

SKEPTICS AND BELIEVERS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE POWER OF LOCAL LEGEND  
  
A CREATIVE PROJECT  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Willard Library, an imposing, three-story Victorian Gothic structure located in the heart a Midwestern river city, has been allegedly haunted by a ghost for more than seventy years. In 1937, a night janitor made his usual rounds of the drafty building and stopped in the basement to add coal to the furnace. That's when supposedly he saw it: the filmy, translucent image of a lady wearing an old-fashioned grey dress, appearing to float as if in a mist. Startled and shaken, the worker dropped his flashlight and quit his job soon after...Or so the legend goes. The story was passed down orally among library workers and the local community, eventually ending up in print as a small section in a history book about the library (Schaperjohn 1986, 208), and, later, attracting considerable attention in the media.

Since the initial report, sightings of a lady in grey clothing became increasingly frequent at Willard Library, built in 1885 in Evansville, Ind. Library patrons, employees, and even a local television personality have reported inexplicable occurrences. Strange incidences seemed to be plaguing the library. Eventually the legend of the "Grey Lady" became well-known in the local area, and people began visiting the library in hopes of experiencing a strange encounter of their own. Over the years, some members of the library staff have downplayed the possibility of an apparition on the premises, while others have embraced it

as a unique form of publicity. Late evening tours of the library's "haunted hot spots" have become increasingly popular, and an online "ghost cam" provides an opportunity to look for spirits twenty-four hours a day from anywhere in the world.

Employing many of the techniques of literary journalism, this creative project investigates the subject of paranormal activity, focusing on the subculture of those who believe in ghosts. Specifically the skeptics and believers of the legend are used in a case-study approach to explore the topic in detail. The researcher has attempted to define the legend of the Grey Lady by interviewing those most familiar with its history. The work of a group of paranormal investigators have been used to illustrate the motivations of such researchers and the equipment they use in their quests to document the unexplained. In addition to in-depth interviews, the researcher has employed historical documents and archival material, as well as personal observations to explore the story using a variety of qualitative methodologies.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Brief history of Willard Library and its “haunting”**

Willard Library in Evansville, Ind., opened in 1885 (“A Timeline of Willard Library” 2010). It was built according to the wishes of Willard Carpenter, known throughout the city as an “eccentric philanthropist” (Schaperjohn 1986, 4) He hoped to build a college near his mansion, but when plans for that fell through, he decided on a library instead (Gottcent 2009, B11). Carpenter outlined the plans for the library and supplied the money to build it, but he died in 1883 and never saw his dream realized (Schaperjohn 1896, 3).

Though the Victorian-Gothic library marked a distinctive addition to the city, not everyone was pleased. Carpenter’s daughter Louise sued her father’s estate, claiming he wasn’t of sound mind and was “unduly influenced” by library trustees “when he gave away so much of her patrimony” (3). More than 600 pages of court transcripts resulted from *Carpenter v. Willard Library*, filed in 1900 (3). This family conflict would be revived nearly a century later by those claiming Louise still roamed the library’s halls long after her death.

The first documented sighting of the specter came from a library maintenance worker. In 1937, the night janitor “reported seeing an ‘all-grey’ lady, with grey shoes and grey veil, as he entered the basement during his three a.m. visit to stoke the coal furnace.” Shaken

by the incident, the janitor quit his job shortly after (“A Timeline of Willard Library” 2010). The story of the Grey Lady eventually became a popular legend, with additional sightings reported. One of the most adamant supporters of paranormal occurrences associated with the Grey Lady was Margaret Maier, a children’s librarian at Willard for fifty years, who reported more ghostly encounters than anyone else (Davis 2007, A10). Other extraordinary claims have included strange lights inside the massive building in the middle in the night, figures in the windows, faucets turning on and off of their own accord, and books falling off shelves (A10).

### **A unique form of publicity**

Greg Hager, the library’s current director, has capitalized on the legend of the Grey Lady as a means of publicity for the institution. Examples include a series of “ghost tours” given around the Halloween season, allowing patrons to access the library for after-hour tours of “haunted” locations, complete with “ghost” stories from staff members. Since the 1990s, more than a thousand people a year have taken the free tours (Davis 2007, A10). An online ghost cam allows users from around the world to view various rooms in the library 24 hours a day. Any “evidence” they discover can be uploaded and shared with other enthusiasts. A group called Willard Library Ghost Chatters has attracted members from around the world, who share information on “sightings” with one another through an online forum. On its website, the group notes that the forum is “not just a fan site, but a way of life” (Willard Library Ghost Chat). Each October, a group of paranormal investigators are allowed to spend the night in the library in attempt to capture evidence of the Grey Lady. The library has such groups booked well into the next decade. These and other activities

featuring the Grey Lady have resulted in national publicity for the library.

### **Literary journalism: a commitment to exhaustive research**

Journalist and historian Stanley Karnow maintains that 95 percent of the material he gathers on a given project never makes it into the finished product (Arana 2003, 157), underscoring the amount of research many journalists conduct. Authors such as Truman Capote, John McPhee, Tom Wolfe, and Gay Talese have been known to spend a vast amount of time in research for their works. Capote's interviews and research for *In Cold Blood* resulted in more than 4,000 pages of typed notes (Whitby 1992, 245). For his bestseller *The Kingdom and Power*, Talese spent years researching the complex culture and inner workings of the *New York Times*. By interviewing a wide range of sources and not relying on just one person's perspective, Talese had many options for the vivid scenes in the book. "Had he been less thorough, he would have limited his artistic choices, as well as missed vivid details" (Lounsberry 1990, 2). According to Sharon Bass (1992): "What makes McPhee's work so rich is that it is so informed. It is clear that this writer has done the research and done it with a passion" (344).

Such extensive, in-depth reporting also enables a writer to glean details that might otherwise go unnoticed. Such details, when properly utilized by the writer, can "grow and wrap themselves in meaning" (Sims 1995, 8). By spending time with sources in their world (i.e., immersion), journalists can eventually build trust and gain meaningful insight into the subject being presented. As Joseph Mitchell noted, "If you talk to someone long enough...they will reveal their pain and their experiences" (9). In a discussion of the techniques of Joe Nocera, Norman Sims (1995) notes that the writer preferred "hanging

around access,' which is simply permission to watch the conduct of ordinary life" (6). Sims discusses how this type of immersion reporting immerses both the writer and readers in the culture being presented (6).

Literary journalism arguably requires a greater level of commitment and time than everyday deadline writing, but the material gained can enable the careful and observant writer to craft a compelling work. Talese, considered one of the pioneers of modern literary journalism, developed the skills needed to "[stay] with his subjects until he caught them in moments of candor, and not as their public relations people wanted them defined" (Halberstam 2003, 283). This commitment—which includes follow-up interviews, building rapport with sources, exhaustive research—ultimately serves to deepen understanding. As Mark Kramer noted: "The point of literary journalists' long immersions is to comprehend subjects at a level Henry James termed 'felt life'—the frank, unidealized level that includes individual difference, frailty, tenderness, nastiness, vanity, generosity, pomposity, humility, all in proper proportion" (Kramer 1995, 23).

An ethnographic approach can be useful in long-form narrative journalism. Literary journalist Lauren Kessler (1998) compares journalists to social scientists:

Like our globe-trotting colleagues in cultural anthropology and related fields, we writers are hungry to learn about the world we live in, fascinated by the lives and habits of others, and fueled by a need to make sense of it all. Anthropologists may travel the world in search of the unknown while we nonfiction writers simply look within our own communities, but we're all after the same thing, we want to understand people's lives. We want to dig beneath the surface to find meaning (34).

Using this type of fieldwork, journalists can employ observation and investigation to "analyze findings and carefully crafts written reports for publication," much like anthropologists (34). Kessler used this technique for her research into female athletes in

America. By viewing the women as a “distinct subculture,” Kessler used the techniques of anthropology to study and write about a unique aspect of the world of competitive sports (34-35).

### **The paranormal subculture**

A belief in the supernatural has been prevalent in societies throughout history, including the Egyptians, ancient Greeks, and Romans (Stander & Schmolling 1996, 13-24). “Every primitive society of which we know, no matter how hard the struggle for life, recognized the influence of spirits and departed ancestors” (14). Interest in the unexplained has continued into modern times, evidenced by a wide variety of groups for enthusiasts of the unexplained. Groups include: the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America; American Association of Parapsychology; Center for Bigfoot Studies; Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal; UFO Information Retrieval Center; and the Vampire Information Exchange (Winters 1997, 189-193). A 2005 Gallup poll found that three in four Americans believe in some form of paranormal phenomena . The most popular belief was in extrasensory perception (ESP), followed closely by a belief in haunted houses (Moore 2005).

Personality traits may influence a person’s likelihood to believe in the paranormal. According to one researcher (Spraggett 1967), the popularity of such groups, limited though it may be, is based on an interest in explaining the seemingly unexplainable. Cases of the unexplained in this view “provide a shattering glimpse into the strange world outside the five senses where word ‘impossible’ has little meaning” (2). A study into personality traits found that people who are sensation seekers and open to experience tend to have a greater belief in paranormal phenomena (Smith, Johnson, & Hathaway 2009, 92). However, a similar study (Auton, Pope, & Seeger 2003) found little evidence to suggest that personality traits affected

one's likelihood to believe in the paranormal (711).

