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What was that noise?

Times-Courier

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Our (Scary) Stories

What was *that noise?*

Ask the resident GHOST

Remember Mary? Here's the story behind EIU's Pem Hall mischievous spirit

Editor's note: This story first appeared on Oct. 26, 1994.

The Music Room

The time: A spring night in the early 1920s.

The place: Pemberton Hall, Eastern Illinois University.

She screamed. No one heard. The wind was high and rain lashed the windows of the old building, blotting out all other sounds.

In the morning, Jenny found her friend's bloodied body in the third-floor hallway, slumped against the door of the room they shared. Fingernails had clawed the door, leaving crimson trails.

Jenny wept.

Today, no one is alive to mourn the victim, but all students at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston know her story well.

They say her name is Mary. That she'd been practicing the piano late at night in the music room on the fourth floor of this old residence hall when she was bludgeoned to death by a crazed custodian wielding an axe. That the murderer was never apprehended. That it happened 70 years ago.



Photo illustration by Kevin Kilhoffer

vacy. Doors were routinely left unlocked, at least during the day.

Floyd left the door unlocked and climbed into bed. She turned over with her back toward the door.

"I was in a very light sleep when I got an awful feeling that someone was watching me," she recounts. "As I turned over to look, I glanced at the lighted digital numbers on the clock. It was 2:15 a.m.

"I saw a figure standing by the side of my bed dressed in something like a nightgown or robe. She stood there for several seconds, then turned and walked toward the door.

"She opened the door and started to leave when she turned around with one hand on the door and looked back at me for several more seconds. She left, closing the door behind her...."

In the morning, Floyd checked with other residents and learned that in two nearby rooms locked doors had mysteriously opened several times during the night although no students claimed to be up and about.

O'Neill-Floyd had been living in Pem Hall for three years before she had this encounter with the ghost. She never saw it

OOOHHH — A HAUNTED HOUSE WILL BE HELD FROM 7 TO 10 P.M. THURSDAY IN THE BASEMENT OF EIU'S PEMBERTON HALL. ADMISSION IS \$1 FOR EIU STUDENTS AND \$2 FOR THE PUBLIC.

"Hi" or "Die." The women weren't sure which word it was, and they couldn't figure out where it came from.

Another "Pemite" reported hearing the faint sounds of a piano coming from the fourth floor late one night. That floor is locked and off-limits to students. However, there is a black upright piano there, along with sagging upholstered furniture, an ancient floor-model radio, and some storage bins. Wall studs form unfinished rooms. Not a comfortable or inviting place to be, unless perhaps you are a ghost.

Students say a shadowy figure sometimes exits through hallway doors into a stairwell, only to vanish before their eyes. Is it Mary? Or one of Mary's "neighbors"?

The women believe that at least three other ghosts "live" with Mary on the fourth floor of the ivy-clad building. A saucy "pin lady" in a long white gown taps on doors at night, begging for safety pins. One night several girls followed her to the

And they add, with a bit of pride, that this has never happened. Her spirit remains, gliding silently through the rooms, locking and unlocking doors, turning stereos and television sets on and off, busying herself with a myriad mundane tasks, an ethereal housemother watching over the 225 women students who occupy the hall.

Patty O'Neill-Floyd of Mattoon is one who can vouch for Mary. She believes she was visited by Mary in the spring of 1981.

Midterm exams were at hand and Floyd had stayed up to study until early in the morning. Her roommate was already asleep.

Before turning off the lights, Floyd went to lock the door, but a recent rainy spell had swollen the wood to such an extent that she couldn't shut it all the way. The coed decided against slamming the door and awakening her roommate.

The women of Pem Hall were trustworthy, she reasoned. They looked after one another and respected a person's pri-

against. And she doesn't believe it was a coincidence. Is it possible another resident had entered her room by mistake, or on some nefarious mission? The door was unlocked, after all. The identity of the intruder, mortal or otherwise, was never determined.

