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## Gardner After Midnight, a local trip into The Twilight Zone

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Mike Richard | Gardner News

You're traveling through another dimension - a dimension not only of sight and sound, but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. That's a signpost up ahead, your next stop: "Gardner After Midnight!" Gardner After Midnight is a website "dedicated to exploring the unusual paranormal events that have occurred in Gardner, Massachusetts," according to the introduction created by Kyle Brinkmann. Brinkmann is a journeyman researcher who is admittedly "from all over," living for a time in Kentucky and Michigan, and before his arrival in Gardner, Naugatuck, Conn. While living in Connecticut, he was part of an effort to write a book about paranormal happenings in the Naugatuck Valley. He had been commissioned as a photographer to shoot some of the paranormal sites and record offbeat tales, however the book idea fell by the wayside. Eventually, his move to the Chair City helped pique his interests of the local paranormal, which included legends concerning hauntings, strange tales of Gardner and such phenomena as UFO sightings and stories of alien abductions. "What amazes me about Gardner is that it has such a rich and beautiful anecdotal history," he said. "Strange and unusual things - some of which are amusing and some which have nothing to do with the paranormal "that have happened here." Brinkmann, a self-professed open-minded skeptic when it comes to the paranormal, explained, "Originally I thought that it might be an interesting thing to write a book on, since I found so much information, but obviously, that would be rather costly," he said. "Plus, since I kept going and going it would have to be continually updated," he continued, "so I figured a web site would be my best bet." One of the unique sections of the Gardner After Midnight pages is entitled "Haunted Gardner" that includes "Five Sites of Terror in Gardner." The majority of the listings have been compiled from another website called "Shadowlands Haunted Sites in Massachusetts." They include: Bridge Street Haunting: Relating the tale of a local woman who apparently died on this road after losing control of her car and colliding with a tree. Some have claimed to see a white figure in the area that has been known to follow people down Route 68, until reaching a nearby cemetery. It is theorized that this cemetery was where the woman was laid to rest. Dunn Park Island Apparitions: Local legend has it that the small island in the middle of Dunn Pond is haunted, and people have reported seeing bright lights over the island late at night. It is rumored that a Native American was buried on the island, formerly his favorite fishing spot before Gardner was settled as a town. Gardner State Hospital Grounds: First opening in 1902, the Gardner State Hospital was once known by the politically incorrect title as The State Insane Colony. The state hospital closed in 1975 to become the North Central Correctional Institution. Since that time, reports of strange noises and sights have been reported in two of the abandoned buildings on the grounds at night. Gardner Cinema Ghost: The ghostly apparition of a young girl (nicknamed Alice by the Cinema employees) has been reported roaming in the lobby of the old theater. According to legend, the little girl once lived above the old Orpheum Theater building in the rooming house known as the American House and died during the Spanish Influenza plague of 1918. Her spirit has been known to frequent the lobby, often attracting the attention of a late night passerby who has claimed to see what looks like a little girl peering out the plate glass window. The Torriander: The old SK Pierce Victorian House at 4 West Broadway, currently doing business as the Torriander gift shop, is supposedly haunted by a trio of ghosts. The first is reported to be a 19-year old woman by the name of Maddie Cornwall, who once lived in the house as a domestic. Her name was found in an old Gardner census after her initials were given to the owners of the house by a parapsychologist. The second ghost is allegedly the spirit of a five-year old boy who enjoys playing practical jokes, such as hiding car keys. The third is in the form of a resident of the rooming house who died in a 1963 fire there. There is also a tribute page honoring Gardner's first murder of the Kneeland Maids, which recently commemorated its 150th anniversary earlier this month. There are photographs of the gravestone of the two sisters which details their heinous demise, as well as the blood splattered bed stand taken from the scene of the crime. Another page discusses some of the conspiracy theories surrounding Gardner's first and most sensational unsolved murder. Then, there is a collection of unique and strange tales of Gardner's past including: The Luckiest Man in Gardner: Gardner Revolutionary War soldier David Comee was shot not once, but twice in the same fierce battle of the war. After a near miss where he was struck by a musket ball that cut some hair from his head, another ball hit his musket ripping the barrel of the weapon from its stock. Lightning Strikes Once in Gardner: According to the web page, The home of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Green's home was struck by lightning in 1820. "Mr. Green claimed to have felt the effect of the lightning to be — like a stick of wood coming with great force against his legs. — Interestingly there was no rain and the only clouds in the sky were light brassy ones except for one ominously black one that witnesses claimed to be shaped like a man's hand. Witnesses to the event claimed to hear what sounded like gunfire, but the Greens themselves claimed to have heard nothing. A carpenter commissioned to repair the Green home reported that every nail in the house was affected." If it's science fiction that you fancy, the page also relates several close encounters of the third kind concerning Unidentified Flying Objects. Many of them come from a variety of web sites including Sci Fi Café BUFO Radio and the Yahoo UFO Group. They include: 1978 UFO sighting: A (then) six-year old claimed to witnessed what was originally thought to be an airplane, until the UFO exhibited strange behavior. The event was reported to "World of the Strange" in 2002. 1996 UFO sighting: On New Year's Eve of 1996, four gray circular discs were allegedly witnessed over Gardner. Reports noted that the gray discs flew slowly at first, then gathered around each other, lined up and took off at a great speed. 2003 Alien Abduction at Dunn Park: During the Labor Day weekend in 2003, an experience of an "alien abduction" was reported. While the person declined to fully identify herself, she did email a detailed report of her alleged experience to several UFO groups.

Brinkmann realizes there are as many skeptics as there are believers to this phenomenon, but hopes that everyone who visits the land of Gardner After Midnight, does so with an open mind and appreciation for the value of its local lore. "I hope to add to (the web page)," he said. "I have a couple of people who have anecdotes that I'd like to put into it. I have had instances where people have been ridiculed for having paranormal experiences, so one of my big problems is that I don't want to hold anyone up to ridicule through my website." Some of the opposition often comes from religious groups who may feel that delving into the realm of spirituality may tend to undermine the credibility of a Higher Power. "What kills me about all this is that on both ends of the spectrum, the total knee-jerk skeptics and the true believers "they both have almost identical mind sets," Brinkmann said. "There's basically one side that will accept anything as fact, regardless how tenacious it may be and another side that just wants to label everybody as a liar or crazy." Brinkmann invites anyone who may have personal tales or experiences in the paranormal within the city to contact him through his email address at KyleBrinkmann@yahoo.com. Still, for those who are simply curious and would like to take their own trip to Gardner's own Twilight Zone they can visit his web page located at [www.geocities.com/gardneraftermidnight/](http://www.geocities.com/gardneraftermidnight/). "The real story is the individuals," he said, "I'm just the person who is putting the information together." (Comments and suggestions for The Gardner Scene can be sent to Mike Richard at Rich0725@aol.com or in writing c/o The Gardner News, 309 Central St. Gardner, MA 01440)

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