Hans Holzer was among the first paranormal investigators to receive widespread publicity, writing more than 140 books on ghosts and other phenomena associated with what he termed “the other side” (Grimes 2010, B13). Holzer, who died in 2009 at 89, considered himself a scientist in his quest to investigate the paranormal: “He disliked the word ‘supernatural,’ because it implied phenomena beyond the reach of science, and did not believe in the word ‘belief,’ which suggests an irrational adherence to ideas not supported by fact” (B13). Harry Price, another early pioneer of the field, was “one of the first [paranormal investigators] to employ modern technology in his investigations” during the first half of the twentieth century (Brown 2006, XVIII).

Similarly, contemporary ghost hunting groups use scientific equipment to document evidence of the unexplained. The Orange County Paranormal Society, just one group of many around the country, conducts investigations throughout California. The team uses equipment including infrared cameras, voice recorders, and electromagnetic field detectors in hopes of catching “proof” of paranormal occurrences (McNatt 2010). The reality television show *Ghost Hunters* features members of The Atlantic Paranormal Society (T.A.P.S) using state-of-the-art equipment as they investigate both public and private locations plagued by purportedly unexplained activity (Brown 2006, XX). A rise in popularity of *Ghost Hunters* and similar reality shows featuring paranormal investigators have been credited with fostering a rise in the popularity of the paranormal (XXI).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Approach**

This project has used an applied research technique by examining the paranormal via the case of the Grey Lady of Willard Library. The nonfiction narrative outlines the history of this local legend from eyewitness accounts, including those most familiar with the story, both believers and skeptics, as well as paranormal investigators who have attempted to document evidence of various claims. The norms, behaviors, and attitudes of those who believe in the paranormal have been considered. This is illustrated through the work of a group of paranormal investigators. The researcher has attempted to examine phenomena from a balanced, non-judgmental perspective. The work neither confirms nor refutes claims of the paranormal.

#### **Technique**

Literary journalism techniques utilized in the research project feature characterization, status and sensory details, and scene re-creation. Characters in the nonfiction narrative include the janitor who reported the initial sighting, other people who have made claims through the years, library administrators past and present, paranormal investigators who have conducted investigations in the building, and the historical figures who helped shape the library, including Willard Carpenter and his daughter Louise.

Reconstructed scenes have been developed using eyewitness accounts, newspapers articles, and other secondary documents.

### **Reporting Methods**

This research project has utilized a variety of reporting techniques to achieve an in-depth understanding of the paranormal subculture through an ethnographic examination of Willard Library's history and present state of the legend of the Grey Lady. Interviews were conducted in-person, via e-mail, and by telephone. Participant observation was used on occasion to describe the building and its ambience for scene-setting purposes. Historical research included books, newspaper articles, and other archival/secondary document materials. Because Willard Library is primarily a genealogical/historical repository, much of this research was conducted on site.

### **Structure**

Award-winning literary journalist Walt Harrington has discussed his approach to structuring narrative nonfiction: "I wish I could say I had a clear vision of it all before I sat down to write, but that's never the case for me. Form follows the demands of story, but that story also emerges in a kind of author's conversation with the material." (qtd. in Scanlan 2010). While much of the structure of the body of the project depended on the material gathered, dramatic scenes were included as a unit of narrative construction. This scene-building approach is similar to Talese's *Frank Sinatra has a Cold*. In discussing the award-winning story, Talese said: "It's scene, scene, scene. The first scene is in a bar, the second

scene in a nightclub, the third scene in the NCB studio. Just like a movie.” (qtd. in Boyton 2005, 367). Through dramatic scenes, the nonfiction narrative presents a history of the legend of the Grey Lady, with particular consideration given to those who believe in the unexplained occurrences associated with the legend.

## CHAPTER 4

### BODY OF THE STORY

#### PART 1

##### **Chasing Ghosts: An Evening with Shadow Patrol Paranormal Investigators**

At nine o'clock on a Saturday night in early spring in Portland, Indiana, a group gathered at Norm's Restaurant, at the corner of Main and Meridian streets.

Rhonda Short, leader of Shadow Patrol Paranormal Investigators, sat in a corner booth being interviewed by a reporter from a local newspaper. Short wore her usual red jacket, blue jeans, and brown boots—a woman who preferred practicality over style.

Short considered herself a fairly average person. A mother in her mid-forties, she drove a pick-up truck, raised horses and, worked as a teacher's aide at a local elementary school.

She was a resident of Redkey, Indiana, a town of about 1,400. Situated off Highway 67 in northeastern Indiana, it was the kind of place that attracted visitors only if they ran out of gas or needed directions. But for Short, it was home.

Normally, this small downtown eatery closed around seven. But on this night it was the gathering place for ghost hunting enthusiasts who had converged for a tour of purportedly haunted buildings in the town's historic district.

Short, along with her friend Jill Hall, had founded SPPI about a year earlier. But they had been investigating the paranormal for a lot longer than that.

“We all grew up in haunted houses,” Short said. “It’s almost second hat at times.”

Hall added that she and Short have spent many years traipsing through cemeteries and other spooky areas together in hopes of catching evidence of unexplained activity. While they often investigated at night—that’s when they believe spirits are most active—Hall was quick to point out that darkness has never been a requirement.

“We caught our first picture of a ghost in a graveyard at three forty-five in the afternoon,” she said.

SPPI members had arrived early for the event at Norm’s. They sat at a long table looking at laptops and passing around photographs of evidence collected from previous investigations. They had recently expanded to full-scale investigations of reportedly haunted buildings and private residences throughout northeastern Indiana, working to make a name for themselves in the world of paranormal research. They posted “evidence” from investigations on a Facebook page, which had attracted more than 4,900 followers.

Scattered around the tables in the homey restaurant were postcards SPPI created to drum up publicity. Shadow Patrol was emblazoned in bold letters on the front, along with the phrase: “Strange sightings? Bumps in the night? Got ghosts? Call us!” A jovial-looking

cartoon ghost peeked out from a corner of the card.

On this chilly Saturday night, Short excused herself from the reporter to greet newly arrived guests.

A number of ghost hunting groups—some from Michigan and as far as southern Indiana—told Short they would attend, but only one other group actually came. Three members of the Ball State Paranormal Research Society sat alone at a red Formica table. They waited for the evening to begin. Short, of medium build with brown hair, ambled over to them and introduced herself. They had corresponded only via e-mail before this evening.

“You’re not gonna be disappointed tonight,” she said with a lilt of anticipation in her voice. “We’re gonna ghost hunt your butt off.”

The petite Hall brought her laptop over and showed the college students some recent evidence from an investigation at a private residence in Muncie. Some of the photos were captured with a special night vision attachment, which enabled the group to see things they wouldn’t normally see, she explained.

“We do get the occasional wild cat,” she said with a hearty laugh.

The four college students, three men and a young woman, smiled politely, but didn’t quite share the same enthusiasm as the SPPI members.

Nancy Lloyd, another SPPI member, joined Hall and pointed to a photo of the side of the house. Lloyd was middle-aged with blonde hair.

“That kinds of looks like a leprechaun,” Lloyd said, peering intently at the pixilated-

looking image.

Lloyd said the group had started learning more about “elemental entities,” which they believed included leprechauns, fairies, and other “nature spirits.” SPPI had been doing more and more research into the paranormal as their case list expanded.

Hall explained their latest tool: Irish wind chimes. A set of wind chimes was placed inside a glass jar, which was then sealed shut. It was placed where it couldn’t be easily moved or jostled, operating on the belief that unseen entities could move through solid objects. If the chimes made noise, investigators were alerted that a spirit could be present. So far, the group hadn’t had much luck with this contraption, Hall admitted.

SPPI’s other equipment was a bit more sophisticated, and included digital voice recorders, traditional tape recorders, video cameras and K2 meters. The K2 meters measured electromagnetic energy, which some paranormal investigators believed increased when spirits were present.

Short distributed flashlights, an essential tool of the ghost hunting trade. She then gave a brief overview of the evening’s events: The group would start out with a tour of the courthouse basement, followed by stops at the upper levels of three downtown businesses. The locations were not generally open to the public and required special permission for access, she said. The upper levels did not have power and could be unsafe, she said.

She asked everyone to sign a waiver agreeing not to hold SPPI responsible in case of injury or accidental death. Death by fright was not covered, she said jokingly. This caused an eruption of laughter from the SPPI camp.

“Can you tell it’s a lot like family around here?” she said with a grin.

After exiting the restaurant, Short led the group of about fifteen ghost hunting enthusiasts across Main Street to the Jay County Courthouse. A man referred to only as “McBride” was said to be waiting with a key.

The streets were quiet. Only the occasional car or pickup truck passed by. At about ten p.m. the sun had set, leaving an early spring chill in the air. The Jay County Courthouse, a classic revival structure, was constructed from 1915 to 1919. It was the only courthouse in the state built during World War I. SPPI members had heard that a man was crushed in an elevator shaft during construction. Many believed his spirit still roamed the courthouse halls.

“He is somehow attached to the building,” Lloyd said.

As they waited on the courthouse steps, SPPI members reminisced about an earlier investigation of the building, which turned up some EVP evidence. EVP stands for electronic voice phenomena, which are disembodied voices caught on a recorder that aren’t heard by the human ear. They can be heard, however, when played back on the recorder. During the investigation, SPPI picked up some strange whispers in the basement, Lloyd explained.

“When it was suggested, I said there won’t be any ghosts here,” Short said of the courthouse.

