

The Goatman of Prince George's County, MD

Very little information, reliable or otherwise, exists about the legendary Goatman. Scattered newspaper accounts, a few amusing magazine articles and a brief citation in a cryptozoology book or two pretty much exhaust the available public written sources. While creatures like Big Foot and the Loch Ness Monster get international attention, the Goatman of Prince George's County has faced massive neglect. Nevertheless, just when you think we have heard the last of him there is a new report. Many of us were surprised when the Goatman was featured in an episode of *The X-Files*.

What is the Legend?

Often the Goatman of Prince George's County is associated with all the various other so-called "lover's lane" monsters; attacking the parked cars of teenagers doing more than talking about the weather. However, encounters with this creature have included people of all ages and during the most innocent of situations. It is true that he has banged upon automobiles and that people have set their dogs upon him, the latter purportedly with the most tragic of results. He appears exclusively near wooded and rural areas and at night. The mythical elements are quite peculiar and strike fear into the hearts of God-fearing Christians: this satyr-like creature, not unlike the Hellenic deity Pan, is described as being human from the waist up and like a goat from the legs down. While it is said by some that he wears boots, others contend that his feet are actually cloven hooves. Other renditions would say that his face is also goat-like and that he has devilish twisting horns. The popular story about his origin seems rather farfetched. We are told that he was a researcher at a

local agricultural research facility who suffered a metamorphosis when an experiment went awry. Now he travels as an outcast to humanity, some say with an ax in hand.

Recollections from Forestville-District Heights

I well recall the “Goat Man” phenomenon of my childhood. While I can nostalgically reminisce upon this “creature” from the 1960’s and early 1970’s, at the time it filled me with much anxiety. It took upon itself something of the pallor of a boogeyman, a mysterious figure who might “get us” if we were bad. Such was the message that many parents gave their children. The teenage couples were all excited about this “thing” in the woods; I suppose hoping that a tale of mystery and danger might help their parents forget why they were in the woods, anyway. (As for those in parked cars, they evidently used to agitate the Goatman by flashing their lights upon him. His response was to attack the automobiles.) Did the grownups, themselves, really believe in the existence of this “monster”? Admittedly, a number of them thought there was something strange in the forest, going so far as to hunt it down. However, this was a task often relegated to teenage boys playing a new version of snipe hunting. I suspect that other adults, having taken over the fanciful stories, merely implemented it as but another tool to compel their young ones to behave. The wooded area in Forestville, a name once descriptive of the town, was being developed for suburban housing. An untouched area behind Holly Hills apartments was said to possess a Goatman. Officials of the neighborhood schools, Forestville Elementary and Spalding Junior High, as well as fearful parents, would not hesitate to mention the creature in order to keep us out of the

woods. As any student of human nature might guess, this warning made the prospect more tempting. Indeed, as a shortcut, so many kids had detoured through the woods on the way home after school, that a trail of a sorts had been made. It was the kind of passage one might find in a scary fairytale—winding around through a thick and dark forest. It was a quick adventure and a dare that no one could pass up.

I have to be careful about my memories of those days; they come to me through the prism of a child's mind and feelings. Friends have largely forgotten about the Goatman. But, for some curious reason, the Goatman caught my imagination, and from this vivid land of wonder, it has never entirely escaped. This remained the case, even when more mundane details came to light. Rumor had it that the mysterious figure had been forced into our area by those pursuing him. The county was in the early stages of a transition wherein unchecked construction of homes, businesses, and roads were encroaching upon his habitat. (The rural and farm community of only a few decades ago is almost extinguished, now. Prince George's has become one of the most populous counties in the nation, with all the accompanying regulations, taxes, and laws to match. A creature like the Goatman would be hard pressed to find a home here.) Looking back, it seemed he was an intensely shy individual. Was he ashamed of his appearance? Or, did he just want to be left alone? He would creep from the woods at night scavenging for food, clothing, and any other useful castaways. The Junior High dumpster was repeatedly broken into, as were those behind Penn-Mar Shopping Center. The proximity of these vagabond treasure troves might have been another reason for this wanderer's presence and abode in our location. The stories of

mutilated animals were true. Dog's were dismembered, and sometimes with the meatiest parts missing. It is uncertain whether he actually sought out the dogs; more likely, he was defending himself from them. Pets protecting their owners' property and bands of wild canines were known to go after him. If he ate the meat, the question arises, did he cook it? While I cannot utterly contest that he ate raw flesh, there were definite signs of camp fires in the woods. Eventually, some of the old gang around town found his home, little more than a rickety tree house. It was surrounded by animal skins and bones. They lost no time getting out of there. While in Junior High School, officials were forced by parents to search the small forest for the Goatman. Since, as far as I know, he had never killed anyone, they were going to charge him with trespassing. Word was that they found an old hermit who quickly eluded their grasp.