Although few students admit to seeing Mary, many have had experiences they couldn't explain. Lucy O'Brien and several companions discovered that all the shower curtains in the communal bathroom had been closed.

A short time later, they found the curtains were open and a heavy chair had been moved. No water had been running in the showers and they'd heard no one enter or leave the bathroom. No one pays much attention to stereos, television sets, and radios playing in the residence hall. Not even when they operate all by themselves.

But one night Pattie Hockspiel and her roommate, Deanne Radermacher, had an unsettling experience. Both were awakened from a deep sleep by a whispering voice saying either

fourth-floor landing, where she disappeared.

A "lounge ghost" overturns furniture in a rec room every few years in the middle of the night. In 1976, Nancy Vax, a sophomore student, recalled the resident director who found all the lounge furniture tipped over and the room in total disarray. The director ran to get help to clean up the mess. When she returned the room had been restored to perfect order.

Another spirit makes nightly rounds to lock any unlocked doors.

Are these ghosts separate entities or only various manifestations of Mary?

And most important, is there any truth to these stories?

Shirley Von Bokel, a resident of Pem Hall in 1992, told the authors that she has reservations about the ghost business, yet her door swings open when no one is there.

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Hunter of Midwest hauntings

Troy Taylor is East Central Illinois' expert on paranormal activity

By JOE RICHARDSON
Illinois Country Living

Troy Taylor stands atop a 19th-century stone staircase in the middle of a cemetery beginning at the end of a Decatur cul-de-sac.

Behind him, four tarnished tombstones carve holes in the horizon, their faces nearly swept clean by the wind, rain and time. The Barrackman family plot isn't the oldest site in the cemetery, but if the stories are to be believed, it's certainly one of the most active.

"Whether or not the Barrackmans have anything to do with the ghost that's supposed to sit here, I have no idea," Taylor says, sitting on the stairs.

The author of six books and a quarterly magazine dealing with the hauntings in the Midwest, Taylor would know better than most. As the area's premier research of the paranormal, Taylor's investigations have taken him from city libraries to country mansions, to the occasional cemetery.

"She's supposed to sit on the top step," Taylor says, patting the stone beneath him.

Below his fingers, letters spelling out the Barrackman family name are outlined in lichens.

"She just sits here and cries. She never makes a sound."

According to legend, the Barrackman ghost appears as the sun sets, head bowed, her semi-transparent form clothed in a long dress. When the sun slips below the horizon, she disappears.

"She's never been seen during the day and never after dark," Taylor said, "Only at sunset."

For those who categorize tales of the supernatural as pure myth, Lady Barrackman makes a romantic, if

melancholy story. For those who think there may be more to the spirit world than overactive imagination, Taylor offers another explanation.

"If indeed she does sit here, she could be a kind of residual effect of a woman who sat on these steps and cried, day after day after day," Taylor suggested. "Maybe she left an impression here."

Just as a young girl named Mary Bregavy evidently left her impressions on a Chicago suburb.

"Stories like Mary date all the way back to the time of the horse and carriage," Taylor noted.

This incarnation of the tale describes Bregavy as a girl who lived on Archer Avenue in Justice during the 1930s. According to legend, Bregavy was on her way home from a party at the O. Henry Ball-

room (now the Willowbrook) when the car in which she was a passenger jumped a curb.

The driver lost control, smashing headlong into a support for Chicago's elevated train track. Bregavy was thrown from the automobile and died instantly. She was buried in Resurrection Cemetery off Archer Avenue, not far from her home.

"According to the story, people have seen a woman in a white dress hitchhiking on the side of Archer Avenue. What makes this story different from the typical urban legend is the number of people who have picked her up," Taylor said.

"Cab drivers will pick up this young girl and she'll say, 'I need to go down Archer.' So they'll take her down Archer. When she gets to the cemetery she disappears. All kinds of people have actually seen her on the road, picked her up, and had her vanish from the car."

Taylor said one of the most famous episodes involving Bregavy's ghost occurred in 1977, when a passing motorist spotted a young girl peering through the cemetery gate.

