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Creepy Haunts

Hunting For The Haunted: Lewis County Locales Full of Mystery

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The sounds of children on century-old steps. Creaks and noises above a historic train depot. Unexplained "guests" in a downtown hotel and watering hole.

It seems that no matter where someone goes in Lewis County, tales of hauntings and ghosts will follow. From the long and storied history of the area, dozens of ghost stories have emerged.

One of the more popular and documented "hauntings" is that of the McMenamins Olympic Club in Centralia. Over the years, the 100-year-old establishment has been a favored hotel, eatery and drinking locale.

Many tales have been passed down by employees, and some who work there claim to have had firsthand experience with the paranormal.

Emily Owen, a server, said unexplained events occur with some frequency both in the establishment's upper mezzanine and the basement, the site of the club's prohibition-era speakeasy.

Owen has heard many stories, but remembers her own experience the best. While closing down the club one night, she said she made a point to put out all of the candles on the mezzanine, which used to be a card room.

"I came up here and put them all out and nobody else was here except the other closer," Owen said, standing on the dimly lit platform. "I happened to walk down and look back here and all the candles were lit again. ... nobody had gone up here."

Owen has heard the stories of others as well: chairs rearranged in a pyramid in the basement and an ax falling from above and nearly striking an employee.

Sara McFarland, another Olympic Club server, said she and other employees keep the jukebox playing while closing down the restaurant. On two occasions, she said the normal music was drowned out by a mysterious tune.



Multimedia Video:

McMenamin's Olympic Club in downtown Centralia is home to many strange and unexplainable events, according to staff members.



Multimedia Video:

Chehalis train depot turned history museum is home to spectres "just going about their business" in late 19th century fashion, according to Lewis County Sheriff's Office emergency manager Jill Kangas, who helped to shore up documents and artifacts when the building reopened as a museum in the early 1980s.

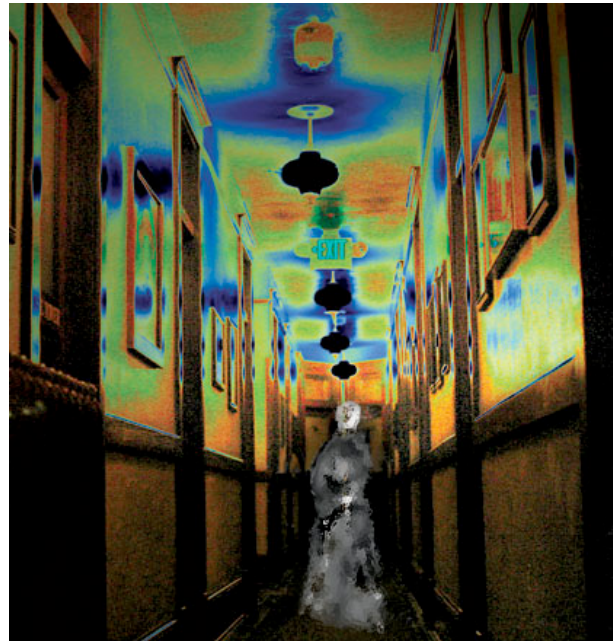


Photo Illustration by Holly Pederson.

"All of the sudden over the top of the jukebox music this old, weird ragtime piano music comes on," McFarland said. "We don't know where it comes from. ... That's happened to us twice."

The Lewis County Historical Museum:

The Old Chehalis Train Depot

People who take stock of the supernatural wouldn't have a hard time imagining that the Lewis County Historical Museum might be an ideal home for the undead.

With photographs and artifacts spanning centuries of life in Southwest Washington, the musty old museum reeks of history as it creaks and settles through time.

Having closed as a passenger depot in the early 1970s, it was to be torn down until local residents banded together to shore up records and artifacts that came to form displays in the early 1980s.

Debbie Knapp, director of the downtown museum, said she isn't sure whether or not to believe there are ghosts haunting her place of employment. Though the stories are widely circulated, Knapp said she has had only one moment at the museum she would define as "creepy."

"I was here late, by myself, and I heard someone sneeze," said Knapp, who is certain she was the only person in the building. "I decided that it was probably a good time to leave for the night."

Jill Kangas, a Lewis County Sheriff's Office emergency planner, is sure she saw and heard more than a simple sneeze.

She helped lead the 150 volunteers who put in long hours to get the museum in order and organize decades worth of stored goods.

"You'd hear drawers open. You'd hear the old-fashioned roller chairs rolling across the ground," Kangas said. "Very often, we'd hear roll-top desks closing, and that's a very unique sound ... but there weren't any there."

Late one night -- alone -- Kangas had an even closer encounter with the unexplainable. Per her usual routine, she locked the entrances when no one else was around.

When it was time to turn the lights out, Kangas walked into the narrow closet where the breaker switches are.

"I got down to the sixth row of breakers, and I heard this voice behind me," Kangas said. "I heard this voice say, 'Excuse me ma'am.'"

In the doorway, Kangas said she saw a petite young woman, maybe 18, dressed in late 1890s black wool dress and holding a small crocheted travel bag in her folded hands.

