



The New England Grimpendum

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A rich compendium of macabre and historic New England happenings, this travelogue features firsthand accounts of almost 200 sites throughout New England. This region is full of the macabre, the grim, and the ghastly—and all of it is worth visiting, for the traveler who dares! Author J. W. Ocker supplements directions and site information with entertaining personal anecdotes.

Topics include:

Legends and personalities of the macabre

Infamous crimes and killers

Dreadful tragedies

Horror movie locales

Notable cemeteries and gravestones

Intriguing *memento mori*

Classic monsters

The New England Grimpendium Details

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From Reader Review The New England Grimpendium for online ebook

Amy says

This is a very fun travelogue of obscure information. There was all sorts of cool and creepy trivia about scenic New England.

The author is a blogger. Sometimes his writing is really funny, but sometimes it's a little too conversational and a touch annoying.

Nicole says

I loved the idea and the cover art for this book, but the author spent so much time explaining his skeptical and cynical beliefs regarding the people, places and things he wrote about that I felt like I was being talked out of reading the book almost the whole time. The author actually created the sense of apathy I felt towards his work. Im giving this book a generous 3 stars because underneath the negative editorializing, the subject matter was interesting, and as a New Englander I will likely be referencing this book for future day or weekend trip ideas. And I have a soft spot for cool cover art.

Brittany says

"If New England is a spooky attic at the top of the country, then you're about to read the account of a man who has rifled through the attic as if it were the afternoon before Halloween and he hasn't found a costume yet."

If you are moving to or visiting New England and love the macabre, get this book immediately. It's a road trip guide to 200 sites that are a wee bit morbid. I have read this author's other books, seen him give a lecture, and followed his blog; therefore, much of the contents of this book I was aware of. I have also stumbled on lots of the sites myself just as a person with an interest in darker history and horror films. However, I wish I bought this book when I moved to the area as it is a great travel book of them all contained in one place. You have sites connected to serial killers and heinous murders, horror movies, ghost stories, interesting cemeteries, and monsters of course. The author has brief descriptions of each site with my kind of humor interspersed. I really enjoy his writing style.

Amanda Lyons says

Overall I found Ocker's book to be well written and full of interesting pieces about several different dark events and stories in New England. However I think it might have benefited from a bit less irreverence and a little more impartiality. Why? Well maybe I should explain what sort of book The New England Grimpendium is.

Ocker's Grimpendium while documenting the various darker bits about and from New England is very much the cynics guide to these things. Ocker makes it clear in the introduction of the book that his is a book for those looking for a realist's guide to the paranormal and fun morbid aspects of the area rather than your usual ghosts and bizarre locations books like say Wierd US.

Now ordinarily I really wouldn't have had a problem with this. I'm as much a realist as the next guy but he does spend quite a lot of time snarking on the genre he's technically writing within. Most of the time this means that we get irreverent comments about the odder aspects of the person, place or thing he's discussing or about his own adventures exploring the area or doing research (actually even jokes about himself as often as not) but sometimes it can mean he's being a little less fun and a little more on the insulting side.

What do I mean? Well for example:

When Ocker discusses Stephen King, one of the more popular and living examples of dark New England in his book he makes it quite clear he's no fan and likely resents the author's popularity.

When discussing his visit to Zaffis Museum of the Paranormal he spends more time belittling the man's collection and past than he does detailing the visit.

He indicated that The Black Dahlia (who has a memorial in New England where she grew up) was bound to turn up dead due to her lifestyle.

Ocker spends most of his discussion on the popular reality tv and paranormal research group TAPS taking them down a peg or three.

He also cracks wise about the 2003 fire at The Station, a small club which was set on fire by pyrotechnics set off by Great White who were playing that night. The resulting fire killed 100 of the 472 people there that night and injured several others. Ocker snarks about the deceased dying "for the Day Glo decade" and riffs on the event in other ways that come across nearly as insulting as that statement on its own.

The book still has some merit for its gathering of people, events, locations, ghosts and other momento mori from the New England I just don't think I should consider it my only resource for information on these things, largely because the author's skepticism often gets in the way of reading the whole story. Consider it a brief introduction to the area and if you don't take his occasional insulting tone too personally it can still remain a decent overview.

Erin says

If you want to look up spooky places in New England, take this book along. If you want great writing, this is not the book to read. I barely made it through the book because of the "oh so clever" banter of the author. Ugh.

The book had some fascinating nuggets of joy and macabre, so it is worth a try, especially for graveyard enthusiasts.

Ava says

I have to say this was one of the only non-boring tour guides I have ever read. Ocker made sure he kept enough of his personality in this book through and through.

It was well written and not just some "ghost chase" like a lot of the paranormal books out there. It was honest, if he didn't see some amazing event he didn't sugar coat it for extra interesting. It wasn't even all about that, it had the weird places that really describe New England (You can't really deny that it ISN'T a weird place.) It was especially interesting when he talked about places where they filmed horror movies that I just watched last week, that just happened to be filmed a town away, not even.

