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'unmentionables' and the hauntings that are known of in Niagara."  
— Jim Diodati, Mayor of Niagara Falls**

# **NIAGARA'S MOST HAUNTED**

## **Legends and Myths**

**Peter Andrew Sacco**

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**LEAD SINGER OF CANADA'S CELEBRATED BAND THE SPOONS**

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and visitors alike to explore and experience the darker side of what  
Niagara has to offer as a truly dynamic destination."**

**— Kim Craitor, MPP Niagara Falls**



***NIAGARA'S MOST HAUNTED: Legends and Myths** is not just a book about ghosts and haunted places. It is a book that uncovers and explores areas in the Niagara region that are considered some of the richest in North American history. This book explores the most haunted places people have seen in Niagara with ghosts dating from the 1800's to 2012. Dare to open the cover and step into the haunted honeymoon capital of the world?*

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**NIAGARA'S MOST HAUNTED**

**LEGENDS AND MYTHS**

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## CHAPTER ONE: LEGENDS, MYTHS AND... HOAXES?

*What does it mean when a black cat crosses your path?*

*Ah, nothing, it's just going somewhere! (Peter Andrew Sacco)*

Perhaps the best place to begin is with working definitions for what I will be discussing in my book as well as my intention. Intentions and connotative meanings are everything when one is trying to make sense of the surrounding world, or of what they are reading. Don't believe me? Just read John Gray's, *Men Are From Mars And Women Are From Venus*, to see the incredible gender differences in communication. And you thought chasing after ghosts was a scary business!

Whenever I refer to *legends* in this book I will be referring to stories created and generated around sites which do have at least some iota of truth. At some point, something actually did happen which may have led to the haunting, that is of course if you believe in haunted places and ghosts. The problem with legends is they can get exaggerated or diminished, or completely misconstrued over time. Do you remember the "whisper game" we played as kids where we would be in a big circle and whisper around it a name someone started out with? Well, by the time the original name had made it around the circle, it had usually completely changed, sometimes even in gender.

Legends for the most part require three central ingredients to convert the story into a legend. First, it needs a culture, society or community of people who have been around for a fair period of time. You would need at least three or four generations to "quote-unquote" get the party started. At least an event, newsworthy situation or happenstance of significance had to occur. Second, (which would only follow simple logic) you need a place of historical significance for these legends to generate and maintain some momentum. A physical landmark with which people can identify. Generations, or even

centuries, later people can actually visit the place and get a “feeling” for themselves. It’s funny how many times people will go into some ancient place and “feel” something even though they have never even heard of the legend. Moreover, when you tell people the various “ghostly legends” in advance, then of course those expecting to “feel” something usually truly feel something. Conversely, the doubters and non-believers usually feel nothing other than the visit to the place was a waste of time. That is of course if they were only there to “feel” or see something rather than enjoy the historical significance. I will be referring to various places in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, which has a tremendously rich history resulting from the war of 1812 between the British and American soldiers. Niagara-on-the-Lake is said to be a “hotbed” for haunted places and I will include some of the interesting places we visited while making our film. Also, for those lovers of beauty, Niagara-on-the-Lake is a precious jewel of a town to visit. The architecture, quaint shops, old inns, live theatre, amazing landscapes and flowers, the Niagara River leading into Lake Ontario, the starry skies, horses and buggies and wineries make this one of the most beautiful places in the world to visit, and has been voted as such in tourism trade magazines and websites: one of the most beautiful places in the world. Add ghosts to Niagara on the Lake’s beauty and charm,, and the magic really begins to happen. It should also be noted that several movies, some better known than others, have used Niagara-on-the-Lake as their backdrop. Hopefully I am not coming off like a Chamber of Commerce commercial for Niagara on the Lake as I am not involved with them, but having said that, there is really good wine in the area and awesome pubs. Perhaps consuming “spirits” leads many to see ghostly spirits!

Communication is the third component needed to keep a legend alive and well and flourishing. At some level, people need to believe in the legend or at least some part of the story to give it legs and get it moving. Their verbatim and/or words spread like a virus to feed the legend and to teach others about it so they will pass it on. The communication has to be started by, and come from, individuals who possess some degree of credibility. In essence, they have to have some

semblance of intelligence! Take for example UFO's. Do you believe in them? Whether you believe in them or not, have you ever noticed whenever they do interviews with people claiming to have seen a UFO or have been abducted (usually anal probing), the person doing the interview is usually named Skeeter, Curly Jim-Bob or Moe, with a beat-up baseball cap on backwards and they are usually sporting one modest tooth in the middle of their grin? When you hear or read about their UFO testimony or close encounter, are you inclined to believe them as a reputable source? And just for the record, for those who think I am discriminating against Skeeter, Curly Jim-Bob and Moe, I too wear one of them beat-up baseball caps but have a full mouth of Chiclets at the writing of this book. Maybe things will change when Curly Jim-Bob tracks me down in his beat-up truck with the deer antlers fixed to the radiator grill.

For any legend to grow, maintain itself as an entity and continue to move from one generation to the next, I strongly believe communication is the greatest key to its success. Perhaps in some way in writing this book, I am an actor on the "communication highway" keeping the legends alive.