Kangas said the figure was not a light or a shadow, but a flesh-and-blood figure characteristically smaller than a modern woman would be.

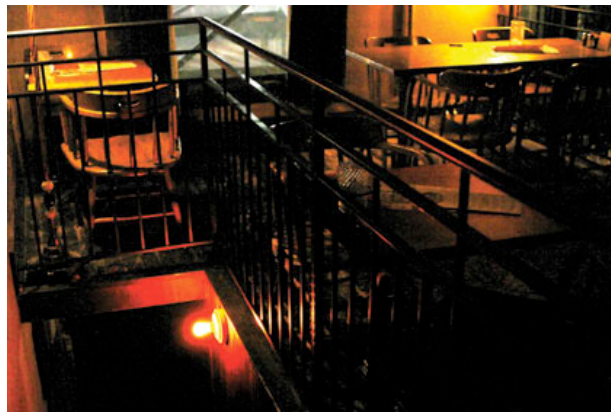
"She probably weighed about 85 pounds ... had her hair coming up in curls on the side with a black bonnet tied on the side with a big sash," Kangas said. "She turned around and looked at me and said, 'Has the train come yet?' She turned around and took one step in the hallway, turned to the right, took three steps on the terrazzo (floor), and nothing."

Panic gripped Kangas. She slammed the door, ran out of the



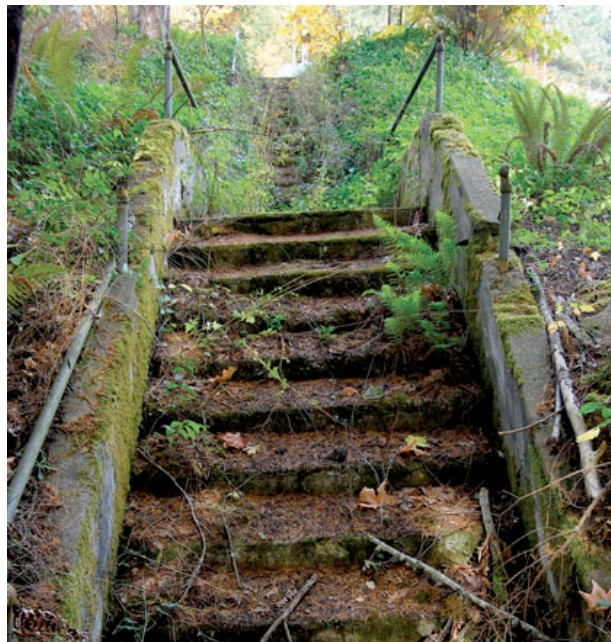
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The Olympic Club's basement, cluttered with old barroom artifacts, was a Prohibition-era speakeasy. Most servers at the restaurant on Wednesday night said they don't enjoy going down there, after too many unsettling stories passed down by the work staff.



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At the Olympic Club in downtown Centralia, servers have reported table candles re-lighting on the second-floor mezzanine after they were extinguished. The loft was once a card room, part of the combined restaurant and hotel built in the early 20th century.



museum and got into her car in the parking lot and locked the door.

"It makes the hair come up on the back of my neck just to think about it," Kangas said.

She said the other volunteers laughed at her when she told her story, but she and two tourists would later see a slender conductor, in the old conductor's office at the far end of the depot, walking back and forth writing notes on a clipboard.

"I don't think I have clairvoyance or ESP," Kangas said. "I'm just an average person secure enough to tell about what I saw. If it gives someone else peace about what they might have seen, that's good."

The Haunted Steps at Lincoln Creek

Another popular story surrounds a short flight of concrete steps just off of Lincoln Creek Road west of Centralia. The steps begin next to the road, and make a quick ascent into a lightly wooded area.

One popular story goes like this: The steps once led to a schoolhouse, which burned to the ground with children inside. If visitors go there at the right time, they'll hear the voices of children and feel a very cold and disturbing presence.

Mike Mahoney, who is putting the finishing touches on a new home on the property, has a different theory.

"There are no ghosts," he said while standing at the top of the steps Wednesday. "I've got a hound dog, though."

Mahoney claims to know the truth behind the old steps. He said that a trio of brothers with the last name "Katola" once lived in the area and worked in the woods for the duration of their lives.

At one point, they decided to build a school for local children living in the area, and the property served that purpose for a while, Mahoney said, but was eventually left vacant.

As for the tragic fire? Mahoney said it never happened. The wooden building was torn down in the late 1970s, he said. Mahoney said his family purchased the property in the early 1980s, and would have known if a fire had burned the building down.

Other locals confirmed that it was torn down without drama, but others swear by its haunted nature and claim to hear the sounds of children laughing and pattering about the forest floor.

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Concrete steps are all that remain of an old schoolhouse on Lincoln Creek Road, about four miles west of Centralia. The owner of the property says the school had an undramatic demolition in the late 1970s, although local lore tells a story of a violent fire and the presence of ghost children that play and chatter in the surrounding trees.