

Charlotte Ghosts

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Ghosts and American reality TV shows are in a sick partnership making the paranormal a mainstream interest. It's like a 'hey, slow down and look at the wreck' as we poke fun at the history of a person's family name. These programs actually mock these spirits, egging them on by cussing them out. Kind of Jerry Springer meets Paranormal Activity. Needless to say, ghosts have been an interest of people of all religions since the beginning of time. Buddhists, pagans and Christians alike all have accounts of seeing, communicating with, or worshipping the dead.

Most cultures have ceremonies honoring the dead while some seem obsessed with it; not just studying the occult but celebrating loved ones' death days more so than their birthdays. It is well known that, historically, Christians have been punished for exploring the paranormal. But with every religion, ghosts are something that isn't fully understood, making it a taboo issue, especially in "this here" Bible belt.

Regardless, many media outlets will engage in Ghostploitation during the month of October. 'Tis the season to spook people. Ghosts are representative of a fear of the unknown. People in general do not want to admit that they don't know what's next, for sure. You don't know what's to come of you once you're ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

I have had many-an opportunity to explore the paranormal. I was even told that due to my Native and European roots that I would be more sensitive, more receptive to ghosts. I can say that I have been in a building that gave me the spooks, but what spooks me the most is a ghost 'leaping' into my soul as I'm walking some grounds somewhere. And that I will take them back with me. This has been heard of though most ghosts are thought to be attached to some property. Some are connected to an object but most are 'stuck' in some real estate or a certain site in the landscape.



I've been in Charlotte my whole life. That's thirty six years. And I was borne of Charlotteans (my dad moved here in his youth from Wilmington and my mother is a straight from the boat WW2 Greek lady). I've seen a lot of changes in Charlotte, most are welcome. If this idea that ghosts are attached to real estate (and usually old old old houses), then what is to be said for a place like Charlotte, whose current habitants appear to be attached to nothing from the past? We knock down old buildings and erect highrises faster than I can say, "look at that interesting old...". So do ghosts then leave once their haunt is plowed to the ground? Some say no.

Ghosts are said to be 'trapped' in a certain area. Some are still inhabiting the buildings engaging in the same racket or routine that they once practiced. But usually a ghost is said to be 'there' due to a trauma, a trespassing or an unfortunate event that makes their pain or their soul residual in that area. Conversely, if a place brought them a lot of joy that they are unwilling to let go of, then a ghost can also be trapped. This covers everything. Pretty much.

I own a book called 'Ghost Stories of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County' by a Stephanie Burt Williams. I bought it in 2003. It is interesting. I enjoy reading history, especially history of a local nature, and it is almost impossible to give an account of a ghost without a little lesson. I enjoyed a lot of it, she shared stories I had heard before. But I have to say that some really old houses "breathe", doors slam and lights turn off and on due to aging or faulty electricity and poor insulation. So some of the stories were just cute to me. I imagine people in their newly purchased old millwork-filled period homes jumping around at every crack and snap of the windows and foundations. This pleases me. Perhaps I suffer

from a bit of schadenfreude. But if you've ever had a haunt (especially a trickster or particularly troublesome one), you are not amused.

Paula Mayhew remembers battling a demon and winning. Jennifer Taylor was visited daily by a haunt in her Elizabeth rental. Some say that others are more receptive to seeing ghosts, especially children. I lived in a duplex on Club Road for a couple of years. A horrible tragedy fell upon a family whose daughter rented a place on Club in the late '90's. Her lover and herself were struck by a speeding police officer and the girl lost her life. Her twin and her surviving family went through so much pain in her loss that I will not use their names. But I heard the girl's name from the lips of not one but two young girls under the age of five who told me that she was their "imaginary friend" (I talked to both of them separately) and came to them several times a week to play with dolls and keep them company (kids, as stated earlier, are more susceptible to seeing spirits and often times are written off by the family as being imaginary friends). My mouth dropped. Both girls? Two different homes adjacent to where the girl used to live? Coincidence or real? My buddy Gideon seems to think the whole street is haunted and it flows down much like the rainwater.

I grew up attending the Greek church on East Blvd. This is not the first building to house this congregation. They worshipped in the Latta-James Mansion, pictured in 'Dilworth : the First 100 Years' by Tom Bradbury (1992), as having two rails for streetcars and unpaved roads. This property is said to be haunted. But what's creepier is the basement of the building that adjoins the Greek's current church. Rumour has it that they rented the space to the Ku Klutz Klan under their Sunday school classrooms. I double dog dare you to go down there when the lights are off. I am convinced that bad energy is also a resin.

I used to visit Wad's every Sunday morning, as a child, to have our bribe of chocolate milk from the cartoon to go to church just down the street. I always loved that place. Wad Smith is said to still be there. I worked in that space in my early adulthood, at a place called Sole' Spanish Grille. Ask the Luongs if they enjoyed closing at night. Past management might say it's haunted.