"He thinks she's trapped inside, so he goes to the

Continued on C2



◀ **SHADOW CHASER:** Troy Taylor stands outside the Culver House in Decatur. The house is one of many in Illinois reported to be haunted. Above: A number of legends revolve around "mourning chairs," stone seats placed at the grave site of a loved one by a relative who wanted to sit while visiting.

LIFESTYLE

Hunter

Continued from C1

police," said Taylor. "They didn't find a woman, but when they got there, the bars on the gates had been pulled apart, and there were small hand prints in the iron. It's such a well-known story. I would say she's the most famous ghost in Chicago."

But all Illinois ghosts aren't confined to cemeteries.

A legend involving a haunted house near Greenville appeared in the Oct. 11, 1940, edition of *The Greenville Advocate*. John Nowlan, a journalist and local historian, recounted a bizarre story spun by Charles Smith, a native of the little town of Smith Grove. The incident involved a pain-ridden woman and a custom-made coffin.

Smith said in 1821 his grandparents bought a farm in the Smith Grove area of Bond County from the Leaverton family. Before the Leavertons owned the land, another family (whose name is lost to history) lived there. The family included a woman suffering from an unspecified ailment, possibly rheumatoid arthritis. Smith said the woman's body was so drawn she was incapable of lying down.

According to legend, pain twisted the woman's mind to the extent that she often threatened to return after her death to haunt those left behind. After her death morticians were unable to straighten her body. A custom-made coffin was built to fit the body, and the woman was buried sitting up.

Shortly after the burial, a land company bought the farm. The home was abandoned and left to wither in a thicket of trees. For years, passersby reported hearing mysterious noises coming from the abandoned home, until John Leaverton finally purchased the land, razed the old house and built his own home on the site. The source of the noises was never discovered.

Another story set in the same area revolves around a grave which may still exist in Smith Grove Cemetery. James Stubblefield (a once prominent name in the area) was buried near what was then the center of the cemetery.

Shortly after the funeral, stories of odd occurrences at the grave site began to circulate. Some reports had ghosts walking over Stubblefield's grave. Others identified lights hovering around the site.

Be it a clear and moonlit night or under a dark and starless sky, the reports always were the same, with the only exception coming on foggy nights, when the lights (or spirits) became more active.

Some searched for a rational explanation. Area residents suggested the roving lights were reflections from a nearby residence. But the original account notes that lights were often seen hovering over the grave when neighboring homes were dark.

Other accounts state that the lights moved even when the observers were standing very still, suggesting that their motion couldn't be attributed to a shifting point of view.

"I was courting my wife at that time," Smith told Nowlan during the original account. "One night, as we were driving near (the cemetery), she said she wished she could see it. I drove around where she could see the grave and, sure enough, there was the light."

Smith said his wife never wanted to see the grave again.

Reports of the mysterious lights continued for nearly two years after Stubblefield's funeral. Then, just as suddenly as they appeared, the lights vanished.

As have many of the ghosts which once haunted Illinois.

Although Taylor works to unearth new hauntings and keep the old lore alive, many of the stories which shaded our cemeteries and lingered over our abandoned buildings are forever lost.

So while some of us will wonder about the light burning in the old warehouse, or quicken our step in the dusky graveyard, or pause to make sure those are our footsteps echoing off an attic wall, most of us won't.

Yesterday's stories, like yesterday's spirits, draw their power from being remembered. In the absence of memory, legends die, and like forgotten ghosts are left to fade away.

Spirit Seekers

One of the most common questions posed to Troy Taylor when he presents himself as a paranormal investigator is: "Why?"

Taylor's interest began with newspaper reports of unusual phenomenon. He decided to see if there were more to the tales than eyewitness imagination and printer's ink.

"When you form a research society, or make it public that you're interested in investigating haunted places, you get a wide variety of telephone calls," Taylor notes in the preface of "Conducting a Paranormal Investigation: A Workshop on the Fundamentals of Hunting Ghosts."

The paper was one of several materials offered by Taylor during the first annual conference of the International Ghost Hunters Society in Decatur last August.

