

weekendpass

D.C.'s haunted haunts

"D.C. ghosts just kind of seem to be trapped here. They appear but never do anything," says Camden Schwantes Arciniega, who then admirably refrains from making a joke about Congress. Arciniega is a tour guide for DC by Foot, which offers — among other themes — ghost tours. (Arciniega herself no longer leads them, for reasons to be revealed later.) Even if our specters are relatively benign, Washington is pretty packed when it comes to the non-CIA kind of spooks, and plenty of spots are ripe for self-led scares. KRISTEN PAGE-KIRBY (EXPRESS)

D.C.

U.S. Capitol

It's not a great idea to say "heeeere kittykittykitty" when walking by the Capitol at night, because you're not going to like what shows up. Congress is haunted by the "Demon Cat," who — legend has it — is the ghost of a mother cat whose den and kittens were destroyed during the construction of the building's underground tunnels. She usually shows up at night because, like most cats, she likes to run around like an idiot at 3 a.m. *East Capitol Street NE and First Street SE*; 202-226-8000, visithecapitol.gov.

Octagon Museum

Completed in 1801, this city home of a rich Virginian hosted James and Dolley Madison after the White House was torched in 1814. Now it hosts — among others — the ghost of a 15-year-old

girl who fell from the second-story landing; another teenage girl who fell down the stairs; and Dolley, who supposedly smells of lilacs. The noisiest Octagon ghosts are the spirits of slaves and servants who worked in the house during its long history. It's said that on some nights the bells once used to summon them will all begin to ring continuously, even though the wires were cut long ago. *1799 New York Ave. NW*; 202-626-7439.

Halcyon House

Remember Camden Schwantes Arciniega? From the introduction? Here's why she won't do DC by Foot's ghost tour unless "literally no one else is available." She'd been hired to give a private tour for an 11-year-old's birthday party. When her group reached Halcyon House, an 18th-century dwelling that's now an incubator for entrepreneurs, she started the regular spiel: Albert Clemens, who bought the house in 1900,



DOE EYED ILLUSTRATIONS (FOR EXPRESS)

is said to haunt the building, wearing a wide-brimmed hat. "One of the little boys pipes up, 'What's that?' and I swear hanging from the top row of windows were three nooses," she says. "Then it looked like a figure in a wide-brimmed hat walks by the window. I take off screaming and running down the street and they were right behind me." *3400 Prospect St. NW*; halcyonhouse.org. *Halcyon House isn't open for tours, but you can lurk outside.*

Virginia

Gadsby's Tavern Museum

Alexandria-based ghosts "vary in terms of time periods," says



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Wellington Watts, president of Alexandria Colonial Tours. “Alexandria saw the American Revolution, the Civil War — whenever there’s major trauma, spirits come out afterwards.” The ghost at Gadsby’s took up residence in 1816, and that’s about all we know: “Female Stranger” is what’s on her tombstone in nearby St. Paul’s Cemetery. She haunts room No. 8 at the tavern, where she died. “Her husband carried her into the room and when he jarred the door, the eight went sideways and formed the sign of infinity,” he says. The ailing woman “went into infinity shortly after.” The husband skipped town without paying, and she’s still waiting for his return. 134 N. Royal St., Alexandria; 703-746-4242, gadsbystavern.org.

George Washington's Mount Vernon

First in war, first in peace and first in scaring the crap out of people who sleep in his room. The best-known ghost story linked with George Washington’s home dates from 1806, when Massachusetts politician Josiah Quincy III slept in the room where Washington died. As reported years later by his son, Quincy got a visit from the Father of Our Country that night. He refused to discuss any details with his family, because who needs details when you’re dealing with something as clear-cut as ghostly visitations? 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon, Va; 703-780-2000, mountvernon.org.

Old Presbyterian Meeting House

“I don’t believe in ghosts myself,” Watts says. That doesn’t mean he hasn’t seen some weird stuff. Take Alexandria’s Old Presbyterian Meeting House and attached cemetery: “My tour guides have been photographed in that cemetery and in the pictures there’s a white mist surrounding them,” Watts says. “In the 16 years I’ve worked on this tour I’ve yet to see the mist, but the tour guide will be completely covered.” (The tour



guides also don’t see the alleged mist.) Though no specific ghosts are associated with the site, the meeting house “gives people the creeps,” he says. 323 S. Fairfax St., Alexandria; 703-549-6670, opmh.org.

Maryland

Surratt House Museum

One of four conspirators to be hanged for their roles in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Mary Surratt still seems to be pretty ticked about the whole neck-meets-noose incident. The plotters held meetings at both her H Street NW boarding house and her Clinton, Md., home and tavern, and when John Wilkes Booth fled the District he stopped at the latter. Her ghost is said to make appearances there, as well as at Wok and Roll, the H Street restaurant

that occupies her former boarding house, and Fort McNair in D.C., where she was executed in 1865. 9118 Brandywine Road, Clinton, Md.; 301-868-1121, surrattmuseum.org.

Maryland State House

The seat of Maryland government was finished in 1779, so it’s had plenty of time to accumulate some unearthly visitors. Thomas Dance, a plasterer, is one; he fell 87 feet to his death while working on the State House dome in 1793. That’s enough to make anyone grumpy, but Dance’s boss refused to pay Dance’s wife and children the pension they were due, and wouldn’t return Dance’s tools to the family. Supposedly, Dance expresses his displeasure by turning lights on and off and slamming doors, which seems, like, totally mature. 100 State Circle, Annapolis; msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdstatehouse/html/home.html.

The ‘Exorcist’ steps

If the spookiness you seek is (definitely) fictional, head to the stairs at the corner of Prospect and 36th streets NW, otherwise known as the “Exorcist” steps. It was from atop that steep staircase in Georgetown that Father Damien Karras plunged to his death in director William Friedkin’s 1973 horror classic. On Friday at 6 p.m. at 3607 M St. NW, the District will finally acknowledge the stone steps as a landmark with a pre-Halloween plaque unveiling. Friedkin, “Exorcist” screenwriter William Peter Blatty and Mayor Muriel Bowser will be on hand for the ceremony. RUDI GREENBERG (EXPRESS)

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