



REPORT

FORT PHANTOM LAKE

INVESTIGATION



Abilene
Texas

TX003

SOUTHWEST GHOST HUNTERS ASSOCIATION



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1990

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The word “investigation” is defined as
“a searching inquiry for ascertaining facts; detailed or careful examination.”

The key word here is “facts”. Do ghosts exist? No, it has not been proven.
Therefore are no facts to investigate.

What we do have is the testimony of the witnesses and this is where an investigational process will work. Investigations are often viewed as a skeptical activity because the main goal is trying to determine what the witness actually saw. Is it explainable or not? This is done through critical thinking and an event replication process developed by SGHA. This is an important concept because what defines a haunting or ghost sighting is “Multiple witnesses reporting unusual phenomena over a period of time”. If these phenomena can be explained, the witness reports are no longer validating paranormal activity as a cause and thus there is no ghost or haunting. Additionally historical research may be done in an attempt to validate facts.

It is important to understand that the goal of an investigation is not to find evidence of the paranormal but to attempt to identify any natural or manmade causes of the reported phenomena

Definition of Terms

Investigation Status: Unsolved investigations will have either an open or closed status. An investigation is given an “Open” status if:

The investigators were unable to replicate all of the witness events. Something significant remains that is still unsolved.

It is important to understand that an “open” investigation does not mean that the unsolved facts are paranormal in nature. It simply means that we have exhausted our resources and cannot solve the “open” items/events.

A “Closed” status indicates that there is insufficient data or confounding variables that prevents replication or identifying possible explanations. This often occurs when investigators do not have direct access to witnesses or some other environmental change have occurred that creates confounding variables.

Confidentiality Notice

Many of the witnesses interviewed have wished to remain anonymous in exchange for presenting their accounts of paranormal experiences. We honor that request and thus witnesses will often be identified by aliases. Any coincidence between aliases and actual persons is unintentional.

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Part 1: Location Information

Lake Fort Phantom, Abilene, Texas

Part 2: Location History

Fort Phantom Hill Reservoir (Lake Fort Phantom Hill) is between Farm roads 600 and 2833 five miles south of Nugent in the extreme southeast corner of Jones County (at 32°37' N, 99°40' W). The lake, impounded by a dam on Elm Creek, a tributary of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, covers a surface area of 4,246 acres and provides a storage capacity of 74,310 acre-feet.



The reservoir's drainage basin of about 470 square miles is bordered on the north by a rolled-earth dam 3,700 feet long and seventy feet high. The city of Abilene owns and operates the lake for municipal and recreational

purposes. Construction began in June 1937 and was finished in October 1938.

Since that time Abilene has developed parks on the lake and has diverted water from the Clear Fork and Deadman Creek to the lake in order to meet the needs of the area's growing population. In July 1974 West Texas Utility Company began operating a power plant on the reservoir.

Part 3: Witnesses

This section identifies the witnesses to the reported activity.

Name	Sex	Connection with reported incident	Interviewed
John Garcia*	M	Witness	18 May 1990
Denise Thompson	F	Witness	20 Aug 1989
Marie Hammond	F	Witness	18 May 1990
Robert Aragon	M	Witness	19 May 1990

*Witnesses given aliases are noted by a * More witnesses were interviewed but all resemble the basic events described in the above accounts.*

John's Account

The Lady o' the Lake" is real stuff man. One night me and some of my homies where riding our Harleys out at the lake, and we stopped at the benches across from the dam to smoke a phat one. As we were puffing and laughing and carrying on we noticed a faint glow appearing across the water to the west of us. Now we had some dang good reefer man but this stuff was "REAL" So as this glowing object got closer and closer we realized it was a woman!

She was wearing a white dress and was soaking wet, and all she would do was moan in a long horrific spine tingling noise that just made us crap our pants! No one moved or said a word as she passed through our little circle. Then just as she appeared , she disappeared back across the lake as if to

be floating right across the top. We looked at each other and fired the hogs up and got the hell out of there , you bet your butts!!

Denise's Account

As we were riding through the lake towards the exit over by the dam, we could hear a faint scream and the air outside got real hot and thick, it felt hard to breathe, and all of a sudden we turned onto US 180 and everything was fine as if nothing ever happened. As we rode off I could feel someone watching me from afar. I turned to see a glow moving across the lake itself ,moving in a way as though it were searching for something or someone. Perhaps she was returning to the point out in the lake where her body rests.

