

Scary Stories Across Maryland with Dr. Andy Duncan

Fri, Sep 30, 2022 1:41PM • 1:04:17

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

story, maryland, people, legend, ghost stories, books, ghost, wise, library, places, bridge, building, civil war, interested, local, writing, allegheny county, tunnel, moved, exorcism

SPEAKERS

Announcer, Andy Duncan, Ashley Biggs

Announcer 00:01

This podcast is brought to you by the Maryland State Library Agency. The MSLA podcast features presenters from Statewide Youth Programs, as well as learning opportunities for library staff and resources for patrons of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled.

Ashley Biggs 00:19

Hi, everyone, this is Ashley with the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and I am so excited today because it's, it's all about weirdness. And we have. We have Andy Duncan. He is an English faculty member at Frostburg University, where he's been since 2008. He holds his BA in journalism from the University of South Carolina and MA in creative writing from North Carolina State University, and an MFA in fiction writing from the University of Alabama. And we got connected Andy through librarians who said, You are the King of weird stories to have you happen to have some juicy ones about Maryland. So I got to ask how did you go from you know, journalism and fiction writing to studying all things weird.

Andy Duncan 01:17

First of all, I gotta say you were very tactful not to say today is all about weirdness. And therefore we have this weird person. But But I do think I do. I did laugh when you said librarians connected us because boy, has has every librarian in my life been long suffering, hearing about all that all this stuff. But they've also been a huge hail. The moment you start asking about ghost stories, or monsters in the woods, or what are unsolved murders, their librarians eyes tend to light up and they say, Oh, well, we have this and this and this collection and that thing.

Ashley Biggs 02:03

Well, you find that is right.

Andy Duncan 02:05

Why is that?

Ashley Biggs 02:07

Every library, every library has had some weird thing going on in it. And it's not always paranormal, or I shouldn't say at all ever paranormal, or anything like that. But libraries are just, there's always a weird thing in it. Like, you put your coffee cup down and you swear, you put it on the reference desk, and it's over in the children's department, head get LBPD. I'm known to take pens and put them down and I go away and I come back and my pen is gone. And nobody moved it. So who knows?

Andy Duncan 02:46

I have I have experienced such things in libraries before so I can I can well imagine. And, and the old Washington Street Library and Cumberland, which for only a few more weeks will be the headquarters library, the Allegheny County system. It's moving to the much renovated and expanded LaVale library in the fall. My students always tell me about how the old Washington Street Library, which is a pre Civil War building is haunted. And the evidence they always give me is that books fall off the shelf for no reason. I always ask them, if they've spent any time on shelves of books, eventually they they fall off some of them. But if you're all alone in the library, when the book falls off several rows behind you, then it's I can understand why you would say Well, time to lock. I'll let the day shift. Check out check that out back there. But But you asked about my weird history, if you will. And it certainly did not begin with moving to Maryland. I as you can tell from my voice. I'm from South Carolina originally. And I spent my first 40 years. The short version is 20 years in South Carolina 10 years in North Carolina 10 years in Alabama. So I lived my whole life in these gothic places are haunted with ghosts, and families that valued oral storytelling and eccentrics and eccentricity. And then I moved to Western Maryland in 2008. Now excuse me 2006 I joined the faculty two years later, but my wife joined the faculty first Sydney In 2006, that's when we moved here. So of course, we moved into an area where there are our hauntings and cryptids and and snarly gas tears and and Civil War halted Civil War battlefields and unsolved murders and so forth. So needless to say I felt very much at home. But ever since ever since I was a kid. I've been fascinated by you know, the Loch Ness libraries again, I was largely raised by the librarians in Whitesburg, South Carolina. And I was always checking out any books there were on the Loch Ness monster on UFOs some ghosts of course. And most of us outgrow those interests and I just never did. And and even in my journalism career for the years, I was working for newspapers and magazines, I look back through my clips. And I was constantly writing about gravity heals the optical illusions where you think you're looking downhill and in fact, you're looking up hill so that when you roll backwards, it weirds you out. And and all of these have a go story or a legend associated with them or or a teenage ritual, I was writing about these things I was writing about the so called Curse of the Scottish Play. So that when the Shakespeare Company in High Point, North Carolina was doing their production of and I got a lot of people delighted to talk about the legends and the lower of of that

particular play by Shakespeare and why and why why that play uniquely, might lend itself to that sort of, of of legendry and that sort of nervousness on the part of people who are who were staging it. I spent days following around half a George file set the light UFO investigator, the Dean of UFO investigators in North Carolina, who happily showed me his garage full of filing cabinets, with everything subdivided and labeled. And I've just always been fascinated in this stuff. So of course it shows up in fiction. It shows up in my classrooms. It shows up in everything I do and and recently I've received some grants

