

Ghost Encounters

A Few Local Ghost Stories ...

Haunted MMC

BY REILLY BIEL
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A place with as much history as Yankton is bound to have tales of hauntings.

One of those places includes Mount Marty College (MMC). Having been in the area since 1936, it shouldn't be too surprising that MMC has its fair share of ghost stories.

Hauntedhouses.com has a list dedicated to MMC's alleged hauntings, some of which include:

- A worker fell to his death during construction and makes his presence known around campus by having water fountains run by themselves, showers turning themselves on, footsteps heard when no one living is present and shadows being seen.

An MMC student who wishes to remain anonymous believes to have had a run-in with this ghost. After returning to campus late one evening and approaching Corbey Hall, she noticed what appeared to be a male figure in old-time work clothing standing in front of Marian Auditorium.

- In Whitby Hall, it is said that residents have seen a figure wearing gray pants crossing their room.

Room 200 in Whitby Hall was believed to have been haunted at one time, but a blessing by a priest moved the ghost to 201.

MMC Senior Vincent Raia currently resides in this room and is positive that it is haunted.

"A breeze cannot come through our hallway," he said, as his room resides at the end of an L-shaped hall, with his room in a corner where there is no light. "Carpets will flutter randomly and the door opens and closes even when it's locked."

When it was suggested that the lock might be broken, Raia denied it, saying that a friend of his once spent the night and witnessed the door open and close after he locked it himself.

"The weirdest part is that some nights, I feel like something gets in bed and lays with me. It gets cold."

Despite these oddities, Raia has gotten used to having Tina (as he calls the ghost) as a constant, unseen roommate.

"I love it!" he exclaimed. "When I have a question about something, like what movie to watch, I'll say, 'Tina! What should we watch tonight?' When the door opens, I'll hold up two movies and list them. If she likes one, the door will close."

In addition to his room, Raia had another creepy encounter when walking to the Whitby bathrooms one night. As he approached a restroom, some doors flew open when no one else was around.

"There was no breeze; it was a calm night," Raia added.

- The Bistro, also known as the old gym/stage on campus, is said to be haunted by a nun from the convent who was a music teacher.

- Dakota Hall is supposedly haunted by a boy who was caught in a girl's room by the dorm mother, who proceeded to lock him in the attic for the night. According to legend, the boy, not wanting to get expelled, hung himself from a rafter. The rest of the hall has since been haunted with strange noises blamed on a male apparition.

- It's said that a female student who lived in Corbey Hall disappeared one day and never returned. Allegedly, she haunts the Corbey elevator by continuously riding it to return to her room. An MMC alumnus who wishes to remain anonymous provides more details on this legend:

"In the 1960s or 1970s, a girl was seen leaving a party with a guy. This girl was seen as a hippie, so when she didn't return, it was assumed she ran off to do hippie things. However, she didn't take any of her stuff. Months later, her severed hand was found in a field by the school. Since then, it's said she rides the Bede elevator to get back to her room, which explains why it stops at empty floors sometimes."

- While the above stories are certainly interesting, it's safe to say none of them are as intriguing as MMC alum Samantha Tobey's experiences. Tobey, of Kearney, Nebraska, offered a detailed description of her ghostly encounters during her time at MMC:

"Freshman year, my first encounter with a ghost/memory imprint was in Whitby Lounge. I was with a friend. We had left to grab something from my room and came back. Everyone had left to grab something, so it was empty. As soon as we walked in, we both saw someone with a gray shirt and white sneakers turn around really fast and run into the kitchenette area. We thought it was one of our other friends and followed. There was no one in there, because our other friends came walking in from the hall a few seconds later. ...

"The Bistro haunt started with the usual weird feeling whenever you're down there. ... Probably my first true encounter was sophomore year while we were doing 'The Inspector Calls' play in the Bistro. The side hall/stairs on the side of the old stage was lit up for backstage use along with the ones in the costume shop, but the rest of the lights were off. I had some dancing balls of shadow kind of float through that side hall while I was sitting on a backstage couch. It freaked me out that night. Once I was in the Bistro constantly working in the costume shop, I had other odd things happen. Things would move when I wasn't there and I know no one else had been there. Probably the best incident I had was with the cork board we had on the dark wood shelf. It was pretty easy to tip over if someone hit it hard enough, but wind or other things wouldn't move it. I was working one day and the cork board kind of got thrown at me. I was a good few feet from the shelf so it was impossible for the thing to hit me if it had just been knocked over; it was definitely thrown. ...