Marie's Account

"I'm still not sure what I saw, but I know it was strange", Hammond said. "I didn't think anything about any ghosts until later."

On New Year's Eve, she looked out over the lake to see a strange woman lurking there. Dressed in light-colored clothing and apparently shrugging off the bitter cold, she seemed to wander almost aimlessly and unnaturally around the lakeside.

And then, far too quickly, she was gone.

"I had drawn the shades but was still looking outside, Hammond said. "That area has very good lighting, and I could see everything. I looked away for a moment, and when I looked back she wasn't there. She just disappeared". Hammond said she only learned of ghostly legends of the lake later, and never quite figured out how the woman, real or otherwise, managed to escape her sight so quickly.

Robert's Account

I was parked in the woods (lover's lane area) with my girlfriend around 12:30am. We had been making out when she noticed a woman walking towards my car. She said "Someone is coming". I turned to watch this woman walk right up to my car and look in the driver's side window. My

girlfriend scream as I struggled to pull my pants back up. When I looked back out, no one was there. She started saying stuff about the "Lady of the lake" and was obviously freaked out so I started the car and got out of there.

Part 4: Reported Phenomenon

Part 4.1: The local myths about the lake

There are 5 variants of the story surrounding the lake. The first claims that Comanche warriors once did battle with a platoon of Calvary near the lake. The Comanche won the battle, however, upon returning to camp a terrible storm hit. They were swept to their deaths into the lake by a flash flood while the women and children watched helplessly. It is believed the lake took their lives in exchange for the blood they spilled in battle.



The second involves an Indian maiden named Nadassa, who became so grief stricken at the loss of her young lover she threw herself into the water to rest with him for eternity.

The third story states that an officer's wife set out in search for her husband who did not return after an attack by the Comanche. Her search ended in the lake when she was caught in a sudden storm which capsized her boat. She drowned in the lake and still searches for her lover to this day.

The 4th version of the story involves a young woman named Mona Bell. Her boyfriend had just returned from the war, and she was to meet him at Lake Fort Phantom, a popular meeting place in the 1940's. Mona made arrangements with her lover to be able to locate him at the lake, he would flash the headlights on his car three times. The meeting went as planned, but as she went to embrace him, he flew into a rage for one of his best friends had told him, jokingly, that he had "kept his girl company" while he was away at war. The story continues with the boyfriend strangling her, and throwing her into the lake. Some of the witnesses of the day claimed that Mona was not dead when her body hit the water at the dam. They heard her scream, and the screams faded into gurgles where she finally drowned.

The final variant also occurs in the mid-1940's when a couple arranged to meet at a church near the lake to exchange wedding vows. The groom never arrived. After hours of waiting and sure that he would not have left her standing at the altar, the woman begged authorities to look for her groom. The next morning he was found dressed in his finest suit floating in a boat in the middle of the lake. Though the man's face bore an expression of severe pain, doctors could not determine the cause of death. Some say the spirit was the bride searching for her fiancé's killer.

Part 4.2: Historical inconsistencies of the myths

Inconsistencies have been found while studying these local legends. Phantom Lake is, in fact, a man-made reservoir that was not constructed until 1938. Historians have also disproved the occurrence of any such battles between the fort's soldiers and the Comanche. So the first three variants of the myth could not have occurred.

The 4th variant is inaccurate because during the 1940's the popular "lover's lane" area where young couples gathered was at Lake Kirby, not Lake Phantom Hill. In fact, much of Lake Phantom Hill was undeveloped at that time. The 5th variant suffers from the same issues.

Part 4.3 Other Phenomenon

Other strange phenomena around the lake includes the sounds of screams, moaning, gunshots and rapping upon vehicle windows. Others report smells of decaying flesh, perfume and roses.

Part 5: Investigation

The main focus of our investigation was to concentrate on the areas along the north shoreline and where the main sightings along the lover's lane area occurred. This was done by setting up Observation points during the next three weeks. The observers were to record and identify any possible alternatives which might explain what the witnesses were encountering and to note if anything unusual occurred. Additionally they talked with any local who were visiting the lake to inquire if they had any sort of unusual encounters that they believed to be paranormal in nature. The table below lists the significant results from these studies.