Those woods are almost totally gone now, replaced by houses and condominiums. If he was old then, he must assuredly be dead now. Of course, there is a possibility that he was not the only one given the title, Goatman. The bums and hobos, while being solitary, would sometimes gather for purposes of sharing stories and trade. This became even more the case as they were less welcome into what we consider normal society.

A friend who grew up in the area admitted quite frankly that this was all news to him. He had no recollection of the Goatman at all, even though he regularly played in the local woods. While I admit to being susceptible to the TALL TALE, these memories of mine grow clearer with every telling of the story. Maybe so many have forgotten the tale because they WANT TO FORGET? Just as stories can be exaggerated or molded into

legend or myth, they can also be repressed. Being scared by a boogeyman is one thing, actually believing in him, or worse, encountering him, is something else!

What About This Goat Business?

Was he a real mutation of a goat and a man? Unless he had suffered some kind of natural mutation, as one might from the womb, I would doubt it. Reason rebels at the notion that any faulty pre-DNA technology brought about this metamorphosis; catastrophic and artificially induced changes in a person's biology frequently precipitate cancer and tend to be terminal. The Beltsville story of an errant scientist at the agricultural center strikes me as contrived, ala a mixture of a mysterious man, hysterical teenagers, and too many *Incredible Hulk* comic books. The county was once a farming community. Small farms often raised goats for their milk, cheese, and when all else failed, their meat. They were even utilized as natural lawn mowers. Some people domesticated them like pets, although dogs were unlikely to get along well with them—there was a definite goat smell. Goat skins could be used as a poor man's leather and as a coat. Wearing the skins of an animal, with the accompanying cap of horns or antlers, was seen as a way for the men of the forest to get close to wild prey, like deer. Wild goats, to my knowledge, no longer roam the county.

One elderly person remarked that they had known the figure, not as the Goatman, but as the "Coatman." The name changed as the particulars blurred by word of mouth. According to this testimony, and it makes real sense, it resulted from this madman always wearing a long coat of fur, even in the sweltering summers of Southern Maryland.

Current Testimony

A remnant of the legend survives in some people's minds, but increasing numbers of modern day kids have neither awareness nor an interest in the Goatman saga. The skeptical will say that it is corny or stupid; the gullible, that it has something to do with alien abductions. Nevertheless, a few still have fun with the traditional story. Asking around, a young woman in her twenties told me that she has heard of the Goatman living under Cry Baby Bridge in Brandywine. I had previously heard rumblings of such a character around Baby Lane, near Mill Swamp, a waterway running into Pomokey Creek. Actually, if he was to live anywhere in the county, that would be the place. It still has a remnant of the rural about it and is adjacent to the countryside of neighboring Charles County. The Pomokey Creek area has many poor people. I know of one family who resides there in a shack with wooden crates for a floor and blankets for room dividers. They make a little money selling wood and eat what they can catch. They have no electricity or indoor plumbing. Hidden away on a dirt road in Pomokey, they are the forgotten residents of the county. Their local minister is an anti-Catholic preacher who earned his theological credentials from an uncertified correspondence course. Ignorance and resentment, as well as children robbed of hope, is still liberally bred. Their overriding pride and deep distrust of strangers makes it difficult to help them. (The importance of such an environment near a creek will come to light in my comments about the Upper Marlboro Goatman.)

Upper Marlboro, County Seat: Source of the Goatman?

An article by Mark Opsasnick in *Strange Magazine* mentions that the Goatman stories “originated with farm families in early 1958 around the Upper Marlboro area of what today is Rt. 202 or Landover Road.” I thought I would make some cursory exploration of the oldest testimonies about the so-called Goatman among the members of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Upper Marlboro, a Catholic community finding its origins in colonial times. (When I wrote these notes, I was assigned there.) The likelihood was that such a creature-man would have emerged from and have been known best by the poorer inhabitants. I turned my search in that direction. Maybe their descendants would have some notion about the oddity’s identity? Many of the black slaves and early tenant workers were parishioners here. After the Civil War, while there were some influential parish families among the property owners, many of the poor made this church their own. Immediately, it struck me as curious that Upper Marlboro seemed at the center of the various sightings:

Fletchertown Road in Old Bowie

[Due north of us] It was once heavily forested with Northridge Community Park still remaining. Newstop and Horsepen streams are near and branch out from the Patuxent River.

