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Culture

Cotton Bales, Goatmen, and Witchs: Legends from the Heart of Texas
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Wandering ghosts, fiends, shadows of people who disappear when approached … these are the tales Turner has compiled into a chilling collection for anyone interested in ghost stories from the heart of Texas. Coupled with black-and-white photographs of notorious sites, this compilation of legends and folk stories explores the realm beyond the here and now.

Gathered from locals and a few old publications, these recollections don't represent historical facts but are part of the social and cultural identity of the men and women of Texas. They seek to entertain, to explain the mysterious, to warn the unfamiliar of possible dangers, and to preserve a section of life not found on the Internet or provable in a court of law. Like many legends, some of the stories the author has collected have multiple interpretations. However, this doesn't lead to redundancy but to a fuller, more rounded telling of the tale, as each successive recounting builds on the previous story line.

Whether they are apparitions in parks, in cemeteries, or inside buildings, or unexplained noises or puzzling lights emanating from an abandoned cabin in the woods, the events in these stories bring back to life the undead. Some are benign tales of writers and poets whose ghosts continue in death the work they did while alive. Other myths are more gruesome; the creepy, crawly bump-in-the-night type of yarns that cause people to pull their shades and get children to go to bed early. Without a doubt, no one wants the Goatman to attack or the witch of Cameron Park to "snatch them up and offer their lives as a new sacrifice, with hopes that it will provide [the witch] with a clean passage to the next life."

Strange tunnels, odd music, unfamiliar scents, often of something rotten … these are the details Turner employs to bring old haunting tales new life and vigor. They are told in a straight-

forward manner, as if Grampa were holding court on the front porch, and selected photographs add credibility to the tales. After studying a few of these myths, readers will come away with a heightened sense of the abnormal and mysterious, as these legends will unsettle even the most stolid.

For those who like cryptic and unsettling tales, this selection of eerie stories from Texas will provide a delightful, albeit spine-chilling read.

Lee E. Cart