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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## Boo!

*To mark this spooky month, Cook-Witter is bringing you stories about a few Illinois folks who've sent chills up our spine. Enjoy.*

### The Night the Martians Invaded

What was supposed to be a quiet Sunday evening on Oct. 30, 1938 quickly changed throughout the country when radio listeners heard:

*"Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt our program of dance music to bring you a special bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio News.*

*At twenty minutes before eight, central time, Professor Farrell of the Mount Jennings Observatory, Chicago, Illinois, reports observing several explosions of incandescent gas, occurring at regular intervals on the planet Mars. The spectroscope indicates the gas to be hydrogen and moving towards the earth with enormous velocity..."*

That was the beginning of former Illinoisan Orson Welles's now infamous broadcast of H. G. Wells's story, "War of the Worlds." In convincing detail, the radio play told the story of Martian marauders landing in New Jersey.

Although the program was interrupted four times with a disclaimer that it was fiction, loads of people didn't pay attention. Instead, many became hysterical. The country was jittery with fears of a second World War and Welles's realistic program hit raw, vulnerable nerves.

"In Newark more than 20 families wrapped their faces in wet towels to save themselves from the gas

raid, tied up traffic with their calls for gas masks, inhalators, ambulances, police rescue squads," said the November 7, 1938 Time magazine.

Local reactions to Welles's broadcast filled both of Springfield's newspapers - the Illinois State Register and the Illinois State Journal. The Oct. 31, 1938 Register said: "Several hundred Springfield residents may never see or hear an actual air raid but if they do it will be old stuff. They went through their first real war scare last night as they listened to the 'War of the Worlds' broadcast over a Columbian network and shuddered in their chairs as they heard air raid-

ers from Mars destroy a large part of New York City and spread death and destruction throughout the east coast."

Springfieldians called the Register's office and asked the usually bored operator for details.

"The telephone operator, well qualified to be a 'Doubting Thomas' by virtue of a number of years of denying false rumors, didn't take the situation seriously enough to satisfy some," the Register said.

"When she told one person that there were

no air raids and smiled out loud during the conversation, the excited party on the other end of the line waxed wrathful and declared there would be nothing to laugh about in a few minutes when the raiders got to Springfield."

The Journal's phones rang all night as well, according to the Oct. 31, 1938 paper.



*Orson Welles 1937 -- photo courtesy of the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences*

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### The Night The Martians Invaded

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“As the broadcast continued, calls increased and voices raised in pitch as the plausibility of ‘the end of the world’ became a convincing possibility,” the article said.

“A woman in Pittsburgh tried suicide, saying ‘I’d rather die this way than like that,’” said the Oct. 31, 1938 Register.

“At a high point in the program the electric power failed at Concrete, Washington, a town of 1,000 and the lights went out in most of the homes,” the Register related. “Many thought the invasion had reached the west coast. Women fainted and men prepared to take their families to the mountains.”

Welles had no idea his broadcast would panic the public, according to Time magazine. Ironically, he had worried it was “too old-fashioned for modern consumption.”

Angered by the hysteria, the Federal Communications Chairman demanded the radio script and promised an investigation. A Democratic senator from Iowa said he would introduce a bill in Congress to control “radio abuses,” according to the Journal.

Orson Welles and Columbia Broadcasting System apologized. Then, according to Springfield’s Oct. 31 Register, Columbia said it might rerun the program because of “a deluge of phone calls” asking it to do so.



### Welles’s Illinois Roots

Orson Welles was born in Kenosha, but grew up in the Chicago area. His mother, Beatrice Ives, was from Springfield, according to “Current Biography 1965” (HW Wilson Co., 1965). According to a November 2, 1938 unidentified newspaper article in Springfield’s Lincoln Library, the Ives family was involved in the coal business in the capital city and was “musically and dramatically inclined.” Welles’s mother was a beautiful and talented pianist and award-winning “rifle shot,” it says. “Current Biography 1965” called her a “radical” who spent time in jail because of her fight for women’s suffrage. Ives died in Chicago when Welles was eight.

Welles attended the Todd School for Boys in Woodstock, Illinois and the Chicago Art Institute before moving to Ireland for a short time. He is “remotely related” to Adlai Stevenson, according to “Current Biography 1965.”

**To hear Orson Welles’s “War of the Worlds” broadcast, visit this Web site: [www.mercurytheatre.info](http://www.mercurytheatre.info). You can listen to many other Mercury Theatre on the Air broadcasts here, including: Dracula, A Tale of Two Cities, Abraham Lincoln, and more.**

### Illinois Professor Celebrates Original Horror Writers

When he was a child, Jack G. Voller, an English professor at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, loved reading ghost stories and science fiction, and he loved Halloween. Add his adult appreciation for literature and history, and you’ve got one big fan of traditional Gothic literature, like Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein,” Bram Stoker’s “Dracula,” Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” and many more. These are the scary stories written before 1950 that used human psychology, not gore, to make readers’ hearts pound.