"Many are obvious hoaxes, or at the very least, confused people who are mistaking natural events for ghostly phenomena. But there are those few calls that make everything worthwhile," Taylor adds. "They're the ones that fit into the small percentage of cases that appear to be genuine."

Rather than outfitting themselves with arcane instruments, ghost hunters typically are equipped with standard recording equipment such as camcorders, tape recorders and cameras with high-speed film, along with some not-so-standard tools of the trade such as electromagnetic field meters and digital thermal scanners.

"One of the most important things you have to possess for success as a ghost hunter is an open mind," Taylor says "You have to be positive about the investigation and open to whatever phenomena that may occur."

As for other ghost hunters' motivation, Taylor says many are simply searching for proof that ghosts are real — "evidence that they're spirits of the dead who still roam this world," he says.

"If we take this into account, it means that we're accountable for the things we do in our life. We have to ask ourselves if we really want to try to repair any damage we've done after we're dead, or while we're still alive."

Preserving local haunts

Old ghosts may never die, but old buildings do. With the passing of their original owners, some of the most impressive, historically significant structures in Illinois have fallen into ruin.

Isolated cemeteries also are victims of abandonment, their markers often destroyed by neglect or vandalism. In recent years a number of restoration groups have worked to improve the condition of these sites. Not coincidentally, many paranormal investigators or "ghost hunters" also are avid historians and part-time preservationists.

A number of paranormal researchers have played active roles in campaigns to save these failing structures and forgotten cemeteries.

"If we're going to save these sites, we've got to use them," noted Jon Musgrave, a journalist and Southern Illinois historian.

Musgrave, along with other researchers, turned up enough information about Hickory Hill Plantation (also known as the Old Slave House) to arguably make it one of the most historically significant homes in Southern Illinois.

Musgrave passed the information along to Troy Taylor, who incorporated slivers of history into his own article about the house, which appeared in the spring 1997 issue of "Ghosts of the Prairie Magazine."

Taylor highlighted the need to preserve the home, characterizing it as "a fascinating historical museum" offering insight into a period of hidden history.

For more information on efforts to preserve Hickory Hill Plantation, contact Jon Musgrave at jonm@midamer.net, or PO Box 1142, Marion 62959.

Ghosts

Continued from C1

"Everybody still talks about Mary," she says, "but I'm not sure if her spirit is around my room because people are always coming and going."

Doris Enochs, Pemberton Hall counselor from 1970 to 1980, says the story of Mary is not true, "but the upperclassmen keep it as a tradition to pass on to incoming freshmen. Everyone who tells it adds more and more to it."

Enochs thinks the story had its genesis in the death of Mary Hawkins, a dorm counselor from 1910 to 1917. A plaque in the hall's lobby honors her. However, the woman did not die in the hall, but in a hospital. Further, there are no records of any murder or other unusual death in Pem Hall.

Although Enochs does not believe in ghosts, she did tell a news reporter, "Some weird things happen there." She did not elaborate.

Stella (Craft) Temple was a 1921 resident of Pem Hall. She had a different perspective on the ghostly tales.

"Those myths have no origin in dead dorm counselors or murdered coeds either," she told student news reporter Karen Knapp.

Temple recalled a 30-year-old student named Euterpe Sharp who was studying psychology and was much interested in hypnotism. According to Temple, Sharp used to hide in the janitor's closet next to the restroom and jump out at the girls as they walked by. In time, no coed would walk the halls alone; they traveled in groups of threes or fours.

Temple said that Sharp wasn't really strange, but "she had different interests than the rest of us. Her eyes were crazy."

Temple contends that the ghost legends originated from Sharp's frightening prowls through the halls.

Journalist William M. Michael was less concerned with determining the origin of the ghost legend than with finding a good Halloween tale for his newspaper.

Michael, a lifestyle writer for the Decatur Herald and Re-

where I would spend the night. A light in the closet was burning. Who had left it on? How long ago? Mary? Are you here?