Date	Notes
25/26 May 1990	*(25th) A blue light was spotted moving slowly across the lake. Further investigation revealed it to be a light up fishing bobber that was attached to a baited line. The line was not secure and was drifting. *(25th) 2 am, Patches of fog developing around the lake's perimeter. Really noticeable when illuminated by the headlights from cars. Sometimes they are "human" shaped. *(25th) Interviewed two couples who claimed to have seen the ghost. The sighting was near the boat ramp near the dam. They watched the "ghost" moving eastward and then seemed to move out across the lake's surface. They said that the ghost was wearing a light blue or gray dress and had black hair. One of the girls freaked out so they left without investigating

	<p>further.</p> <p>*(26th) Two people moving around in the back roads of the lovers lane area with a flashlight. From the sound of it, they were playing a practical joke on one of their friends (ghostly moaning, screams and laughter). Hoaxing / practical jokes may be an issue.</p>
<p>01/02/ June 1990</p>	<p>*(1st) While watching the Lover's Lane area, we noticed that car headlights, moving through the trees and scrub, produced very weird shadows that looked like a person walking.</p> <p>*(1st) Firecrackers heard at 8:00pm</p> <p>*(2nd) Heard sounds of a woman screaming (not in terror but more like she was having a good time/partying). This occurred three times during the night from two different areas near the Lover's Lane area.</p> <p>*(2nd) Around 1am a man wandered into our area with a flashlight looking for his car. He had gone to "relieve" himself and had lost his way.</p>
<p>08/09 June 1990</p>	<p>*(8th) Two men in a canoe were fishing late into the evening. They were very hard to spot unless they turned on a light.</p> <p>*(8th) When looking across the lake towards the power plant we noticed that people on the shore were silhouetted in a way that made them look like shadows. Features were distorted and the "shadows" passed back into the scrub brush near the bank rather seamlessly.</p> <p>*(9th) Just after sunset we observed the smoke from a car's exhaust (the car had just started and left) moving south towards the lake. The smoke did not immediately disperse (inversion?) but stayed massed together in a vertical cloud. The effect is really profound especially when a light was shined on it. The cloud finally seemed to disperse after a minute or so.</p> <p>We attempted to replicate this using a cigar and the horizontal movement of the cloud does look alot like a ghost. May be an explanation for some of the sightings we have heard.</p>

13/ 14 July 1990

July 14th, Around 1:00am we noticed a woman walking along the north bank. Our initial concern was why is she alone. (car broken down, fight with boyfriend, etc.). Perhaps she needed some assistance? Investigator Ash took a radio and drove from our observation point on the hill to an area near the woman's location. Guided by radio from the rest of the team on the hill he parked as close as possible then proceeded on foot. When he arrived at her position he was unable to see or locate her although she was in plain view of the observation team on the hill. At one point it appeared that she walk behind and past Ash. We attempted to direct Ash towards her but he was still not able to see anyone. She soon vanished from view behind the scrub brush that lines the shore. Was this the ghost we are looking for?



The observations made by the team on 14 July warranted further investigation. The first issue was the distance that the "ghost" was being observed at (about 1800 feet distant). How close was Ash to the specter? Was perception an issue due to the distance of the observation point?



The following evening the team was repositioned on the hill while Cody and Ash remained on the shoreline near the area where the woman was seen. Using radios and flashlights to communicate with the observation team, Cody would attempt to mimic the movements of the woman while Ash repeated the same approach he took the night before.

One area that was of special interest is where the woman seemed to vanish (from the observer's view point) and the areas near the shoreline where the drop towards the water was significant enough to possibly conceal a person that was walking there (Ash's viewpoint).