Andy Duncan 07:42

from the university and from from other entities that has allowed me to really delve into some of this on the regional level Western Maryland in particular. But as I was preparing for this conversation, I was looking back on my shelves of books that are currently not falling off but will soon enough and and I saw I was reminded of all these things elsewhere in Maryland, too. It's it's a weird state we are, but we are fortunate to be in a state that has so many histories, plural, so many geographies, plural, so many so many populations plural. And and so many stories from every era and stories that are still being generated now we're lucky in many respects that we have so many stories to tell one another and so many people dedicated to preserving the stories including librarians to bring us back around to that theme. So is that is that a hill?

Ashley Biggs 09:01

That's a huge help. So you know I my before coming to Maryland so I grew up in Delaware and I heard I hung out in libraries investigating the weird do so you're right and so I asked the question having having studied the weird and different in in so many areas like in South Carolina and that and in Maryland is it true does every does every county every city have a cry baby bridge or something like that, you know where we all kind of have similar stories or or is that like Cry Baby bridge? Only a Delaware?

Andy Duncan 09:43

No, no, there are certainly cry berry Cry Baby excuse me bridges all around, including including Maryland. People who've never heard the term Cry Baby bridge may not know what we're talking about, but Uh, if you are in Prince George's County and I mentioned governor's bridge, or governor's Bridge Road, or if you're in, in the on the border there of how Harford County, and Baltimore County and I mentioned the Jericho covered bridge, you may be you may be nodding your head and saying, oh, yeah, but these are these are bridges that tend to be narrow, tend to be at least at one time out in the country, rural areas dark, not much light, sort of a destination that you would have to know about. You would have to be local to know about these, these legends do not tend to grow up around, you know, six lane interstate bridges, you know, but these are places and we call them cry berry Cry Baby bridges as a sort of umbrella term. In that supposedly if you go there late at night, or at certain dates or certain times or under certain circumstances, you turn the the lights headlights off and you count to 12 or something. Are you are you are you say the magic words, and you and you can hear babies crying in the distance. And there's usually a legend about how babies were drowned their babies thrown off the bridge. And and there are infinite variations of this. Tragic brides who who jumped to their to their day

as murder cases where people were purposefully drowned old battles of the revolution or the Civil War or what have you. And there's there always stories surrounding the sounds you hear and who supposedly hearts the bridge sometimes, there's also the wrinkle of the handprint show up. When you drive away you there was nobody outside the car. And yet you see the clear handprint of somebody having touched your car. And if it was a child's handprint, well then that's even creepier you know, and, and so these these places become Locus of Power for for lope for for the people in that area. And often a sort of, if not hazing, a sort of rite of passage, you get your license, and then you have to drive out one night out to the crybaby

Andy Duncan 12:36

and, and, and, and these sorts of things show up everywhere. I'm sure that those two I just named are only the start of, of bridges that have reputations like this. But but other bridges develop very different reputations for this for similar reasons. There's a there's a, I have visited one out in out in rural Nebraska now talk about rural talk about a flat landscape out in the cornfields. But there is a lonely road with a very sharp U turn with a one lane bridge on it with no lights around anywhere, but a major power line does cross the road at that spot. And the local story is that out there. If you go out there in the middle of the night, then just by holding a light bulb in your in your hand, the light bulb will illuminate so electrified is the place but there again, there's a there's a story to justify getting out of your car and scaring yourself for sitting there with the lights off, you know, and and there of course, time honored reasons for teenagers wanting to get out of the house and go sit in the dark in the car, you know, with groups of their friends. But I'm sure that there are plenty of bridges with stories like that. Try. There are plenty of places including Maryland, where there are cliffs called lovers leap where supposedly the star crossed lovers fail long but in some pre contemporary, literally pre historic time. It's very hard to find an actual such incident written down here the same basic story is told at the narrows just west of Cumberland, in Allegheny County, and then a few miles away also in Allegheny County, a very similar story. Tell that Dan's rock they are on the front of the they're at the Allegheny front where you can look across 100 miles of territory, but but this is a this is an across North America legend a I'm the Maid of the Mist tour boat at Niagara Falls is named for the local go story version, the maid who failed her death, etcetera. And so many of the so all you need is a cliff basically, or a steep waterfall. But you But so many of those particular stories, the lovers leap stories are also about a forbidden or taboo or controversial interracial marriage or Interracial Love affair between a white person and an indigenous person the the proverbial tragic Indian princess. And so you have to wonder how much this nearly universal story is, is some sort of heavily coated, more easy to deal with sort of cultural admission of the guilt and the genocide and all those all those all but exterminated indigenous peoples whose land this was before the European settlers and so forth came in and took it. So I'm sure there are other lovers lead stories elsewhere in in in Maryland. The Calvert Cliffs, for all I know, could have a similar story. But yeah, and so some things are just universal. And some places just have a story, utterly unique. I think Baltimore, for all its many other charms has one of those, it has not only the ongoing historical and literary and medical mystery of just what killed Edgar Allan Poe, because because he certainly died there in the city. This is documented. And and people as long as people can still discuss anything, people will be advancing theories over what it was he died of, because the old just drank himself to death no longer no longer satisfies we've become more sophisticated than that. So even as we are trundling over those clothes over and over and over.

