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Ghosts in Pem: True or Not

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Ghosts in Pem? True or not, myths

by Karen Knapp

They say that the rustling of her long dress mingles with her whispers as she roams the halls of Pemberton checking to make sure that "her girls" are safe in their rooms.

And sometimes, they say, you can hear fingernails scratching on the doors late at night. It's the ghost of a dead coed, a former Pem resident murdered on the fourth floor by an insane janitor.

"They" are residents of Pemberton Hall, the oldest dormitory in the state. "She" is Mary Hawkins, Pem Hall dorm counselor from 1910 to 1917. And who the murdered coed is is anyone's guess.

"There's no truth to any of these stories," Pem Hall Counselor Doris Enochs said, adding that Hawkins did not die in the dorm, and that there are no records of any murder.

The ghost stories are perpetuated by a plaque in the dorm lobby dedicated to Hawkins and a fourth floor that is locked and off-limits to students.

The fourth floor is locked because the floor is unfinished in several areas and because the rest of the rooms are used solely for storage, Enochs said.

The off-limits floor has only added more mystery to the stories. Rumors of fully-furnished rooms, bloody, scratched doors and closets of antique dresses cannot be denied by residents who have never visited the fourth floor.

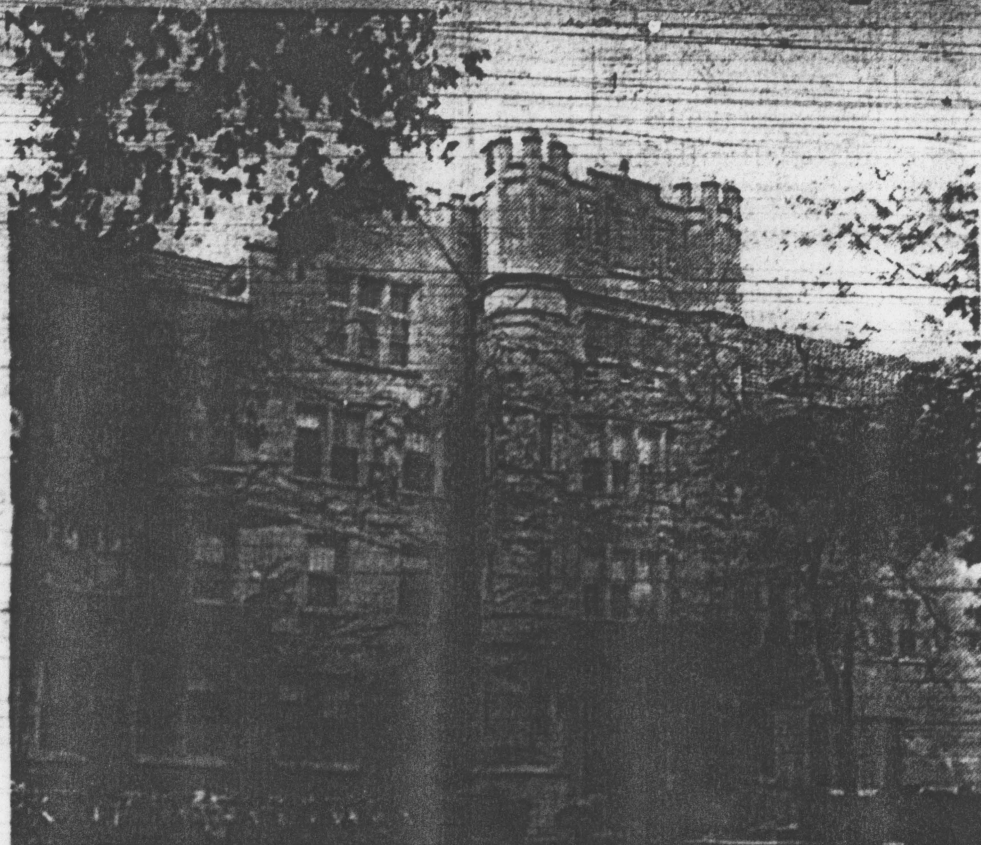
But in spite of this lack of proof, the ghost stories persist and have even grown into more terrible tales. This is due, in part, to the tradition of the "Upperclassmen classics," Alison Murley, a junior from Canada and resident of Pem, said.

She said that all veteran Pem residents who were terrified by ghost stories when they were freshmen keep the tradition alive by passing the stories on to new residents. The freshmen, in turn, add their own details and continue the stories because ghosts are "a good conversation piece," she added.

Three-year resident Gale Smith, a junior from Martinsville, added that she knew of several freshman girls who expanded the stories and gave speeches on the Pem Hall ghosts in their speech classes. One student who had heard one of these speeches showed up at the Pem Hall desk demanding to know why there was a light glowing from a fourth floor window.

Smith added that he refused to accept her explanation that it was just an exit light.

The age of the building only helps to perpetuate the stories. Several Pem residents report odd sounds in the middle of the night, drawers that open without



Is the oldest dormitory on Eastern's campus haunted? For the most part, residents claim that the stories are just stories, but the myths have been handed down for years and years.

explanation and doors that constantly swing open and shut.

"Whenever the wind blows, naturally you have weird sounds because of the age and construction of the building," Enoch said, adding that "old buildings always creak."

But no logical explanations will quell the stories which become more embroiled and accepted with every year.

The stories vary, but Mary Hawkins is usually the central figure. She is not only the kindly but dead dorm mother watching over "her girls," but several veteran story tellers have also dubbed the mystical murdered girl Mary.

It is the murder story that is a true ghost story of the horror tradition. The story line varies, but a general plot does emerge: one of the few girls staying in Pem over Christmas break is axed to death by a sex-crazed janitor while she is playing the piano in the fourth floor music room.

