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Group wants to see if Seneca County haunt is really haunted



The 1884 building drew the investigators' attention both because of the possibility of ghosts and because it is threatened.
(THE BLADE)

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By JENNIFER FEEHAN
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TIFFIN — Rumor has it that Seneca County's shuttered 1884 courthouse harbors bats, mice, and even some sinister mold.

Now, a group that investigates paranormal activity wants to find out if ghosts roam the corridors of Tiffin's historic landmark.

The Buckeye State Paranormal and Haunting Investigators asked county commissioners Monday if their members could spend some time inside the building.

“They want to investigate any strange things that may be happening at the 1884 courthouse,” Commissioner Dave Sauber said, prompting chuckles from the crowd.

Mr. Sauber said he'd been contacted by a former classmate who belongs to the group and then received an e-mail from Gene Lafferty, founder of the Bellefontaine-based organization, formally requesting permission to investigate the building that commissioners for years have alternately considered demolishing or remodeling.

“While the Grand Old Lady is still sitting there, I thought we might want to see if anyone's floating around inside,” Mr. Sauber said.

The newly elected president of the board, Ben Nutter, said he had no problem with the request as long as the group filled out the necessary paperwork.

Contacted by phone after the meeting, Mr. Lafferty said he was not aware of any specific accounts of paranormal activity at the courthouse, but some of the group's Seneca County members had heard stories about voices coming from the basement and doors closing without explanation.

He said they've also heard stories — all true — that the building is in danger of being bulldozed.

“We work with any place that's in danger of being demolished,” he said. “... We really feel a history of a place is more important than anything else going on there.”

Mr. Lafferty said the group's investigative efforts have been helpful to endangered buildings in two ways: bringing attention to the building and helping the owners raise funds.

When his group found considerable evidence of paranormal activity at the Hardin County Museum in Kenton, Ohio — voices that showed up on recordings made during the investigation as well as the sighting of a ghostly image resembling the woman who once lived there — he said the news generated not only publicity for the museum but also interest from other paranormal investigators willing to pay to spend time at the museum.

“Based on the stuff we found there, they’ve been able to charge other paranormal groups to come in, so they found a new way to help raise funds,” Mr. Lafferty said.

If and when the group visits the Seneca County courthouse, Mr. Lafferty said they probably would show up around 7 p.m. and spend five or six hours in cozy spots like the basement and attic.

They would bring along a DVR system with night-vision cameras, thermal-imaging cameras, hand-held digital cameras with built-in night vision, digital voice recorders, and 35-millimeter cameras.

“Typically we can get a pretty good feel for a place in one visit. If we find a little bit of something, we’ll do follow-up,” he said, adding, “Just because we’re there one night and nothing went on, it doesn’t mean it’s not haunted. It just means nothing happened that night.”

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