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Paran'orr'mal Orr Mansion: Site of ghostly investigation

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A stuffed cat moving when no one is in a closed room; nearly imperceptible voices asking "What's for lunch?"; a loud knock from a sealed artifact case.

These are some of the phenomena the Buckeye State Paranormal and Haunting Investigators reported after spending a night in the Orr Mansion and Logan County Historical Society Museum.

"It's very rare to get this many," said Gene Lafferty, a Belle Center resident who founded the team of paranormal investigators about three years ago. "A typical place, we might get three to four, but we got 20 out of the museum while we were there."

The team of 13 investigators from throughout Ohio converged on the museum at 7 p.m. Aug. 30 — a night of a new moon with minimal weather activity to interfere with their findings. Over the course of their 51/2 hours inside the museum, they used electronic sound recorders, infrared cameras and other sophisticated equipment to try to document any otherworldly phenomena they experienced.

They will be revealing some of their findings in an entertaining format prior to the historical society's Halloween Spooktacular event from 8 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The group also will offer a more formal free presentation on the museum and their other work during a 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 25, discussion at the Logan County District Library.

The bulk of the findings were in the form of electronic voice phenomena, or EVPs, which are noises — not in the form of sound waves — that can only be detected by recording them on digital recorders, Mr. Lafferty said.

"No one really knows," Mr. Lafferty said in response to a question on why it takes the electronic devices to record the nearly imperceptible sounds. "Some theories are that the spirit might be able to manipulate waves to communicate, but they don't have vocal chords to make a sound."

The sounds include a male voice asking "What's for lunch?," a back-and-forth discussion between a male and a female, and a male voice saying "Turn over" in a room that contains an old x-ray machine.

Of the 19 noises documented on the group's www.bshphi.com Web site, the majority were collected in the museum, which was used as a nursing home from the early 1960s through 1984, when it was closed because of city zoning codes. A fewer number of phenomena, including the moving cat, were observed inside the 100-year-old Orr Mansion.

While the investigation team's Web site states, "We never call a place haunted based on only one investigation," it goes on to state, "this is the first place that has demonstrated to us to rethink that rule."

They classify the haunting as residual and intelligent.

Mr. Lafferty explained that they consider the spirits inside the museum intelligent because they asked them to make a noise and got a direct response. This happened three times in the Native American room, including one incident in which the investigators claim they hear a loud knock emanate from inside a sealed display case containing numerous artifacts.

There are also several EVPs on the Web site in which the spirits seem to be responding to questions asked, although the investigators do not hear the responses until playing back the recordings.

But one of the most notable observations involved a stuffed cat in an upstairs bedroom of the mansion — a phenomena that has also been observed by caretakers and volunteers at the mansion.

The cat, Mr. Lafferty said, was tucked between the pillows and headboard of the bed and about 10 minutes later it had been knocked off the pillow despite no one having entered the room and the fact that all windows were closed and its positioning would not have been conducive to wind moving the cat. About 10 minutes after the first time it was moved, investigators found the stuffed animal lying on its side.

"At times it has seemingly been in different places," Museum Curator Todd McCormick said of experience staff and volunteers have had with the stuffed cat. "If you're here alone, you do hear noises — the pipes — but I've had no real experiences myself. I wasn't surprised there was more on this (museum) end because it has been a nursing home and there would have been more deaths here than in the house. Also with the mysticism of Indian culture there is a lot of fascination about whether there might be something in the artifacts."

While the Logan County museum was one of the most active sites the team has investigated, Mr. Lafferty said during a September 2007 investigation of the Sullivan-Johnson Museum in Kenton, one investigator reportedly



Gene Lafferty of Belle Center, a founder of Buckeye State Paranormal and Haunting Investigators, is shown in an upstairs bedroom of the Orr Mansion where staff and volunteers report the stuffed cat shown moves regularly when no one is in the room.

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saw and took infrared photos of an apparition later identified as possibly being Luella Mohr Sullivan, the wife of Daniel Sullivan who built the home. The description matches that a group of children previously touring the museum related after reportedly seeing a ghostly woman.

That incident and a door that opened spontaneously, Mr. Lafferty said, were what made the Hardin County museum one of the most interesting sites the team has investigated.

Mr. McCormick said the group's professionalism in handling the Hardin County investigation was one of the main reasons he allowed them access to the museum.

"It wasn't sensationalized and we thought it would go well with the haunted house," he said. "They seemed to be very professional and they showed a lot of respect toward the museum when they were here."

A skeptic himself, Mr. McCormick said the results have not changed his attitude about the museum.

"I did think it was kind of neat, but what happened hasn't changed my feelings or made me scared to come in the museum," he said.

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