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## Eastern Folklore

Old Mainline (EIU)

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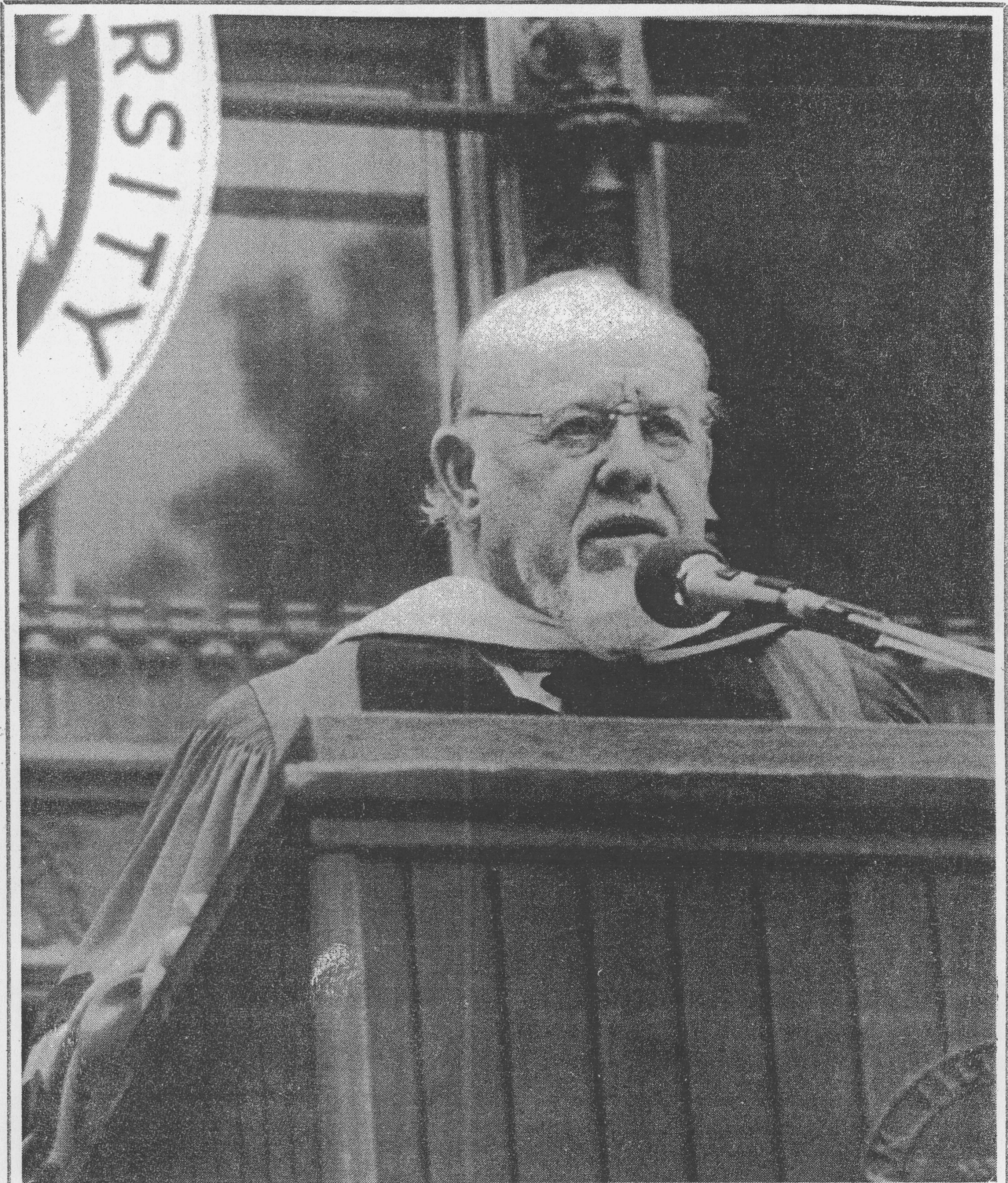
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PEM HALL  
"MURDER"

# The OLD MAINLINE

EASTERN ILLINOIS  
UNIVERSITY  
Summer 1985



Former Eastern Illinois University student Burl Ives addressed the 1985 graduating class after receiving an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from EIU. The internationally renowned entertainer attended Eastern from 1927-30 before embarking upon his career in the arts. He reflects upon his days in Charleston on page 5.