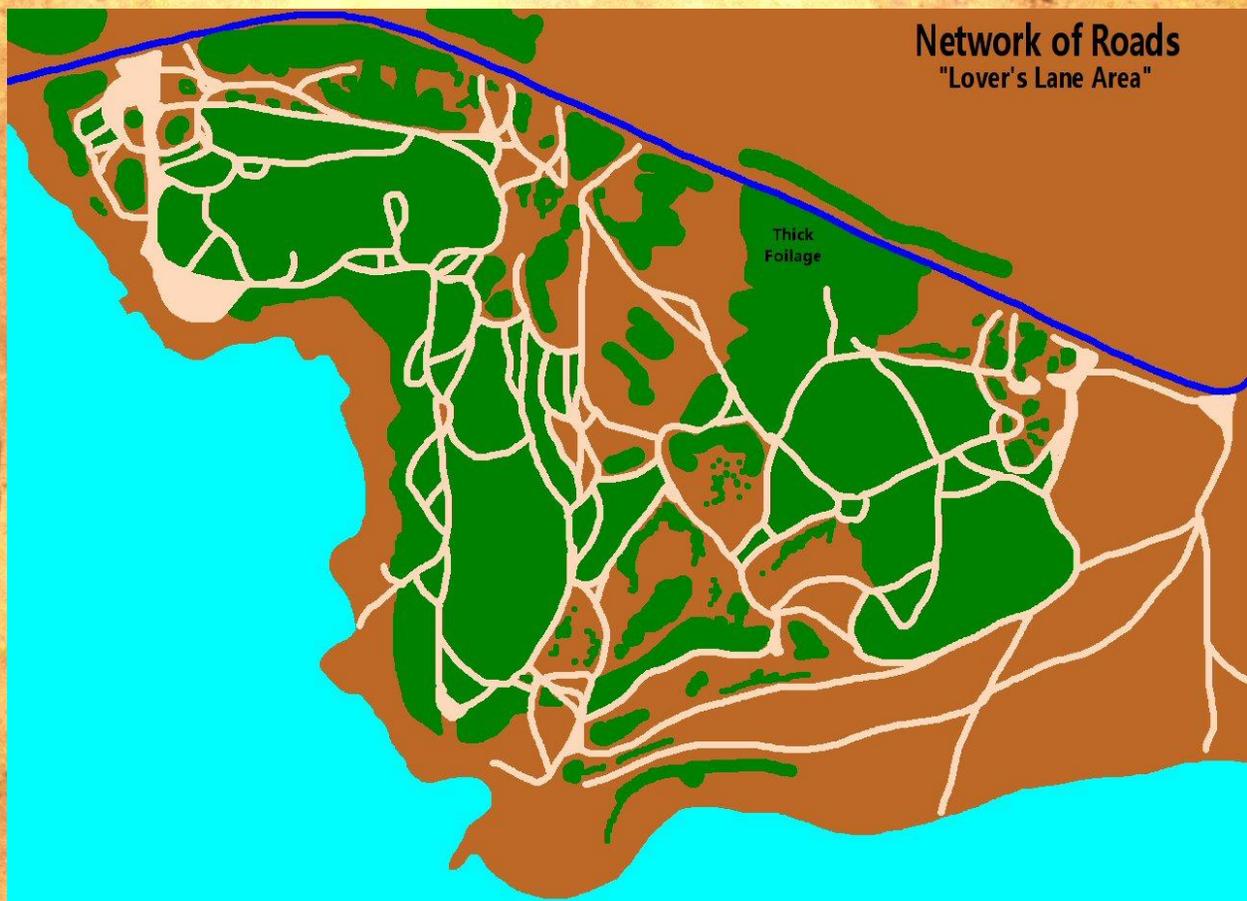
The area along the shore where the "ghost" appeared to vanish

After dusk, Cody donned a white oversized t-shirt and started moving along the route taken by the "ghost" the night before. Meanwhile Ash repeated his approach to the area with the observation team guiding him by radio. We repeated this test five times with the ghost moving in the same direction but in different positions (in front of and behind Ash). We also experimented with different "escape" routes in the area where the ghost seemed to have vanished in an attempt to explain how such a disappearance could have occurred.

Three significant things were discovered by this test. The first was that the perception of the ghost's location was indeed inaccurate. The observation team was often incorrect by directing Ash forward when Cody was actually behind him. The second was that the natural slope of the shore line was often more than adequate in concealing Cody from Ash's view, even when

he was fairly close to Cody. The final discovery came when we were experimenting with the escape routes in and near the Lover's Lane area. In fact, that particular area may be the vital key that causes many of the reported sightings of the ghost.

The Lover's Lane area is riddled with unimproved roads (colored tan) which cut through a very extensive growth of mesquite, salt cedar and juniper brush (colored green).



The same factors that make it an ideal "lover's lane" are also the factors that influence the misperceptions of paranormal activity. It is quite easy to lose sight of a person walking along near or in the foliage. Cody was able to "lose" the team searching for him with minimal effort.