Also in Dilworth, I worked at 300 East for about eight years. People used to say upstairs was creepy. And no one wanted to be up there alone. I never had a problem. I know that faulty electricity can emit 'strange feelings' (ranging from unpleasant to straight up paranoia, as I have learned from the above aforementioned ghost programs - sigh). Perhaps I just didn't "feel it".

Across the street is the former residence of a local author, a Carson McCullers, 311 East Blvd. She cooked up 'the Heart is a Lonely Hunter', a number of other books, a slew of short stories and some plays (from the '30's to the '60's). They now dish up Indian cuisine in there. It's called Copper. I have seen many businesses in there. I used to tell the patrons of 300 the same thing I'd heard, "no business will last there because the author killed herself and is still in there". A tormented ghost is a three course meal in no thank you. I took a co-worker home one night (late) and we stopped in front of the house across the street. I dared her to travel the stairs. She wouldn't without me. Together we read the plaque outside and took a few steps toward the home. We both retreated screaming like

little kids. We just freaked ourselves out, is all. Right?

The tale I heard was false, I have come to find out. Not only did she not kill herself but she didn't even die there. What's more 'fun' to find out is that she and her husband had a complicated and rocky relationship of bisexuality, love triangles (they were once in love with the same dude) and all-consuming alcoholism. He did try to convince her to kill herself with him but she declined and he did it solo. This happened no where in Charlotte. She had health problems that took her life. And I no longer believe that her former home is haunted. Perhaps the owners of Copper know differently. Maybe he 'floated' back to Charlotte to inhabit this home due to some connection he had with it or someone else who visited often.

I worked in Elizabeth when I lived there off and on for almost twelve years in my grandmother's house in the 2400 block of 7th Street. My first cat used to go to the front door at exactly 7pm nightly in, what I believed was, an attempt to greet my grandfather, who I never met, as this was his usual time to arrive home from work. He died on the front porch there enjoying a pre-dinner smoke. When I had my first child there, I had a baby monitor. This allowed me to see and hear in his room to find out if he awakened. His nursery was my grandmother's den. It had French doors I could close for privacy while he slept. Every morning, at the same time, I could hear newspaper pages turning. She read the Greek paper there daily at that very time. I think they might've both been there. But wouldn't they prefer the hills or beaches of Greece, from whence they came? Can't we choose our place of haunt? In the disco days, a mayor Lottie of Elizabeth ran everything in Elizabeth once. And she rented out several of the homes on the corner of 7th and Caswell as rooms. There were many-a lassie and bachelor that made that a hot little corner at one point. I wonder if some of them are still hanging out "living" it up.

At the Bayou Kitchen, I'd heard from coworkers an account of a couple who lived in the house next door, the former Elizabeth Tea House. This couple was "tore up" with some addiction. He took his life and she discovered him, upstairs in the home, where she elected to do the same years later. Is this why this building keeps changing hands? Creative Loafing in 2006 said that the Cajun Queen (another New Orleans themed restaurant) had stories to tell. They said there was "a lady that haunted the bar because she wanted to get crunk". Charming.

In Miss Williams book, another place just down the road is sited as being haunted; it's Independence Park. But the story seems odd to me. In the 30's, a basketball coach (Lillian Arhelger) accompanied the Girl Scouts from Myers Park Presbyterian on a trip to the mountains for a swim and a kid named Virginia went over the falls. Lillian jumped after her. The kid survived but the coach's skull smashed on the rocks and a log stabbed through her face and killed her. Now this coach and teacher (at Central) haunts this park searching for the kid she doesn't realize survived. She haunts the old swimming pool. Hmm. I wonder if this makes sense. My mom swam there when she was a child and thinks this is a silly tale. Miss Williams also says that the building next door to the Double Door, which serves as the home of a catering company, is haunted. The owner in the 1980's called this spirit "Alice". This haunt could be harmless or nonexistent as she only played with the air conditioning. Electrical things are easily debunked or pushed under the rug. I would imagine the Double Door to be haunted by some of the people who rocked at the "Home of the Blues" as

dubbed by Daniel Coston's book (collaboration) on the thirty-five years of the renown venue (2009). The place and spirits seemed to be married.

