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America's First National Ghosts

As his defeated Redcoats marched to the official surrender ceremonies at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, Lord Cornwallis ordered his band to play "The World Turned Upside Down." In many ways, his choice of music was fitting. Indeed, 13 upstart colonies—short on means, manpower, and materiel but long on spirit—had achieved an almost unbelievable victory over the most professional army in the world. That history-making achievement was almost supernatural in nature.

The men and women who lived and died during those turbulent times wrote the initial chapter of America's history as an independent nation. Where history abounds, so do ghosts. And thus, the Revolutionary War yielded the first truly "national" ghosts of the United States.

In his book *Spirits of '76: Ghost Stories of the American Revolution*, author Daniel Barefoot tells the stories behind over 170 different locations where the ghosts from the American Revolution have been spotted. Some of the ghosts would be recognized by any American schoolchild. Others may be more obscure, but their stories are no less fascinating.

Probably the most famous of the spirits of '76 is George Washington. He cheated the Grim Reaper so many times, often in miraculous fashion, that many thought he was protected by a higher power.

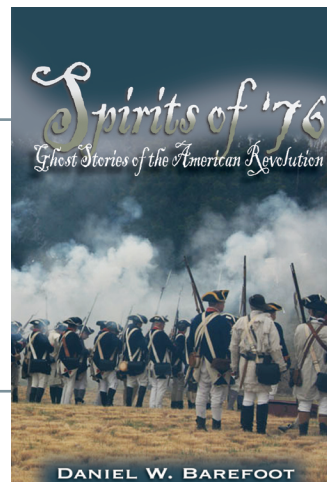
Another founding father whose spirit still apparently haunts his grave is Benjamin Franklin. When Franklin died in 1790, he was interred at historic Christ Church Burial Ground in the heart of Philadelphia. On a July evening during the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a nurse waiting for a bus on the corner near Franklin's grave experienced a strange encounter. When something struck her neck and fell to the sidewalk with a pinging sound, she looked down to see a penny. Observing no one about, she was pondering the source of the coin when another penny struck her, and then another. She glanced at Franklin's grave, where countless Americans have thrown pennies as homage to the man who proclaimed, "A penny saved is a penny earned." Unnerved, the lady hurried to another bus stop. Over the years, similar occurrences have taken place near Franklin's penny-laden grave.

The ghost of Mad Anthony Wayne is found in more places than any other Revolutionary War figure, but he can often be seen galloping along U.S. 322 on his birthday, New Year's Day, in a desperate search to recover his bones. After General Wayne's service during the Revolutionary War, Washington convinced him to become commander in chief of the new American army. Wayne was returning from masterminding a victory at the Bat-

tle of Fallen Timbers in Ohio that ended the Northwest Indian War when he fell ill and died at Fort Presque Isle in what is now Erie, Pennsylvania. He remained buried there until 1809, when his son attempted to bring his well-preserved corpse back to their home in Radnor. The two-wheeled buggy would not accommodate a full dead body, so General Wayne's corpse was cut into numerous pieces and boiled. What remained after this procedure was packed in a box. During the return to Radnor, bumpy roads caused a number of bones to spill from the box. Although what remained was buried at St. David's Church in Radnor, the general still scours the countryside on his birthday in a "mad" search for his long-lost bones.

Not all ghosts from that period are famous generals or founding fathers. One spirit belongs to Mary Post, who owned an inn in northeastern New Jersey where American officers frequently stayed. After walking into a trap, Mary was exposed as a spy for the British forces. In 1777, a group of Patriots took justice into their own hands and hanged her from a maple tree near her inn. She cursed the tree and warned that anyone who caused it harm would suffer. Numerous tragedies subsequently befell people who tempted the curse until the tree was finally felled in 1980. Although the tree is gone, Mary's spirit can still be seen floating above nearby Lake Vreeland on autumn nights.

Over the years, tales of spirits from the Revolutionary War have appeared sporadically in volumes of historical and traditional American ghost stories. For the first time, *Spirits of '76* gathers these tales in a volume devoted entirely to the supernatural history of the American Revolution.



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Daniel W. Barefoot
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