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The Octagon House as it looked sometime in the 1970s. USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

## These places are full of dead men telling tales

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USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

**F**OND DU LAC COUNTY - Are you sure it's just the wind? Or the house settling? Maybe it's not in your head this time.

Throughout Fond du Lac County, ghostly attractions dot the landscape, and not just those that pop up around Halloween.

From restaurants to hotels and abandoned houses, tales tell of screams and levitation that take place year-round, emanating from residents who have not relinquished their hold on the mortal world.

We took a look at five alleged legends, to get you in the mood for Halloween:

### Big Al Capone's

Located in Pipe, Big Al Capone's has been the home to many operations since its construction in 1846.

It was opened as the Fuhrman's Hotel, according to an Oct. 31, 2011, article in The Reporter, as a rest stop for travelers in the 1800s. As it added years to its tenure, it traded names, becoming the Club Harbor Hotel. Gangsters from Chicago also made

it a stop on their road north, including the infamous Al Capone.

Now, when dropping by for a refreshing beverage and pizza at Big Al Capone's, visitors hear not only the well-known gangster who serves as its namesake, but of the other nameless guests who never checked out.

Occurrences include: pizza pans thrown in the kitchen; a beer glass flying off a counter; the scent of perfume wafting through the air; the shaking of a desk chair as one is sitting in it; and the unstoppable rolling of a mop bucket.

Inside on the third floor, paranormal investigators have picked up EVPs, or electronic voice phenomenon, of both a woman and man.

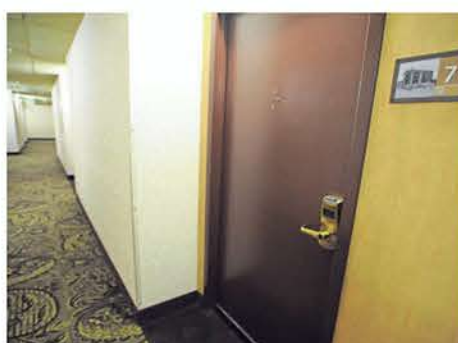
From the outside, passersby have spotted the third floor's lights turning off and on, as well as the moving of curtains. In the window, a woman in clothing of another time has also been spotted. Who is she? Sources believe a woman who met her death from the top floor window, be it of her own volition or someone else's.

### Witherell House

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The Ramada, 1 N. Main St., in Fond du Lac, Oct. 6, 2010. USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN FILE PHOTO



Room 717 of the Ramada, 1 N. Main St., in Fond du Lac, Oct. 6, 2010. USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN FILE PHOTO

## Haunts

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Driving down Fond du Lac County K near Holy Family Catholic Community Church, one can spot a home behind a gate marked "No Trespassing."

Dilapidated, its white paint peeling, the home carries an air of mystery, as well as unsettling feelings.

Known as the Witherell House according to the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Queen Anne-style home was built in 1873.

With much of its detail work still in place on the outside, including the gingerbread work that hangs from its roof, one can picture the beauty that it had once been.

Nearly 145 years later, what has caused the home to become uninhabited to unknown.

Legend has it that a family was killed on the property, and that those who owned it do not wish to live in it due to a dark spirit present, and would like to keep others from doing the same. These unknowns have only increased the allure to ghost hunters.

However, explorers should keep off the private property grounds, as one has a better chance of running into the police than a specter.

### Octagon House



The Octagon House as it stands in 2017 at 276 Linden St. A for-sale sign remains in the window. DOUG RAFLIK/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Built in 1856, according to a July 27, 2015 article in The Reporter, Fond du Lac's Octagon House has a long history bound up in legend. Sources say that the home created by Isaac Brown was active during the Civil War, hosting the Women's Relief Corps, as Brown's son, Edwin, fought and died at the Battle of Antietam.

Featured on a variety of programs, including the History Channel's "Hidden Passages," the Octagon House's nine tunnels were thought for many years to be used for the passage of slaves to the North as part of the Underground Railroad.

Now, in recent months, the idea has shifted to instead be for the movement of alcohol during prohibition, per an article in The Reporter from Jan. 30 of this year.

Whatever the case, the tunnels that run through

the home are also believed to be inhabited by ghostly residents. Owner Marlene Hansen previously hosted events at the home, including Halloween tours that brought guests in be touched by paranormal activity tied to it.

Many are believe to from Edwin, and the wife and the three children he left behind following his death. Hansen and visitors have reported the feeling of being pushed by forces on the stairs, the sounds of children playing and the appearance of Edwin's wife, Ruth, standing in doorways.

Now for sale by owner, The Octagon House, along with its tales and inhabitants, can be yours ... for a price.



Big Al Capone's, present day. TAIMA KERN/ACTION REPORTER MEDIA

### Callan Road

Located west of Rosendale, off Fond du Lac County KK, lies Callan Road, also known colloquially as "Witch Road." Its name can be traced to the tale that at one point, a witch used to live on the road.

Now a skeleton, the so-called witch's house sits in an area of the road encased by trees. Their gnarled branches, it is said, only add to the eerie feeling that the witch is still lurking.

According to an July 28 article in The Reporter, "Witch hunters' cited for trespassing in FDL County," some say the story of the witch's home is nothing but a fable. Instead, it finds its origin as the home of two sisters, who — due to their reclusive tendencies — were misunderstood by those who lived around them.

With gossip spreading, following their departure, the home was destroyed, according to the same article.

Despite this, those who have ventured down the road continue to share their experiences rooted in the paranormal. The glow of random lights, disembodied voices and the specter of a young girl who peeks out from the tree line are all common sightings along the stretch of pavement that is Callan Road.

### The Hotel Retlaw

Last is one of the most well-known haunted spots in the county: The Hotel Retlaw. The hotel has been listed by Today as one of the most haunted hotels in the country, and has been the subject of a segment on NPR's "This American Life" episode "Remember Me."

While closed in 2015, chilling encounters of both guests and staff still circulate, including those of hearing voices, having their hair pulled, seeing

the flicker of lights and the spouts on the faucets turn, all of which are logged by employees, according to NPR.

The host of parties and receptions, the spirited liveliness of the hotel is not found only in the banquet halls but in Room 717. Here, staff said that after a guest reported screams from help, they found the door of Room 717 shaking, like someone was trying to bust through it with their arms in legs. Until it stopped, the no one could get in the door, even with their keys, and when they opened it, it was vacant, not a visible soul to be seen.

The source of these hauntings? Legend says it comes from a series of tragedies, including a man who killed himself in the ballroom, and a ballerina who jumped from the seventh floor.

Also staking the halls from beyond the veil is Walter, thought to be Walter Schroeder, who initially opened the hotel. Known in life for his giving nature, Walter is believed the source of moving money in cash registers, or changing the channel of televisions to C-SPAN, leaving guests and staff with a lasting impression of their time there.

The hotel is presently undergoing renovations to return the hotel to its heyday, so we are curious to see if the ghosts will move out, or stick around a bit longer.