauntings may be environmental imprints or recordings of something that happened at a location as a result of the repetition of intense emotion. As such, they tend to be associated with a specific place or object, not a particular person. The ghostly figures tend to perform some kind of task or activity that is repetitive. Sometimes the haunting is so repetitive that witnesses feel as though they are watching a video loop that plays the same brief scene over and over. A good example is the image of a deceased grandmother who makes appearances seated in her favorite rocking chair. Another is John Pedder,

crewman on the *Queen Mary*. His image is often seen sliding under the watertight door that crushed him during a routine drill.

There is much evidence that people can trigger and experience these environmental recordings by visiting the particular site, touching an object that was a key element of the event, and psychically connecting with the event. Images of hauntings have been picked up on still and video film and digital recordings. The location of strong environmental imprints can also be discovered through devices such as electromagnetic field detectors. Higher magnetic readings have been found at locations where psychics frequently experience hauntings.

HOW DOES A GHOST MANIFEST ITSELF?

Ghosts interact with our environment in a variety of ways that may have something to do with the strength of their personality, level of confusion concerning their transformation by death, talents or skills they possessed in life, personal objectives, or level of frustration in getting our attention. Some ghosts create odors or sounds, particularly those associated with their habits, such as cigar smoke or whistling. The odors of tobacco, oranges, and hemp are most commonly reported. Sounds, including voice messages, may be detected with an audio recorder (see Audio Recording Techniques in chapter 1). Ghost hunters have recorded greetings, warnings, screams, sobbing, and expressions of love.

One of the most common ghostly activities is moving objects. Ghosts like to knock over stacks of cards or coins, turn doorknobs, scatter matchsticks, and move your keys. For many, it appears easy to manipulate light switches and TV remotes, move windows or doors, or push chairs around. Some ghosts have the power to throw objects, pull pictures from a wall, or move heavy items. As a rule, ghosts cannot tolerate disturbances within the place they haunt. If you tilt a wall-mounted picture, the ghost will set it straight. Obstacles placed in the ghost's path may be pushed aside. These seemingly minor indications of ghostly activity should be recorded for future reference on the Sighting Report Form in Appendix A.

Ghosts can also create changes in the physical qualities of an

environment. Ice cold breezes and unexplained gusts of wind are often the first signs that a ghost is present. Moving or stationary cold spots, with temperatures several degrees below surrounding areas, have been detected with reliable instruments. Temperature changes sometimes occur along with a feeling sensed by witnesses that the atmosphere has thickened as if the room were suddenly filled with unseen people.

Devices that detect changes in magnetic, electrical, or radio fields have been used in the search for ghosts. However, detected changes may be subject to error, interference by other electrical devices, or misinterpretation. Measurements indicating the presence of a ghost may be difficult to capture on a permanent record.

Ghosts may create images on still cameras (film or digital) and video recorders, such as luminous fogs, balls of light called orbs, streaks of light, or the partial outline of body parts. In the 1860s this was called "spirit photography." Modern digital photographs are easily edited and make it difficult to produce convincing proof of ghostly activity.

Humanoid images are the prized objective of most ghost hunters but they are the least to be experienced. When such images occur, they are often partial, revealing only a head and torso with an arm or two. The feet are seldom seen and full-body apparitions are extremely rare. The solidity of these images is highly variable. Some ghost hunters have seen ethereal, fully transparent forms that are barely discernible while others report ghosts who appear as solid as a living being.

WHY DO GHOSTS REMAIN IN A PARTICULAR PLACE?

Ghosts remain in a particular place because they are emotionally attached to a room, a building, activities, events, or special surroundings that profoundly affected them during their lives, or played a role in their death. A prime example is the haunted house inhabited by the ghost of a man who hung himself in the master bedroom because his wife left him. It is widely believed that death and sudden transition from the physical world confuse a ghost. He or she remains in familiar or emotionally stabilizing surroundings to ease the strain. A place-bound ghost is most likely to exist when a violent death

occurred with great emotional anguish. Ghosts may linger in a house, barn, cemetery, factory, or store waiting for a loved one or anyone familiar who might help them deal with their new level of existence. Some ghosts wander through buildings or forests, on bridges, or alongside particular sections of roads. Some await enemies seeking revenge. Others await a friend and a chance for resolution of their guilt.

