



# **Good Scary Places 2007**

The Best of Maryland's Ghosts, History and Hauntings



*By members of East Ghost, Maryland Ghost and Spirit Association,  
Eastern Paranormal Research & Maryland Paranormal Research Society*

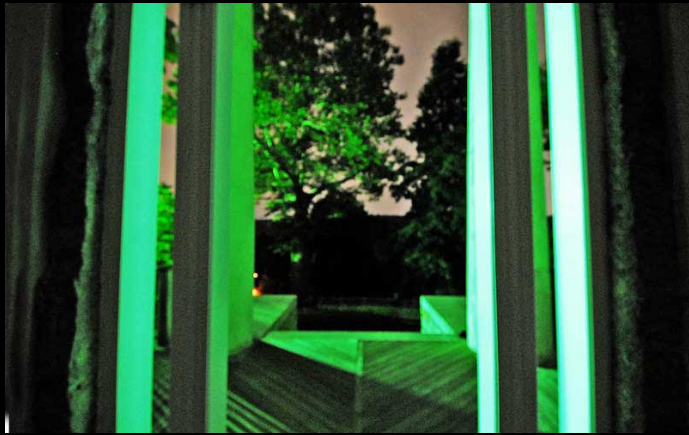
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# Patapsco Female Institute

known colloquially as “PFI” • *often Incorrectly called “Hell House”*





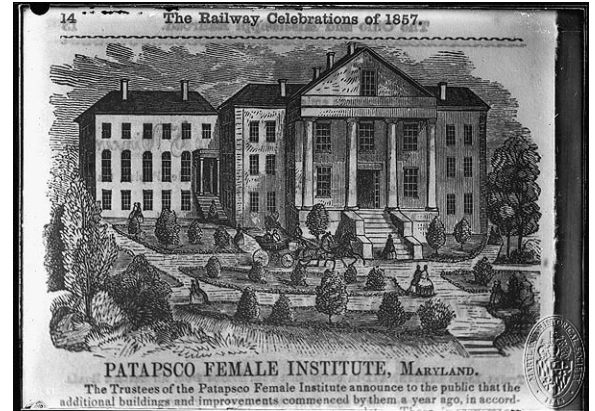
# Patapsco Female Institute

Ellicott City, Maryland • <http://marylandghosts.com/haunt/34/>

The Patapsco Female Institute is found high above Ellicott City on Church Road. The view from the front lawn of the ruins, once a girl's school, is a commanding one and looks out small town, the hills and the river beyond. It is hard to imagine the place as it once looked, although valiant efforts in recent years have erased the signs of time and vandals and have restored at least a portion of the old building. It is not hard to imagine that this scenic and beautiful spot may become a little bit spookier once darkness comes to Ellicott City... or that it is home to at least one ghost!

The school had the distinction of being one of the first female institutes in the south when it was officially opened in 1839. The walls were constructed of yellow granite and huge columns supported the magnificent porch.

The west wing was given over to an immense ballroom and the floors were made from a fine hardwood. The house was decorated with fine tapestries and imported furnishing and fabrics and, needless to say, attracted daughters from the cream of southern society. Despite the opulent surroundings, life at the institute could be rigid, especially for wealthy girls who were used to be waited on at home.



The building was made of stone and could be bitterly cold in the winter. There were no sanitary facilities at the school and so chamber pots were used. Colds and sickness spread among the girls during the wet and cool months and a number of girls even died from influenza and croup.

One such girl was said to be Annie Van Derlot, the daughter of a rich southern planter. She died from pneumonia during her first winter at the school and her ghost is said to still linger there, roaming the ruins where her classrooms and dormitory used to be. Annie was said to have resented being sent to the small mill town of Ellicott City to attend school. She sent a num-

ber of letters home which protested her "incarceration" and spoke badly of the school. One has to wonder how happy her spirit must be when wandering the despised building under the light of the moon. Needless to say, much has changed at the Institute over the years... but the stories of Annie's ghost remains, through the years of the school, through the occupants after and even up until today.

A few years ago, a girl who found herself separated from a group of visitors to the site saw something that she will never forget. She was alone near the front steps of the school when she saw a young woman in a long gown walk out of the front doors, down the stone steps and across the lawn... where she abruptly vanished. Was it An-

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nie... or some other spirit lingering behind at the former institute?



After the Civil War, the lives of the young girls who attended the Patapsco Institute changed drastically. Things were now very different in the south and classes on etiquette and manners did not seem so important anymore. The curriculum at the school made many changes and shortly, its reputation began to suffer.

By 1891, the Patapsco Female Institute had closed its doors for good. Later that same year, the building was purchased by James E. Tyson and it was turned into a summer hotel. It was during this time that a large porch was added (since destroyed) and a spacious in-ground swimming pool. The pool

has survived, although it is now a weed-choked ruin which lies just off of the current property line of the old building.

The building was purchased again 14 years later and named Bern Alwick, after the English ancestral home of the new owner Miss Lilly Tyson. She used the place as a residence for three years before it changed hands again. This time, in 1917, the school was turned into a 50-bed hospital for wounded service men from World War I. It is unknown just how many soldiers may have passed away in the old building, but one has to wonder if any of them chose to stay behind in the massive building as time passed on. In the 1930's, the



building became known as the Hilltop Theater for a short time, but it saw its last occupants in the 1940's.

The last occupant was Mrs. Magnolia Brennan, who later willed the school to her daughter. She, in turn, sold the house to Dr. James J. Whisman, who willed it to his alma mater, the University of Cincinnati. It was during the time that Dr. Whisman owned the building that he ordered it gutted so that no one would be hurt there. It had become a popular spot for teenagers to visit but even after the work was done, the local police still received disturbance calls from neighbors.



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Today, the site is accessible as a historic park and has been partially restored for events. It is also an active archaeological site as well. There are tours conducted through the structure and more information is available by calling 410.465.8500. The Institute is also included on the Haunted Ellicott City Ghost Tour.

PFI is often incorrectly confused with Hell House. Hell House refers to the St. Mary's College, catholic order of Redemptorists, in nearby (to the south) Ilchester. See Old St. Mary's College <http://marylandghosts.com/haunt/29/>



The Patapsco Female Institute was built in 1839 atop a high hill overlooking the little town. It was the one of the first female institutes built in the south and it became the preferred school to which Southern planters sent their daughters to be turned into young ladies.

The Civil War changed the status of the school. Young Southern women were no longer required to learn the subjects that the Institute taught, French, literature, or manner. More practical curriculum became the study of the day. The institute closed its doors in the 1890s because of its inability to change with the times. School then served as a hospital, private residence, and a theater.

In the 1950s the building was allowed to fall to ruin. The roof has collapsed and the wooden floors are given way and now only a cavernous shell stand where a proud school once stood. The ruins have been partially restored and the building is now a tourist attraction.

Today the school is the home of a very unhappy ghost. One young lady named Annie Van Derlot was not happy with the Patapsco Female Institute and she did not like the town of Ellicott City. The young woman died during her first winter at the school. People say that the young woman's unhappy ghost still roams the classroom and the dormitory.

Two tourists had a startling visit at the school. They were taking a tour during the daylight hour. The tourists felt that the building had an aura of spookiness. When they were about to leave one of them spotted a young woman coming down the stairs. She was dressed in white and he was not walking but floating. When the ghostly apparition reached the bottom of the steps she disappeared into thin air. Annie's ghost is not frightening, she just presents a sorrowful image.

## **BRIEF:**





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