Lottsford Road in Mitchelleville

[Northwest of us] On the other side of Watkins Regional Park from us, it includes the remnant forest, Western Branch Stream Valley Park and several golf courses. It is intersected by Bald

Hill and Western branches on one side and Southwest branch from the Patuxent on the other.

National Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville

[Northwest of us] This is still a somewhat rural and farming area, with a stream running into Indian Creek It encloses Alter Pond, Beaverdam Creek, Indian Creek, Little Paint Branch Stream out of Little Paint Branch Park, etc. Adjacent is the Nasa Goddard Space Flight Center.

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel

[Northwest of us] A portion of the Patuxent River actually flows through here. It remains a substantial natural wilderness.

Walker Mill Road/Forestville-Ritchie Road

[West of us] One could follow the Southwest Branch stream right into this area. It includes Walker Mill Regional Park and on the other side, near Forestville proper, the Suitland Bog Conservation Area and stream.

Tucker Road in Clinton

[Southwest of us] Henson Creek can be followed into Henson Stream Valley Park.

Brown Station Road in Upper Marlboro

[Immediate area] An assortment of farms and woods dot the landscape. Cabin, Back, Turkey, and other branch streams intersect it. It is not far from Rt. 202 (Largo Road), Southwest Stream Valley Park, and Watkins Regional Park.

Note that all of these areas still have at least some residual rural flavor, usually reduced to a park, and that in past days, were accessible by a waterway. Upper Marlboro is a place of convergence for many streams and canals. These particulars are important as they help to collaborate some of the history about the man or men behind the Goatman legend uncovered in Upper Marlboro.

One of the parishioners of St. Mary's recalls a man named Dominic But— whom he thinks was the source of these Goatman stories. He lived on Leeland Road, an area still quite rural and housing many rustic characters. He would close up his house from Spring to Fall and go trapping for turtles. Principally, he would look for what locals call the crocodile turtle, a type of large Terrapin so much in evidence in the state. It is a monstrous water turtle, with ridges along its tail. It loves brackish water. The beast looks something like a dragon with a shell on its back. They can also grow quite large, as much as 15 to 25 pounds. I myself have seen them in School House Pond down the street from the church. Man-made canals, creeks, and streams crisscross the Upper Marlboro area, feeding into the Patuxent River. Water levels sometimes flood the local bridges. Patuxent Park River is also a feature of the area within parish boundaries. The turtle population, no longer actively pursued, has become a nuisance to local fishermen, snaring their lines. Dominic would have followed these waterways in search of turtles. Indeed, the Collington and East branches (streams) passed near his home. He tended to move westward to find turtles, perhaps because the water was murkier in that direction—the kind the turtles liked best. He would also go quite a way south, but as he got older, his treks shortened. Along the muddy

banks the turtles would bury their eggs; he would collect them for human consumption, an acquired taste, for sure.

He was quite a character. Most certainly he wore some sort of head-dressing as protection against the elements. Nature could have easily provided the horns for a cap. Of course, all sorts of head-gear could have been mistaken for something bizarre in the cover of darkness. During the time he was out, he would live totally off the land. He wore furs and carried other gear on his person. He would not cut his hair, which grew quite long. Because of the dirt and hair, you would be hard-pressed to testify to his African American ancestry. He was a trader. While he traveled, he would occasionally ask permission to stay in barns. Knowing how his appearance was offensive, he never asked to enter a house. While he probably carried a hatchet, if not a complete ax, it is known that he carried a long stick with a nail at one end. This was his most valuable tool. He would use it to probe for turtles in the muddy water. He could determine from the bubbles which side was the head and which was the tail. The last thing anyone ever wanted to do was to reach for one of these creatures on the head side. Their mouths are very powerful and dangerous. He was known to reach into the mud past his shoulder to drag the heaviest of turtles out of the water. He would then take the turtle and trade for things he needed. If someone wanted him to prepare the turtle, he would gut it as one might do a fish. As one who has eaten turtle, I can testify that the meat is quite good; however, the process of extracting it from the shell is a bit gross. Because of its primitive nervous system, the turtle can run around without its head and the heart will continue beating for a while after it has been detached from the rest of the reptilian flesh. As a boy, I can remember my

mother with an ax, chopping the head off a turtle. Then my brothers and I had to chase the headless body as it sought to get away. Yum yum!

