

Group presents evidence of what it says are ghosts in old Licking County jail



Written by

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NEWARK -- On Nov. 13, Michelle Duke thought she heard a prisoner in shackles walking in the basement of the old Licking County jail.

But there haven't been any inmates in that building for more than 20 years.

Duke is one of the co-founders and lead investigators for the Southeastern Ohio Paranormal Investigators, a Zanesville-based group that investigates buildings for evidence of spiritual activity.

On Nov. 13, Duke and eight other members of SEOPI spent 12 hours in the jail, exploring the facility. On Tuesday night, they reported their findings to the Licking County Commissioners and a small group of county employees.

"The fact that we could catch so much evidence, it is definitely haunted," Duke

said. "It's definitely worth a second look."

In September, the Licking County Commissioners organized a tour of the old jail. The building, which was built in 1889, is now headquarters for the Licking County shredding program and houses a large amount of county records. The commissioners hope to make it a tourist attraction, Commissioner Tim Bubb said.

After The Advocate published an article about the tour, several paranormal groups contacted the commissioners with requests to explore the building, Bubb said. Three groups were given permission to conduct investigations.

"We heard anecdotal reports (about unexplained activity) from people in the building at various times; this prompted us to see what professionals could find," Bubb said.

SEOPI was one of the groups invited to investigate the jail. Duke spent the three weeks leading up to the investigation

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researching the building and its history.

When SEOPI members arrived, they set up video cameras and audio recorders on all floors of the jail. As investigators moved from room to room, they tried to debunk any noises they heard.

"We don't go into a place thinking it's haunted," Duke said. "We go in trying to prove it's not."

SEOPI members try to be scientific about their investigations, but in the old jail they saw and heard things they couldn't explain, Duke said.

The investigators captured more than 20 electronic voice phenomena, raspy voices that were heard only on their audio recorders. Tom Robson, SEOPI co-founder, played the recordings for the commissioners Tuesday.

Some of the recordings were taken in empty rooms. When SEOPI members did speak, they clearly identified themselves, Robson said.

In one recording, Robson said footsteps could be heard. In others, Robson said spirits responded to investigators questions or screamed. Duke said she heard what sounded like an inmate walking with shackles on his legs.

Robson also showed videos of lights moving around the jail and a flashlight being turned on and off on its own.

"I classify myself as a skeptical believer.

You've really got to show me stuff," Robson said. "All I can say is, in the realm of paranormal, it was definitely not normal to us. I can't explain it."

Bubb, who stopped by a few times during SEOPI's investigation and observed the methods, said he was impressed by the findings.

"You may be a believer or a nonbeliever, but there are some things in this world that can't be explained," he said,

Commissioner Brad Feightner said he also was amazed by their presentation

"To actually see lights flickering on and off when it's pitch dark and see shadows and hear the voices, it's amazing," he said.

Another paranormal investigation team, Croton/Hartford Investigators of the Paranormal, also explored the jail and will present their findings Tuesday.

Bubb said he hopes their findings will

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inspire a non-profit group to form that could organize tours of the jail, similar to what is being done at the Mansfield Reformatory.

"Our goal is to restore what we can and make it a tourist attraction," he said. "We believe it's a significant building. Sometimes you've got to step out of the box a little."

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