“She never listens to me,” Lloyd said chuckling.

The mysterious McBride never surfaced. After a few more minutes spent milling out about on the cold stone steps of the courthouse, Short rounded up the group and

shepherded everyone to the next stop.

“There’s no electricity at this location, so you’ll need your flashlights,” Lloyd cautioned as the group crossed the street.

Situated above Norm’s Restaurant and a neighboring fitness center was a set of former office buildings. Most notable of its early occupants was the town doctor. A few people were exercising in the twenty-four-hour gym on the ground level. The bright fluorescent lights spilled from the front window and onto the sidewalk, illuminating a door set into the side of the building. The group walked through it and up a set of , dusty stairs.

Once on the landing, it was hard to imagine that so much vibrant life was happening just inches below the old floorboards. The rooms scattered throughout the space were abandoned, dark, dirty, dusty, and, quite possibly, dangerous. A stack of yellowed newspapers sat in one room, while another room housed rusted metal shopping carts. Everyone was given free rein to explore the building, their LED flashlights casting blue pools of light on the floor as the investigators wandered among various rooms.

After a few minutes, an SPPI member named Julie raced up to Short and reported she saw a man standing at the end of a hallway, but that he had darted into a side room before she could snap a photo. The only image she was able to capture on her digital camera was a couple of “orbs,” she said breathlessly.

In the world of paranormal research, orbs are considered evidence of spirit energy. In photos and on video, they appear as free-floating translucent circles of light. Skeptics generally dismiss orbs as dust particles or reflected light. SPPI specializes in orb-related

evidence.

After talking with Julie and looking at the photo, Short joined a group that had gathered on the opposite side of the building, which used to serve as the Portland Five and Dime. Old advertising signs and sales racks scattered around served as testaments to an earlier time. The place seemed like an unopened, disorganized time capsule.

Short paused and shined her flashlight around.

“Something just squeaked,” she whispered.

“That was me,” a voice echoed from down the hall.

“Debunked,” Short said with a smile.

Debunking is one of the most important aspects of any investigation for many ghost hunting groups. The majority of bumps in the night easily can be explained away by rusty hinges or curious cats. It is the evidence that can't be explained that concerns SPPI.

After about half an hour of exploration, the group climbed down the twenty-five steep steps and reemerged into the light of the fitness center. A police cruiser passed by slowly, its driver keeping an eye on the group. The cruiser did not stop, but everyone quieted down.

“It wouldn't be true ghost hunting if the cops weren't called,” said a young man named Trevin, who wore a thickly lined plaid jacket and resembled a central casting lumberjack. He was a member of the SPPI junior ghost hunting team – a group of teenagers primarily composed of members' children, who were allowed to attend investigations of

public buildings.

Their mood lightened, the group continued down Main Street. Like marchers in a haphazard parade, the investigators passed local downtown landmarks such as the Ritz Theatre and Pit's Lounge. The door to Pit's stood open, beckoning passersby with the strains of country music. A few doors down was Franklin Electric, the next stop on the tour. The building was once home to the Princess Theatre. Portland also used to boast a third theater, which showed silent movies in the 1920s. That building now houses the local tattoo parlor. As the night wore on, the downtown itself had begun to take on the look of an empty movie set, lit only by the occasional neon sign.

The group entered through the glass door of the hardware store and continued past displays of bolts, screws, and lighting accoutrements into a backroom with a staircase leading to the second floor.

"This is basically a hidden secret," Short said.

This building used to house a gambling hall, and the second floor operated as a speakeasy during the Prohibition era. Locals had reported seeing a woman in a bridal gown where the bar once stood.

"She may have been jilted by a guy in the speakeasy," Short said in a somber tone.

The group walked up another set of dusty steps and confronted a heavy wooden door with a small round hole cut in it, about a third of the way from the top. Short opened the door to reveal a wooden latch on the other side, designed to swing aside so the bartender could size up patrons before granting them admittance.

In the hallway outside the speakeasy, names had been scrawled on the wall in black pencil. Lights from passing cars briefly illuminated the more visible of the entries.

Karen the Great.

Carlson.

FRANKIE.

Judi.

Donna.

“I’m sure in the twenties this town had to be rip-roaring,” Short said.

Inside the speakeasy, all evidence of any rip-roaring antics were all but gone. The bar had been dismantled and removed, the room now used for storing electrical equipment and the town’s Christmas lights. The names on the wall provided the only clues to the past, but even they were nothing but inscriptions from a different era.

At this point in the tour, interest in ghost hunting faded. No one used a tape recorder, and the only photographs anyone took were to capture the historic architecture or names on the wall outside the speakeasy. This particular stop seemed to be more about nostalgia than any unexplained activity.

The FOE building, headquarters of the Portland chapter of the Fraternal Order of the Eagles, marked the final stop on the tour of local haunts. Built in 1883, the three-story structure once was a luxury hotel. The second floor had been converted to a dance studio, while the first floor housed the FOE bar. The third floor was silent and empty.

The group entered under an impressive awning and walked through a set of ornate metal doors. A sign in the lobby advertised an upcoming Texas Hold ‘Em poker tournament. After climbing four flights of stairs, group members faced a short door that forced most of them to duck down to enter. Short paused on the landing in front of the door to tell the group of the reported activity on the third floor. Bar patrons had heard footsteps and other strange noises late into the night, including giggling. A little girl was said to have fallen to her death on the set of steps leading to the third floor.

The mood was somber as the group passed through the door and ascended the final set of stairs. They walked in darkness through what was once a grand lobby. Their footsteps echoed off the tiled floor. The lobby opened into a ballroom, complete with vaulted ceilings and a stage where local musicians used to play late into the night as elite patrons swayed in time to the music. Thirteen floor-to-ceiling windows lined the walls, their panes filled with wavy glass. Ghost hunters congregated in various corners of the room, their outlines silhouetted on the walls as shadows were cast from the streetlights outside. The occasional camera flash illuminated the room for moments at a time.

A hallway connected the ballroom and lobby with rooms that once served as guest quarters. One particularly large room boasted one of the two remaining skylights in downtown Portland. Two panes of thick glass were placed in a hole in the ceiling to form a peak. The opening was now too dusty and grimy to even see the stars.

Back in the ballroom, Short’s cell phone rang just after midnight. The screen flashed the word “restricted.” The caller’s frantic voice was loud, causing Short to hold the phone away from her ear. In the background, a faint shrieking could be heard.

“Try reciting the Lord’s Prayer,” she said, her voice a calm contrast to the anonymous caller’s.

Short passed the phone to Hall, who had been listening intently. As Hall walked a few feet away, Short addressed the concerned faces of her fellow SPPI members. She said the caller was a young man from Valparaiso who found her number through the SPPI website.

“It looks like we may be taking a trip to Valparaiso tonight,” she said gravely.

The town in northern Indiana is about a three-hour drive from Portland.

“We don’t know his name,” she said in response to a question. “All we know is he’s being attacked by a spiritual entity.”

The caller was clearly upset, Short continued. In addition to the shrieking, she said she also heard things crashing and being thrown around. She thought it might be the work of a demonic entity. Across the ballroom, Hall’s voice grew louder as she talked to the caller.

“You tell it to get out,” she said firmly. “You talk from your toes and really mean it.”

Hall was a woman of slight stature, but in this moment, she displayed the courage and conviction of someone twice her size.

Hall handed the phone back to Short, saying the shrieking had subsided, and the man was slightly calmer. Short ended the call, telling the young man to call back if he needed any more advice.

The group discussed the pros and cons of driving such a long way to help a stranger

in the middle of the night, who may have just been making the whole story up. The young man didn't leave a number and the group agreed to do everything in their power to help him if and when he called back.

“I would go to Valparaiso right now because that is exactly what I want to be doing,” Hall said. “You'll get enough sleep when you die.”

The group departed the old hotel to Main Street to go their separate ways, but Short lingered in the empty ballroom.

Standing still in the darkness, it was easy to picture carriages pulling up under the awning outside, and well-dressed guests being whisked to the third floor, where they would dance well into the evening, the ballroom aglow with lights from the chandeliers hanging from the tin-punch ceiling.

But Short's work was not about recreating the past or resurrecting old ghosts. It was very much rooted in the present, as calls like the one tonight reminded her.

“We came together and we helped him,” she said. “How much we helped, we don't know. But we helped.”

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**PART 2****A Specter of Publicity:****The Grey Lady Ghost of Willard Library**

*“Of course you have to believe in ghosts for any of this to make sense.”*

*-Betty Palmer, adult services librarian at Willard Library*

A thick book bound in red leather contains 373 pages devoted to the history of a small library in Evansville, Indiana. Published by the Friends of Willard Library, *Where There's a Willard* presents the story of the institution, from its inception in the mind of Willard Carpenter to its place on the National Register of Historic Places. The changes, both in architecture and in personnel, through one-hundred-one years were chronicled in the 1986 publication.

In all those pages and documentation, it is not until page 308 that something curious and seemingly out of place appears:

“Many ancient buildings are haunted by resident ghosts, and Willard Library is no exception.”

For just the next four paragraphs, the authors succinctly outline a ghost story before swiftly moving to the opening of bids for alterations of the children's room in 1980. But in those four brief paragraphs lie clues to a mysterious legend that has come to define the library almost as much as its extensive genealogy collection or its reputation as the oldest public library in the state.

