

Things That Goes Bump In A Canadian Night

The Customs House, Hamilton, Ont.



By Ronald Wolf

Old houses and buildings seem to have a life of their own. They've seen and felt numerous events through their existence. At times unfortunate incidences such as a death may have occurred within their walls.

The victims, of tragic events, may have all but been forgotten but their spirits linger on.

Travel now to Hamilton Ont., where the building, formally known as the Customs House, has seen its share of things that go bump in the night.

The Customs House, sits at 51 Stuart St., was built in 1860. Its function was to house the customs department. In its 149 years the house have been a home to an army recruiting centre, a flop-house (a cheap boardinghouse), a martial arts academy and even a macaroni factory.

The Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (OWAHC) reside in this haunted building.

The first documented sighting, of a female spirit, came in 1873 by Alexander Wingfield, an employee of the Customs House.

Now, no one is sure who the lady of the house was but throughout the ages she has been coined the Black Lady or Dark Lady (BK/DL).

Fast forward to 1940 where three female students of Murray Street School, located behind the Customs House witnessed an event that would have emotional consequences.

What they said they saw was a slightly transparent figure of a beautiful woman in the top floor of the Customs House. Their experience was so traumatic that 37 years later when they retold their experiences they were still frightened of the figure.

Is the BK/DL alone in her haunting? A certain woman had her own experience with a male voice telling her to "get out of here." Unexplained breezes, doors opening by unseen hands and electrical equipment have been reportedly operated when no one

was there to operate them.

In 1996 major renovations consumed the OWAHC. When the workers ended a hard day of work they returned to a fresh day only to find tools scattered over the house.

This would not be a big event if the workers had not put away their tools the night before. Once the workers found their tools stacked (called stacking in paranormal investigations) up in a pile.

Jim MacDonald, a painter, was told by a spirit that, if during the renovations a certain mantelpiece was moved, the result would end in a flood. Perhaps not at biblical proportions but a messy costly flood nevertheless. Low and behold, the item was moved, a flood ensued resulting when a roof drain broke.

The flood was the straw that broke the camel's back for many staff members. The staff suddenly believed in spirits that haunted the building.

But the strange events didn't stop here. Not by a long shot. A volunteer of the OWAHC, James Newbauer, was on his first night. Nothing was out of the ordinary when he shut windows and locked the fastening bars on the shutters. But only seconds later, when Andrew DeNew, a fellow volunteer and Newbauer found them unlocked.

I was once a visitor of this majestic building. A few years ago during my visit I too felt a chill at the main staircase and my digital camera picked up orbs (a mass of spiritual energy).

I visited many supposedly haunted buildings and places but few have compared to the Customs House. I had the feeling of being watched. Perhaps not by a lady but someone or something knew I was there.

<http://www.hauntedhamilton.com/ghostwalks/customshouse.htm>
http://shadowicc.com/CUSTOMS_HOUSE.html
<http://www.wahc-museum.ca/>