

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Ghosts in the Grove

By
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“Do you know about the little ghost girl who runs through the aisles?”

When I first began researching an article about paranormal activity in historic Forest Grove buildings, I wondered if anyone would take it seriously. But soon, those I knew and trusted began asking, “Did you know that the Grand Lodge is haunted?” and “What about the Theater in the Grove? Do you know about the little ghost girl who runs through the aisles?” and “Have you spoken with Jeff Grundon about the ghost in Knight Hall?”

Forest Grove’s most-publicized ghost, known as “Vera,” is said to reside at Knight Hall—a stately 1870 Queen Anne Victorian located on College Way that houses Pacific University’s Admissions Department. Vera’s ghostly appearances date back before the early 1940s, following the death of a young coed by the same name. Some say she was a music student who died in the building; others say she was the university president’s daughter. Still others say she was a jilted lover. If you believe the stories of anonymous male students who claim to have communicated with Vera during their 1996 séances in Knight Hall’s attic, Vera herself revealed that she was murdered by gunshot wound. Regardless of the circumstances of Vera’s untimely demise, however, one thing is certain: Each and every Admissions employee I spoke with while touring Knight Hall told me they believe that Vera haunts the building. And no one more so than Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate

Admissions, Jeff Grundon.

Grundon practically grew up at Pacific University. After enrolling as a student in 1975, he coached Pacific’s football team for twelve years following his graduation. He has worked in Admissions since 1983 and is in his fourth year of coaching Pacific’s soccer team. Like many coaches, Grundon is rational and perceptive—just about the last person in the world you’d expect to believe in ghosts. As a student, Grundon had heard stories about a ghost who haunted Knight Hall, but he never believed them. But that changed in 1993, shortly after Admissions moved into Knight Hall.



Grundon was working alone in the building late one hot July night, checking his email with his back to the door. Suddenly, the hair stood up on the back of his neck as he sensed that someone was watching him. He heard the sound of the office door as it began closing behind him. A large, wooden doorstep wedging the door open started making scraping sounds as it slid against the floor. Oddly, the bell on the door failed to ring as usual when the door moved. But the instant Grundon turned to see what was happening, the door abruptly stopped moving. He recalls feeling “freaky” at the time, but dismissed the incident as “just my imagination.”

A day or two later, Grundon recalls entering the bathroom just as his boss exited. Minutes later, upon attempting to leave, he recalls, "It took all my strength to push the door open again." An invisible but extremely strong someone was holding him back from the other side of the door. After that, Grundon became a believer.

Since then, Vera continues to play pranks on Grundon at least once every few months, generally during times when he works alone late at night or early in the morning while recruiting students from distant time zones. She has repeatedly made his office lights flicker and she has switched his heater on and off. On numerous occasions, he has heard her footsteps going up and down stairs, and has heard her open and close the front door. His computer has been "messed with" as words unexpectedly broke and moved to the next line as he typed. He has noticed a noxious odor "like burned bugs" in his office that vanished as quickly as it came. He has heard Vera speak to him in a

kind of "whispered gibberish" he couldn't understand. And, once he even watched while she slid his briefcase "three feet to the left" as it sat on the floor next to him.

Over time, Grundon has learned that communication with Vera can be a two-way street. One morning last summer around 5 AM, he heard "this funky, loud laugh" emanating from the basement. Because he was busy at the time, he responded with, "Okay, Vera, I know you're awake now. I got work to do." When she again laughed, he insisted, "Okay, that's enough! I gotta work now!" Vera stopped laughing.

Grundon has never actually seen Vera, but in the 1960s, two security guards investigating the grounds claim to have witnessed a woman "enveloped in blue, shimmering light" who vanished as they approached her. And in 1979, during a time when Knight Hall was occupied

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by the Music Department, two student reporters for Pacific's Index newspaper spent the night in the building to see if they might encounter Vera. When one of them began playing a piano, he twice heard Vera whisper in his ear, "Please stop!" The next day, the reporters returned with several friends. When one of the friends again began playing the piano, all present could hear a heavy "sigh" fill the room.

On the front side of Knight Hall's attic, there is a stained-glass window known as "Vera's Window."

As they exit the attic, Admissions staff always try to ensure that this window stays closed and the lights turned off. But, as employees leave the building, they sometimes see the window mysteriously pushed open with light streaming through to the outside. Who knows? Perhaps Vera gets tired of being cooped up in Knight Hall and, like Elvis, quietly exits the building.



The McMenamins' Grand Lodge, Forest Grove, Oregon

Forest Grove is also home to numerous

other ghostly spirits said to reside at McMenamins Grand Lodge. Having served for 77 years as the Masonic and Eastern Star Home for aged and infirm masons, the facility was taken over in 1999 by McMenamins and converted to a hotel. At the front desk, I met Eva Tower, who has worked at the Grand Lodge since it opened in 2000.

