

Spirits

Cont. from p1-a

In addition, Sheriff J.B. Rogers was fatally shot in 1872 by a horse thief within a block of the jail grounds, Ms. Bell reports.

If violent deaths contribute to hauntings, then the old Freestone county jail easily fits the bill.

When the facility served as a private residence, a staircase was moved from along an interior east wall to the middle of the structure, which leads to another ghost sighting.

Ms. Bell recounts that a man visiting the museum was upstairs in the jail building and said that he saw another man who walked down the staircase, the staircase that was removed during remodeling.

Recently, the curator and volunteer Casey Collins noticed a solar and fluorescent light powered calculator cycling through numbers as it sat on the front desk in the exhibit building. The oddity, Ms. Bell says, is that the calculator does not work when it is sitting on the front desk.

"It was cycling as fast as it could," Ms. Bell says.

TEXPART team members made a preliminary visit to the museum last month and came back Friday evening to spend two nights on the grounds with digital recording and video equipment.

"This is one of the things we can do together. It's a lot of fun going to different places," Mike Johnson of

Denton, who arrived with wife Diane, says.

Leading the team were J.J. Rice, founder of the team, and Jimmy Kelly Billman of Dallas.

Billman has been involved in searching for paranormal activity since 1994, and has made treks to different sites regularly since seeing an apparition while visiting the Alamo with his daughter—he saw a man walk across a path, but nobody was really there.

"That really got me going full bore," he says.

In his investigations Billman reports he has witnessed pieces of glass flying across a room and a small girl apparition talking, and had his hair pulled and been slapped.

"I am a believer, but I think there are plenty of explanations," he says. "We go in to try to explain it away first."

The team uses infrared cameras linked to a computer to try and detect ghostly presences, and digital recorders to pick up otherworldly voices which sometimes are detected in the background of regular conversations.

Billman took a picture Friday night that showed a green orb in the museum exhibits building and will study the picture to try and determine what the cause might be.

K2 meters read the magnetic field in an area, and fluctuations of the field that could indicate paranormal activity.

Friday night the team got readings on the K2 meter in the exhibits building, and on asking questions of the presence a nearby cabinet started shaking, followed by skipping footsteps across the room and sounds of knocking and tapping in an area in which wooden counters from the Stewards Mill store are on display.

The K2 meter readings, shaking cabinet and noises were witnessed by a half dozen people.

Billman and Ms. Bell report that all electronic equipment set up in the old jail shut off for a short time Friday night as investiga-

tors detected what they thought was a paranormal presence.

Team members worked in shifts over the weekend in the exhibits building, old jail, Young Community Church and log cabins on the museum grounds.

They were joined by some Freestone county residents who have ties to items at the museum—for example Connie Watson of Fairfield is from the family that formerly lived in the Watson log cabin on the museum grounds, and she participated in the investigation Saturday night.

"It seems like activity picks up when members of certain families are in here," Ms. Bell says.

As a way to perhaps entice spirits to appear, the old prisoners' bathtub and a ball-and-chain were moved into the jail for the investigation.

TEXPART members will take all recordings and indications they received at the museum and study it over the next few weeks, trying to determine if there are reasonable explanations for what they saw and heard. If something can't be explained, it could indicate ghost activity.

The first priority of the investigators, though, is to find a worldly explanation to anything they come across. Each team member writes a report, which are compared, and hours of video and audio recordings made at a site are played.

"You have to police yourself so that you don't put out bogus information," Johnson says. "When in doubt, throw it out."

"I'm a skeptic and I'll run it through the ringer."

Should the TEXPART team determine that the museum grounds is a site of paranormal activity, haunted, it could be a tourist draw for Fairfield.

The team conducted a lengthy investigation of several buildings in McKinney and found things they could not explain. McKinney now holds a "ghost walk" event at Halloween.

"We're here for two purposes, to find out what is happening and to help support the museum," Billman says. "It's a service in more ways than one and, the truth is, it's a whole lot of fun."

When the investigation is completed, TEXPART will notify museum personnel and post their findings on their website.

Billman points out that even if paranormal activity is not detected, most of the team members are history buffs and enjoy researching locations.

In the meantime, the group has enough investigations scheduled to keep it busy through the summer.

Writer's Roost

by Willis Webb

If he sounds like a communist...

Homer Wayne Scott, Jr., has a special place in the history of education and of newspapers and, in his case, the two areas are inextricably intertwined. Mix in a story about Fidel Castro and it begins to gain the flavor one might expect of historical characters.

But, first a little background.

Scott spent the last 25 or so years of his working life in education, after a couple of stints with newspapers and then in the advertising industry. He died in November.

Scott was an extremely bright man and wrote like many of us only dream of being able to write.

Upon graduating from Houston Lamar High School, Wayne went to what many still consider one of the best journalism/communications schools in the nation, the University of Texas-Austin.

Some early serious ailments necessitated treatment and recuperation in Houston and cut short his UT education. Upon recovering, however, he found the University of Houston to offer the opportunities and challenges that a mind such as Wayne Scott's required. It was here that I made the acquaintance of this very bright young man.

Since his illness caused a couple of years interruption in his college education, he was an "older student" that we younger guys looked up to.

Several years after he and I graduated and went our separate ways to make our mark in the world, he called me and said there was a newspaper editing opportunity he'd accepted that really was more than a one-man job and he'd recommended to the publisher that he and I have a dual and equal editing role. To prove the need for two of us, he told the publisher he'd work for half of what I would (because I was married and he was single).

And, that's what we did. We edited this weekly newspaper that had been

moved into Rosenberg, Texas, where there were two other papers. Upon the "death" of the old Houston Press, leaving Houston with the Post and the Chronicle, and with the demise of the third paper in Los Angeles, Calif., Rosenberg became the only town west of the Mississippi River with three newspapers.

In a few months, Wayne's health worsened again and he went home to recuperate. Later he'd go into advertising before finally finding the niche he filled at our alma mater for the next quarter century or so. He became the adviser to student publications at UH (the newspaper and the yearbook), then assistant manager of the Office of Information and a professor of journalism.

But, back to the student days at the University of Houston and the establishing of his place of admiration among his younger fellow journalism students.

Wayne Scott was chosen to be editor of the student newspaper, the Cougar, in January 1959. Fellow students Gordon Fales and I were named managing editor and copy editor respectively.

Within a month of Scott's assuming the editor's duties, a historic event occurred. A young Cuban revolutionary, Fidel Castro overthrew dictator Fulgencio Batista and made a triumphant tour of the United States. One of the stops was Houston.

Scott, a very bright and enterprising editor, obtained an exclusive, late night interview with Castro in a penthouse of the famous Shamrock Hilton

Hotel. Scott was accompanied to the interview by Fales.

The next day, Scott, Fales and I sat in the Cougar office dissecting the interview. Finally, Scott looked at us and said, "I believe Fidel Castro is a communist, but I don't know if that's what I should write."

Fales and I, knowing Scott's intellect and analytical skill, told him that if that's what he believed, then he should write it.

The University of Houston Cougar became the first newspaper in the United States to label Fidel Castro a communist. Scott wrote a masterful article, carefully laying out the case for determining that Castro was indeed more than the "agrarian reformer" he claimed to be.

I for one am glad Wayne Scott advised and taught young journalists, encouraging them to pursue careers in newspapers. He was perfect for the job.

Willis Webb is a retired community newspaper editor and publisher. He can be reached by email at wwebb@wildblue.net.

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