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS IS A SIGHTING MOST LIKELY?

Although ghosts may appear at any time, a sighting may occur on special holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, or during historic periods (July 4, December 7) or calendar periods pertaining to the personal history of the ghost. Halloween is reputed to be a favorite night for many apparitions, while others seem to prefer their own special day, or night, on a weekly or monthly cycle.

Night is a traditional time for ghost activity, yet experienced ghost hunters know that sightings may occur at any time. There seems to be no consistent affinity of ghosts for darkness, but they seldom appear when artificial light is bright. Perhaps this is why ghosts shy away from camera crews and their array of lights. Ghosts seem to prefer peace and quiet, although some of them have been reported to make incessant, loud sounds. Even a small group of ghost hunters may make too much noise to facilitate a sighting. For this reason, it is recommended that you limit your group to four persons and oral communication be kept to a minimum.

IS GHOST HUNTING DANGEROUS?

No. Ghost hunting is not dangerous. Motion pictures and children's ghost stories have created a widespread notion that ghosts may inflict harm or even cause the death of persons they dislike. There are a few reports of ghosts attacking people but these are highly suspect. Persons who claim to have been injured by a ghost have, in most cases, precipitated the injury themselves through their own ignorance or fear. The ghost of the Abbot of Trondheim was reputed to have

attacked some people decades ago, but circumstances and precipitating events are unclear. Authorities believe that rare attacks by ghosts are a matter of mistaken identity, i.e., the ghost misidentified a living person as a figure known to the ghost during his life.

It is possible that attacks may be nothing more than clumsy efforts by a ghost to achieve recognition. Witnesses of ghost appearances have found themselves in the middle of gunfights, major military battles, and other violent events yet sustained not the slightest injury. If the ghost hunter keeps a wary eye and a calm attitude and sets aside tendencies to fear the ghost or the circumstances of its appearance, he will be safe.

Most authorities agree that ghosts do not travel. Ghosts will not follow you home, take up residence in your car, or attempt to occupy your body. They are held in a time and space by deep emotional ties to an event or place. Ghosts have been observed on airplanes, trains, buses, and ships, however. It is unlikely that the destination interests them. Something about the journey, some event such as a plane crash or train wreck, accounts for their appearance as travelers.

HOT SPOTS FOR GHOSTLY ACTIVITY

Numerous sites of disasters, criminal activity, suicides, huge fires, and other tragic events abound in the greater Los Angeles area, providing hundreds of opportunities for ghost hunting. You may visit the locations described in chapters 2 through 6 to experience ghostly activity discovered by others or discover a hot spot to research and initiate your own ghost hunt.

Astute ghost hunters often search historical maps, drawings, and other documents to find the sites of military conflicts, buildings that no longer exist, or locations of tragic events now occupied by modern structures. For example, maps and drawings on display in the old Spanish missions point to the location of mass graves that may lie under parking lots, streets, or other structures. At historic places such as the Banning Home in southwest L.A. and Drum Barracks in Long Beach, old photographs can help you locate the former sites of wells, barns, shacks for ranch hands, barracks for soldiers, and other places to stage a ghost hunt.

Earthquakes have resulted in a large number of sudden and tragic deaths in Southern California. In 1812, a huge earthquake killed 40 people at Mission San Juan Capistrano and seriously damaged mission buildings at Ventura and San Diego. Another major quake struck in 1870 killing over a hundred people and destroying buildings that had literally been constructed with blood, sweat, and tears, mostly by local Indians.

More recently, the Northridge earthquake of January 17, 1994, killed more than 60 persons, collapsed major freeways, and destroyed hundreds of homes. People who died in the earthquake or in its aftermath may haunt the site of their cherished homes, favorite bar or restaurant, or even workplace.