Andy Duncan 17:19

We also have the wonderful story of the pogo toaster, the costumed person who showed up to leave to leave wine and flowers pose grave for generations. And was that a single person was that a assortment of people was that a particular secret society are devoted to doing this? That that's that all those poll elements intertwined, which come to us from the history and also from people very much inspired by the stories Poe wrote that that that's, that's a Baltimore thing. I don't know of a corresponding story quite like that. anywhere, anywhere else, anywhere else in Maryland.

Ashley Biggs 18:13

No, that's definitely unique actually, in the US. Because I had to so being originally from Delaware, and I grew up with, you know, stories of polio and things like that. When I moved to Louisiana, which is, of course, another state filled with amazing tales of the weird, you know, the PO toaster, fascinated people, anybody I met who I talked to him about, so yes, it's definitely something incredibly unique.

Andy Duncan 18:42

Now, I'll tell you how to now. Exorcism stories are told everywhere. And as with so many of these things, we're talking about keep in mind that for some people, this is something you trot out at Halloween, to scare yourself or scare the kids. And for other people, it is a matter of absolute religious faith that there is an afterlife and therefore ghosts exist and therefore I know Pop Pop was communicating with me. When the bird was thinking outside my window on the morning of his funeral, one of my students told me that story years ago, and it is beautiful, and it just sticks in the head. Because even though you could, you could probably demonstrate that a bird saying outside the house like almost every day that summer, and every summer before that, that's not going to dislodge the feeling that that young person had of grief relieved and hearing the bird in this completely new light on the day of the funeral. And you just can't take that away from people. That's that's that's how that's how That's how faith appears, you know, it's these sorts of reinforcing incidents. And but certainly exorcism is for many people just a simple fact the devil exists. The devil is always trying to get into us. Not just metaphorically but literally. And sometimes they have to be cast out. But while there's a very old, rich history of this, I think you could argue that Maryland is unique in that respect, because we have not just a an exorcism story, that we have the exorcism story. We have the case from cottage Park, in Prince George's County. And we know and we now know his name because just this just recently, after the man died of a stroke, age 85 It was the young man who at age 14 was the subject of the exorcism rituals that actually got written up in the newspapers at the time. In 1949, when William Peter Blatty, a devoutly Catholic young man was a student at the Catholic University that is Georgetown and read it in the DC papers. And this was he always say that this was the nugget that inspired his novel The Exorcist, which became and remains a phenomenon thanks to the the Hollywood movie. And Mark, years ago back in the 90s. Oh, what's the Mark, Mark assassinate the haunted boy of cottage City was the article he published in strange magazine in 1999. They found a lot of the facts behind this. But now we finally have an actual name. And the young man who was 14 at the time was Ronald Edward Hunkeler. Hu, n k, e. L. E. AR, he just died last year, he died at five, after this extraordinary series of incidents, where the priests worked over him in Maryland, and then took him to Missouri, and worked over him there. And the priests recorded bloody red scratches of writing appearing on his body,

apparently in answer to questions, et cetera, et cetera. That was like the most the most lurid aspect of it all. But after the priests declared him cured, he went home and apparently live a normal life. He became an engineer, he worked for NASA, he worked on the Apollo missions. He retired in 2001. And, according to his family, the only thing the only sign of scarring, psychologically speaking, from that extraordinary time when he was an adolescent, was that he was just worried about being found out, he was terrified that the people at NASA, who are who are, you know, are a rather rather scientific, pragmatic bunch. As you can imagine, he was terrified, they would find out about his his past that this would discredit him, and that people would make fun of him. The family reported that every Halloween