Myths when referred to in the colloquial sense are usually portrayed as a false story. When you take the concept of a myth in an academic context, it is neither judged in its merit of truth nor its falsity. It is accepted primarily as a story first and foremost. If anything, the story, the "myth" is left for the reader to discern whether they believe it or not and whether or not they would like to conduct their own research into it to determine its authenticity.

Some researchers and theorists assert that myths are distorted or falsified accounts of real historical events. This might have been done to sensationalize the event and to promote profit. For example, one takes a picture of a distant figure atop a lake. When people start to look at the photo, almost all of them start to see "sea monster". Before long, everyone starts visiting a place like Loch Ness because they want to see the monster known as Nessie.

Myths can also arise to explain rituals. Anthropologist James Frazer believed primitive man started with a belief system based on magical laws. Man uses magic to try and explain things to make sense of the world for themselves. Eventually, the people who bought into these myths start to lose faith in magic surrounding the myth. In turn, these individuals start instead to invent myths about gods and other deities. The “former magical” rituals become modified and are used as religious rituals intended to impress their gods and deities.

Some theorists propose that myths were and are still created to establish models and norms for behaviour. Myths are used as forms of story-telling, where rules, norms and ways of being are encrusted in models like religions and cosmology. Perhaps the best example of this is in Greek mythology. Various gods were created so people could relate to them. Often times these gods and other demi-gods in other belief systems represent certain natural phenomena or aspects of nature—earth, air, fire, water and spirit. Today for some, myths are used as a religious experience or way to get individuals to buy into belief systems, no matter how ridiculous or outlandish they might sound.

Do you believe in superstitions or generational unfounded, unproven and non-factual truths? If you are of the mindset that believing in ghosts and haunted is silly, then try this on for size. I am going to give you an interesting list of quasi-myths/superstitions. How many in the following list have you heard of? Furthermore, how many in the list did you believe in as a kid, still believe in as an adult, or teach your kids today? No need to journal folks, rather identify and perhaps chuckle at!

*“Make sure to tie your shoe laces or you will break your neck!”* – when was the last time headlines were made with someone breaking their neck because they tripped on their shoelace? FYI, the tumble will most likely not lead you to fall on your head!

*“Wear a hat and scarf or you will catch your death cold!”* –How many people actually die of hypothermia each winter in North America



because they never wore their hat or scarf? Moreover, how many people actually contract the flu or cold because they didn't wear a hat?

*"Break a mirror and seven years bad luck!"*—How many women reading this book, or men broke their compact mirror or something else that could create a reflection? When you think about it, you can see your reflection in a bath or swimming pool when looking down. Have you ever splashed the water and seen your reflection disappear immediately. Did you experience seven years bad luck?

*"Never walk under a ladder!"*—Okay, what happens if you walk under a ladder? What is supposed to happen exactly? Next time you climb a ladder or stairs are you going to slip and fall?

*"Never open an umbrella in a house!"*—This one is absolutely priceless! When was the last time you saw someone's house get struck by lightning because some person opened an umbrella in the house? I was once at a stage play where women actresses were walking around with open-umbrellas on stage. I was waiting for people to start streaming for the exits in fear of getting struck by lightning!

I think you get my point when it comes to myths. Some people might refer to them as fairy tales, fantasies, "ole wives tales" (bet there are lots of women who still despise this term), campfire stories and urban legends—just like the previously discussed legends. The greatest difference some would assert that exists between legends and myths is that the legend is more likely to hold just a tad more water of truth.

And now we come to the delicious hoaxes! In the world of psychology we refer to this as feigning—making something up for personal gain or to avoid facing responsibility. For the purpose of this book I will refer to a "hoax" as a deliberate attempt to trick or deceive the active viewing audience. For what purpose or real reason, you would have to ask the "hoaxer"!

Often times the hoax was originally created as a joke—pulling the wool over someone's eyes as a form of retribution for what was done to

them. Conversely, the hoax might have been created as a form of entertainment—to amuse or engage a select group of individuals, namely the gullible!

Some of the great “mysteries of the unknown” have turned out to be the raunchiest and nastiest of hoaxes. There have been cases of foot prints cast in forest mud believed to belong to Bigfoot only later to be proven to have been created by extra-large cast imprints made by some knucklehead who had nothing better to do than trounce through a forest making Bigfoot impressions. Of course there are also the mysteries of “crop circles” which were later proven to be the work of some lame-brain who had nothing better to do with his time. The lengths some people will go to create the ultimate hoax sometimes baffle the mind. If they put that same kind of effort into their careers or educations, they might have gone further in life instead of being a one hit wonder hoaxer! Needless to say, I will cover some of the hoax-related stories which have circulated throughout the Niagara Region.

Whether they are legends, myths or hoaxes, many of the stories about the haunted places in Niagara are worth reading about, if only for entertainment purposes. At the end it is up to you to be the judge and decide what you want to believe. Seeing is believing! You might choose to visit a specific place in person and see and feel it with your own eyes and be the judge and jury. Always keep one thing in mind—it has been said that one needs to believe first and then they will see. Perhaps ghosts are a little squeamish when it comes to resident doubters!



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