# Eastern Folklore—Fact or Fiction?

Each college has its stock of legends and lore, of tales funny or scary or sad. Eastern, of course, is no exception, and stories of various kinds have been around since even before the towers of Old Main began to rise above the trees of Bishop's Woods. Some of these involve the University, its buildings and others its alumni.

The first account, which originated even before the ground was broken for Old Main's construction, first appeared in an 1899 newspaper, the *Charleston Plaindealer*. It was recounted nearly half a century later in Professor Charles Coleman's well known account of Eastern's past, *Eastern Illinois State College: Fifty Years of Public Service*. Coleman, a respected historian and the author of several books, wrote the volume as part of the school's Golden Anniversary celebration in 1948.

A frequently heard story in Charleston concerning the selection of the city as the location of the normal school is that, when a sample of city water was secured for testing, the water was switched, unknown to the representative of the Board of Trustees who had secured it, and filtered water substituted. The story is current in various forms, but all probably stem from the following account which appeared in the *Charleston Plaindealer* at the time of the dedication of the school in August 1899:

## Testing the Waters

*Many strange tales could be told of the things done to land this big prize.*

*Speaking of our water supply, and the chemical test that was applied to it brings to mind the story told by Dick Cadle [Proprietor of the Charleston Hotel], and which Oliver Gerard, then the bus driver [the bus from the railroad station to the hotel].*

*every hand as though that "catfish hole," as Peck used to call the classic Ambraw, were 100 feet deep and a mile wide.*

*When Trustee Walsh rose to take the early east-bound train he was greeted everywhere along the way to the depot with people sprinkling, and he left with a very profound regard for Charleston's water supply.*

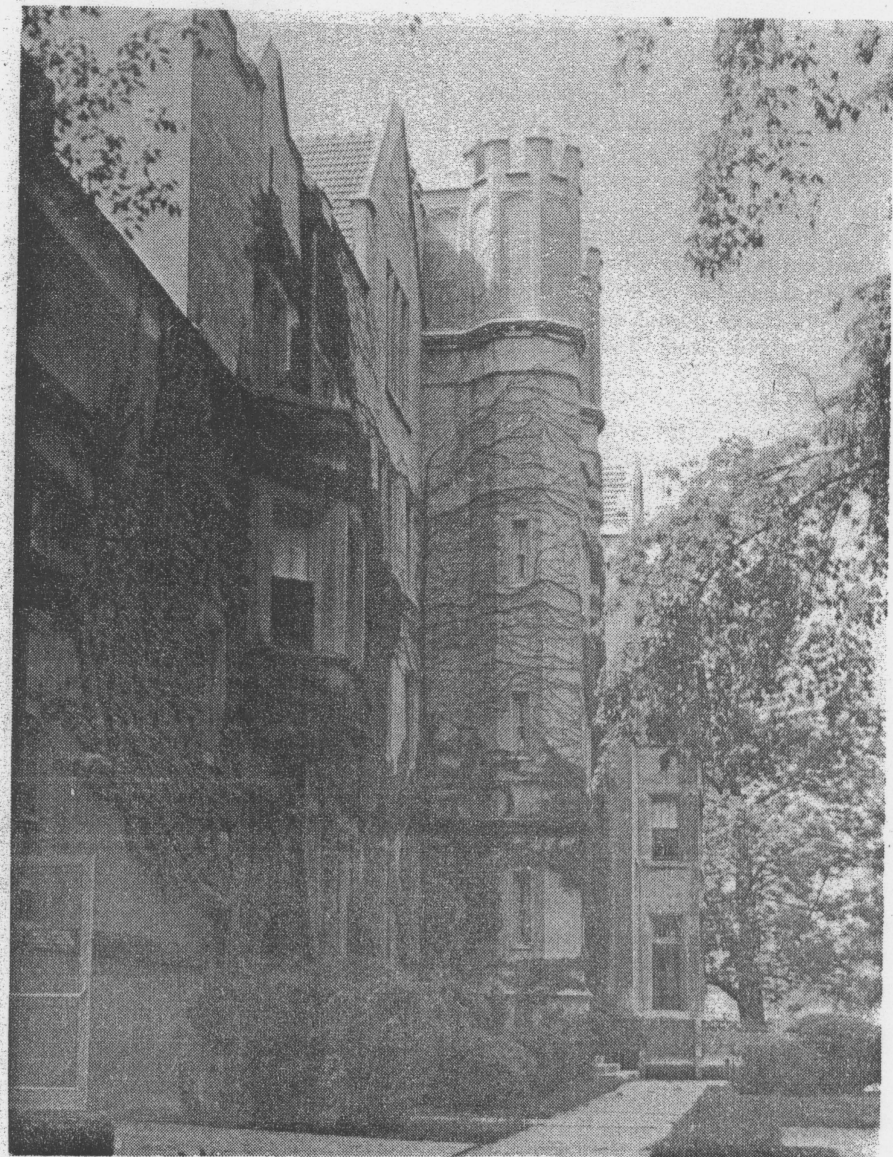
*Meantime, while this good man slept, Cadle had extracted his bottle from his gripsack, and emptying the "real stuff" from the Ambraw filled it with the clear, sparkling fluid that is always on tap at his filter in the hotel office. The sequel to this story is that on the very day that the location of the Normal was decided, the St. Louis chemist sent word that Charleston's water was the best and purest of all.*