Andy Duncan 23:43

he would try to get out of the house and stay down for fear that somebody one day would show up on the doorstep. And so, are you the boy who, you know, so he was so he was more haunted by the, by the fame, the infamy and the pop culture element. Then he was hounded by, by Satan. And I don't know in the accounts I have read whether he was a religious man or not, clearly the family was when he was a kid. Because you don't just you don't just call a priest the way you call a plumber. You have to have some sort of belief system in place. But But I just think that's fascinating. There are lots of of possession and exorcism cases claimed all over the world and arguably even in you know, ancient records and Scripture and so forth. But I think a case could be made that that young man who good for him built a life and a family after all that that that you can, that it started right there and in PG County is all my students from there call it and I always point this out to them and, and some of them are just some of them know about it, having heard about it. Some of them are just completely blindsided and just real and say, Oh, no, I had no idea. And there's others, having, you know, having grown up there and are hearing it now for the first time just laugh and nod their heads and says, Yeah, that sounds like

Ashley Biggs 25:18

I can I can tell those who are listening right now that the library does have a copy of The Exorcist. I don't know of any library that wouldn't have a copy. So it can be checked out. But what if somebody wanted to follow in your footsteps and find out a little bit more about where say a legend like the Exorcist came from? What are some of the steps you take to learn more about the stories because like, just like we talked about, like with Cry Baby bridge and covered bridges, and you know, stories, like The Exorcist, they all start somewhere they are starting to legend. And whether or not they're, they're true or not, there's always some some surrounding evidence of some kind one way or another, how do you how do you as a as I guess, pulling on your genitals training, look for that?

Andy Duncan 26:11

Well, there's one one starts anywhere, the light, the light, Charles, for the collector of anomalies, and basically weirdness from all the newspapers and magazines and scientific journals of his day. Like to say one measure is the circle starting anywhere. So really, anywhere you start, if there's some family story, if there's some story in your neighborhood, if there's some story, you grew up hearing about a bridge, about a, a, an old house, about the building that used to be on that lot about the woods that used to be where the development is now, any of these lost or abandoned spaces that fill our lives,

well, then you've got a handle, you know, you've got something to go out. The local historical society is often a good place to start the local collection at your local public library. Or if you have a community college or university, in your area, often they have some sort of, probably not for circulation, but some sort of special collection. Devoted to things genealogical societies have really have really done a lot to keep such collections nourished, and, and the holdings catalogued and so forth. A lot of volunteer work has gone into this and you can you can see the benefit of that sort of record for a Genealogical Society. But But simply finding out who lived in a particular house, for example, that sort of thing is very, very helpful. Old phone books, old city directories, newspaper holdings, but for just things like the general study of this stuff, if you're not just interested in a local ghost, or a local folk tale, or legend, but you're interested in the whole subject,

Andy Duncan 28:25

being fascinated with locale and fascinated with geography. I usually start with something that takes a statewide angle I've got I'm just happen to be looking at two of the books sitting here in front of me. One is weird, Maryland, by Matt. Matt Lake. Yes. All these books are like all books are like out of date, the moment you they publish, but still, there's a lot of great information in them. And I've also got here, The Big Book of Maryland ghost stories by an economist, which is a great trove of information. But often, cities, towns, counties, have local folks who do their own local books on these topics. They're a terrific little book, Alice Weinberg's spirits of Frederick. She was a longtime journalist in Frederick County and Frederick city. And and she clearly had that reporters have built a good reporters ability to like go into anybody's house and just had them talk to her and write down what they said, you know, everybody from this book came out in the late 70s. Everybody from like teenagers to, to 80 something year old women, you know, still living on the homeplace. Mayor errs, doctors, the clerks at the grocery store, she got stories from everybody. And then she would go and check out where the church was or what the history was, and so forth. That that book in particular, which, which you can find in various libraries, is a sort of like a how to have this sort of thing you just taught everybody and then you follow the threads wherever, wherever they lead. But there are professional folklorists. Sociologists, people who study anthropologists, people who study, the stories we tell and the why. Increasingly, there is serious academic attention being paid to this these subjects. Many, many years ago, I had for I first moved to an area, and I asked one of the local historic society, leaders, where are the ghost stories, basically, and they got mad, and they said, Why? Why would you be interested in nonsense like that? They just completely dismissed it. And for generations, the academic attitude that was sadly common, I'm afraid, even ghost stories, much less witchcraft, much less UFOs, much less cryptids of Bigfoot stories, forget about it. But increasingly, more attention is being paid from serious academics. So we've had a number of very good anthologies and books published in recent years, that take a rather sober sided academic view of the stories that we tell and why. And so once you get interested, you start pulling those threads, and then you start to see things not just as purely local phenomena, but as variations, larger patterns, Civil War co stories, civil rights, NGOs, stories, conspiracy theories, involving mysterious deaths involving the national defense and the Cold War, for example. And there, this reminds us that, just like the Genealogical Society, and the reference folks at the library, there are plenty of other experts whose brains you can pick, you probably are not far from some serious Civil War buffs, who can tell you all about the maneuvers and the strategies and and the heraldry and the promotions and in the medical corps, but very often, the Civil War battlefield is also a trove of ghost stories, you know, and that sort of