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The ornately carved, oak banister anchors the curving staircase in the foyer of the library, setting the tone for what the rest of the massive building contains. Each room is a testament to a time when craftsmanship was valued above convenience, and architecture was intended not only to last but inspire.

Willard Library opened its doors to the residents of Evansville, Indiana, in 1885. The two-story Victorian Gothic building quickly became a landmark in the city, situated at the corner of First Avenue and West Illinois Street. The area surrounding the library has changed significantly over the years. Modern buildings have been erected as older structures were demolished. A large expressway dominates the view from the large windows on the south side. A space once scattered with trees and other greenery is now marred by concrete and steel. Large billboards blink and sparkle well into the night, advertising local attractions—namely a riverboat casino and various nightclubs.

Yet amid these competing views, the library rests as timelessly as an antique pocket watch tucked inside the suit jacket of a modern businessman. Its architecture has remained a constant in the city for the past 126 years. The brick building looms over the surrounding landscape, its turret pointing to the sky. Terra cotta owls, symbols of wisdom, perch on the north and south roof gables. Inside, modern conveniences such as electric lights, neon exit signs, and computer terminals blink and hum. But even these amenities remain overshadowed by the classic architectural features hand-wrought generations ago by dedicated craftsmen whose work is prized as artistry today.

Golden chandeliers hang from the plastered ceiling in the first floor reading room,

reminders of the days when gasoliers lit the building. The plasterwork itself is devoid of decoration but crafted so as to divide the fifteen-foot high ceiling into large rectangular sections. Columns jutting from the floor support each section. Large floor-to ceiling windows surround all sides of the structure, providing ample natural light during the day and casting great shadows as the sunshine fades to dusk. Many still have the original antique glass, which has rippled over the years causing the light to dance on the floors, tables, chairs, and bookcases in rainbows of refracted light.

The winding staircase leading to the second floor is lined with wooden scrollwork featuring intricately carved roses and vines. Each wooden step has been worn down in the center from years of library patrons and workers trekking up and down in search of a certain book or historical document. The railings have likewise been rubbed smooth by countless generations of unseen hands. The stairs creak and groan as today's patrons climb yesterday's stairs. The main room on the second floor houses the library's genealogical records. Four long wooden tables fill the front half of the room, while rows of bookshelves complete the space. The air is permeated with the scents of bound books, old glue, and a vague mustiness characteristic of repositories of history.

Inside and out, Willard Library resembles the mansion of some long-dead aristocrat. The carved, geometric designs on the wooden fireplace mantles or tiny ceramic tiles joined to create colorful mosaics on the floors seem unlikely extravagances in a public institution. But Willard Library is a relic of a bygone era, one of the few lingering vestiges of history in an increasingly modern city.

In the words of current library director Greg Hager, "It simply looks like it should be

haunted.”

The land now occupied by Willard Library was initially going to be a college for women. Eccentric businessman Willard Carpenter dreamed of opening such a school on the land, which was located near his mansion in the city’s thriving downtown, in the mid-1800s. The brick and limestone mansion exemplified Georgian architecture and served as the home of Carpenter, his wife, Lucina, and their three children.

When Carpenter’s plan for the college fell through, he decided to instead build a library. He outlined the plans for the library and supplied the money to build it. He visited the site often to watch the construction, and even worked on the construction site. As a section of Willard Library’s website notes: “Not everyone was thrilled with that arrangement. His family was said to be embarrassed that he was hauling around wheelbarrows and climbing up on the roof; and one has to wonder how excited the workers were to have his watchful eye on them daily.”

Carpenter died 1883 at the age of eighty after suffering a stroke. He never saw his beloved project completed. But the work was finished under the direction of architects James and Merritt Reid, and Willard Library soon became an integral part of the city. It is one of the few buildings named after someone’s first name rather than last, perhaps a fitting homage to the eccentric philanthropist himself.

Carpenter left all of his considerable fortune to public charities and other efforts. But not everyone agreed with his generosity of wealth, and he was not without his critics. In an article titled “Speaking Ill of the Dead?”, the Willard Library website sums up the situation:

“The grand ornament Carpenter had built for the city—the library—must have been

a bitter reminder to those closest in his family tree that he loved the city and his own name more than he loved them. He had been one of the architects of Evansville, thorough his political and business dealings. And he had seen to it that he would be remembered—by designing, funding, and helping to build a monument to himself.”

Carpenter’s daughter, Louise, eventually sued her father’s estate for “claiming he wasn’t of sound mind and was “unduly influenced” by library trustees “when he gave away so much of her patrimony.”

The family’s conflict would be resurrected years later by those claiming Louise still roamed the library’s rooms long after her death.

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Three o’clock in the morning is a curious time. Not quite morning, not quite night. Daylight is still a few hours away; yet the stars may begin to fade as the sun, still unseen, moves closer to the horizon. For some, this particular hour may be the very definition of the dead of night. But for those who believe in the paranormal, three a.m. is widely believed to be a particularly “active” time for unexplained activity.

According to the library’s legend, the apparition of a “lady in grey” has been haunting the structure since an early morning the 1930s. There are multiple accounts of the first sighting of the Grey Lady, as she has become affectionately known over the years. Book authors, journalists, historians, and others have attempted to document the encounter since it was first reported by a custodian. In some accounts, the custodian dropped his flashlight in fright after coming face to face with a figure. In others, he fled the library panic stricken,

never to return to his job.

One particularly colorful account was published in 2008 in *Hoosier Heritage Magazine*. In this version, the custodian carries a revolver and has been drinking Jack Daniels. As author Jim Adkins writes:

“As he got to the bottom of the steps, he put his right hand into his coat pocket and felt the reassuring weight of the pistol. ‘Ah, Mr. Remington,’ he said, louder this time, for he was indeed feeling the whiskey, ‘I thank you.’”

After the custodian hears a woman’s dress swishing and smells a sweet perfume, Adkins maintains the frightened man “unleashed a string of profanities that he had been perfecting since his Navy years.”

Other reports are tamer, painting the custodian as a mild-mannered man who was frightened by an unexpected figure. Some contended he was ostracized by the community for making such seemingly outlandish claims.

It is unclear how many of these accounts are fiction and how many contain elements of the truth. The most enduring parts of the tale are as follows:

A custodian is working at the library in the early morning hours of a snowy winter. He goes to the basement to add coal to the furnace so the massive building will be warm for patrons later that day. As he goes about his task, he looks up and sees the filmy, translucent image of a woman in grey, old-fashioned Victorian dress. The shock causes him to drop his flashlight in terror. At some point, he terminates his employment with the library out of fright.

In at least one historical account, the incident occurred in the dead of night—at three o'clock in the morning.

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After the initial sighting by the custodian, others began to report similar encounters with the unexplained. There are stories of faucets turning on by themselves, the scent a strong perfume hanging in the air that cannot be identified, and grey shadows that seemingly out of nowhere and disappear back into it. One library worker seems to have encountered the ghost more than anyone else.

As children's librarian at Willard for fifty years, Margaret Maier was quite familiar with the library and its legend. Affectionately known to generations of Evansville children as "Miss Margaret," she conducted the library's first children's story hour in 1943. She continued to enchant children and families for years to come, encountering some enchanted experiences of her own along the way.

Before her death in 1989, Miss Margaret reported many mysterious occurrences at the library. In a photo adjacent to a newspaper article about a celebration of her fiftieth year at Willard, Miss Margaret appeared as a jolly, round-faced woman with dark hair and a welcoming smile. A necklace of pears and pair of reading glasses dangled from her neck.

Betty Palmer, a librarian at Willard, worked with Miss Margaret and has collected many of her stories about the Grey Lady ghost. Miss Margaret reported her first encounter in the 1950s. For years after, Miss Margaret would see shadows or hear footsteps with no rational explanation. The Grey Lady ghost became so familiar to her that she reportedly

believed the female specter took up residence in her home, while the library's children's room was being renovated in 1980.

Miss Margaret lived with her sister, Ruth, in Evansville. Both women reported smelling a strong perfume, one of the Grey Lady's signature calling cards. They also claimed to have seen the Grey Lady herself in various rooms of the house. When the remodeling project was completed, Miss Margaret reported that all mysterious happenings in her home ceased. She declared that the Grey Lady had returned to the library.

From various reports of Miss Margaret and her connection with the Grey Lady, it seems apparent that she held an affinity for the "ghost," regarding it as an old friend. When a local newspaper wrote an article on the "Gray Lady," Miss Margaret reportedly said the reporter, who following The Associated Press style for spelling, had misspelled the Grey Lady's name. Palmer isn't sure how Miss Margaret knew the phantom's preferred spelling, but took it as evidence that her friend did indeed have a special relationship with the entity.

After Miss Margaret's death at age sixty-seven, Palmer noticed that reported encounters with the Grey Lady ghost dropped off sharply.

"Because fewer things have happened in these last years," Palmer wrote in an essay after her friend's death, "I more than ever think the ghost was somehow linked to Margaret."

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For Betty Palmer, unlike her friend Miss Margaret, the legend of the Grey Lady raises more questions than answers. In her thirty years of work at the library, Palmer has

become the unofficial historian of the Grey Lady. She has written many essays and articles about the legend, some published in the Evansville *Courier & Press* newspaper.

Palmer is a tiny woman. Her short grey hair is cut conservatively, appropriate for a woman nearing retirement. She often wears tennis shoes, which are suitable for long days spent on her feet shelving books or talking with patrons. Sometimes those questions pertain to the Grey Lady ghost.

