

How Curious – Stone Lion Inn

Why is Guthrie's Stone Lion Inn considered the most haunted place in Oklahoma?

MUSIC: How Curious theme

Rachel Hopkin Script

Hello. Welcome to How Curious. I'm Rachel Hopkin

FX - Scary sounds montage

Rachel Hopkin Script

Yes. It's October, Halloween month, and you've probably seen the usual annual rise in ghostly goings all around you. On my street, for example, I've noticed a number of ghoulish figures draped over gates and shrubs.

A recent Gallup poll found that just under 40% of Americans profess to believe in ghosts, slightly more avowedly do not, with the rest being unsure.

But this episode of How Curious is absolutely not about whether ghosts exist, rather it's about what people talk about when they talk about ghosts – with reference to one specific Oklahoma location: the Stone Lion Inn in Guthrie.

Christy Powell

I will stand by this saying that the Stone Lion Inn is one of the most haunted locations within Oklahoma.

Rachel Hopkin Script

This is Christy Powell, founder/director of Oklahoma Paranormal Research and Investigation or OKPRI

Christy Powell

You can't pay me enough to spend the night by myself in the Stone Lion Inn. You just can't.

Rachel Hopkin Script

We'll hear more from Christy shortly.

But before we get to the Stone Lion Inn, I wanted to learn more generally about the human fascination with ghosts.

Shelley Ingram

Hi. I'm Shelley Ingram, I'm a folklorist and professor and I have spent many semesters teaching courses on ghosts, ghost lore and ghost hunting.

Rachel Hopkin Script

As you might expect, those courses are routinely over subscribed.

Shelley Ingram

People have been interested in hauntings since people have existed. We find traces of ghosts and ghost stories in almost all ancient civilizations, ancient texts. One of the assignments that I have my students do is to go find what they would consider the first ghost story and so many of them come back with Pliny the Younger has this story of a man that had a bad death who was buried incorrectly, and his spirit haunts this house. So you have an ancient Roman philosopher writing a ghost story at around the first century.

Rachel Hopkin Script

I asked Shelley if she had any thoughts as to why we're so fascinated by the idea of ghosts.

Shelley Ingram

One of the things that we see is these kind of waves of interest in ghost lore throughout the centuries and they're often connected to issues of technology and new technology. And I think it's Barbara Walker in her introduction to *Folklore and the Supernatural* says that in a hyper visible society, in which we have so much information at our fingertips, the supernatural and ghost stories allow us to not know everything. It introduces this freedom to not have to have all the answers. So even if you're a non-believer, interacting with a ghost story, watching a film – it allows you the opportunity, even for a moment, to turn yourself over to something that's larger than yourself, something that you don't understand, and there's a lot of pleasure that comes from not understanding.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The aforementioned ghost story by Pliny the Younger features various plot devices that would later become common in the genre across different media, including fear provoking activity, a clear reason for why the haunting occurred, and a satisfying resolution. But most accounts from people who believe themselves to have encountered ghosts are not like that.

Shelley Ingram

Most of the time, they are very mundane experiences of hearing somebody walking, seeing a figure in a doorway. So you have the literary and film ghost horror stories, but then you have the actual ghost stories of people in the every day world that aren't the same kind of fear, they're not the same kind of frightening.

SEGUE

Grant Aguirre

Good morning.

Guest

Good morning.

Grant Aguirre

How did everybody sleep last night?

Guest

I slept like a rock.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The Stone Lion Inn in Guthrie, Oklahoma, has functioned as a bed and breakfast for the past several decades, during which time it has regularly offered murder mystery weekends, in which guests become members of the cast whilst the house itself is the star. Recently I joined the

participants of the homicidal happenings for Sunday breakfast and owner Grant Aguirre sat down with us all to tell us the history of the house.

Grant Aguirre

So the home was built in 1907 by Frederick Edward Houghton who came with the land run of 1889, and he is one that actually makes good. He had the first cotton gin in Oklahoma, the first car dealership. He owned a mercantile store here in Guthrie and he owned a mercantile store in Enid. And so they decided to build this house.