thing. And so, all that it's just it's such a huge topic. But but there is a, there are good books being published all the time. And they're also good websites, as a roadside America and Atlas Obscura. To pioneering websites that take a nationwide perspective. And really Atlas Obscura aims to go global. These are very good online places to start looking for stuff to, but one really, one really starts anywhere, but don't don't overlook your local experts. What do you know about that old house over there? You know, just asking your neighbors this. You may be surprised what you what you find out.

Ashley Biggs 33:46

Now, a lot of individuals in the library for the blind and print disabled community. You know, there is a lot of materials are inaccessible to because of, you know, scan, like OCR technology isn't very good on older newspapers. Yes. Yeah. And that kind of brings me about to oral histories, something that goes mentioned was, you know, go and talking to your neighbors. But oral histories and stories are a huge part of every culture. In Maryland, have you run across any oral stories that, of course, they've been written down by now but oral stories that as they, the older they get, the less or that or that have changed over time?

Andy Duncan 34:45

Well, one, I know in our area, for many years, a number of the high school have had basically oral history gathering projects every year. Where year after year, the juniors and the seniors would go out and on a given theme, talk to everybody they could find out that used to work in the coal mines, for example, or who are talking about what sports and games were like when they were kids growing up in the area. And this is all this is all terrific. This is all terrific stuff.

Ashley Biggs 35:24

You know, oh, my God, one day this happened story kind of came out of those things, too.

Andy Duncan 35:28

Yes. Oh, absolutely. And, and, but the, and we have again, locally in Allegheny County, we have some volunteers who have done a lot of labor through the years finding out about the lives of the mining families, the coal mining families in the Georges Creek Valley, where just enormous amounts of coal came from during the heyday of the coal mining, which was long ago. But plenty of people alive. Remember the stories told by their parents and their grandparents. And so they've collected a lot of this local history in three volumes today titled, miner recollection recollections, but you're quite right about things that are inaccessible to people who are visually impaired. Because digitization is slow. It requires personnel, it requires resources. Even if you use like a sort of phone app, like I use every day, to just scan pages willy nilly everywhere I go and email them to myself, Well, okay, but that's still time consuming. And it's not translating it into into an oral text that can be listened to, that would be additional work and so forth. So, so you, you and the staff around, you know, a lot better than I do, what materials are readily available? For the for the visually impaired, and which ones and which ones are not.

Ashley Biggs 37:13

But I got my book list ready.

Andy Duncan 37:17

Yeah. Well, that's, that's, that's great. And I don't know, I know that. My guess would be that at least some of the newspapers of record, perhaps, are getting some coverage in this way. And certainly, certainly a general interest newspaper, those that we still have with us, is a trove of information, not just the birth and the death, the opiates and, and the marriages and the elections. But also every time there's a there's any sort of historical event being commemorated anytime Halloween rolls around, anytime Christmas rolls are out and they find people to talk about the past Christmas customs. In the Germanic speaking parts of Maryland, including much of central and western Maryland, you have the the yuletide tradition of the bell snickles for example, the sort of goblin like creatures that accompanied Santa who would show up in costume and play tricks. There was like the Halloween element of Christmas tied. But you were talking you you mentioned stories that how stories change our stories that evolve. I can think of two examples that that one of the oldest ghost stories in Maryland, and in fact, it has been argued it was argued in the mid 20th century, that it was the oldest ghost story. In Maryland, at least the oldest one we have any old record of is like the the 17th century Legend of The Blue Dog in in Charles County. That the ghostly dog that guarded it's its owner's house than a particular stretch of road, a story that comes down through through the centuries basically, but that dog was associated with a property or stay in a stretch of road called Rose Hill. Well, centuries later, you have a mansion in Frederick County called Rose Hill. So sure enough, you look at Alice Weinberg's book or you go on the ghost tour of Frederick and and its own Blue Dog legend has appeared at Rose Hill in in Frederick County. The historic house and and you just know that that's just like a simple word association. You know if what if one rose he'll have a blue dog in the 17th century, or by God, this Rose Hill in Frederick County is going to have a blue dog in the 18th in the in the 19th and 20th centuries. So that's one the the other which may be my favorite ghost story. Certainly my favorite Civil War ghost story in Maryland, is the story of wises Well,