While she herself has not experienced anything that would be classified as paranormal, Palmer does give credence to the reports of her coworkers and others.

“The accounts of those who do not work at the library carry the most weight in this ghost story,” Palmer noted.

One of the most credible reports, in Palmer’s view, is the tale of a mysterious security alarm from the 1990s. Palmer recounted the story as follows:

One of the library’s security alarms sounded one night. Following protocol, two city police officers arrived at the library to check for intruders. Don Baker, who was the library director at the time, was also alerted to the potential break-in and arrived about the same time as the officers.

Before entering the building to conduct a search, one of the policemen said he saw a woman in one of the windows on the second floor with a man standing behind her.

Once inside, the men were surprised to find that none of the door alarms had been activated. They finally located a tripped alarm in the basement, finding it odd that no one had apparently entered or left the building since the door alarms had been set. An exhaustive

search of the entire building turned up no living person.

Concluding that no one had entered or left the building since the alarms had been set, the officers and Baker left the building still unsure as to what caused the alarm. One officer still maintained he had seen the figure of a woman in an upstairs window. When Baker suggested he may have seen the Grey Lady, the officer replied he had never heard of the legend.

For Palmer, such an account from law enforcement officials adds credibility to the legend.

Yet despite chronicling these and other reports of the Grey Lady, Palmer maintains she's not sure if there is anything haunting the library. In one of her essays on the Grey Lady, Palmer addresses her skepticism:

“Why have I not had one (an encounter with the ghost)?” she writes. “Possibly I think only certain people have them. Possibly—and highly likely—I don’t want to. I’ve been told I’m ‘not open.’ That’s probably right. I’m just content to be the writer/reporter and let others have the encounters.”

While she occasionally hears odd noises, Palmer maintains that many of them can be equated to the creaks and groans common to many old structures.

“This building is 126 years old; not everything is supernatural,” she says.

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Palmer is quick to point out that not everyone shared Miss Margaret’s enchantment

with the Grey Lady. When Palmer first started working at the library in the in the 1980s, she was not aware that the library had a resident spirit.

“In the early years, she wasn’t talked about because we didn’t want to be known as a haunted library,” Palmer said.

The legend was all but silenced in the early nineties after a traumatic incident left the community shaken and brought stories of life and death too close to home for many local residents and even some library patrons.

In 1992, a National Guard C130 crashed into an Evansville hotel and restaurant. It exploded into flames upon impact, killing all five crew members on board. Nine people on the ground also perished in the crash, and many more were injured.

After the crash, a young boy was visiting Willard’s children’s room, where he heard stories about the ghostly activity plaguing the library. A distraught mother later contacted library officials and told them her son was upset over the talk of ghosts. His father was one of the victims in the plane crash.

After that, Palmer said, talk of the Grey Lady ghost was all but silenced.

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Greg Hager came to work at Willard Library in 1993 as the adult services librarian. Hager obtained his master of library science degree from Indiana University and was familiar with Evansville and Willard. He first heard about the Grey Lady legend while visiting friends in Evansville in 1990. After a year at Willard, Hager was promoted to library director.

Under his leadership, a marked change took place at the library. The Grey Lady was

resurrected and once again took on a life of her own.

Willard's promotion of the paranormal did not begin with the Grey Lady, however. In 1995, the library decided to offer a tour of the historic building in conjunction with a program about the Salem Witchcraft Trials. Similar programs had attracted some thirty attendees.

The Evansville *Courier & Press* previewed the event in the October 26, 1995, edition, playing up the library's haunted reputation in an article titled "Visitors can get the willies from Willard's Lady-in-Grey." Reporter Rich Davis began the article: "Willard Library, with its 112-year-old Victorian tower and creaky stairs, resembles the kind of classic haunted house where the Adams family might live."

The article profiled the event, and also included information about the legend of the Grey Lady.

Betty Palmer was among the staff members to lead the after-hours tour of the building once the featured speaker, a professor from a local university, concluded her talk about the witchcraft trials. Palmer recalled looking out the library's front windows a few minutes before the event. She was shocked by what she saw.

"There were 800 people in the driveway," she said.

Attendees were lined up single-file all the way down the library's driveway, spilling onto the city's streets beyond. Despite the unexpected crowd, Palmer, Hager, and other staff members made sure everyone who came expecting a tour was given one. The evening, which started at six p.m., concluded about one o'clock in the morning.

While the Salem Witchcraft Trials were the focus of the event, it was clear most people were hoping to catch a glimpse of the Grey Lady.

After the rousing success of the first after-hours tour, it became apparent to Hager that the Grey Lady ghost was of interest to many in the community. The tours of the library became an annual event at the library, with an increasing focus on the building's notoriously haunted areas.

In 1998, Hager opened the library to paranormal groups for overnight investigations.

After four years of successful tours, interest in the Grey Lady was at an all-time high. Then an idea was formulated that would take the legend into a new dimension.

Hager was chatting on the phone with his friend Jim Derk, then new-media editor at the *Courier & Press*. Derk asked Hager if he had ever considered installing a webcam at the library, which was still relatively new technology for 1999.

Hager replied he loved using technology and had been thinking about installing such a device in the library. Hager recalled Derk's reply:

“How about we install a cam so people can look for the Grey Lady between now and Halloween?”

Hager readily agreed, and the first Willard Library Ghost Cam was installed on the library's second floor. Users could go to a webpage hosted by the *Courier & Press* to look for any spirit activity twenty-four hours a day.

Derk wrote a column to promote the camera in the October 27 issue of the

newspaper.

“We’re playing a little version of *Ghostbusters* on our Web site these days after we installed a live, 24-hour color Webcam inside the supposedly haunted Willard Library in Evansville,” he wrote. “We’ve asked people from all over the world to drop in and have a peek at the camera and perhaps capture the famous ‘Grey Lady Ghost’ in action.”

The article was picked up by The Associated Press, CNN, and other national news outlets. Thousands of people took the challenge, and “evidence” from the ghost cam began pouring into the newspaper and the library.

Some people took a lighthearted approach to their ghost hunting, sending in images that were clearly created with Photoshop, featuring cartoonish looking ghosts grinning out from the screen. But other more serious paranormal enthusiasts submitted images of mists and shadows they firmly believed to be manifestations of the otherworldly.

“The ghost cam was viral, and by November 1 we had millions of hits. So many on Halloween night that it knocked out the Internet service provider we were using—not just service to Willard Library, but to everyone in Evansville who was using Evansville Online for their Internet service,” Hager said.

The first ghost cam was initially only going to be offered through Halloween, but due to its popularity, it became a permanent fixture. The library now has six ghost cams throughout the building and is preparing to install a seventh.

“The Grey Lady went from being regionally famous to the world’s most famous library ghost in a matter of weeks,” Hager said.

Users continue to log onto the website to look for the Grey Lady in droves. Cameras are located in the Children's Room, the basement hallway where the first sighting was reported approximately eighty years ago, and the research room on the second floor.

A community has developed among the most frequent viewers of the library cams. The Willard Library Ghost Chatters is an online forum with the express purpose of discussing the Grey Lady. Members from around the world chat online about the ghost and other paranormal encounters that have been reported at the library. The group's motto? "Not just a fan site, but a way of life."

Group members make an annual pilgrimage to Willard each Halloween to participate in the overnight investigation of the library. Since 2003, they have visited the library more than eight times. The original online forum was last updated in 2010, but the members are now active on Facebook and a few continue to meet at Willard each Halloween.

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Greg Hager stood in the reading room of Willard Library holding an antique photograph in a gilded oval frame. The sepia-toned image of a middle-age woman in a dark, high-collared Victorian dress gazed off to the side, a mysterious smile on her face. It was 12:45 on a Sunday morning, one week before Halloween in 2010.

"Some people think the Grey Lady is none other than Louise Carpenter," Hager said slowly, scanning the faces of the captive audience before him.

Hager, forty-four, leaned back against the check-out counter as he held up the frame. He was dressed casually, sporting a grey jacket over a white dress shirt with no tie and dark

blue jeans. His clothing offset his trim, fit physique. Though his close-cut hair was salt-and-pepper in color, he exuded a youthful exuberance.

The group of about twenty, mostly paranormal investigators, were preparing for an investigation of the library. On this evening, the assembled were from two different paranormal outfits: Southern Wisconsin Paranormal Research Group and the Illinois Ghost Society. Participants in the investigation ranged in age from early twenties to well over sixty.

A group of five adults stood clustered near the dominant, antique glass windows that lined the front of the building. A man who looked to be in his mid-thirties wore a belt buckle emblazoned with logo from the movie *Ghostbusters*, while a middle-aged blonde woman sported a black t-shirt with pink sparkle letters, proclaiming: “I kissed a ghost and I liked it.”

Another group of people sat at a table nearby, admiring a large sheet cake with white and blue icing that someone had carried in. The cake was in celebration of the Willard Library Ghost Chatters, which was celebrating its tenth anniversary. A few of the members had journeyed to Willard for the evening’s festivities.

Hager orchestrated the annual event like a skilled promoter, building interest by allowing only select groups to investigate by invitation just one night per year.

He set the photograph gingerly on the counter before asking the group to follow him to the second floor, where he would explain various “encounters” that staff members and patrons had with the Grey Lady through the years.