Our replication of the July 14th event shows that the "ghost" could have easily been a living person walking west near the shore-line.

Part 6: Historical Research

As stated in Part 4.2, the myths have many inconsistencies with recorded history. However, the myths may have originated (and kept current) due to actual events that have happened at the lake. There have been murders at the lake. The first reported one we found occurred in 1968 but more recent ones keep these facts current in the mind of the public.

Lake home to more than fishing

Fort Phantom Hill area perfect spot for crime, Abilene police say

By Sidney Schuhmann

Reporter-News Staff Writer

**(Note: Article added to this updated report for emphasis)*

The secluded dirt roads and grassy fields that surround the rocky shores of Lake Fort Phantom Hill provide a welcome mat for murder, suicide, rape and other crime, police say.

At least six murder victims have been discovered near the lake in the last 22 years. The most recent body was found March 2 in a wooded area near West Lake Road about 50 yards from the lake.

A preliminary autopsy revealed that Lenore Ewing, 32, was stabbed numerous times in the back and hit on the head. She was last seen leaving her Abilene home Feb. 26 by her 9-year-old daughter. Ewing's mother reported the 5-foot-1, 275-pound woman missing that evening.

Abilene police Detective John Reid said anyone who saw the brown-haired, brown-eyed Ewing should contact the police department at 676-6610.

Lake Fort Phantom Hill is located 11 miles north of Interstate 20 in Jones County. The lake is owned by the city of Abilene.

During the day, the lake patrol monitors the area. After 8 p.m., Abilene police and the Jones County Sheriff's Office respond to calls in the area.

Since Lake Fort Phantom Hill was built in 1938, the area has proved a popular place for drugs, alcohol, affectionate couples, college hazing, teens skipping school, suicide, dumping stolen cars and occasionally, serious crime such as murder and rape. Rural homicides make up 10.5 percent of all homicides in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Lake Fort Phantom's seclusion provides an ideal place for people to kill or dump bodies amid the prickly pear and spiny mesquite, Reid said. The lake

area is open to the public and therefore more accessible than private property. A lake patrol officer said some areas are so remote that no one drives by them for two or three days.

“It’s an isolated area where people feel like there’s no one else around and no one watching,” Reid said.

That’s not necessarily true, he added. Most bodies near the lake are discovered within days.

Day and night, people roam the lake area fishing, picnicking, cruising, talking and even using metal detectors to find coins and jewelry.

“There’s always people,” Reid said.

Sgt. Roger Berry, an Abilene detective for almost 20 years, said people often come to the lake to talk or work out problems. Once there, arguments can erupt into murderous anger. Bodies are left because the area is secluded and hauling dead-weight to another location is hard to do, said Berry, who heads the police department’s narcotics division.

Lake Fort Phantom might seem secluded, but several houses sit near the lake’s shore and mobile homes and farms are scattered farther away. The lake community is close-knit, Reid said.

“They notice when something is different,” he said. “People out there know each other.”

Gary Hendrix, 66, has lived in the lake community most of his life. His home is located less than a mile from the lake.

Hendrix said people asking for help frequently wander from the lake and pound on his door late at night. Some are college students left at the lake by friends as a joke. Some are women saying they were dumped at the lake by their dates.

“It’s bad in the summertime,” Hendrix said. “...It’s just an easy place to go to get away. A lot of drinking and partying goes on.”

Hendrix recalled a car found near the water in the 1950s. Lying just ahead was a body wrapped in a blanket.

Abilene police officer Gary Heslep said a small percentage of Abilene’s crime occurs at the lake. Since 1987, about 155,000 crimes were reported in Abilene, including 552 in or around the lake. Lake crime accounts for less than less than one percent of the city’s crime.

Four of the six most recent lake murders have resulted in convictions.

Dec. 5, 1999 — The skeletal remains of Shirley Jeanette Ketchum, 39, were found in Seabee Park near the south end of the lake. An autopsy revealed she died sometime in May from a blow to the head. No one has been convicted of her murder.