"The ghost in the Bistro has a fondness for music. I had a couple friends with me one night with one of their 'ghost cameras.' We set up a ball on a chair and tried to get something to move it but never got a response. The choir's rehearsal piano was down there and one of my friends got bored, so he started playing a couple short things to amuse himself. My other friend caught orbs of light around the piano almost as soon as the music stopped. We went back the next night and did more experimenting with the piano and music. We cleared the Bistro floor and I had the lovely experience of inviting the ghost to dance. It took a little bit of time and finding the right music, but we got more video of me dancing with orbs of light in the Bistro. The ghost prefers piano/classical things or more ballad/slow types of music. It's not every day you get to dance with a ghost, but I'll always remember that as one of my best experiences at MMC.

"There's also some hardcore activity on fourth floor Corbey in the south wing. I was in 420 freshman year and 428 sophomore year. Room 424 was blessed my freshman year for paranormal activity after a girl tried to put her key in the door and it bent in half in her hand. We had another ghost hunt on a spring break night my senior year, so very few people were on campus at the time. We had more people and had them spread out along the hall with a camera and heat sensory equipment. I know a lot of them saw shadows dart from doorway to doorway. I got to sit in view of the camera because the ghost seemed to only react to me. We had video of multiple orbs of light around me and I definitely remember being touched and poked a lot. I know I've heard some girls say that they've see a shadowed gentleman with a cowboy hat in their rooms before, but I never saw that one personally manifest.

"My junior year, I encountered the ghost of the construction worker who fell and died during the construction of Bede Hall. I was walking to Corbey Hall in the evening and caught the shape of a person standing under the crabapple tree by the bike rack. When I looked over, a fairly large man was standing there in a dark gray or tan janitor-like suit outfit. I kind of jumped and looked away for a moment and he disappeared. Never saw that one again, sadly."

Follow @ReillyBiel on Twitter.

Theatre Thrills!

BY ALISSA WOOCKMAN
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A dark and dusty theatre. The cool atmosphere. The fur felt material of the red cushion seats. So comfortable, so inviting to sit down and escape to another world. With all the entertainment to come out of that theatre, many things can never leave. Including the unknown darkness that hides so many things.

The Dakota Theatre has a long history of changes. It first opened in 1902 as the Yankton Opera House. After years of play performances, concerts and a few new owners, it was named the Dakota Theatre in 1929. The venue hosted some of the first "talking pictures" and rising stars. It was remodeled, closed, reopened and is now the home of the Lewis & Clark Theatre Company (LCTC).

Actors, performers, patrons and staff have come and gone over the years. But some still remain. The theatre is known to possess certain ghostly qualities.

LCTC Executive Director Tara Gill has been working in the theatre since 1999 and she believes the theatre is being haunted by several spirits from days past.

"When I became a board member, you hear about all the urban legends," she said. "We have at least three ghosts haunting our theatre."

Staff members believe the most famous one to be "Carmen." Legend says that Carmen was an entertainer in her 20s who worked in the vaudeville theatre in the early 1900s. She was believed to be walking across the catwalk above the stage when she fell to her death. Since then, Carmen has been a "reoccurring visitor" for theatre patrons.

"She is a friendly ghost but mischievous," Gill said. "Any events that happen on stage, in the basement or the main stage, we believe are Carmen."

Gill recalls a number of incidents that may be Carmen's way of staying involved in the theatre after she was robbed of her time in the spotlight so many years ago.

She likes to be in the dressing room, Gill said. Water faucets will come on by themselves, paper towel racks will fly off the wall, lights will blink and, in the ominous hallways, staff can hear heels clacking against the concrete floors.

A person Carmen fancies in particular is Sue Fields, previous treasurer, husband of LCTC board member Randy Fields, and actress for various productions.

"She feels Carmen picks on her a lot," Gill said. "In the middle of summer, (Fields) had to wear a fur coat for one of the productions. She was always hot in this fur coat. One day, she put the fur coat on, went on stage and was suddenly freezing cold. She felt that Carmen was in the coat with her."