As everyone ascended the oak staircase, footsteps reverberated through the now-

empty first floor. The tour resumed in the library's special collections department, a large room dominating most of the second floor of the building. Hager waited until everyone made it up the stairs before beginning a story about a male staff member who, a few years earlier, reported an inexplicable occurrence between the narrow rows of the long bookcases during broad daylight on a summer afternoon.

“He came face to face with a figure,” Hager said soberly, his face partially obscured by the shadows that slipped among the stacks of the books as the occasional car passed by outside. “It was not a good experience for him.”

He explained that the employee and the shadowy figure stared at each other for ten seconds. Hager paused for exactly ten seconds while looking toward the bookcase to ensure the story achieved his desired effect of setting a spooky tone.

“Person to ghost. It was terrifying.”

After hearing Hager explain this and other ghostly encounters with such sincerity, his views on the subject may come as a shock to many.

“I don't believe in ghosts. I have never seen a ghost; nor have I ever had the existence of ghosts proven to me scientifically,” Hager said matter-of-factly in a recent interview.

Yet as a jolly man of about fifty vowed to make Hager a believer by the end of the night, Hager chuckled good-naturedly. His blue-grey eyes smiled as he told the man while he hasn't seen any evidence of a ghost, he tries to keep an open mind.

As the tour ended back in the first floor reading room, Hager gave the ghost hunters

free reign of the building until dawn. Everyone scattered to various areas of the library. Some went to the basement, others to the second floor, and a handful went outside to either get some air or have a smoke. Hager retreated to his office for a few minutes.

In a back corner of the second-floor reading room, two soft-spoken women sat with a small, silver digital voice recorder on the table between them. They introduced themselves as Jodi and Becky. Jodi had graying hair, while Becky's was light blonde.

Both were members of the Ghost Chatters and lived in Kentucky. They said they most enjoyed the sense of camaraderie among the members of the group. They had only recently started doing investigations. When asked who they thought the Grey Lady was, they admitted they weren't sure.

Becky, the younger of the pair, said she had read that ghosts are often found at Indian burial grounds. She thought that perhaps there were some Native American connections in the area. Jodi, who was wearing a Willard Library T-shirt, offered a different take.

"If I would have to take a guess, I would say someone who has just been here since the beginning and loved books."

Nestled just off the main reading room upstairs was the Baird room. The small, plush-carpeted and well-appointed room was used for board meetings and other formal events. Dim light reflected warmly off the wood-paneled walls and glass windows that surrounded two sides of the room, while the midnight blue carpeting made the space feel slightly confined. Members of the Wisconsin team, mostly college-aged, sat in heavy chairs

around a large wooden table that dominated most of the space.

The two women and two men were about to begin an “EVP session” in attempt to communicate with any spirits that might be present. Group members would record themselves asking questions and then play back the recordings, hoping to have recorded responses not heard by the human ear.

They went around the table and introduced themselves before starting the session. Jen sat at the head of the table, an appropriate seat for her role as group leader. Troy occupied the seat to her left. He wore black square-rimmed glasses and had a small goatee. Paul sat at the far end of the table across from Jen. While Troy’s facial hair was trimmed neatly, Paul sported a large, bushy goatee. His dark hair was spiked. Sarah, who seemed slightly older than the others, sat to the right of Paul.

Two hand-held silver digital voice recorders on the table were turned on. The group began the session by noting the time, date, and location. Then they went around the table asking questions. They spoke in serious, somber tones. While one member was speaking, the others listened as earnestly as managers during an interview session with a potential employee.

Most members asked specific questions of the entity.

Jen: “What is your name?”

Troy: “What year is it?”

But Paul preferred a different approach.

“Horses or ponies?” he asked in a distinctive Wisconsin accent, putting emphasis on the “o” in horses and ponies.

It was clear the other group members were used to Paul’s unconventional tactics. Group members laughed softly after his question, but they did not break from their questioning.

“Do you feel that this is your home?” Sarah asked without missing a beat.

“Are you mad because of all the people investigating in the library?” Jen asked.

After about fifteen minutes, the recorders were turned off. No one seemed daunted by the fact that every question had been met with silence. They would take the recordings back to Wisconsin for analysis, hoping to hear the voice of the Grey Lady ghost or any other spirit that might have something to share with the living.

Back in the main reading room on the second floor, Tim Harte sat in front of a glowing computer monitor. A portly middle-aged gentleman with graying hair, Harte shared his expertise jovially with investigators throughout the evening from his post. During the earlier introductions, Hager referred to him as the “father of the paranormal TV show.” This was Harte’s fifteenth investigation of Willard Library, and he seemed to be revered as a legend among the local paranormal community.

Harte started the MESA (Multi-Energy Sensory Array) project in 1994, an elaborate computer system to study energy associated with what he terms “haunt phenomena,” a subset of the paranormal that focuses specifically on studying locations reported to be rife with spirit activity. He and his team had filmed at the library, and Harte had been asked to

do a documentary on the Grey Lady ghost for the Discovery Channel in 1999.

On this night, Harte monitored a computer screen that measured energy levels in the library. He remained an elusive figure for most of the investigation, chatting with people as they approached him but keeping mostly to himself. He revealed that while he had investigated the library many times, he and other members of MESA continued to be invited to every year as “in-house paranormal counsel.”

At about three a.m., most of the attendees had moved their investigations to the basement. It housed the Children’s Room, reportedly among the most haunted areas of the library. In a far back corner of a small reading room filled with brightly colored children’s books, Maer E. Mack sat cross-legged on the floor holding court.

Maer, one of the founders of the Willard Library Ghost Chatters, traveled from Canada for the investigation. A large redheaded woman dressed in flowing clothes, Maer spoke in a booming voice and moved with rapid almost frenzied movements. She sat next to bookcase painted bright yellow, which housed a selection of books from the *Nancy Drew* mystery series. Other members of the Chatters sat around her as she tried to communicate with an unseen boy she referred to as Billy.

“Billy does tricks,” she said with a wide smile.

She took a pair of long, thin metal dowsing rods from a man seated to her right and held them straight out in front of her. Dowsing rods are used by many paranormal investigators. They are thought to indicate energy fluctuations, which some believe indicate spirit activity.

Maer continued to talk to the unseen Billy as the rods crossed slight in her hands. She whispered that crossed rods meant a spirit was answering yes, while parallel rods meant no. She said Billy had been known to play with her hair and dangling earrings. He was thought to be the spirit of a small child.

“Billy? Are you here?”

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Considerable interest in the Grey Lady ghost has continued for about the last ten years. Betty Palmer estimates that not a week goes by that someone doesn't ask her if she has seen the ghost. Around Halloween, demand is so high the after-hours tours are given by reservation only. And every year, paranormal investigation groups will meet at Willard Library and spend the night among its shadowy rooms and dark hallways, hoping to catch evidence of spirit activity. Yet many more groups will have to wait a few years. Greg Hager is currently taking reservations for the year 2028.

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## PART 3

### **Explaining the Unexplained: A Mix of Conflicting Perspectives**

Paranormal investigators could be said to live in a world where the living and dead frequently collide. In many cases, they make it their mission to document evidence of the mysterious and unexplained. Much of their work comes down to a very simple question, fundamental human existence: Is there more to this life than we can see, hear, touch, or feel?

In pursuit of an answer to this question, they devote their weekends to attempting to prove that people say their houses are haunted by dead relatives or former occupants are not crazy. They compete for the chance to spend the night in a historic library pursuing a legendary a phantom that has become a local icon. They try to communicate with the dead, in some cases even talking to them like old friends. In their worlds, fairies dance on the grass, and shadows are more than mere tricks of the light.

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Tim Harte has been studying the unexplained for more than twenty years. In that time, he has encountered many paranormal groups and often finds himself at odds with their approaches to the field.

Harte prides himself on taking a scientific approach to his work with the paranormal realm. He studies what he terms “haunt phenomena,” which he defines as inexplicable physical changes in an environment. His interest was sparked in the late 1970s when he read *The Entity*, a book by Frank de Felitta. The book chronicles the story of a woman who was

being afflicted by an unknown force, later determined to be a poltergeist.

Harte's interest continued in subsequent decades. In the 1990s, studying clinical psychology as a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Springfield, Harte read as much scholarly research as he could about parapsychology and hauntings.

After enlisting the help of a friend from his high school days, Harte created the MESA computer system to study energies believed to be associated with haunt phenomena. The system uses a laptop computer, analog-to-digital converter, and various sensors to measure energy. Since its inception in 1994, MESA has been used at more than two-hundred-fifty purportedly haunted sites in states across the Midwest. It records and collects data that is later analyzed for anomalies.

Harte's interest in the paranormal, specifically hauntings, is rooted in scientific approaches. He has had a few encounters that cannot be rationally explained.

"I have seen full-bodied apparitions in places in Kentucky, shadows and shadow people, orbs and lights, felt sensed presences, heard voices," Harte said. "Most of the things mentioned at different haunt sights."

Harte has strong opinions when it comes to paranormal investigators. He said one of the biggest misconceptions of paranormal investigators is the methodology used by many groups.

"They do not have the scientific training needed to quantify and quality haunt phenomena," he said. Such groups work to acquire more and more equipment and try to get their own television shows, he added.

“The groups are unprofessional, amateur, hobbyists, and tend to counsel ‘clients’ in places that may have haunt activity,” he continued. “The hobbyist has so scientific background, counseling, training, or any idea of what ‘evidence’ is.”