March 1, 1992 — The body of Jimmy Houston Todd, 43, was found shot to death on County Road 503 near the lake. His friend, James Allan Sanders, said Todd asked him to shoot Todd in an elaborate plot to frame Todd's girlfriend. Sanders pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

July 1991 — Paul Soliz, 43, was shot to death by his brother, Joe Soliz, after an argument at Johnson Park near the lake. Joe Soliz was convicted of murder and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

June 12, 1983 — The nude body of Harley John Goswick, 24, was found face up in the creek running through Seabee Park. Three men were arrested for sexually assaulting and beating the hitchhiker to death. Earl Burt Barnes III was convicted of murder and sentenced to 75 years in prison. Tommy Lee Jackson was convicted of murder and sentenced to 60 years in jail. Billy Wayne Penney was indicted for murder and received 10 years probation.

Jan. 11, 1979 — The corpse of Chris Wayne Kennedy, 23, was discovered stabbed to death near the lake's dam. His wife's boyfriend, Royce Wayne Bivins, was convicted of the murder and sentenced to 78 years in prison. Kennedy's wife, Judy Kay Kennedy, was convicted of conspiring to murder and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Part 7: Conclusion

The events that are reported at the lake have rational explanations. From our observations, historical research and investigation notes we have determined that the major causes of the phenomenon is misperception of quasi-normal events by the witnesses. The details of these misperceptions are listed below.

1. Witnesses have claimed to see a translucent woman (ghost) wearing a gray or light blue dress who easily passes through cars and brushes before she "vaporizes" into thin air.



A bluish cloud of cigar smoke that has travelled through the brush on the north side of the lake. The cloud lasted for several minutes and travelled over 50 meters before it dissipated.

During a period when an temperature inversion is present, clouds of smoke from car exhaust, cigars and other sources does not disperse readily. In a temperature inversion, cold air is trapped near the ground by a layer of warm air. The warm air acts like a lid, holding these substances down. A mild breeze then gently pushes these clouds, moving them around the area of the lake. The phenomenon was first witnessed on June 9th, 1990 by one of the observation teams and replicated. During the evening when it is dark, these clouds can really be emphasized if the headlights from a car or a

strong flashlight is shined on them. They really do look quite creepy but they are explainable. They are referred to as quasi-normal because both conditions (a gentle breeze and a temperature inversion) must exist for this phenomenon to occur.



A picture of an apparition? Not quite. This is a cloud of exhaust from a pickup truck that just started its motor. The cloud stayed intact as it travelled over 30 meters from the north shore line and out across the lake.

This effect also explains the many reports of the phantom moving out across the lake before vanishing as well as the stories where a car drives "through" the apparition.

2. Witnesses report that the ghost approaches their vehicle and raps on the windows.

From the historical data there is an entry that suggests that there are many people who wander around the lake looking for assistance.

"Hendrix said people asking for help frequently wander from the lake and pound on his door late at night. Some are college students left at the lake by friends as a joke. Some are women saying they were dumped at the lake by their dates.

"It's bad in the summertime," Hendrix said. "...It's just an easy place to go to get away. A lot of drinking and partying goes on."

This was also noticed by one of the observation teams on June 2nd. One of these scenarios was also the most likely cause of our observation of a woman walking along the shore line on July 14th. The additional discovery of how a person can easily vanish from view due to the dense foliage and that the electrical plant can make people walking on the shore appear shadow-like provides a reasonable explanation for many of the ghost sightings, especially on the north shore.



Photo showing the dense vegetation on the opposite side of the dam.

3. A blue light moving across the water was reported by several witnesses who believed that it was the ghost that haunts the lake.



Photograph of a lantern light on a small boat near the boat ramp. The boat was out during the evening and occasionally turned the lantern on and off.

Several alternative explanations were noted by investigators at different observation points around the lake.

The first were caused by lights that were on boats out on the lake after dark. The light sources were mostly lanterns and flashlights, both of which are visible at quite large distances.

The second explanation that was observed were fishing bobbers designed for night fishing. These bobbers (similar to the one pictured on the left) produce a light that can come in many colors (depending on the



make and model of the bobber).

Another major discrepancy is that the description of the ghost varies wildly among the witnesses. Some describe the woman as Caucasian while other describe her as being Hispanic. The color and style of the dress she is wearing also varies. Some claim the dress is gray, others white, and still more say it was light blue or black. There are also some reports of the dress being blood-stained but in other accounts it is not. If this was actually a ghost of a woman murdered at the lake, shouldn't her appearance be somewhat consistent?