"My courage began to falter, but then I remembered that Mary is a good ghost — prankish but the non-hurting type," his account read.

Michael noted the dingy furnishings, including the ancient piano. He spread out his sleeping bag on an old leather couch that had no cushions, and settled down to await his spectral visitor.

He had just started to doze off when he heard voices — human voices. Michael jumped up and hid behind the door. When it opened, he jumped out from behind it.

The curious coeds screamed and giggled and asked to see the rest of the attic.

Thus, William Michael's career as a Pem Hall tour guide was launched. Several more groups of women made their way up the dark stairs that night. All were disappointed to find a vast unfinished area and a less than attractive music room whose floor was covered by a dirty green rug. To please them, Michael spun ghost stories until the wee hours.

Alone at last, he slept fitfully.

At a quarter past three he was jarred awake by a pungent smell. Mary? He squinted into the darkness. The odor of the old couch had awakened him; he hadn't been aware of it before.

At dawn, the bleary-eyed newsman packed up to leave. As he made his way out of the hall, students crowded around to ask if he'd seen Mary.

"No." He shook his head. "I didn't see Mary. But I sure saw a lot of non ghosts," he said, looking at his audience.

He added that he was disappointed to have missed Mary, "but deep down I didn't think I would have . . . a ghost of a chance . . . of meeting her anyway."

Although William Michael's ghost search was uneventful, his visit to Pem Hall brought him a different distinction. He told the authors that he believes he and the late distinguished ac-

Trilla couple to mark 60th



Mr. & Mrs. Delno Hart

TRILLA — Mr. and Mrs. Delno Hart of P.O. Box 36, Trilla, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary Thursday.

A family gathering is planned at their home.

Hart and Evelyn Napier were married Oct. 30, 1937, in Terre Haute, Ind., by the Justice of the Peace. Their attendants were Arlo and Inez Hart and June Napier.

They are parents of Patty Maples of Charleston, Ronald Hart of Trilla, Larry Hart of Strasburg and Debra Greenwood of Charleston. One daughter, Betty Davis, is deceased. The Harts have 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

They are retired.

Willis Chapel Church of God plans harvest celebration

The Willis Chapel Church of God in Martinsville will have a Harvest Celebration on Sunday.

The schedule of activities include: 4 p.m., games; 5 p.m., wiener roast; and 6 p.m., special service with the Martinsville Prevention Theatre.

Hot dogs, buns, drinks and table service will be provided. The public is welcome to attend.

NEW ARRIVALS

Avery Motley

Bob and Ann Motley of Kansas are parents of a daughter, Avery Ellen, born at 9:16 p.m. Sept. 24, 1997, at Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center.

Avery weighed 10 pounds and was 20½ inches long.

Her grandparents are Leland and Carol Grimes of Charleston and Jim and Nancy Motley of Kansas.

The infant's great-grandparents are Virginia Motley and Ruby Wilson, both of Kansas, and Charlie and Marjorie Grimes of Charleston.

She has two brothers, Ethan, 6, and Wesley, 2½.

Cassandra Hendrix

Alan Hendrix and Jaime Pedigo of Humboldt are parents of a daughter, Cassandra LeAnn, born at 2:13 p.m. Sept. 24, 1997, at

Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center.

Cassandra weighed 6 pounds, 2 ounces and was 18½ inches long.

Her grandparents are Albert and Clara Pedigo of Rardin and Garry and Sharon Hendrix of Hindsboro.

The infant's great-grandmother is Dorothy Cook of Charleston. The great-great-grandmother is Beulah Bennet of Big Bend, Wis.

Thomas Coates

Bill and Evelyn Coates are parents of a son, Thomas William, born at 12:03 p.m. Sept. 25, 1997, at Passavant Hospital, Jacksonville.

Thomas weighed 7 pounds, 13 ounces and was 21 inches long.

His grandparents are Lee and Emma Foster of New Canton and Bernard Coates of Mattoon.

He has one sister, Emily, 2.