Another misconception, in Harte’s view, is that many groups tend to label haunt phenomena as demonic or evil. Harte has encountered many such groups over the years, even some with ordained ministers as members of their team. He notes that “things turn into a circus quickly.” He said power struggles often result, as well as competition among teams working in the same areas.

Harte prefers to study the energies associated with haunt phenomena. He generally works independently.

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Amber Hoskins is a member of the Midwestern Researchers and Investigators of Paranormal Activity (MRIPA), based in Indianapolis. Her group, like Harte, has strong views on what constitutes the paranormal. The website states:

“MRIPA is NOT a ghost hunting group. The MRIPA team researches all unexplained phenomena as well as train and educate those with questions or interests in the paranormal field. The term ‘Paranormal’ means ‘above the normal’ and consists of many types of strange areas, from UFOlogy, Cryptozoology, Hauntings, Myths, Legends, Metaphysical, Lost Civilizations, and much, much more.”

While the group was organized in 1996, Hoskins joined in 2008. MRIPA has strict requirements for its team members. Hoskins was admitted after completing an application,

lengthy interview process, and a training period before being officially invited to join the group.

Hoskins serves as the research manager for MRIPA. She is responsible for locating and research potential locations for the group to investigate. Hoskins is also a member of the group's Anomaly Response Team, which include six of the group's main members who attend the majority of investigations.

Paranormal experiences are nothing new for Hoskins. They are the reason she wanted to join a group of investigators.

"I've had paranormal experiences since I was a child," she said. "The first experience I remember occurred when I was eight years old. Several days after my great-grandmother passed [away], she appeared to me in my room. She stood in the corner and told me that everything was going to be all right. My father says I have seen spirits since I was an infant, although that is the first that had an impact on me. Since that time, the paranormal experiences have not ceased."

Hoskins acknowledges that paranormal groups are not always taken seriously.

"I believe the main misconception about paranormal investigators is that we believe everything is paranormal," she said. "This misconception is perpetuated because there are non-professional investigators that do believe everything they capture is paranormal, including a picture of dust. They misrepresent the real investigators."

For Hoskins, the unknown motivates her work as an investigator.

"Where are we going go next? What are we going to discover? Those questions keep

me coming back for more,” she said.

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Dr. Colleen Boyd, a cultural anthropologist and ethnohistorian who teaches at Ball State University, has studied legends for much of her career. She has worked extensively with Native North Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Her fieldwork with members of that population led to her interest in studying people’s beliefs about the spirit world and the pervasiveness of legends.

“One of the things I have learned in the years that I worked with the Indian people was the significant way that ghosts and spirits formed their attachment to place,” she said. “That’s what I’m interested in is how people get their ideas about the environment and express them through whatever cultural means they use.”

She started collecting stories and looking for patterns. Working with other scholars, she had published material on the topic of ghosts in Native American culture and history. Eventually her work expanded from native beliefs, and she began looking at more modern tales of hauntings from a folklore perspective.

“I see myself more of a ghost story hunter as opposed to a ghost hunter,” she said.

In that capacity, Boyd has found many commonalities among prevalent ghost stories.

“If you have an abandoned asylum, guaranteed ghost stories. If you have a university campus, guaranteed ghost stories. Old churches? Absolutely. Graveyards? Sometimes...The older and creepier they look, the more likely I think you’re going to find that.”

An influx of paranormal-related television shows, many on cable networks, seems to

have given rise to the popularity of the field. Shows like *Celebrity Ghost Stories*, *Destination Truth*, *Ghost Adventures*, *Ghost Hunters*, *Ghost Lab*, *Most Terrifying Places in America*, and *Paranormal State* feature ghost stories and the people who investigate claims of the paranormal.

Boyd notes that while such programs highlight the field, interest in ghost is nothing new. She teaches an introductory folklore class at Ball State, which includes studying beliefs in ghosts. The class is a “perennial favorite.”

“There are just some subjects that people are always endlessly fascinated in,” she said, adding that new technology has increased the capabilities for average people to attempt to document evidence of the unexplained.

“What we have [now] is so much more sophisticated,” she said. “You can type EVP, which is electronic voice phenomena, into a computer and come up with hundreds of examples of what people say are EVP. That’s amazing....The access to information is just much greater.”

Boyd is particularly interested in why such beliefs have endured over the ages, regardless of technology.

“It’s the twenty-first century. Science was supposed to replace all of this, but science hasn’t replaced it all,” she said. “If anything, these ideas are stronger and more prevalent than before.”

Boyd said she isn’t sure why science hasn’t replaced beliefs in the afterlife, noting that religion and science often form a complicated web of belief for many people.

“At the end of the day, people have their beliefs, and then they have science, and they’re not the same thing,” she said. “Science, I think, is a cold comfort for people who are seeking some deeper understanding. I think the fear that people have about death and the unknown, science has not been able to adequately explain to them. Nobody’s made it to the other side and back again in anything we might consider a scientifically valid research project. So that leaves open the door for other possibilities, and I think that is important to people.”

## CHAPTER 5:

### CONCLUSIONS:

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Willard Library's Grey Lady ghost could be defined as a living legend. Analysis of the legend, from the first reported sighting of the apparition in the basement of the library in the 1930s to its current state of widespread popularity, has revealed changes through the decades. The initial sighting seemed to fuel more speculation, with the Grey Lady eventually becoming an institution in the community.

Across its history, the legend of the Grey Lady has had both skeptics and believers. When the custodian first reported it, there were those who doubted his claims. Today, library director Greg Hager and adult services library Betty Palmer both promote the Grey Lady legend. But they also are skeptical of reports of ghostly apparitions roaming the rooms of the library. Yet others, like Tim Harte and Maer E. Mack, have investigated Willard multiple times in search of paranormal activity. Children's librarian Margaret Maier seemed to have even developed a friendship with the "ghost."

The Grey Lady legend is indicative of a larger issue: the power of ghost stories and the motivations of people who investigate them. An interview with Dr. Colleen Boyd

elucidated the power of legends as something that has been commonplace throughout human history. Legends like the Grey Lady can be viewed as a way of linking people to their local community.

The paranormal is a broad field with many competing definitions. To some, it means simply the unexplained—anything outside what is considered normal. To others, it represents haunted houses, poltergeists, and even demonic activity. Bigfoot sightings, the Loch Ness Monster, and alien abductions could even fall under this category as well. The researcher made no attempt to define the field of the paranormal or attempt to validate to any claims of such activity. Instead, the researcher focused on ghost stories and those who investigated them. The Grey Lady of Willard Library and the work of Shadow Patrol Paranormal Investigators indicate that the power of legend is still very much alive. There are those who devote much of their time to studying the unexplained even in the face of ardent skepticism.

In telling the story of the investigations, the researcher used techniques of literary journalism. These included characterization, sensory and status details, dialogue, and dramatic action. Saturation and immersion reporting techniques allowed the researcher direct access to the paranormal investigators chronicled in the body of the project. In addition to the investigation of downtown Portland, Indiana, the researcher attended two other investigations with members of Shadow Patrol Paranormal Investigators. These experiences provided further insight into the methods used by SPPI. Beyond the overnight investigation at Willard Library, the researcher conducted interviews on site and visited the building on other occasions to gather scene-setting material. This type of direct access allowed the researcher to directly witness much of the dramatic action chronicled in the body of the

project.

Interviews with Tim Harte and Amber Hoskins, both paranormal investigators, have revealed conflicting viewpoints of the field. Harte has strong opinions about paranormal groups and prefers a scientific approach, while Hoskins seems more drawn to the sense of community and adventure such groups afford. These competing viewpoints are seen throughout the field of the paranormal, as each piece of literature appears to have a unique definition of what constitutes the paranormal. The validity of such groups, much like the validity of many ghost stories, is often subject to intense debate.

The use of secondary research was a large part of telling a complete story. Archived material from newspapers, Willard Library, and the National Register of Historic Places provided information on historical aspects of the project and was used to verify information. This method of research was especially valuable in chronicling the legend of the Grey Lady and its place in the history of Willard Library.

The main limitation of the project was the vast expanse of resources available on the paranormal. With so much material online, the researcher often found it difficult to determine the validity of information. Many articles and other reports were subject to intense debate and offered contradictory information. Historical accounts likewise varied. In many cases, legends were only passed down orally and could not be substantiated by documentation.

Access to subjects was another limitation. For example, many participants in the investigation at Willard Library were from out of state. Follow-up interviews could only feasibly be conducted via phone or e-mail. In e-mail especially, tone and body language

cannot be captured and the true meaning of statements is harder to discern than with in-person interviews. Attempts to reach some participants after the event were unsuccessful.

Time was a third limitation. The majority of the project was written in the spring, while interest in the Grey Lady legend is greatest in the fall, especially around Halloween. While subjects were willing to discuss the legend, the bulk of activity, such as tours of the library's "haunted hot spots," occurs in the autumn.

The field of the paranormal has long-fascinated the human population. As local groups of paranormal investigators continue to form in communities around the world, the motivations of the members of such groups should continued to be explored by researchers. Much work remains to be done in determining the forces that drive such groups. This work is especially lacking in the realm of journalism, as few reporters have covered the topic in much detail. Future researchers, especially journalists, would be wise to find a specific angle of study in the increasingly broad field of paranormal investigators and the power of local legend. Researchers should be prepared to sift through competing viewpoints and a plethora of often contradictory information.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION

Two evaluators reviewed the project: Ronald C. Roat, professor emeritus of journalism at the University of Southern Indiana and Paul G. Moore, a member of the Spirit Seekers of Southwest Virginia. The full evaluations are located in the appendix of the project.