The writer is not prepared to say that the water substitution incident actually occurred. Concerning the public-spirited Mr. Cadle of the Charleston Hotel, it is interesting to note that the *Plaindealer* for December 21, 1894, described him as "the cleverest man in town," who "always finds time to lend a hand to every public enterprise that comes along." If anyone did perpetrate a trick of that sort, obviously he was the man to do it.

## Pem Hall Mystery

Another legend, which has haunted the residents of Eastern's lovely old Pemberton Hall for almost seven decades is the so called "Pemberton Hall Ghost Story." The account below was written by alumnus Ed Cobau, '78 and appeared in the Spring, 1977 issue of the *Eastern Alumnus* magazine when Cobau was a student writer for that publication.

Some call it "The House That Lord Built;" others refer to it as "Pem Hall;" and yet still others say it's "The Place



outside the door, where she was not found until the next morning by her roommate.

Although there are no records or any evidence indicating any murder, the story is regularly passed down from upperclassmen to freshmen, constantly changing in tone and detail each time it is told.

But the question still remains for

the existence of a piano on the fourth floor but for the sake of the legend the chance that there is one still remains, since few students have ever seen the fourth floor.

Another resident tells of seeing a "ghostly figure" exit through the hallway doors into a stairwell, only to find that the "figure" disappeared after she had followed it to the end of the

*Many strange tales could be told of the things done to land this big prize. One will suffice. Speaking of our water supply, and the chemical test that was applied to it brings to mind the story told by Dick Cadle [Proprietor of the Charleston Hotel], and which Oliver Gerard, then the bus driver [the bus from the railroad station to the hotel], vouches for. Trustee Walsh was a committee of one to go from town to town and get a sample bottle of water which was to be tested by chemical analysis.*

*One night while the summer's heat and drought were at their worst, and when no one suspected that he was within a hundred miles of Charleston, Walsh "rolled in" on the midnight Big Four train from the west. Gerard knew him by sight, and he knew that mischief would be to pay if Walsh discovered that our water supply was low. For in addition to supplying our own shops and mills, we were furnishing thousands of gallons daily to Mattoon, Kansas, and other towns besides street and yard sprinkling. These latter uses had been curtailed, however, and only certain hours were given in which to use the water—which limitations have since been removed by the building of the dam.*

*Gerard went over these things in his mind as the "Bessie" rattled uptown, and while Mr. Walsh was at the water trough filling his bottle from the pipe that conveys the Ambraw's crystal tide to the city, Mine Host Cadle was aroused and the situation explained to him. Dick first hustled Mr. Walsh off to bed. Then he sent Gerard down to waken Jack Jeffries. Next the engineer at the water works was telephoned to give extra pressure. Quietly and steadily the word was passed along the line and when the early morning came everyone was out sprinkling street and lawn, and water flowed on*

and appeared in the Spring, 1911 issue of the *Eastern Alumnus* magazine when Cobau was a student writer for that publication.