Many adobe missions exist throughout Southern California with present structures dating from the early 1800s. Most of them are beautifully restored and open to the public. The grounds of these monuments to California's Spanish and Mexican periods comprise mass burial sites for thousands of Indians. Many lost their culture, language, religion, and freedom under the harsh rule of Spain and the mission fathers. Mission San Gabriel Arcangel, Mission San Juan Capistrano, Mission San Buena Ventura, and Mission San Fernando Rey de Espana in San Fernando Valley possess fascinating histories and an ambience conducive to ghost hunting.

The homes of many Southern California pioneers, such as the Phineas Banning house in Wilmington, the Doheny Mansion, and the Avila Adobe in central L.A. are reputed to harbor ghosts. Other historic homes such as the Monroe House in Monrovia, Rancho Los Cerritos Adobe in Long Beach, and the Ware-Stanley House in Garden Grove have curious histories and ghostly atmospheres. Of course, San Diego's world-famous Whaley House and Santa Barbara's Big Yellow House are well known for ghostly activity. Some of these charming old homes have become bed-and-breakfast inns, museums, or restaurants, making them exciting weekend destinations for ghost hunters.

Several historic military sites in Southern California are believed to harbor ghosts. At one time, the Union army headquarters at Drum Barracks in Wilmington occupied 60 acres and included the finest hospital in the West. About 17,000 troops trained here from 1861 to

1865 and many went on to see action against the Confederate army in New Mexico and Texas. Today, Drum Barracks is reduced to a single building that served as quarters for junior officers. The site of the hospital is occupied by modern structures and presents a great opportunity for ghost hunters with a flare for historical research.

Fort MacArthur in San Pedro is also greatly reduced from its original span of several hundred acres. Two huge gun emplacements with connecting passageways, powder rooms, and galleries still echo the sounds of gunnery officers and troops who protected L.A. harbor from 1914 to 1977. Some ghost hunters believe spirit remnants from the Spanish period can be detected here as well.

Several cemeteries dating from the 19th century are scattered about the Los Angeles area, many of them quite small and tucked away in seldom-visited areas with unattended graves and forgotten decedents. Westwood Memorial Park, Woodlawn in Santa Monica, and Sunnyside in Long Beach contain the remains of particularly interesting people, including criminals, movie stars, and pioneers.

Among the most fascinating cemeteries in the southland is Hollywood Forever in West L.A. This place is “home” to 88,000 dead people, including screen stars such as Rudolph Valentino, producers such as Cecil B. DeMille, and comic talents like Mel Blanc. On summer weekends, as many as 1,700 living guests join the dead. Visitors unfurl blankets among the headstones, spread out gourmet picnic dinners, and enjoy old movies projected onto the wall of the mausoleum. An evening among dead film stars makes perfect sense to people fascinated by the movie industry. For those looking for a fun, spooky evening, this cemetery is perfect.

Information about large construction projects may point you in the direction of a haunted site. The huge Playa Vista project north of Marina del Rey in west Los Angeles includes apartments, condominiums, business venues, and open space. Late in 2003, construction was halted when the bones of more than 300 Native Americans were uncovered and removed. Archeological and historical research revealed that this area was once an important center of Native American culture. In addition to burial artifacts, remnants of at least one large village, including jewelry, eating utensils, and arrowheads, have been found. Construction projects that disturb ancient graves

often lead to paranormal phenomena in modern structures placed on the site. Spirits of the dead hate to see their remains unearthed and relocated.

TWO SIMPLE RULES

Two simple rules apply for successful ghost hunting. The first is to be patient. Ghosts are everywhere, but contact may require a considerable investment of time. The second rule is to have fun.

You may report your ghost hunting experiences or suggest hot spots for ghost hunting to the author via e-mail at HJDDwyer@msn.com or by visiting the Web site www.ghostreport.com.

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