It's definitely a cool book, there was a couple grammar mistakes here and there. If you live in New England or plan on moving there, this is a book to read just to realize how different it is.

Kristin says

I liked the subject matter of this book, weird things in New England, but the sarcastic tone of the book is off-putting. The author lists many interesting New England oddities and in the same paragraph almost makes fun of anyone that would be curious to see them. It's one thing to discount ghost stories and legends, it's another to make fun of your target audience for being into them. I did like and appreciate all the Pee Wee's Big Adventure references.....

The Ol' Rattlesnake says

I was given this book, along with others, as a xmas present, and I feel awful someone had to spend money for this.

It was by far, one of the worse written books Ive had the misfortune of reading.

I thought it would be useful to just jot down some facts/info for research, but quickly found that it was just so lame to read, that I had to by pass the first & last sentences just to get to the facts of each section. I gave up close to the ending of the book, I couldnt stomach the corny "wit" and 5th grade level "inputs" this man feels needs to be in the book to make it, what, interesting??

With passages as:

"Cokeheads & lesbians."

"I almost wrote tactfully incestuous there, but the phrase creeped me out."

AND

"I doubt I want to be imprisoned for a year in one of its attics with my sister. No matter how hot she was."

One can't help but CRINGE...and then throw the book across the room.

Bill says

If you are interested in the most obscure of the obscure about supernatural New England this is your volume. I loved it in spite of the sometime weird gothic style the author writes in. I may even go buy it or at least have someone give it to me as a Christmas present.

Karla says

I'm morbid, and have been for as long as I can remember. Graves and cemeteries and, in general, the grim and gruesome side of history fascinates me. I'd rather read about the Black Death and its preceding famine and parallel religious wingnuttery (and murderous excesses) than contemporaneous lords and ladies and royalty and all the ins and outs of court protocol and intrigue. (Big, fat YAWN more often than not.) Charles II and his mistresses rate very low on my Interest-o-Meter in comparison to the Great Fire of London (and its preceding plague).

Death, sickness, disease, epidemics, religious fanatical freakouts, a scorched earth both physical and psychological, with a population on the edge of apocalyptic meltdown. It's like my birthday, Christmas AND Arbor Day all wrapped in one.

But I'm not a snob. I love the grim and gross and tragic on a small scale, too, and when a bunch of stories are collected that are all pertinent to my geographical region, I'm the author's Huckleberry (whatever that means.)

Ocker's book is a perfect bathroom reader in easily digestible (and conveniently short) bites that span the mundane and disappointing myths and legends to the "OMG, I wanna hop in my car and GO NOW!" must-see oddities next summer. A few entries seem overlong and rambling, and a few are too short when the event in question is really fascinating, but Ocker's point isn't to be a historian but a snarky tour guide for the bored and morbid cynic. So he succeeded mightily here.

The highlight of the entire book, for me, was the section on Phineas Gage, he of the "3 foot 7 inch iron bar that blasted through his skull, removed part of his frontal lobe, and yet he survived" fame.

And, for those of shallow bent (*raises hand*), it doesn't hurt that he was quite the looker:

My bodice rippers have a new hero. Sorry, Phineas. It's a mark of respect, trust me.

It's also kinda cool that he held a job at the inn (that still operates as an inn) just a stone's throw from where I work. Talk about small world. I love rural New England. It's weird and quaint and twisted and peaceful and very inter-connected.

The only major ding for Ocker's "research" is a huge oversight in the chapter on a murder committed in 1778 by three soldiers, two of whom were British who were "awkwardly hanging around after their country lost the Revolutionary War." American History Chronology FAIL! That brought me up short, as did the typo (?)

in the Phineas Gage chapter about his death (if the accident occurred in 1848, and he died 12 years after the accident, that does not make the year of death 1890). Those two goofs should have been caught in edit.

I'm glad I got this one out of the library, rather than buying it myself, since quite a few of the bits are on his website. But the handiness of this region-specific volume can't be denied.

It's given me some travel ideas for summer fun. First off is the "Grave With A Window" in New Haven, Vermont:

Who cares if it's too dark, moldy, and whatnot to see anything? It's a grave! With a window!

And now on my reading list is hanged criminal James Allen's autobiography, a ghoulish literary delight bound in Allen's skin that resides in Boston (and in full text on the internet).

The multiple sections on Salem, MA only reinforced my inclination to never go there, a town that's become a carnival park of cheesy witchydom. I'd much rather tramp through old cemeteries and get my vicarious spooky thrills from the headstone engravings.

[image error]

I'd post photos of ye olde gravestones around my work cubicle, but I'm sure I'd freak out my co-workers. So the bunny photos do a good job of keeping their illusions about their quiet and harmless colleague intact. Mwahaha.

