

Ghost floats around Neihardt—and so do the stories

Residence hall may be haunted

By Rainbow Rowell
Senior Editor

Sarah may be the most popular resident of Neihardt Residence Center, but she can't be found in the student directory.



Although most of her neighbors have heard of her, few know her by name and even fewer have met her.

Sarah is a ghost. Late at night, when the moon is full and the wind is blowing, Neihardt students fill their rooms with stories about her—and usually no two stories are alike.

By most accounts, Sarah lived in the Raymond section of Neihardt during the flu epidemic of the 1930s. Because health facilities were rare, students were treated in their rooms.

Sarah was a flu victim, feverish and often delirious. Before she died, Sarah would ask her nurses to open or close the curtains in her room whenever they came to check on her; she was never satisfied.

Lincoln storyteller Duane Hutchinson said years later, residents of Sarah's old room would complain about curtains that would open and close themselves.

"The curtains would zip open," Hutchinson said, "as if someone had grabbed hold of the rope and jerked."

Some say after numerous complaints, Sarah's room was converted into the Raymond 3 TV lounge. During the first week of school, Wendy Donahue said she believed she met Sarah there.

Donahue, a junior elementary education major, was sitting in the lounge. She left for a moment to get a drink, and when she came back, she noticed that someone had rearranged the curtains.

This happened two or three more times, Donahue said, before she told a friend, who told her the Sarah story.

Hutchinson, author of a three-book series called "A Storyteller's Ghost Stories," said this ghost drew more attention after a Lincoln Cablevision employee said he spotted her about five years ago.

The stories say the cable man rushed out of Neihardt and swore he would never step inside the building again. Some say he saw Sarah. Others say he was overpowered by the scent of her lilac perfume. Some swear the man lost his job and still hasn't recovered.

But the Cablevision employee, who asked not to be identified, said few of

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Lincoln storyteller

these stories resembled the truth.

He said he was installing cable about seven years ago in the closet of a Neihardt room—not in a lounge and not in Raymond 3—when he looked over his shoulder and saw a woman.

"I didn't think a whole lot about it, at that point," he said. "But when she started disappearing, I freaked out pretty hard."

"She was standing there and then, blammo, she was gone."

The source, who no longer works in Lincoln, said he never thought about ghosts before, but he now believed "beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was a ghost."

He didn't lose his job, but he said he was too nervous to finish at Neihardt.

"For the rest of the day, the next day, the next week, I was extremely jumpy," he said.

Neihardt residents in search of Sarah may be disappointed. Hutchinson said he had found that not everyone could see ghosts. However, he couldn't explain why some people have the ability while others don't.

"I really think we haven't the foggiest idea about this world, about this universe," Hutchinson said. "There are some things we can't begin to understand."

Ghost

Continued from Page 1

any frightening ghost stories," Overton said. "He was just playful and mysterious."

But Overton is not the only one who has heard the haunting tales.

Julie Hagemeyer, a theatre arts graduate student and company manager of the Nebraska Repertory, said she had met with the theatre ghost herself.

"Way back in 1975, we were working on costumes and we were pulling an all-nighter," she said. "There was a monitor in the room we were working in. Over the monitor we heard somebody dancing really hard on stage. We knew we were the only ones

in the building."

Hagemeyer said they opened the doors and saw an empty stage. The director's St. Bernard also reacted to the noise.

"The dog knew all of us," she said. "He had been sleeping, but then he was wide awake and ready to attack."

Hagemeyer and Overton said they didn't have any real explanations for the ghosts.

Overton said she had heard a story of a man who had been killed while working in the attic and of a ballerina who spent a lot of time in the theater.

Other stories revolve around a man who was killed during the initial construction of the building in the early 1900s.

Overton said the hauntings had

changed since the building was renovated in 1979-80.

Overton said she thought the renovation may have scared the ghost into the attic.

"Things will move rapidly from one end of the floor to the other up there, without reason," she said.

But Overton said that didn't keep her from going into the attic.

"I don't feel weird things up there like other people say they do," she said.

Hagemeyer said she believed all the stories and got an odd feeling when she went into the theater attic.

"If you're up there at night now, things rattle," she said. "It could be the wind, but you never know."

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Stories of the Lewis-Syford House ghost abound among employees who work there. Some employees say that Ethel Corrine, who died in 1955 in the house at 700 N. 16th St., is responsible for the hauntings.

House

Continued from Page 1

home, she said.

When university employees built a new parking lot on the side of the house, Myers said, they found an upside-down gravestone in the dirt.

Employees joke that Corrine's ghost is the gremlin behind the mystery, she said.

Mike Rindone, preservation architect for the State Historic Preservation Office, said it wasn't uncommon for people to talk about ghouls living in old homes.

"I don't know too much about any ongoing spirits in the Syford house," he said.

The upstairs of the house has not

yet been restored. Its creaky floors and dust-filled rooms probably look similar to when Ethel Syford lived—and died—there.

The house is not insulated, he said, and had to be completely rewired to channel electricity and heat throughout.

Myers said some custodians refused to work in the home because the electricity often shuts down when they vacuum.

"It's conceivable that the wiring is old and that anything that moves it can break it," said Richard Hoback, manager of maintenance for UNL facilities maintenance.

"Of course there might be something else in the building," he said.

"After all, it is Halloween."

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