Andy Duncan 40:35

of the bad part of the battle of South Mountain. No one is quite sure. Where wises whale was, though most sources say it was near where the Reno monument is now we're general Jesse Rena was was shot dead. But this is the story about all the bodies after the Battle of South Mountain, lying around all the casualties. And there was simply no time for the Union. Troops that were pursuing the Confederates back across the river to bury all these bodies. So they had to turn to local people, including Mr. wise or old man wise, as he is very commonly referred to, and he was paid good cash money to bury these dozen or so bodies that were owned his property, give them a proper burial. Well, the story goes, that Mr. Wise pocketed the money and gathered the bodies up and dump them unceremoniously down the well on his property. Now, it has to have been a dry well defunct, well, no sane person would drop corpses in the way all that you required for your drinking water every day. So we will assume it was a different whale or a disused whale. But of course, in the best AC comics tradition, just like a Tales from the Crypt episode, the ghosts of the soldiers came back to Mr. Wise, saying, demanding a proper burial, are threatening him with the usual supernatural visitations and

harbor so like Dickens is Scrooge, a formative ghost story in US culture in many respects, but like screech, Mr. Wise has this terrified change of heart, and somehow gets the bodies out and buries them properly. But that story, when it arises, I have not pulled the thread far back alone to see when that arose, although I believe it is in one of the 19th century collections of Civil War lore, it varies depending on who told the story. If a Confederate sympathizer of whom we had many at the time in Maryland, and still do, was telling the story, then it would be like the Yankees themselves who dumped these Confederate bodies down the well. Right? You would have you know, this would be a story of a of a Yankee atrocity, right. But other other stories are told involving Mr. Wise as the as the culprit, but whether they, whether the dead man, our Union soldiers, or Confederate soldiers, or both, and her main gold, these details vary. And it's very interesting. It's like, it's like, one of the many interesting things about this story is that is that it's like a template for one's own sympathies or thoughts about the war in the post war time, what I really also I value that story, because it's so focuses on the horror of the story, because whether one believes in ghosts or not, and again, that's a religious issue with some people. But whether one is concerned with ghosts or not, the Civil War was a series of atrocities, a series of bloody horrors, that scarred and nation unto this day, and one only has to watch 20 minutes of the Ken Burns documentary, or flip through a few pages of Matthew Brady photographs to see the evidence of this. And and these, these were people's farms, people's front yards, people's main streets, that suddenly became slaughterhouses, our carnal houses, every town every building still They are in Sharpsburg, Maryland, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, that was there at the time of the battle was pressed into service as a hospital or a morgue. The bloodstains literally touched every, every part of life, particularly in much of the East and Southeast United States in a way that no conflict before our sense has ever done, thank goodness. But this story, we so often don't talk about that aspect of it. We talk about, you know, the chsp strategy movements are we talk about the politicking in Washington, but I value the story of wise as well, because it focuses just on that post on that immediate post battle horror. And I love that the character's name is wise. It's almost a fable. How wise was Mr. Wise? It's like a cautionary tale of like, don't don't don't think you're too wise, Mr. Wise, because the dad have their have their eye on you.

Ashley Biggs 46:12

Have you found that the introduction of the internet has made has changed some of the stories like you were talking about how some of the elements of which soldiers, right, has has the internet changed? how some of these stories develop and and are shared because I I actually heard a very similar story to Mr. wises story, but up in a New Castle, Delaware.

Andy Duncan 46:41

Okay, I bet. I wouldn't be surprised. ,

Ashley Biggs 46:45

Yeah but it was a woman and she was dumping her husband's in the but I remember, I remember hearing that story. You know, when I was probably 14-15 years old on a message board or reading it, I should say. Yeah. So how how has the internet?

