

Stepp Cemetery

An interesting activity for this Halloween month could be a visit to Stepp Cemetery located in Morgan-Monroe State Forest, about 15 miles north of Bloomington. Not only could one enjoy a hike in a beautiful natural area, but also visit one of Monroe County's earliest pioneer cemeteries that is steeped in creepy legends. Stepp cemetery is located near the Three Lakes Trail and the Walls shelter house, just off the main park road.

The cemetery contains about 114 graves, the oldest of which is probably that of Isaac Hartsock, a veteran of the War of 1812. He was born in 1793 and died in 1851. Veterans of the Civil War and World Wars I and II are also interred here.

The cemetery may have been connected with the Crabbite religious sect, a fundamentalist group with a reputation for excessive practices, such as snake handling. These strange practices may have instigated the beginning of scary legends. The most famous legend of Stepp Cemetery is known as "The Woman in Black" and has many variations. The gist of the story is that a woman, or witch, or ghost dressed all in black can be observed in the cemetery. Supposedly, the woman's young child had died tragically and had been buried at the cemetery, where the woman had a tree felled, with the stump cut out to form a chair where she could sit beside the child's grave and mourn. Eventually, the "chair", which is still present, was given the name of "The Warlock's Chair", and some say the woman has been seen sitting in the chair with two white wolves at her feet. Some versions of the story tell that the father had killed the child, and in fury, the woman had killed the husband, then had been sentenced to die by hanging. The woman put a curse upon the chair, that if anyone sat in, or even touch the chair, they would die in one year.

A visit to the Stepp Cemetery offers an experience of our state's beautiful natural resources and our county's interesting cultural heritage, as well as a spine-tingling adventure!