

## The Black Aggie

**Place of Origin:** Druid Ridge Cemetery, Pikesville, Maryland

**Sculptor:** Edward Pausch

**Created For:** General Felix Agnus

**Year of Installation:** 1925

**Current Location:** Howard T. Markey National Courts Building, Washington, DC

When a cemetery has a name like druid ridge, you expect it to have a creepy grave statue or two. And Druid Ridge Cemetery in Pikesville, Maryland, has a doozy of one. Or, rather, it did. Today, if you walk its pleasant, winding paths, you'll eventually come across an empty, chair-like pedestal with the name Agnus engraved into its base.

This is the abandoned throne of the Black Aggie, a cursed funerary sculpture with a strange past and an almost stranger present. The Black Aggie is a six-foot-tall shrouded figure in bronze. She sits on a stone. Her eyes are closed. Her hand lifts to rest beneath her chin. She is, in a word, creepy. And the legends that surround her are even more so.

They say her eyes glow red at night and that if you look into them, you'll go blind. They say that if a pregnant woman walks through her shadow, that woman will miscarry. They say that at night, the spirits of the cemetery gather around her. They say that if you sit on her lap, you will die. They say if you stay overnight with her, you will die.

According to the most specific story told about the Black Aggie, her arm went missing in 1962. It was found in the car of a local sheet metal worker, who claimed that the statue had ripped it off herself one night and handed it to him. It is an outrageous story, but five minutes in the presence of the statue at night might make you inclined to believe it.

There is a good reason for this statue to be cursed. The Black Aggie is an unsanctioned knockoff of a genuine work of funerary art, the Adams Memorial, which was made to memorialize a woman who killed herself.

Henry Adams, of the influential Adams family that gave us two presidents, returned home one day in December 1885 to find his wife of more than a decade, Marian "Clover" Adams, dead on the floor. She had ingested potassium cyanide, a chemical that she normally used to develop her photography. Nobody knows why she killed herself. If there was a suicide note left behind, her husband destroyed it.

Adams hired famed Irish-born American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to create a work of art to memorialize his wife that could be placed above her (and eventually his) grave in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, DC. The sculpture didn't have a name, but folks who saw it called it *Grief* and proclaimed it to be one of the most profound expressions of mourning and loss in the funerary art genre. It was immediately famous. Immediately touristed. And, shortly before Saint-Gaudens's death in 1907, ripped off.

The copycat was the celebrated sculptor Edward Pausch, who created a replica of the Adams Memorial for General Felix Agnus, a French-born Civil War veteran and newspaper publisher in Baltimore. Agnus proudly erected the statue on his family plot in Druid Ridge Cemetery in Maryland, about thirty-five miles from the place where the Adams Memorial loomed. The widow of Saint-Gaudens, Augusta, was outraged by the unauthorized copy of her husband's statue and threatened legal action. But Agnus refused to remove the statue.

In 1925, Agnus was buried under his bootleg sculpture. But instead of becoming a renowned work of art like its inspiration, the Black Aggie — as it was nicknamed — became the dark shadow of the Adams Memorial. The Jekyll to its Hyde. She became one of Maryland's most prominent cursed objects.

Things got so bad at Druid Ridge Cemetery, what with the attention and the scary stories and the people who would trespass at night to test their mettle against the statue, that, in 1967, the Black Aggie was removed from the cemetery. The Agnus family donated it to the Smithsonian, the curators of which didn't want to display the knockoff. Instead, the Black Aggie was shoved in a basement, which ensured that nobody could stare at her glowing eyes or walk through her deadly shadow. Three years later, the museum received an authorized casting of the original Adams Memorial, which they gave a place of honor in the museum proper, and which still sits there today. While the official casting of the Adams Memorial lorded itself in a gallery, the illegal knockoff Black Aggie moldered in the underworld of the museum archives. In 1987, the General Services Administration (GSA) asked for the statue because they thought she would make a great garden gnome.

The GSA installed the statue in the courtyard of the Howard T. Markey National Courts Building on Lafayette Square at 717 Madison Place NW. If you visit the building during business hours, you can walk right up to the more-than-a-century-old statue that countless Baltimore teenagers and college students spent their youth swapping stories about and sneaking up to at night. And let me tell you — I know she's an unauthorized copy with a sketchy past, but, man, is that statue striking. Even without glowing eyes.

Interestingly, the courthouse is around the corner from the White House. You can almost see it from the statue, and you can definitely see it a dozen steps away from the statue. And that means it's close to another site. An extremely important site. One that jumpstarted the weird chain of events that yielded this cursed statue.

About five hundred feet from where the Black Aggie sits is the former site of the house where Clover Adams killed herself. The structure was razed to make way for the Hay-Adams Hotel, which is still there today — and which, some say, is haunted by the specter of Clover herself.

**Excerpted from *Cursed Objects* by J. W. Ocker. Reprinted with permission from Quirk Books.**