Rachel Hopkin Script

It cost almost 12 grand which at the time made it the most expensive house in Guthrie. It's a grand affair set over three stories plus a basement with almost 5000 square feet of living space.

Grant Aguirre

The Houghtons had a total of 12 children and the only one to not survive childhood was a little girl named Irene. She contracted whooping cough and at that point in time, they used opium in the cough syrup which is a wonderful cough suppressant. It's also a wonderful suppressant of your heart and lungs if you take too much of it. She got worse and worse and worse, the cough gets worse in the evening, and her nanny, who was also the upstairs housekeeper, kept giving her more and more and more of the cough syrup and she passed away in that room. And people experience, on the second, a little girl floor coming in and patting them on the cheek, waking them up in the middle of the night.

Rachel Hopkin Script

I should mention here that OKPRI, who do historical research on the properties they investigate, including the Stone Lion Inn, were unable to verify the existence of this little girl or her passing in any of the official records that they looked at.

Grant Aguirre

Then in 1910, the Capitol is moved from Guthrie to Oklahoma City and Guthrie kind of becomes a ghost town so they move to Enid because they had a mercantile store that was doing well. They lease the home to the Gooch Smith family who turn it into a funeral parlor and the table across the hall is the embalming table that they used to embalm bodies.

Rachel Hopkin Script

That table was now being used to serve the breakfast from.

Grant told me that he doesn't believe in ghosts and says that he can find rational explanations for such weirdnesses he's encountered in the home, not least of which is that it's an older building with a lot of wood in it so it can be creakily noisy. Meanwhile his brother, Ral Mazza – with whom I spoke by phone on a not great line – seems more perplexed than his sibling.

Ral Mazza

I struggle with it because I'm a pretty rational person but I will tell you that growing up in that house, there were just a lot of eerie things that were happening. Literally like up on the third floor there's a closet that we turned into our toy closet and I just felt like periodically things would get moved around, and it freaked me out enough that I had mom put a lock on the door and it still kept happening.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Ral said that the strange goings on extended beyond the toy closet.

Ral Mazza

We had numerous guests feeling like they felt something in the house or saw a ghost. I never saw anything but certainly if I was home alone, you'd hear someone going up and down the stairs. And then at times it just felt like just an odd feeling, like someone was in the room with you.

Rachel-in-situ

Looking back now, with all the rationalism that you embrace elsewhere, do you have any explanation for the misarrangement of toys or the eerie feelings now?

Ral Mazza

No

Rachel-in-situ

Is it something you can accept as being a haunting?

Ral Mazza

[Pause] That's a tough one for me. Do I think it's haunted? I don't know. There's some really weird shit [bleeped] that happened in that house, there really are. And a lot of people had experiences like that, including the ladies that worked for us for years.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Michelle Smith is one of those ladies. She's worked at the Stone Lion Inn for more than a quarter century. She told me she started to notice an eerie-ness in the house when she was on her own in it.

Michelle Smith

I would hear people walking up the stairs and I'd come out and don't see anybody. We were serving dinner and I really watched a lady walk through the door and the door was closed. I'd be cleaning in the room and I could see a dress go by. And I got to the point that the whispering was so much that I would blast the TV just to drown the sound out so that I could get my work done.

Rachel Hopkin Script

At one point, Michelle was asked to stay over with the guests by Grant and Ral's mother, Rebecca Luker, who's the person that started the B&B.

Michelle Smith

And I did it for about a month, but this one night it was not a good night. We had a murder mystery. Everybody ... I shut it down, went up to the third floor to go to bed. I was watching TV, and I was dozing off, and then something got in the bed with me and I was, like, "oh."

Rachel Hopkin Script

Just to be clear, Michelle was on her own in the room and the door was locked.