Andy Duncan 47:07

I think it's in some ways it's too soon detail how long term it's going to affect things. But I mean, just like any other development of human history, it has like so many developments, it has it has these enormous effects, some of which can be seen as positive, some of which can be seen as negative, certainly every year more stuff. And again, we have the the accessibility problem. Simply putting it out online does not make it accessible for all populations as we have said, however, compared to having to get in a car and go down to the National Archives, or go down to the local public library during its hours which might well be during the work day to find this stuff, it is a big benefit to have it digitized and accessible from from wherever you happen to be even your phone, this is a positive people who are interested in these topics can find one another so much more readily. The genealogists can tell us about this, how just about any question you pose on on these these sites, gets readily answered with authoritative information from somebody who turns out to be interested in the same thing that you're interested in. Let me put in a plug for the Find A Grave website that's a wonderful sort of community creation that I find out new things every time I go there, it's it's very searchable. But again, accessibility for the visually impaired is an issue. There are bad indie toxic elements at play to you go on to any number of sites for like, colonists stories and ghost stories and so forth. And it becomes very easy to see that some people are just cutting and pasting a story from one place and putting it in a completely different and and like the same story that used to be unique to a particular location is now getting told like any place that has a creepy house in it. It's absolutely having an effect, but that's true of like every other sphere of American life.

Ashley Biggs 49:46

I'd like to close out with your favorite story that you've heard so far. I mean, and that's probably an impossible task. I know that for me like because Like I love I love ghost stories and I love paranormal stories and legends and goblins and all that fun stuff. But what is the one story that's that you keep coming back to the as like, you know I could listen to this one over and over again this one gives me a chill this one gives me a sense of satisfaction. Is it the Mr. Wise story or is it a different story?

Andy Duncan 50:25

I'm fascinated by the pulpal tunnel, Paul Paul tunnel like Paul Paul, Pa W space, Pa W space tunnel, which is the most remarkable structure on the Cumberland and Ohio Canal. They see an o canal. In many ways that whole canal project was a folly, outdated for most of its existence, in contrast to the b&o Railroad just to the north, which took most of the freight. And yet so much of Maryland's history along the Potomac is caught up with that long building of the canal and the long life of the canal well into the 20th century. But the most remarkable structure and the only tunnel on it is the Powell Powell tunnel, where I have been multiple times. And it was it was when you look at what was required to drive this tunnel. And this waterway through a mountain using pre Civil War technology, blast blasting powder basically and peaks and Pike's the back breaking labor of it, the sort of insane hubris of it. And countless stories from the building on it, of the hardships undergone by the workers, overwhelmingly Irish Americans, but certainly including slave labor, black Americans who were owned all their suffering and hardship for a project that none of them would ever see any real economic benefit from it wasn't going to change their status. And then, but then once it was in operation, the ghost story surrounding it,

the sort of literal rite of passage, it was to guide one's boat through that Stygian darkness, the complicated sort of traffic maneuvers that were required, because it wasn't wide enough for two lanes of traffic, basically, boat traffic. So there was this elaborate etiquette about who went through first and who had to yield, which was of course, as often observed in the breach as in the observance. So fights would break out, shoot outs would re up. And, and now you can go and I don't know, if it's reopened during the pandemic, it was closed for a time for renovations, I would have to look, but normally it is, it is the State Park is part of the federal part now, the canal Park, and you can ride your bicycle through it or whatever. But the water is still there, the tunnel is still there. And it is so charged with all this history, and all this, all these reminders of the way to have simultaneously the the ingenuity required and the discipline required to build the thing at all to build this thing that shouldn't exist. And simultaneously, all the atrocities and hardships and miseries that went into the building of it. I just find it like it's I'm not a religious person. But it's a very moving experience to go from the light into the darkness of that tunnel and out the other side, and then turn around and do the same thing again, by the time you get back to your car there in the parking area. And this I might add would be, I think a perhaps an even more profound experience for the visually impaired. Because you would be detecting as you go in how the sound changes, how the the air changes around you.

Andy Duncan 54:54

It really is a sort of a descent and a rebirth to go through. That tunnel. So there's a host of, of anecdotes surrounding and ghost stories surrounding it in the inevitable weeping child, and so on and so forth. But to me, just the the experience of it. I mean, it's it's a building. It's a construction that halts us, I think and continues to haunt us. So I think of of all the notes I've scribbled for this conversation, I think the title is important to get in there.

Ashley Biggs 55:34

I think so too. That sounds like a heroic feat of engineering, but a devastating way to get it done.

