

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES



BOOK 3

Phantom Ships
The Jersey Devil
Living Dinosaurs?
...and More!

 **SADDEBACK**
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

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STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES

THE JERSEY DEVIL

“Oh, no, a flat tire!” the taxicab driver groaned. He steered his cab to the side of the road and looked around. He shivered slightly in the silence. There wasn’t another house for miles in this lonely part of the New Jersey countryside. And there were no other cars on the road. The scary creature everyone was calling the Jersey Devil flashed into his mind.

“Stop that nonsense!” he told himself crossly. “The sooner you get the tire changed, the sooner you’ll get out of here.” He quickly went to work.

He was about to put the jack back in the trunk when he heard a shrill scream! Looking up, he gasped in horror. A hideous creature was flying toward him! He left the jack and the tire behind as he dove into the back seat.

Then the monster landed on the roof

and the car rocked violently. Letting out another piercing scream, the creature rocked the cab back and forth. Was it trying to rip off the roof?

The cab driver decided to start the car. But he was shaking so badly, he was afraid he'd flood the engine. "Oh, please," he begged silently, "please start."

Suddenly, the engine roared to life, and the creature let go. As it rose into the sky, the driver cringed as he heard a final angry scream.

The jack and the damaged tire were left behind as the driver sped away.

* * *

That cab driver encountered the Jersey Devil back in 1929. And that was just one of many documented sightings. All across the state people were asking the same question: Is the Jersey Devil a hallucination, a mythical creature . . . or is it some kind of biological freak? Written records say it's been around for more than 200 years. And the creature's been

The Jersey Devil

seen by more than 2,000 people.

The Jersey Devil was first spotted in 1735. At that time, some said it was the unwanted child of a very poor woman. Supposedly, she'd cursed her thirteenth child, turning it into a monster.

Later, other people suggested it might be a still-living prehistoric animal. But no one has ever seen any other kind of animal—alive or dead—that looks anything like the Jersey Devil.

The creature is described as being about three and a half feet tall. They say it has a head like a horse, a long neck, and wings. Its back feet are hooves, and its front feet are paws. Some say it barks, but others have only heard it scream.

Among old records is a report made by Commodore Stephen Decatur, a naval hero. He was on a firing range when he saw a strange creature flying across the sky. He claims that he hit the creature with a cannon ball. *But it kept on flying.*

Napoleon Bonaparte's brother also

wrote about seeing the Jersey Devil while he was hunting in New Jersey.

During one week in January 1909, more than 1,000 people saw the creature! In fact, the Jersey Devil left tracks all over South Jersey and Philadelphia. In one town, strange hoof prints in the snow appeared. The prints went up trees and moved from roof to roof. And they disappeared in the middle of roads and fields—as if the creature had suddenly taken to the air. Trappers were called in to follow and capture the creature. None of them had seen tracks like those before.

All week long, the Jersey Devil killed chickens and dogs. It also terrorized people.

After 1909, the number of sightings reported to the authorities began to fall off. Had the creature gone away? Or died? Perhaps people *did* see it, but were worried that the authorities would think they were crazy.

Is the Jersey Devil a grotesque animal

The Jersey Devil

of some kind? A hysterical burst of imagination? Or is it just a hoax? The great number of sightings and the tracks left in the snow are hard to deny.

On the other hand, nothing seems to be able to kill it. In 1909, the Jersey Devil flew into the power lines above the tracks of the electric railroad. After a witness reported a loud explosion, it was found that 20 feet of track had melted in both directions! No body was ever found, but the Jersey Devil appeared later . . . in very good health.

So is the Jersey Devil a natural or supernatural being? Whatever it is, given the large number of witnesses, the people of New Jersey have definitely seen *something*.

STRANGE BUT TRUE STORIES

THE GHOST WHO LOVED TO DANCE

"I must be the luckiest guy alive," Jerry Palus thought. He gazed at the beautiful girl in his arms as they whirled around the dance floor. She smiled and put her head on his shoulder.

The year was 1939—a long time ago. In those days public ballrooms were very popular places. Since Jerry loved to dance, he often went to the ballrooms. It was a great way to meet new girls.