Inconsistencies in Witness' Accounts

Dress Color	Gray	Light Blue	White	Black
Dress Style	Ankle length (Long)	Knee length (Short)	Off Shoulder Formal	Formal Dress
Race	Caucasian	Hispanic	Pale white (corpse like)	**
Other dress details	Stained with Blood	Dress is in tatters, torn	Seaweed like material hanging off ghost	**

Like most urban legends involving a female ghost on or near a lake, this legend is composed of a combination of two folklore stories, La Llorna (the weeping woman) and an Urban Legend known as the Vanishing Hitchhiker. Hoaxes and practical jokes have also been identified as the cause for some of the sightings and was observed at least one night of investigations.

Another urban legend with similar elements is only a couple of hours to the East, the ghost of White Rock Lake. It is highly likely that all of the combined phenomenon along with the proximity of the other legend greatly contributed to the creation of this "haunting".

Part 8: Photographs



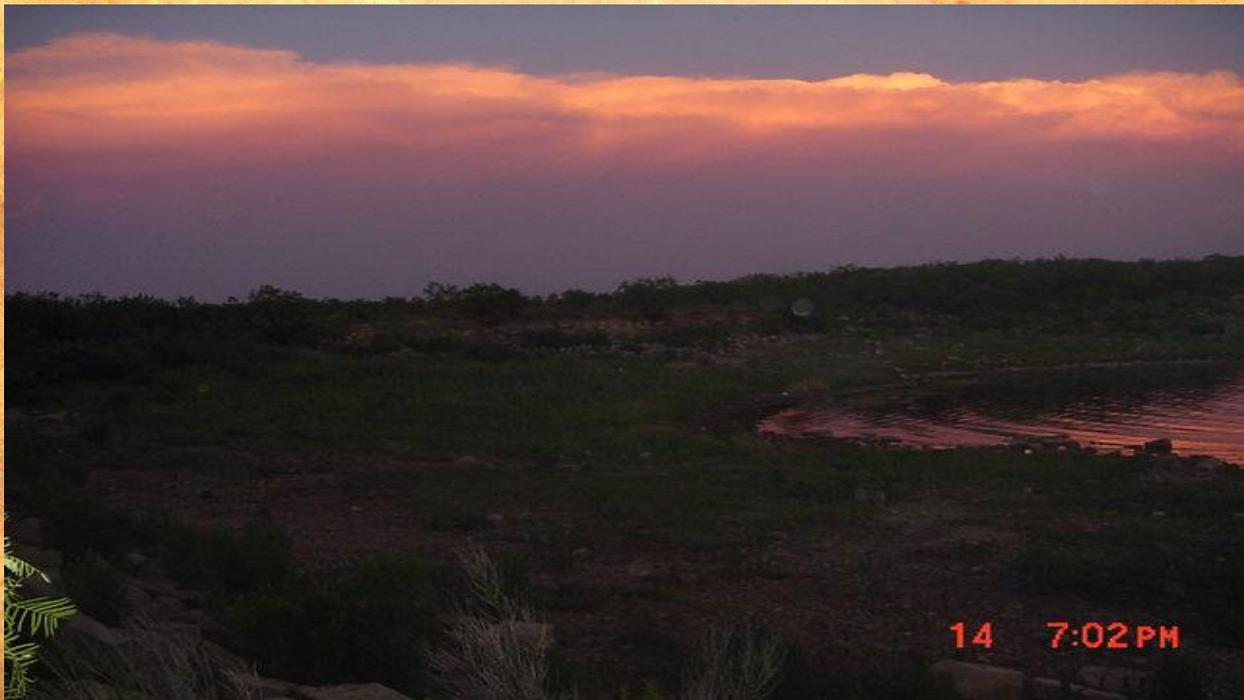
Photograph taken in 1963 of a bridge with bare trees around it and underneath it. A two-story house and what appear to be a grain silo can be seen in the background. Source: Hardin-Simmons University Library



Photograph of a dry water ditch at Fort Phantom Lake. There are rocks at the bottom of both sides of the ditch. A truck is parked along the right side of the ditch. Source: Hardin-Simmons University Library, 1963



Photograph of the Phantom Hill Water Pump at Fort Phantom Hill Lake. In the foreground is churning water that flows into the lake. Source: Hardin-Simmons University Library, 1963



References:

<http://www.texnews.com/1998/2001/local/more0317.html>

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