Michelle Smith

And so it got in bed with me, so I scooted over. It scooted over. And I was like "Oh God, what is this?" And I knew again, it was only me. So I scooted over again and it got real close at that point. So I covered my head up and I was just praying and I think I because I don't want to wake up to it, I fell asleep. And in my sleep, I went to the basement with it and poured a bucket of

water on the floor, which I didn't do it, whatever did it, and set the bucket down. And when I woke up, I said, oh, that was a weird dream. So I went to the basement to get some stuff and start laundry. And when I turned around, it was a puddle of water with a bucket. And I was done. I said, you can't ever ask me to stay here again.

Rachel-in-situ

And you never have?

Michelle Smith

No. And I won't.

Rachel-in-situ

Did you have any sense of what kind of spirit this was very impudently getting into bed with you?

Michelle Smith

It had to be the little girl, because I really wasn't threatened, but I was uncomfortable.

SEGUE

Christy Powell

I have seen a little girl there, a little brown headed girl.

Rachel Hopkin Script

This is Christy Powell again from OKPRI. Christy describes herself as a psychic medium and it sounds like she may have run into the same mischievous spirit as Michelle.

Christy Powell

She told me that she likes to play with little tea sets. She bounces a ball. She giggles. Another time I was laying in the main living room. I happened to just feel someone or something hovering over me. And when I opened up my eyes, there was Edward. And he was staring down at me. And he just said, "boo," laughed and disappeared. So Edward is one of the ghosts that's there. He came in when the Stone Lion Inn was a funeral home. He's in a gray suit. And he was reading a newspaper. And he told me that he loves cigars. And in life, he smoked a lot. And he got lung cancer and died from it.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Christy says she's also come across a couple of female adult spirits in the house, including a brunette that she saw lying in one of the guest room beds.

Christy Powell

So Elizabeth is the dark-headed one and there was some sort of loss of a child with her, but there was a lot of a depression associated with her, she did die very young. Now, Sarah is an older woman. She's snotty, I would say. Not real friendly, but she's kind of like a caretaker of the Stone Lion Inn, very possessive of it. If she doesn't like something, she throws a tantrum. She did die from, it felt like, natural causes to me and was brought in at the time that it was a funeral home as well.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Now this is not OKPRI's first time on How Curious. In fact they appeared in the very first episode I made which was about another reputedly haunted place – Kendall's restaurant in Noble, OK. I post a link to it in the program notes. At that time, they shared with me a series of recordings they told me were Electronic Voice Phenomena or EVPs. EVPs are unexplained voices captured on audio recordings that weren't audible to the human ear during the actual recording session. I asked Christy if she had any from the Stone Lion Inn.

Christy Powell

I remember one in particular. We were going down into the basement and one of my investigators missed the step and she fell forward and she landed on, it was a water pipe that was right in front of her and it broke. And yes, so we had water spewing out and I was in a panic. And so I'm trying to call my dad to come up there to fix it and he did. But when I played back my audio to listen, I had a woman's voice and warning, this is a cuss word that's recorded in this EVP, but she says, "calm down, bitch."

Rachel Hopkin Script

Here's the recording itself.

EVP Recording.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Just in case you didn't catch it, here it is again.

EVP Recording.

Rachel Hopkin Scripts

Make of that what you will.

As I listened to the various accounts of potential supernatural activity at the Stone Lion Inn, I remembered what Shelley Ingram had said about most paranormal personal experience narratives usually being non-frightening and rather mundane. Aside from Michelle's alarming bedtime contact, that's what most of them here struck me as too. But while their content may largely be slight, their import is another matter. Here's Shelley again.

Shelley Ingram

This interaction, however brief, between our world and another world can be profound. For some people, it's validation of a whole entire world view. For some people, it's about what happens after you die. And that's not a small thing, that's a very large thing.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Thanks to Shelley and of the contributors to today's episode, plus Kathryn Wickham who is the OKPRI historian and Tammy Wilson who's co-authored a couple of books about Oklahoma ghostlore.

You can see photos of the Stone Lion on the episode webpage - search for KGOU and How Curious.

How Curious is a KGOU Public Radio production. The Managing Editor is Logan Layden. David Graey composed our theme music and I'm Rachel Hopkin.

As ever, if you have an idea for a future episode, please drop us a line at curious@kgou.org.