Tonight he was dancing with the most fascinating girl he'd ever met. She said her first name was Mary, but she wouldn't tell him her last name. She was a gorgeous creature with blue eyes and curly blonde hair. Her pretty white ball gown made her look like a movie star. Just one thing seemed a little strange. Her hands were *very* cold. And once—when

The Ghost Who Loved to Dance

Jerry kissed her—he couldn't help shivering. Even her *lips* were cold!

After the last dance, Mary told Jerry where she lived. "Could you give me a ride home?" she asked. "And would you mind driving down Archer Avenue before you take me home?"

Jerry was puzzled. Archer Avenue wasn't anywhere near Mary's house. But, hey—he really liked this girl. If that was what she wanted, why not?

As they drove down Archer Avenue, Jerry saw that they were approaching Resurrection Cemetery. Mary looked up when they neared the gates. "Stop here," she said. "I have to get out."

Jerry was confused, but he pulled over to the curb and parked. He started to open his door, but Mary stopped him. "No, Jerry, just drop me off here, okay? I have to say goodbye now," she said firmly. "Where I'm going, you can't follow."

Before Jerry could say another word, Mary leaped out of the car and ran toward

the cemetery's tall, wrought iron gates. *Then she vanished!* Stunned, Jerry wondered if he'd been dancing with a ghost!

The next day Jerry drove to the address Mary had given him. A middle-aged woman answered his knock at the door. She invited him in and listened to his story. As Jerry talked, he glanced around the room. A photograph of Mary was on the table!

"There!" he said excitedly, pointing to the framed picture. "That's her. That's the girl I danced with last night."

The woman recoiled in shock. "What are you saying?" she cried out. "That's our daughter. You *couldn't* have danced with her last night, young man. She died five years ago."

* * * *

In later years Jerry Palus's pretty dance partner came to be known as "Resurrection Mary." She's one of Chicago's most famous ghosts. Some people call Mary's story an *urban myth*—

The Ghost Who Loved to Dance

an often-repeated tale that grows and changes as it's passed along. Yet nobody has ever been able to trace the story back to its true source.

Most ghost stories are probably urban myths. What makes Mary's story different? Two things: The number of believable eyewitnesses, and the physical evidence some say she left behind.

The first story about Mary was told in 1934. Supposedly, she and her boyfriend were dancing at a ballroom on Archer Avenue. Sometime during the evening, Mary stormed out after an argument. As the story goes, she was hitchhiking down Archer Avenue when she was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver. Her grieving family supposedly had her buried in Resurrection Cemetery.

Then, in 1939, she went dancing again—this time with Jerry Palus. He was the first person to get a close look at her ghost. But he wouldn't be the last.

Ralph, a cab driver, saw Mary's ghost

next. On a cold January night, Ralph had just dropped off a passenger. When he turned onto Archer Avenue, he spotted a young blonde woman wearing a frilly white dress. "She was standing there with no coat pointing up Archer Avenue," Ralph reported.

Thinking she might have had car trouble, he stopped and offered her a ride. She nodded her thanks and climbed in. As he pulled into traffic, Ralph asked why she was out alone on such a cold, dark night. But the pretty blonde just smiled in response. Then she pointed up Archer Avenue again.

She didn't say a word until the cab reached Resurrection Cemetery. Then she cried out, "Here! *Here!*"

Startled, Ralph hit the brakes. He looked all around for a house or an apartment building. But nothing was there except the cemetery.

When Ralph glanced back at his passenger, she'd disappeared!

The Ghost Who Loved to Dance

Over the years, more people claimed to have seen Mary. Some said she dashed into the street in front of their cars. The drivers were certain they'd hit her. But when they got out of their cars, there was no body in the street.

Some people say they've seen Mary lying by the road, an apparent hit-and-run victim. But when the ambulance arrives, the injured girl has mysteriously disappeared. On some especially snowy nights, though, the imprint of a body can still be seen in the snow!

Other drivers on Archer Avenue say they've seen a girl dancing alone by the side of the road. Apparently, Mary's ghost still likes to dance.

As for physical evidence, even non-believers have trouble explaining this version of the story: In 1976, the police answered an emergency call. A young woman had accidentally been locked inside Resurrection Cemetery! But when the officer arrived, he couldn't find her.