Another spirit essence haunting the theatre is called "Mr. Bix" by the staff. One patron who previously worked in the projection room recalled this man: Mr. Bix is believed to be the worker who headed the projection room.

According to Gill, Fields was in the room one day with

her 4-year-old granddaughter pulling costumes for an upcoming show. All the sudden, the granddaughter stood pointing at a murky corner of the room. Fields said to her, "What are you pointing at?" The granddaughter answered back "Who is that man over there?"

Gill remembers three particular incidents that truly make her wonder what lurks within the walls of this old theatre.

She was in the entrance area doing her work all alone in the middle of the day. Suddenly, she heard someone or something let out a loud, sharp cough – almost as if someone were watching her.

Another incident occurred when Gill was walking by the light booth one day. She was overwhelmed by the stench of cigarette smoke, only in the one area, and then it disappeared.

An especially frightening event occurred when Gill was surrounded by her cast getting notes from the production "Death by Chocolate."

"I felt a finger on my back," Gill said. "My cast was standing in my peripheral vision. I asked the one closest 'Did you just touch my back?' He said, 'I'm over here, how would I touch your back?' I truly felt a finger push the middle of my back."

The most mysterious incidence for Gill occurred about a year ago. The night before, the local women's shelter held a presentation on the main stage. Organizers had a projector set up in front of the screen. Gill's father had come to the theatre the next morning to turn the lights on.

He was fairly new to helping out at the theatre at the time, Gill said. He called his daughter to ask how to work the light board.

As Gill's father was fiddling with the lights, three white flashes of light beamed across the screen. He thought nothing of it as he was messing with the lighting controls. But he then discovered that the projector was not connected to the light board at all but was instead unplugged from the outlet. It also had lens cap over the front lens.

"He does not believe in ghosts whatsoever," Gill said. "He said he had hairs just standing straight up and down his arm. He ran back to the light booth and tried to make it happen again but there was only silence."

The third poltergeist resides in the basement of the theatre — the old prop room. Gill admits this room is the scariest of them all.

"There seems to be a really heavy, dark feeling down there," she said. "We've had people down there to get props and swear there is a black shadow constantly walking around the room. It doesn't have a name. No one is sure who it is."

Tonight (Friday) at 11:59 p.m., the Dakota Theatre will show "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" to kick off the Halloween holiday. Let's hope Carmen and Mr. Bix enjoy this cult classic. Otherwise ...

Follow @alwooc01 on Twitter.

Ghost Call ...

At one time, I worked at the *Press & Dakotan* as a switchboard operator and proofreader. Occasionally I worked late to finish reading and making corrections on proofs for the next day's paper. By this time the front offices were closed for the day. This was also true of the back area which consisted of the composing room, the job shop and the adjoining press room at the farthest end of the building.

My desk and the switchboard were in the newsroom with the reporters at the front of the building. Whenever I worked late, there was always someone else working in the newsroom as well. Otherwise the rest of the building was dark and vacant.

One afternoon while working late, I was surprised to see the switchboard light flash on for a minute. This was the end of the business day, when all incoming and outgoing phone calls ended and no longer lit up the switchboard.

The light indicated this was an outgoing call ... it seemed that somewhere in the building someone was using a phone. In a few seconds the light went off, I went back to reading proofs and the incident was forgotten — until it happened again.

It was another late afternoon after closing, only the newsroom was in use when again a switchboard light came on showing a phone was being used somewhere in the building. I could see no one in the newsroom was using a phone. In a few seconds the light went off. I thought no more about it and went about correcting proofs. Then it happened again on another afternoon while working late. This time, I decided to check the adjoining offices thinking that maybe someone had returned to make a call. As I walked through each office in the semi darkness, I could see there was no one around. I checked the back rooms as well. Even though it was dark, I could still see that they were empty. The last place to check was the press room at the far end of the building. There again, through the shadows, I could see that it, too, was empty.

I was never able to solve the mystery of these ghostly calls when the switchboard light blinked on, but it made for quite a spooky experience in the quiet darkness of this old building.

Submitted by Dee Munsch

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