I was married once. I wanted the Van Landingham Estate to be the place. Hands down. Once I was considering photographers, Deborah Triplett, who wasn't my memory capturer for the day but is a wonderful friend, told me that she was married there and viewed photographs of the owner's late son in the top window. That bedroom was where my groom and my children got ready for the night. I had a wonderfully white bedroom downstairs for my girls to dress and prepare in. At the end of the night I slept upstairs with the rest of my family. It was dark. All of the furniture and the wall coverings seemed original to the home and still in good shape due to the quality/cost. Parts of the interior and exterior of the home was built from rocks out of the Linville Falls as this rumored apparition's parents loved to vacay there. Some literature says that stones from water retain paranormal energy. Either way, coupled with the hundred year old rocking horses and the windows that can seat a child but not an adult (I tried and felt like someone was squeezed in there with me), it felt like a busy place even when the employees were gone and my family was asleep. So how was this man's face seen coming out of this window? I had to lay down in it. Oh, well. I didn't see the dude in question, luckily, but I will not argue that it's inhabited by a spirit connected to the place. If I owned that home, you'd have a hard time getting me out of there.

Some of the Victorian era homes in any of the "Ward" neighbourhoods may catch your eye. You may say, 'that place looks haunted as crap' and not even know why. I've seen many abandoned or decaying homes with wagon wheels at their drive that scared me and many refurbished period homes that made me feel weird. I imagine I am not alone in this. Let's let me keep thinking this.

I was talking with a friend of mine, Dave, who reminded me of a home I visited a few times while in college at UNCC. He said, "There was a house on Old Concord Road. My friends all lived there and we were throwing a party. It was 2000 and I went to it. We got there and well, let's just say the rest of the story involves a train cutting a car in half, a portrait of the woman who haunts the house and people foaming at the mouth. I swear it's true." I don't doubt him, I remember the old Victorian house at the end of a dirt road over the tracks by UNCC.

There are Charlotte groups dedicated to the study of ghosts. There are tours that travel the streets and pubs of downtown telling a story of times no more. I don't want to go to any hunt or ride horse and carriage through a place now supporting a light rail and become victim to a wandering spirit. I will just let you tell me your stories. A friend of mine recently shared his ghost investigation stories with me. His name is Todd Slingerland and I heard EVPs from him that would make anyone's hair stand up. (See my interview in the Charlotte People section with him.)

Miss Williams sites a few other places that are haunted in town: the (no longer standing) Antique Kingdom whose doors always opened (house breathing?), the Studio East where I saw an old band, Flyweb record an EP (which was creepy but it may have been the dark lyrics, sure didn't see "brother Ralph"), Alexander Michaels and Latta Plantation (yeah, I believe her. Anywhere you housed a slave against his will is subject to retaining a vibe).

She covered other places with the word "Historic" attached to them; such as Rosedale and Oaklawn (home to a Latta spawn). And there's Hopewell Presbyterian Church (holy places can be haunted, huh?), Magic Maze, Hoskins Mill and a certain hall in Queens College.

Some others Williams mentioned were sites of old railroads, firehouses and places where bootleggers hung out. And then the Manor and Carolina theaters. Ghosts love theaters. Sandra Gray (active in art and theatre) heard the same of the Children's Theatre and says it's the spirit of a "hoochie cochie" dancer. I love it. Southpark Magazine's October 2013 has an interview with a Cheralyn Lambeth who has a book called "Haunted Theaters of the Carolinas". Looks like I will be getting myself and Mrs. Gray a copy.

Bree Stallings told me that as a student at Queens (though not in the above aforementioned hall) she had an experience. "I once saw someone hanging from a tree in the lower quad. I freaked out and called campus police, but nothing was there when they showed up. Turns out, someone had hung themselves from that tree in the late 1800's."

My good friend Marina says that the Dilworth Neighborhood Grille has a story of being haunted from someone back when the whole joint was a bowling alley. And the building in Park Rd. Shopping Center, which is currently a Monkey Joe's, used to be a YMCA a long time ago. And it contains a whole slew of underground rooms extending under the whole parking lot and supposedly a pool. That was all I got out of her, she said it freaks her out to talk about them (must be the Greek blood).

Stories of ghosts are all over town. I hear them all of the time. I lived in the room a woman jumped from at UNCC in Scott Hall. She died. Sometimes my TV would turn itself on in the middle of the night and turn all the way up. Sometimes I didn't stay at the dorm and my neighbours would be mad that they couldn't access my TV to turn it off. I went to high school at West Charlotte and some of the students used to tell me that the Excelsior was haunted. I've also heard that empty textile mills have haunts (maybe by souls mourning for the loss of a thriving local industry). I've heard of the Founder's Hall ghost. This was a woman whose corpse was sold illegally to Duke University. I worked there in an optometrist's office. I didn't see her. Ha. Get it? Eye doctor. I also worked for Bank of America and never saw the Hearst Tower jumper and I'm glad that I did not.

Whether you believe or not, you know someone who has told you an interesting story. I don't want to make anyone believe anything that's against their sensibilities (hello, Christians). But I know that when someone tells you their story or shares an experience with you, they are not laughing. So let's not make this a mockery. Either don't believe in it or do. It's your choice. But let's not poke fun of the unknown.