Tower shared many hair-raising occurrences at the lodge. She also pulled out a logbook from beneath the front desk that recounts dozens of ghostly encounters by lodge guests and employees. Entries describe dried blood drops mysteriously found on bedding and towels when guests return to their rooms. Blankets are found "tucked in" (perhaps by ghostly nurses?) to the surprise of waking guests. Photos taken sometimes reveal "white, misty-looking orbs" reflecting from

walls and ceilings. Showers and sinks spontaneously gush with water. Objects are inexplicably rearranged atop furniture by unseen hands. Mysterious scents, ranging from lavender flowers to cigar smoke, waft through the air, vanishing as quickly as they came.

Tower also described a personal encounter she had in Spring of 2001. Late one rainy night, she was heading out the basement's west door and up the outside stairs on her way to cover the soaking pool. She suddenly felt the hair rise on the back of her neck, and turned to see "an old man wearing a gray-green cardigan and brown hat" watching her from below. "The scary thing," recalls Tower, "was that I could see right through him." After standing frozen, staring at the man for what seemed like about 30 seconds, she quickly glanced away toward the top of the stairs. When she looked back down an instant later, the man had silently disappeared. Tower quickly ran back through the lodge to look for the man, but he was gone. She later learned, after spotting the man's exact likeness in an old photograph hanging on the lodge's second floor, that she had seen the ghost of "Old Joe"—a deceased resident of the Masonic nursing home who was known for hiding beneath staircases and around corners so that he could "watch people."

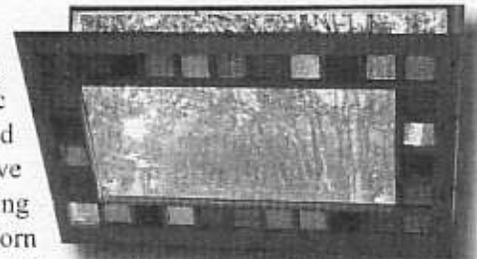
The Grand Lodge's most-famous apparition is the Lavender Lady. Gracing the back wall of Room 232, which bears her moniker on its door, you will find a hand-painted image of the Lavender Lady's grinning face. To the right of her face, whimsically hand-scrolled text winds its way around the room, describing her mysterious movements through the lodge.

According to the description, when construction crews arrived in August, 1999 to begin restorations, they began noticing "sudden bursts of lavender" wafting through the air in various parts of the building. One day, as construction worker Tony Blocker was working outside Room 213, he saw a white-haired, Dutch-looking woman as she "spirited across the hall" from Room 211 to the bathroom. Blocker recalls that the woman wore "a contented grin, as if she was getting something." For some time after she was gone, the strong scent of lavender lingered in the hallway. The Lavender Lady has not been seen since, but you can find a life-sized painting of her on a door just beyond the east end of the second floor's main hallway. Periodically, residents and staff continue to

notice the strong scent of lavender lingering throughout parts of the lodge.

Numerous other paranormal encounters have been noted throughout Forest Grove.

Those working at Pacific University's Old College Hall have heard the "swishing of long skirts" worn by a female ghost said to haunt the building. Theater in the Grove is



Looking East from Vera's Window on the Front Side of Knight Hall's Attic

reportedly haunted by three ghosts: A male ghost who can be heard speaking through a dressing room wall, a little girl who can be heard running up and down the aisles, and an angry female ghost who slams the heavy iron door to the lighting room and swings spotlights around. The Levina Lyon Watts house, located on 15th Avenue, is considered the ghostly abode of "Aunt Harriett," who died in the kitchen from heart failure while serving as house mother back when the house was a fraternity. Frat boys believed her spirit remained to "get even" with them. Late at night, they would spot her roaming the house in the form of a "yellow light" on her way to clutter up their rooms.

My own Lelia B. Smith House, an 1865 Second Empire Victorian on 18th Avenue, has also hosted its share of ghostly events. A very compelling one occurred during late-summer, 2006 after friends and I had finished planting the Victorian gardens in my backyard. Along the fence that borders the left property line in back, we had planted raspberries. Late one night shortly thereafter, as I was lying in bed reading, the room suddenly filled with the scent of raspberry jam cooking on a stove. The intense scent hung heavily in the air for about a minute and then vanished as quickly as it came. I wasn't really scared—mostly

honored that she would reveal herself to me in such a lovely way. Why do I believe she's female? Because it seems most likely that a woman would conjure up such yummy-smelling raspberry jam. And because, on another occasion, she so deftly rescued my family heirloom china from certain destruction. But, that's another story...



The Lavender Lady Depicted in Room 232, McMenamin's Grand Lodge

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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