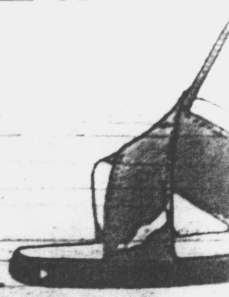
According to the story, the girl manages to drag herself to her room where, unable to speak, she scratches at the door. Her roommate who is too frightened to answer the door discovers her dead roommate

lying in a pool of blood in the hallway when she opens the door in the morning.

And, to this very day, the murdered girl still crawls the halls at night scratching on doors with her fingernails.

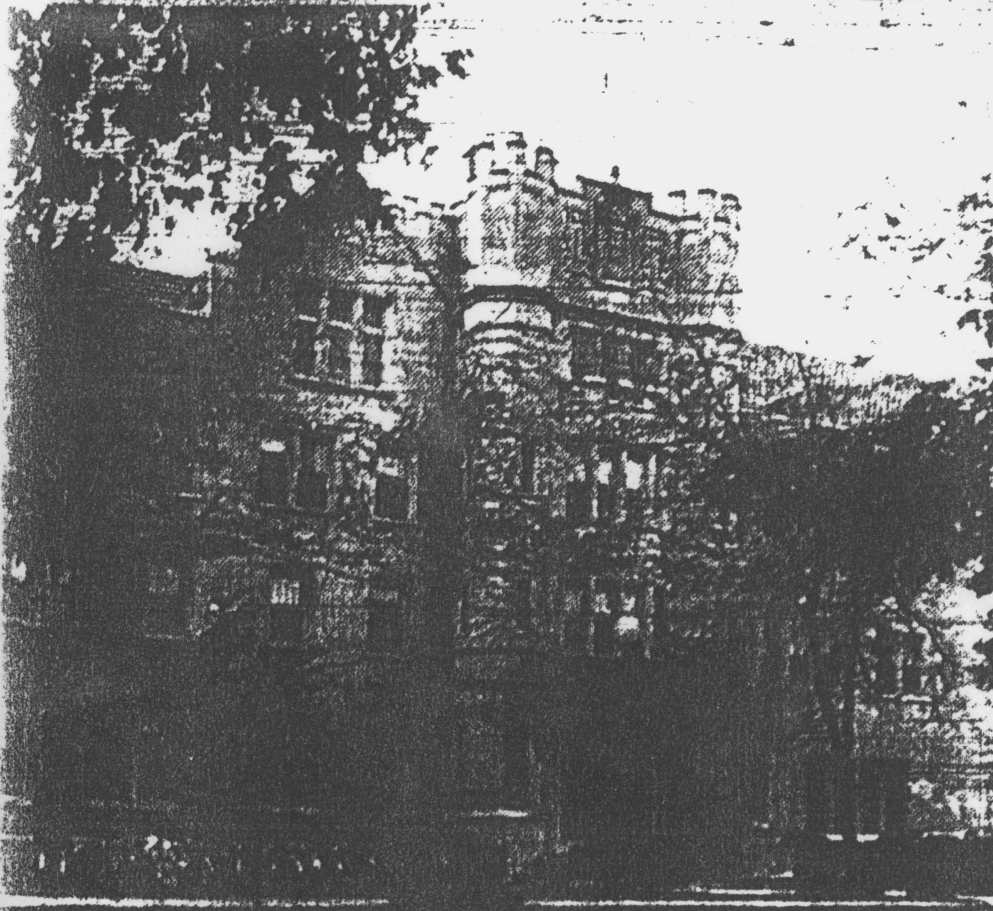
But these stories are not the sole perpetuations of the Pem hall ghosts. The

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Pem? True or not, myths persist



the oldest dormitory on Eastern's campus haunted? For the most part, residents say that the stories are just stories, but the myths have been handed down for 100 years.

Windows and doors that constantly swing open and shut.

"Whenever the wind blows, naturally you hear weird sounds because of the age and construction of the building," Enoch said, adding that "old buildings always have a way of doing things."

No logical explanations will quell the rumors, which become more embroiled and detailed with every year.

The stories vary. Mary Hawkins is the central figure. She is not only a ghostly but dead dorm mother watching over her girls, but several veteran story tellers have also dubbed the mystical murdered girl Mary.

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body is lying in a pool of blood in the hallway when she opens the door in the morning.

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But these stories are not the sole perpetrators of the Pem hall ghosts. The

residents themselves have reported a number of odd happenings.

Nancy Vax, a sophomore from Hazelcrest, told the resident assistant who had an urge to get up and go into the lounge one night "several years ago and discovered that the furniture had been tipped leaving the room in total disarray. She left for a minute, but when she returned the room was back in order again.

Another weird event occurred two years ago when a girl in a long, white nightgown went from door to door asking for safety pins, Vax said.

Thinking it odd that no one knew who the girl was, several girls followed her to the fourth floor landing where she disappeared, she added.

It is still possible — and maybe even likely — that these stories are all the figment of an over-active imagination. But, if so, why are the ghost stories perpetuated year after year?

"I think people like to believe in them because of the heritage and age that ghosts imply," Enochs said, adding that several upperclassmen had even held a "Mary Hawkins Day" last spring.

She added that a new scientific interest in unexplained psychic phenomena might be another reason that people were becoming interested in ghosts.

Murley said she thought "there is something thrilling in having a ghost. It sets Pem apart from the other dorms."

"Some people just do it for excitement," Kathy Nelson, a freshman from Toledo, said.

But, whatever the reasons may be, the ghosts who have haunted Pemberton Hall for so long seem to have found themselves a home. You just can't tell a ghost that he doesn't exist.

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