Andy Duncan 55:42

Yeah. And we should note, too, I haven't said much about black history so far. But any industry pre Civil War, any construction project, pre Civil War was largely a matter of slave labor or to facilitate the slave trade. Every every fort, every stagecoach stop. Every canal, every railroad and every building that exists still from the, from the antebellum days. Churches, school buildings, municipal buildings, private homes, is in part a living reminder of slavery. People associate slavery happened on big plantations down, down east or south of here. And yeah, I did, but it happened everywhere. It happened in Frostburg, it happened in Garrett County, it happened in montgomery county, it happened all along the Potomac. It happened in the coal mines, it happened everywhere. So so that to and of all the people and all the people whose footsteps I have followed in writing the histories, writing the oral histories, writing the sociological pieces, writing the pop culture, ghost books, how many of them are themselves black writers and black researchers a tiny, tiny fraction, so much work remains to be done. With all of this, perhaps somebody in your, in the audience, young people in the audience, people of any age, will be inspired to start looking into this sort of thing. With that in mind, not just looking for weird stories, but

looking for the particular span or the particular messages that say Maryland's black population would would, would bring to these tellings that the that the state's queer population would bring to these tellings that the state's immigrant population or non English speaking population would bring to these to these tellings. So weird stories are not complete without our our brother. No, no, they're no, they're, they're not. But that just made and and so that too, is part of the fascination. I think, no matter how well you've preserved stories, how much is lost, how much is still out there to be found. Just through asking, or knocking on a door or opening a musty drawer, or a dusty book that people have overlooked.

Ashley Biggs 58:33

That goes right back to the importance of oral histories and in the importance of libraries like mine, to get the stories, you know, that are written down in inaccessible formats even more, so to get them recorded. Yes. Professor Duncan, thank you so much for being with us today. And for taking this time to kind of walk us through you know, weird history and how we can get involved in it. And it sounds like there's, there's room for everybody. It's not, it's not just an academic game.

Andy Duncan 59:12

Oh, I think so. Absolutely. If anything, academics are playing catch up now. Because so much of this stuff was just like, just about every family certainly has traditionally had somebody who was the keeper of the books or the keeper of the memory, you know, somebody that was in charge of the family tree, the family Bible, the WHO KNEW literally where the bodies were buried, where cousin so and so it was like duress and so on and so forth. Often these morphed into the family genealogists in the late 20th century. But, but yes, and I think the conscientious people who write articles for met popular articles for magazines and newspapers? Who do oral history collection for their high school, or their college or their historical society? Who just look stuff up on the internet for fun and make connections and go to people to say, Hey, did you ever hear the story growing up? All those people have a have a role to play, I think. And you can you can start anywhere. We haven't even mentioned cryptozoology. But if you're interested in the Goat Man, show you're interested in the snarly Gaster. If you're interested in the chassis, the sea serpent, the fabled sea serpent at the Chesapeake Bay, we'll get right in there. You know, if you're interested in the whole UFO element, if you're interested in the whole, bizarre, ongoing legacy, the ongoing cold war industry, the military industrial complex, and its casualties in in Maryland, much of it spreading out from Andrews Air Force Base now Joint Base Andrews, but especially fort Dietrich, in Frederick County, aka fort Doom, to its critics, there's so much so much that needs that needs. Uncovering there, the whole word a call comes from comes from the Latin for hidden, the hit the stuff that we are working to make less hidden, to bring out the secret knowledge to bring it forth. And that, and that is always and always has been a political act. So this is also a sort of activism ethic,

Ashley Biggs 1:01:52

Telling stories. All right, well, thank you, again, so much for being here. And I am going to be sharing with my patrons a book list for for these different kinds of stories and legends of the items that we have available from a good country. Good, because it's and some of these books will have legends from with with a little bit of history thrown in and some of them have just the legend. So it's really important that

we know that they these books are available on BART, they can be downloaded through your Bart account. But if you are listening, and you are not a patron of the Maryland State Library for the Blind or print in print disabled, please visit your local branch library that will be your library of your county. So Allegheny County and Arundel County, Baltimore County, Enoch Pratt and Baltimore City, please take this time to go and visit because a lot of these legends and stories and local histories can be found there. And you never know what you'll find.

Andy Duncan 1:02:59

And I would think and I would think on the accessibility front, that anybody taught to if there were materials that were not at the moment accessible for the visually impaired, that would be a profound incentive, I suspect for somebody to get those into an accessible form. And because because, you know, as with so many other things, it goes from goes for demand at the all the librarians I've ever known, we're delighted to find out from their patrons what it was they wanted, because, cuz otherwise, because otherwise they're like, you know, taking taking guesses, you know?

Ashley Biggs 1:03:46

Well, thank you again. I'm going to stop the recording now. Everybody, you have a great day.

Andy Duncan 1:03:53

Thank you.

Announcer 1:03:54

This has been a presentation of the Maryland State Library Agency. For links to additional resources provided by today's presenter, please visit the show notes. For more information on MSLA or the Maryland State Library for the Blind and print disabled, visit [Maryland libraries.org](http://Marylandlibraries.org)