Voller teaches about traditional Gothic literature, as well as other genres, and developed an award-

winning Web site about it ten years ago to spread the word. It’s called “Literary Gothic,” [www.litgothic.com](http://www.litgothic.com).

It has reprints of hundreds of traditional Gothic tales by obscure and well-known authors, as well as study guides and resources about the genre. “My professional interest in the Gothic developed in graduate school when I realized that the Gothic developed in the same cultural moment as the Romantic Period in Britain. That time witnessed the birth of many other important aspects of modern civilization, from the industrial revolution to human rights to



modern understandings of the self,” Voller says..

“Gothic (literature) gave writers a very symbolic way of talking about the revolutionary changes of the time in an ‘indirect’ way, a way that allowed them to tell a compelling story but at the same time to address the anxieties of the age. It’s not just

about ghosts and crypts and vampires; it’s about us.”

Today’s readers often prefer modern horror writers to the traditional Gothic scribes, according to Voller. They like contemporary writers’ immediate shock tactics over the Gothics’ gradual psychological scares. And, “older literature is, often, simply more

challenging to read and... often not as ‘exciting’ to many modern readers,” he says.

For those willing to give old Gothic tales a try, Voller recommends Bernard Capes’s “An Eddy on the Floor” (available on his Web site). “It’s from the end of the Victorian period (1899), and reflects the 1890s interest in psychology (this is just before Sigmund Freud burst on the intellectual scene) that was powerfully shaping not only Gothic literature but Western literature in general. The story’s psychological examination of a juxtaposed brutality and humanism in its main character is quite haunting, yet the story also incorporates some genuine supernaturalism, making a good read for those who want a traditional Gothic thrill.”

Another of his personal favorites is Shirley Jackson’s “The Haunting of Hill House,” published in 1959, and therefore not included on his Web site. “It’s widely regarded as one of the most important horror novels of the Twentieth Century, and that’s a fair estimate,” Voller says. “It’s not one to read by yourself in a large, empty house late at night.”

Visit Voller’s site at [www.litgothic.com](http://www.litgothic.com). Best check it during daylight hours.



## ABRAHAM LINCOLN WALKS AT MIDNIGHT

by Vachel Lindsay

*It is portentous, and a thing of state  
That here at midnight, in our little town  
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,  
Near the old court-house pacing up and down,*

*Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards  
He lingers where his children used to play,  
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones  
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.*

*A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,  
A famous high-top hat and plain worn shawl  
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,  
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.*

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### Abraham Lincoln Walks At Midnight

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*He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.  
He is among us:--as in times before!  
And we who toss and lie awake for long,  
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.*

*His head is bowed. He thinks of men and kings.  
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?  
Too many peasants fight, they know not why;  
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.*

*The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.  
He sees the dreadnoughts scouring every main.  
He carries on his shawl-draped shoulders now  
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.*

*He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn  
Shall come;--the shining hope of Europe free:  
A league of sober folk, the worker's earth,  
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.*

*It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,  
That all his hours of travail here for men  
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace  
That he may sleep upon his hill again?*

While this poem is often cited as an otherworldly portrayal of Illinois' favorite son, Springfield poet Vachel Lindsay wrote it to express his pacifist views, according to Lindsay expert and Illinois State Historical Society Executive Director William Furry, from Springfield.

Lindsay wrote the poem in 1914, at the beginning of World War I. "You could write a book about

Lindsay's argument against the War," says Furry, who co-edited, with Peter Ellertsen, the book *"Tramping Across America: Travel Writing of Vachel Lindsay"* (1999, Rosehill Press). Lindsay's pacifism "had much to do with his religious beliefs," Furry says.

"He was even invited to participate in anti-war demonstrations led by (Chicago reformer) Jane Addams and Henry Ford, but he declined, probably because he couldn't raise the cash to participate."

The poem also reflects Lindsay's respect for Abraham Lincoln. "Lindsay had relatives who lived in the Lincoln neighborhood after the Lincolns left," explains Furry. "Vachel played in the neighborhood as a child. He was a great admirer of Lincoln and dreamed of a world full of 'Lincoln-hearted men.'"

Lindsay was asked to read the poem at the 1918 dedication of the statue of Abraham Lincoln that's on the Statehouse lawn in Springfield.



## Transitions

On October 1, 2007, **Dr. Damon Arnold** of Chicago took **Dr. Eric Whitaker's** place as the new Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. Dr. Arnold recently finished a second tour of duty in Iraq where he treated wounded soldiers; he formerly worked for the Chicago Department of Public Health. The Illinois Senate has confirmed his appointment. Dr. Whitaker has taken a job with the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Former Illinois Congressman **George Sangmeister** died on October 7, 2007 in Joliet. He was a Democrat who served in the Illinois legislature before representing Illinois' Eleventh District in Congress.