Some call it "The House That Lord Built;" others refer to it as "Pem Hall;" and yet still others say it's "The Place That Has The Ghost," and that may be the strangest reference to Pemberton Hall yet.

Snugly situated on the north western corner of campus near Old Main, the 68-year-old dormitory has a unique and mysterious legend that surrounds the building like the ivy that entwines its castle-like walls.

The legend is that of an unknown coed, an early Pemberton resident who was allegedly murdered on the upper floor of the building by an insane janitor who wielded an axe.

The gruesome murder, according to the tale, took place on the dormitory's fourth floor, which is now locked and off limits to students. The coed who was supposedly murdered was one of several residents who remained on campus during a spring break in the early 20's. The maid's quarters on the floor were opened early to facilitate the janitor's cleaning work, thus explaining his access to the floor.

Some residents have described the unknown coed as a "lonely, withdrawn" person, whereas the janitor remains non-descript except for the fact that he was mentally deranged.

The story describes how the girl was chased down the hall from a piano lounge half alive, to her dorm room, where she frantically clawed at the door seeking assistance from her roommate.

Her roommate, terribly frightened, was reluctant to render any help. The bleeding and unrecognized coed then fell in a pool of blood in the hallway

found until the next morning by her roommate.

Although there are no records or any evidence indicating any murder, the story is regularly passed down from upperclassmen to freshmen, constantly changing in tone and detail each time it is told.

But the question still remains for some: Is the story of the murder and the ghost really true?

## Believe It or Not

Doris Enochs, longtime Pemberton Hall counselor, agreed with the idea that the story holds no water.

"Of course the story is not true," she said, "but the upperclassmen keep it as a tradition to pass on to the incoming freshmen.

Everyone who tells it adds more and more to it, and it gets out of line each time it is told. Occasionally you'll find an underclassman who is gullible enough to believe it, but on the whole, most take the story in keeping in line with the tradition."

Enochs added that the ghost stories are kept alive by a plaque in the hall lobby commemorating Mary Hawkins, a Pemberton dorm counselor from 1910 to 1917.

"Quite a few things" are attributed to Mary Hawkins, Enochs said, since Hawkins was the first counselor in the dorm and since many students like to refer back to that period because it was "a long time ago."

But there are still others who claim that the "murder" and the "ghost" are true.

One resident tells of hearing the faint sounds of a piano on the fourth floor one night. The piano is housed in a room where the coed was supposedly playing music before the murder occurred.

Most Pemites aren't quite sure of

floor but for the sake of the legend the chance that there is one still remains, since few students have ever seen the fourth floor.

Another resident tells of seeing a "ghostly figure" exit through the hallway doors into a stairwell, only to find that the "figure" disappeared after she had followed it to the end of the hallway.

Additional rumors of blood-stained floors, scratched doors and more locked rooms add to the mystery of the tale as well as to the building itself.

The fourth floor has two white doors with opaque windows that are kept firmly shut by a brass lock, thus preventing entrance and perpetuating the story of the murder and the ghost. The fact that the floor contains only old storage bins that house obsolete equipment, along with musty furniture and assorted belongings, has done nothing to undermine the legend.

Constructed in 1909, Pemberton Hall is the oldest dormitory in the state, in addition to being one of the oldest buildings on campus.

Perhaps the story adds to the popularity of the dorm and gives Pemberton Hall a uniqueness that no other building on campus has, and to a certain extent, this is true. After all, what other building at Eastern can lay stake to the story of a ghost?

But for whatever reasons the story is told, the legend and mystery that surrounds it will probably remain unexplained through many more generations of Pemberton residents. The tale, in each varying version, collects more moss as it is passed on.

So how to explain those faint footfalls in the night or the desperate scratching of clawing fingernails, or the white, ghostly, slip of a girl who wanders the halls while strange piano music floats on the air? Oh, well, that's just the stuff of ghost stories.

Isn't it? □