You can well imagine what this hairy man, dressed strangely, and caked in mud must have looked like. He functioned this way faithfully from the 1930's to mid-1950. After the war, people began to settle in the county who were more circumspect about trespassers and unfamiliar with the ways of men like Dominic. They went into a panic when they saw him and unleashed their dogs upon him. The civility he and his kind knew had been replaced by a fear and loathing— the ultimate in bad manners and intolerance. The last thing they wanted was to trade with this man trespassing on their property with a bucket or inverted shell full of turtle guts. They probably did not give him time to explain what he was offering. Confrontations became so bad that he was reduced to traveling public roads at night. That is where the teenagers come into the picture.

His family line, still found locally, has sometimes suffered from skin diseases which rob the features of pigment. There may even have been some albinism. It is a major presumption, but if such was the case for Dominic, then much would be explained regarding glimpses of a milky complexion and the care he took to avoid direct exposure to the sun. Further, the legendary red eyes would find a logical explanation since this is the natural appearance of eyes lacking pigmentation.

I am told that one of his favorite areas to work was down on Brandywine Road, a place where maybe his family and compatriots continued their line of work for many years. Particularly, the area was in the direction of Baden in what is

today Cedarville State Park. It still allows hunting within designated areas. Several waterways penetrate this forest, but Dominic preferred Zekiah Swamp Run. If I wanted to find a modern day Goatman, that is where I would start my search. Who knows, maybe they still carry goats with them for milk and cheese? After all, it is a lot easier than toting a cow through the brush and mud. Plus, it will eat anything.

There were similar persons often confused with Dominic and who may have lived a parallel type of life. One was named Joe Car—. Another was George Tay—. He also refused to cut his hair and would wear a long green army surplus jacket. He wore this coat even during the humid hot summers. I am told he would bring an alarm clock to Mass and would make a racket if the pastor went too long. People laughed about it and tolerated him. Such people made life interesting. Maybe that is why the legend of the Goatman has endured? My feeble reflection does not exhaust the mystery. That is probably for the best. Too many things today are easily explained away. Instead of being bothered, maybe we should find joy in the search itself and nurture awe toward the world of wonder God has given us?

Postscript: Who Are the “Real” Goatmen?

My faith mandates that I make a qualification to these remarks. I would argue that such creatures do exist and that they are truly monsters of the worse possible sort. They are not restricted to Prince George's County; indeed, they co-exist with us as a secret society. These goat-men and I must quicken to add, goat-women, do not possess horns— at least none that we can see— but still they are kin to Satan. Unlike the local fables, they are not the end-product of either science or nature, but of super-nature.

They constitute that other city which has been repudiated throughout the centuries and most brilliantly discussed by St. Augustine of Hippo. It is a legion which lies to itself and to all others. Their allegiance is only to themselves, and then only when it is profitable and/or pleasurable. They have no immediate concern for judgments against them, but are a parasitical hedonistic community enraptured by proximate goods and ends. Unlike the poor old men who were harassed for their peculiarities, and who were really a threat to no one; these other goat-people are all murderers. True to the mythic symbolism of the horned goat, they are the ultimate manipulators. Well-versed with pretense, they have stifled genuine charity both in their hearts and in their daily operation. They become more and more beasts, and less and less human. Compounding the problem, they are all plagued carriers of a lethal contagion called sin— a poison which if left untreated, results in the death of souls.

“But when the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory; and before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the GOATS; and he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the GOATS on the left. “Then the king will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the just will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and feed thee; or thirsty, and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and take thee in; or

naked, and clothe thee? Or when did we see thee sick, or in prison, and come to thee?’ And answering the king will say to them, ‘Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me.’“Then he will say to those (GOATS) on his left hand, ‘Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Amen I say to you, as long as you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me.’ And these will go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

A Revision of the *Challoner-Rheims Version*, 1943
Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Recommended Reading: *Strange Magazine* Issue #14, Fall 1994, pp. 18-21. Author: Mark Opsasnick. ISSN 0894-8968.