4 stars, for the following reasons:

- * brain candy for the hectic holiday season
- * snarky
- * reinforcing my love for this part of the country
- * eclectic and entertaining
- * informative and day trip-inspiring

Kate says

If you're a fan of the macabre, the odd, and occasionally the vaguely cheesy, this is the travelogue for you. J. W. Ocker takes readers through the New England states to visit a variety of places, from the graves of infamous murderers and their victims to strange museums and memorials to movie locations and birthplaces of celebrities. Ocker's approach is often self-deprecating and skeptical, so you don't have to be a hardcore fanatic or a conspiracy theorist to enjoy the book. If you've always wondered where you might be able to view a book bound in human skin or contemplate a possible alien encounter, this book will direct you on how to get there or just let you take an armchair trip without letting on that you're a fan of the creepy and

weird.

Kyle Burley says

Lightweight, but cool tour of creepy sites in New England. The author clearly shares my taste for the dark and morbid.

Sara says

3.5 out of 5 stars.

Michael Kleen says

The New England Grimpendium: A Guide to Macabre and Ghostly Sites by J.W. Ocker is one of the most unique books I've ever read in this genre. More than just the usual collection of haunted sites, it contains a listing of homes and birthplaces of authors and entertainers, infamous crimes and criminals, horror movie filming locations, and even creepy plants. This book has everything the eclectic tourist could ask for.

J.W. Ocker was originally from Maryland, but has lived in New Hampshire since 2008. He's authored several books, including Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe (2014) and A Season with the Witch: The Magic and Mayhem of Halloween in Salem, Massachusetts (2016), all of which look fascinating. At his blog, Odd Things I've Seen (OTIS), he chronicles his visits to hundreds of cultural, artistic, natural, and historical oddities across the country and world.

Although some reviewers found Ocker's writing style in The New England Grimpendium slightly off-putting (he leans on the snarky, skeptical side), I enjoyed every page of it. The writing is relaxed, focusing not just on the history but also on his experiences visiting the location. The fact visited most if not all the locations in this book also sets it apart from other travel guides that often rely on secondhand sources.

I picked it up in a gift shop in Salem, Massachusetts. I'm always looking for new places to visit, and although most of these are outside my usual diving radius, I couldn't pass it up. "Grimpendium," the author's invention, is a fitting description for the eclectic contents. "Ghostly sites" represent a small portion of the places in this book. Most are related to celebrities and infamous people, but all are wonderfully unique.

One of the most unusual places in the book is "Skull Cliff" in the Lynn Woods Reservation in Lynnfield, Massachusetts. It's not a popular or well-known destination, at least not at the time of writing. It reads like a wonder the author discovered while on an afternoon hike. It's a 30-foot-tall sheer rock face covered in white skulls and bones by a graffiti artist in 2001. It's this type of place that keeps fascination in exploring our backyards alive.

I was surprised to learn how many horror movies have been filmed in New England. Of course, a lot of Stephen King adaptations were filmed there for obvious reasons, but did you know the infamous I Spit on Your Grave (1978) was filmed in Kent, Connecticut? I didn't. Unfortunately, there's nothing left of the Beetlejuice (1988) set, but you can still visit the town of East Corinth, Vermont. Don't look in the library for

Adam's scale-model of the town, though, that is just a rumor.

There's plenty in here for taphophiles too (whoa there, Chris Hansen, it means people who like cemeteries). The Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California is well-known among paranormal enthusiasts, but did you know Sarah Winchester herself is buried in New Haven, Connecticut? From the alleged grave of a Knight Templar in Westford, Massachusetts, to that of "Ocean-Born Mary" in Henniker, New Hampshire, each monument and memorial has a unique story and reveals a rich history.

The New England Grimpendium is full of interesting facts and surprises. It is an indispensable guidebook for tourists looking to spice up their trip to the east coast with something a little off the beaten path.

Amy Sturgis says

I so thoroughly enjoyed J.W. Ocker's *Poe-Land* that I had to read more from him. *The New England Grimpendium* is another travelog, in this case arranged by theme rather than location. Ocker scours New England looking for 1) Horror Legends and Personalities, 2) Infamous Crimes, Killers, and Tragedies, 3) Horror Movie Film Locales, 4) Notable Cemeteries, Gravestones, and Other Mememto Mori (one of my favorites), and 5) Classic Monsters (another favorite), which focuses on sites relating to local tales such as alien sightings and alleged abductions, cryptids, witches, vampires, mummies, demons, ghosts, creepy plants, and famous local monsters. Ocker investigates these sights with good-humored skepticism and a relish for the weird.

I enjoyed this volume greatly, although it fails to rank as highly for me as *Poe-Land*, because the entries by nature are necessarily shorter and somewhat disjointed (that is, there's not the feeling of a thematic road trip here, just a series of separate visits), and because there are far more typos and such that pulled me out of the text. That said, this was charming and laugh-out-loud funny and at times unexpectedly poignant, and perfect for anyone interested in local history, regional lore, small-town (and sometimes large-town) New England, and the macabre.
