

Ghost hunters go on a mission at Old Stone Village in Washington Township



Nick Appice, chairman of the Washington Township Historical Preservation Advisory Board, at the Olde Stone House Village in Washington Township.

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on October 20, 2015 at 10:50 AM, updated October 20, 2015 at 11:00 AM

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WASHINGTON TWP. — A small white house sits empty in the dark, chilly October evening. The windows are dark, and anyone that had been inside during the day has long packed up and left. Outside the house, small groups of people walk by, bundled against the cold, talking excitedly amongst themselves.

Everything seems normal until someone spots the flutter of a curtain on the second floor.

Could it be a fluke, a draft from the fall wind? Or could it be that someone – or something – has taken up residence in the historic building and is keeping a close eye on the people below? Or perhaps they never left.

That was one of the questions that members of the New Jersey Researchers of Paranormal Evidence (NJROPE) set to answer last Saturday night when they investigated Washington Township's Olde Stone Village.

Along with a number of participants hoping to gain some evidence of the paranormal, the members of NJROPE gathered in the Village to launch a full-scale investigation into claims of spirits wandering the buildings and grounds of the historic site.

"I know that there have been a lot of claims [of spirit activity] from the people that work here," said Kristina Richard, the assistant director and tech manager for NJROPE.

"There is supposedly a soldier that wanders the grounds, and there have been reports of a little boy and a little girl here. There's also an older man in the Quay House up on the second floor."

Although NJROPE's primary mission is to find evidence that proves or disproves the presence of a haunting at a particular site, Director Frank Lazzaro said that he enjoys the investigations for another reason as well.

"We're captivated by the history," said Lazzaro. "We're proud to help [the people who run the Village] to keep it running with this event and we enjoy meeting new people in the process."

In the center of Olde Stone Village the group gathered inside one of the four sites they would be investigating that night, the Bunker Hill Presbyterian Church. There, they received instructions and a crash course on some of the equipment they would be using,

including a tape recorder to capture any lingering sounds or whispers, an infrared camera to pick up any unusual heat signatures, an EMF detector used to determine fluctuations in the electromagnetic field which could indicate an unseen visitor, a Mel Meter used as an EMF as well as to detect dropping temperatures, and a full spectrum camera made specifically to capture the entire range of the light spectrum to photograph both light and presences that might be invisible to the human eye.

MORE: [Who may haunt the Olde Stone House Village?](#)

"I've never done anything like this before," said Pat DiMeo. "It should be interesting. I'm hoping to see the little girl who runs in the Quay House. People say that they hear her laugh and have seen her face so I'm looking forward to that."

While some of the group seemed convinced that they would see and hear evidence of apparitions, more skeptical attendees hoped for concrete proof of spirit activity.

"I want to see actual evidence," said Taryn Fanz, who attended the investigation with two of her family members.

As everyone was split into smaller groups to explore, their anticipation could be felt in the air. People were shifting in their seats and even the most experienced of the investigators were whispering to each other, eager to try out tools and hoping to see the fabled spirits with their own two eyes.

The first stop of the night was the Blackwood Railroad Station, which had been moved to the Olde Stone Village in the late 1980s. Despite past reports of ghost activity in the building, the equipment remained quiet. But, was it due to the lack of a presence that night, or was it because the high number of people making a nighttime excursion through the building had frightened any lingering visitors?

According to Richard, who had been in the building a few nights prior to prepare for the larger investigation, there hadn't always been silence in the railroad station.

"A few nights ago we split our groups up and we traveled to each location and in the railroad house we got ghost boxed," she said, referring to a small modified FM radio

which cycles rapidly between stations to create white noise. "I got a gentleman's voice and a couple of yes responses from him. I was asking about the original tools on display [in the railroad station] and whether he had used them and got a yes."

The next stop, the church, was also quiet. Although the equipment ran, the spirits either didn't wish to speak or didn't have a message for the group of people eagerly asking questions directed into the darkness of the room.

But the group didn't lose hope.

In the Quay House, an old white house dating back to the 1820s, stories of a ghostly little girl and a solitary older gentleman were almost immediately realized. An Xbox Kinect, which NJROPE uses to recognize human shapes, picked up a very small figure in the corner behind the group.

Another encounter came in the form of a radio call to Richard, informing her that someone had spotted a figure in an upstairs window.

While the experience was surreal for some, the presence of the Quay House's spirits made others uneasy.

"A couple of colleagues and I got very dizzy," said Susan Herman-Johnston, a member of NJROPE. "We felt like the energy was really heavy in there so we had to step outside and regroup ourselves."

At the final location of the night, the group stood in the kitchen of the Olde Stone House, huddled both against the chill of the limestone walls and the spookiness of the house's dark history. A woman had died downstairs, they were told. A man had passed away in his sleep in the upstairs bedroom. Another man, the infamous wandering soldier, had fallen down the steps and suffered a broken neck.

At the mention of the upstairs bedroom, one woman decided to take a look for herself. As her foot touched down on the staircase, however, there were gasps and jumps as the sound of a sliding piece of heavy furniture reverberated from the floor above.

"Did you hear that?" One of the group members downstairs asked. The woman peeked back downstairs from where she was standing. She hadn't heard anything at all.

"I heard it loud and clear as day," said Michael McNamara, another one of the group's first time ghost hunters. "I absolutely heard it."

As the night wound down and groups headed back to their own homes, many reflected on what they had experienced throughout the night.

"In the stone house we saw [on camera] what we thought was an orb going underneath the bed and then it shot around the room a couple of times," Herman-Johnston said. "Then the running man, which is a sensor that lets us know something is moving in there went off."

After the events of the night, some of the participants remained unsure of what they believed.

For others, the investigation of Olde Stone Village solidified the belief of a hidden world amongst our own.

"[Spirits] are definitely here," said Rhonda Vennell. "They're everywhere. I would look at it in the sense that they're protecting their destinations. Other than that you wouldn't know spirits are around unless they're protecting something."

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