Halloween pet protection

BY GRACE WHEATON
Coles County Humane
Association

PET TALK

It's Halloween and the night for "trick or treaters." Your doorbell rings. Your dog starts barking and the cat runs to a hiding place. You enjoy the little ghosts and goblins, Supermen and Power Rangers, but to your pets, they're just intruders.

On "trick or treat" night, pets are better off in a quiet room where strange faces won't upset them.

Before the big night, as you get your little "trick or treaters" ready for Halloween, you should start exposing your pets to the strange figures they may see around the house.

If your normally docile dog does not recognize the person in the Halloween costume, it may think it's an intruder and act ac-

cordingly. Even a lovable kitten may see a new face as a threat to its territory.

It is important to teach children that wearing a mask to tease and scare pets is a "no-no" and can be dangerous.

Every year, there are calls for help because outdoor dogs have been so frightened by the strange creatures roaming about that they break their leashes and get out of their fenced in yards.

Be sure to bring your pet inside on "trick or treat" night or move it to a protected location.

Halloween practices have changed radically over the years, but for the animals in our homes, it is still just a night of strange creatures they'd rather not meet.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Stroke support group to meet Tuesday

This month's stroke support group will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Madison Room of Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center.

Colleen Stoner will lead a discussion on setting priorities for the holidays. This program will be designed to encourage us to recognize and focus on our individual priorities during the upcoming holiday season.

Stroke survivors, their families and friends are invited to attend. There are no fees or dues and advance registration is not required. For more information call 258-2397 or 348-2397.

Rebekah Lodge to meet Monday

The Charleston Rebekah Lodge will meet at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Masonic Temple.

Members attending should bring finger foods for the social hour.

VFW Halloween party Saturday

The Halloween party for the community children up to age 12

will be held Oct. 25 at 1 p.m. at the Post Home. Come in for judging, games, prizes and refreshments.

The VFW Ladies Auxiliary Post 1592 met Oct. 5 with 20 members present and Oct. 20 with 16 members attending.

The members voted to give several donations to community projects; Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the Special Olympics and the ABATE organization. Along with a money donation, the VFW and Auxiliary donated new and used toys to the ABATE Christmas Toy Donation Drive.

Workers of Trailmobile also helped the VFW with the toy donation, collection and delivery of the toys. Trailmobile employees have helped with many of the VFW functions in order to express their appreciation for the help we gave them in the past in their time of need.

Members are encouraged to pay their 1997-98 dues, second notices have been sent out. Paid up members enjoyed a free meal at the VFW Oct. 16.

The District 17 meeting will be held Nov. 3 at 1:30 p.m. at the Paris Post home.

Mary Lou Cobble won the door prize Oct. 5 and Janet Warpenburg Oct. 20. The next meeting will be Nov. 3 at 7 p.m.

view before his retirement in 1988, spent a night on the fourth floor of Pem Hall. All reporters had heard the fantastic rumor about the attic: that it had been partitioned into beautifully, furnished rooms whose closets were filled with elegant gowns, presumably worn by the numerous ghosts.

On a brisk October afternoon, Michael climbed the stairs to the "murder" floor. He carried his sleeping bag under one arm.

Fifteen Pem Hall residents followed him. "You're not really going to sleep up there?" one asked. Michael shivered. Yes, indeed, he was going to sleep there all night.

"The wind whooshed around the gables, rain rattled against the roof, huge leafless trees shook. The air felt heavy and musty," he wrote. "I found the music room

and the late distinguished actor and folk singer, the late Burl Ives, are the only two men to have spent some time in the women's dorm.

Burl Ives attended Eastern Illinois University from 1927 to 1930. Legend has it that the singer visited a Pemite one evening and was seen crawling out a lower-floor window shortly before dawn the next morning.

In 1986 Burl Ives received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree for his many years of dedication and financial support to Eastern Illinois University. Later, the Burl Ives Art Studio Hall was dedicated to him in the spring of 1990.

Some day Eastern Illinois University might see fit to award their famous ghost similar honors. In absentia, of course.

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