Roat noted that literary journalism was an appropriate method of reporting on the paranormal, as the approach can attempt to answer fundamental questions about the subculture of paranormal believers. In terms of depth, Roat indicated that the project was a solid introduction to the topic but could have benefited from more detail. He concluded that much more work remains to be done on the subject so that “we can learn about [ghost hunters] as a reflection of our own curiosity.”

Moore stated that paranormal groups are an important area of study as a means of inquiry into that which cannot be scientifically proven. He added that the author’s “impartial stance” and methods of research were particularly suited for a discussion on the topic. He concluded that the fieldwork conducted by the author “made an interesting contribution to the subject.”

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## Appendix

### Evaluations

**EVALUATOR NAME: Ronald C. Roat**

**1. Brief discussion of the evaluator's credentials** (e.g., knowledge and experience of the subject area)

I am a journalism professor emeritus, University of Southern Indiana (USI), where I taught 22 years. The university offered merely one journalism class when I joined the faculty in 1986, but I shaped a creditable program that became the school's foundation for successful departmental accreditation. I created, among others, the senior level literary journalism class and taught it twice before retiring. As experienced professors certainly know, literary journalism challenges everything you teach while demanding more work from students than they happily provide otherwise. Yet I still believe the approach to be a backbone of what print journalism can and should offer in coming years. I often toy with attempting a contemporary history of this Western Michigan region, where I now reside, using literary journalism, but so far, I regain my senses when I realize the work I would face.

Prior to being a professor, I reported for the *Lansing State Journal* until I was drafted into the U.S. Army. After the military and studying at West Virginia University, I joined the staffs of the *Morgantown Post* and the *Morgantown Dominion-News* as a reporter and city editor. I later

reported for the *Dayton Daily News* and then was the city's consumer advocate. Following graduate studies at Oregon State University, I became the managing editor of *The Times* in Frankfort, Ind., until joining USI. I have written three novels. I continue to work at various writing projects. I hope to publish a much different kind of work in the near future.

## **2. Relationship to the student and subject matter**

I taught Emily Taylor everything she knows about writing. I wish I could say that with a straight face. The truth is that I performed every dance I knew, borrowed from the mystical arts, and used as much honest reasoning as I could to get her to leave the “darkness” of the English Department and join my program. I knew – and I still know – Emily was among the very best students I had the pleasure to teach. I also served as her academic advisor. She is a pleasure to know, and we have remained in loose contact. To be honest, I have asked her to be the final editor of the book I intend to publish soon. She has agreed.

## **3. Evaluation of the topic as appropriate for the creative endeavor**

For five years I lived in an odd house within a mile of USI and owned by the university. Built as an artists' studio, it had an eccentric arrangement of rooms with the kitchen and main bath upstairs and the remaining rooms downstairs. A half dozen times I could hear someone walking around upstairs, stepping on just the right flooring to provide an appropriate squeak. My cat and my daughter's cat would stop and gaze at the ceiling wondering perhaps if my daughter had come home. I would merely shout, “Knock it off!” to end it. I believe that highlights my direct experience with the topic.

To return to the paper at hand, I must say it sparked some thinking. Consider the situation. The literary journalism approach demands a great deal of time and energy to help readers get behind the public image and glean whatever awareness the study produces. The public image of ghost hunters, meanwhile, is confusing at best. These folks set about to prove or disprove the existence of spirits (for the lack of a more definitive term) by visiting scenes of reported sightings of spirits. One group tends to use “new” scientific theories and machinery to detect and record new forensics trace evidence. Another uses a peculiar interrogation technique before declaring success apparently no matter what happens. Other practices remain too obscure and confusing to define. And finally, the a number of others, not organized in a group, manage to push their performances to the television screen and feed a public which new nothing to begin with and might know less after viewing the programming.

It would seem that if you are going to report on these people with anything approaching even tepid seriousness, the literary journalism approach seems a worthy method. It can come closer to answering questions, such as: Who are these people? What are their credentials? How do they operate? How do they determine success? Do they have motives the public can understand? Has any one of them verified and/or produced evidence we can understand? A minute-to-minute illumination of their common practices appears as a credible investigative process.

Nobody should kid anyone about this topic. How serious should we take it? Generally, it appears harmless. These ghost hunters cause no notable disruption in everyday affairs. No

political agenda manifests itself. The public faces no costs here. Children are not secreted away to learn bizarre behaviors. No, our interest ranges from simple curiosity to entertainment. We do not take these activities even as seriously as we do religion, and this country takes religion less seriously all the time, given church attendance trends. Finally, since this is a journalism project, it is proper to note that journalism has been consistently reluctant to report deeply about anything that smells of religion. It is uncertain whether chasing ghosts smells of religion.

#### **4. Evaluation of the student's approach**

The present study approaches the topic from as good a perspective and method as would be a number of others. A number of its early topics – such as the history of ghosts within the introduction – could be a shelf of books. Her The discussion of the history of the Willard Library's ghost was as thorough as it should be. The unique form of publicity, an interesting topic in itself, could be more thorough, but that would redirect the paper's focus in an irrelevant direction. The idea, however, of building upon a local's potentially damaging history might be a useful research topic. It is good the paper touched upon it at least twice.

A true strength of this paper is its actual usage of the literary journalism approach. As noted earlier in this evaluation, the step-by-step description of the ghost hunters' activities gave the research the necessary feel. It was illuminating. The hunters' comments and evaluations told us a great deal about the nature of their chosen tasks. If you can excuse subjective observations here, the dialogues and activities revealed a lost group of people. You cannot help but suspect they would fail to recognize the evidence they seek even if they stumbled

over it. They seem a little too focused on preconceived ideas of what constitutes positive evidence of ghosts to notice what might be evidence that is yet more reliable.

## **5. Evaluation of the body of the project:**

### **a. Quality**

I would have expected nothing but excellent, quality work from Emily Taylor, and that is what this paper presents. I have nothing to add to this.

### **b. Depth of treatment**

It is easy to fault this study for its lack of depth. You could follow the ghost hunters day after day and through their routine planning and evaluating. That might be revealing. It would be good literary journalism to be the hanger-on through their daily routines, much as Tom Wolfe or Gay Talese or even Truman Capote might have done, but that would be beyond the reach of a graduate research project and require immense financial resources. That said, it was good for the depth to begin the process in Portland, Ind. It showed what constitutes a simple examination of ghost activities. The details of the nighttime trek through various buildings offered a very pleasant yet illustrative way to introduce the topic.

Still, the paper might have improved if the author had hunted down Jim Derk, the former new media editor of the *Evansville Courier & Press*, to see what he had to say about the ghost cam and how that played in gaining followers to the newspaper. On the other hand, he might just offer some wise guy remark you would feel obligated to include. The same is true of Don Baker who, in my memory, was last directing the Newburgh library. It is doubtful he would have much to add to this inquiry, but my journalistic background makes me feel I

have not done my job unless and until I hunt down and question everyone mentioned in a story. I cannot tell you how many times a nearly irrelevant remark from a marginal source changed the entire story.

### **c. Coverage**

I am at a loss to know what coverage we are to evaluate here. The topic is wide open. In fact, if the topic were more defined and corralled, this paper would necessarily have to address some slim subject matter within the topic to be a worthy research project.

## **6. Evaluation of the student's work as contributing to the field (e.g., body of knowledge)**

Again, it is time not to delude one another on this, but it is my impression not much has been done in this field from a journalistic point of view. Reporting and listing ghost stories for a coffee table book or a quick market project does not count as adding knowledge.

Those merely gloss up and contrive the topic. Accordingly, Emily Taylor's unusual research project using literary journalism might in fact be creating a new field of study. I would hope others can pick up where she left off and provide further study of ghost hunters so that we can learn about them as a reflection of our own curiosity.

**EVALUATOR NAME: Paul G. Moore**

**1. Brief discussion of the evaluator's credentials (e.g., knowledge and experience of the subject area)**

Only extend to my knowledge of folklore and legend; the importance of oral tradition, and a limited experience with a paranormal group.

**2. Relationship to the student and subject matter**

While investigating some “haunted” sites in the winter of 2010 [in Indiana] I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Taylor.

She interviewed the four members of our group, Spirit Seekers of S.W. Virginia, and accompanied us in an investigation of the Randolph County Infirmary.

**3. Evaluation of the topic as appropriate for the creative endeavor**

As a topic of critical study I think paranormal groups are a very important area of study from an anthropological viewpoint and also an inquiry into the human need to believe in things that can't be scientifically proven i.e. ghosts, religion, UFO's.

**4. Evaluation of the student's approach**

Miss Taylor's paper is an excellent study of the personalities involved in the area of paranormal investigations and her impartial stance is aptly suited for a topic such as this. Her methods of research and her willingness to accompany these groups is really the only way to gauge their credulity, honesty, and scientific methods (if any).

**5. Evaluation of the body of the project:**

The paper gives an honest and impartial look at an area of study that is often misunderstood, but her approach in relation to the ongoing developments of folklore and legend puts these paranormal groups in a much more understandable context.

**6. Evaluation of the student's work as contributing to the field (e.g., body of knowledge)**

I think Miss Taylor's research and fieldwork have made an interesting contribution to a subject I've been involved with for over forty years, and I hope to see more of her work in the future.