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### Campus Haunts

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**Tales of the supernatural have enthralled generations of IWU students.**

**By Anna Deters '05 (*shown in above photo*)**

**Photos by Marc Featherly**

*The stairwell directly adjacent to my room in Kemp Hall/ International House is haunted. Late at night, as I creep up the former service stairs of the mansion-turned-residence hall, I listen to the creaks and groans of the winding structure beneath my feet. I near the first landing and see in the porthole window the reflection of not only my own pale face, but the ghostly image of the house's former mistress, candle in hand, following me up the stairs.*

To be honest, no such thing has ever happened — to me, at least. It is true that I live in International House (more commonly known as I-House), and I do often take those stairs on my way to the basement to do my laundry. But, as yet, I have seen no ghostly apparitions of any kind.

Nonetheless, when I heard that I-House was the subject of persistent legends regarding ghosts, I was intrigued. After all, a good ghost story is part of the pleasure of living in an old house. And such tales, however far-fetched, give stressed-out college students a chance to let off some steam and allow their imaginations to run wild. So I wasn't too surprised to learn that eerie tales have

become associated with several campus buildings over the years. Some are genuinely creepy, others laughable, but all provide that same kind of giddy amusement one feels when telling spooky stories on a cold, dark night, gathered around a warm campfire. The following are among the most well-known campus ghost stories.

### **Encounters with the Lady in Red**

Located at 1207 N. Main Street, I-House was finished in 1907 as the residence of one of Bloomington's most prosperous citizens, A. E. DeMange, and his wife. The classical-revivalist mansion featured imported woods, servants' quarters, a library, and even a ballroom on the third floor.

Tragically, after only a year of living in the house, Mrs. DeMange died of natural causes, leaving Mr. DeMange grief-stricken and alone. He left the house vacant but fully furnished for three years and then sold it to the University in 1911, when it was established as a women's dormitory. But the lavish furniture might not have been all the DeManges left behind. Some might say that 1207 N. Main continues to be Mrs. DeMange's current — if not eternal — address.

I first learned of I-House's supposed haunting when I happened to glance through a scrapbook compiled by residents over the years. The mention of the ghost was brief, but enough to spark my interest in further research.

Old issues of *The Argus* proved to be a rewarding resource. Poring over past Halloween issues, I soon realized that the various stories of I-House's alleged hauntings twisted and turned like the many creaking stairwells and winding corridors of the house itself.

One article from 1979 states: "In the master bedroom, just off the top of the stairs on the second floor, stands a full length mirror, which has remained there for 80 years. Late at night, on certain evenings of the year, the mistress of the house appears again before the mirror, dressed in her favorite red dress, preparing herself for the elaborate ball to be held upstairs. Although she herself cannot be seen, so they say, her reflection is clear in the moonlight shining on the mirror."

A variation of this story, given in a 1981 *Argus* feature, is that "a lover's quarrel at a ball in the 1880s led to the woman's spirit remaining in the ballroom. Late at night, she reputedly dances alone, through the walls." The statement that this alleged "lover's quarrel" reportedly occurred two decades before the house was built does place a strain on the narrative's credibility.



International House residents Ajeet Bajaj (left) and Amer Kahn '04 pick up some of the old mansion's supernatural vibes.

The most enduring story associated with I-House is that the ghostly spirit of a woman haunts the service stairwell adjoining the former servants' quarters. As a resident assistant explained to the Bloomington *Pantagraph* in 1993, "You feel something follow you up the stairs, and you can see something from the corner of your eye reflected in the glass, but if you turn around and face it, you won't see anything."

While a few of I-House's current residents have heard such stories, they have very little substance, or spirit, to add to them. Aside from reports of the main floor T.V. being mysteriously turned on when no one seems to be around and offhand remarks from nocturnal pool sharks about late-night creaks, murmurs, and scurrying sounds (usually attributed to mice), no one who now lives in the house feels particularly disturbed by its alleged haunt.

One resident assistant did recount an incident that took place one Halloween. "I walked into the

house and heard classical piano music, but when I strolled by the grand piano to see who was playing, no one was there. I was kind of freaked out," he chuckled, "but then I remembered that WESN, the student radio station, is located in the basement of the house and that sometimes they play their music loud enough for us to hear it upstairs."

### **A Mystery on Chestnut Street**

A more profound brand of spookiness is associated with another long-standing campus building, as related by my friend and fellow ghost-story aficionado Chris Weber '04.

Chris is a member of Phi Mu Alpha, a music fraternity, and their house at 303 E. Chestnut Street is loaded with supernatural folklore. Built in 1898 for a doctor and his family and located in historic Franklin Park, the Victorian home harbors a legend, related by Chris, that is definitely not for the squeamish.

The physician's daughter — who, out of respect for any living descendants of the family in question, we'll simply refer to as "Eva" — fell in love with a young sailor in town and became pregnant. When her father found out, he tried to surgically end the pregnancy in his home office to prevent a potential scandal. However, the procedure failed, so the story goes, causing Eva's death. Horrified and mentally unhinged, the father then dismembered her body, carried the parts to the dumbwaiter, and lowered it into the basement, where he buried her remains in the floor.

As one would expect from such a tale, the ghost of Eva supposedly roams the house to remind residents of her tragedy, and the bricks placed above her grave are said to sink into the ground no matter how many times they are replaced.

While it may have had antecedent variations, the main legend of Eva and her macabre end seems to have surfaced in the mid- to late 1960s. The first account Chris and I were able to trace in *The Argus* was from October 1971. This article quotes a Phi Mu Alpha brother who claimed that the dead girl's ghost appeared in his room frequently, dressed in a heavy white veil, as "though for a wedding she never got to."

Other Phi Mu Alphas from that era report similarly strange encounters. According to one witness, a séance using a then-fashionable Ouija board was even held in the house. The witness claims that the pointer spelled out the dead woman's first and last names before the board was put away when the participants became too spooked to continue. Apparently less frightening were visions of Eva herself, for residents from that era describe encounters with her as being rather casual. "The clearest sighting of (Eva) in our room," said one, "was of a humanoid ethereal form sitting on a couch. ... (She) was never threatening, or even frightening."

Although accustomed to her ghostly presence, the fraternity brothers have made efforts to rid Eva's spirit from their house. A kind of "burial service" was said to have been performed around the sinkhole in the basement that is rumored to be her grave, probably with the intent of bringing her tormented soul to eternal rest. There are reports that the house was even blessed. Indeed, at some point someone whitewashed the symbol of a cross on a door near the "grave." Legend has it that as long as this cross is maintained and doesn't fade, the Phi Mu Alpha house will be "protected."



In the Phi Mu Alpha basement, Philip Montesinos '04 and Scott Priniski '05 remove a plywood panel covering the house's mysterious sinkhole.

To borrow a familiar quote, the truth is out there, and the truth as it relates to Phi Mu Alpha's ghost is a bit of a letdown. The original owner of 303 E. Chestnut was, in fact, a physician and he did have a daughter, who, according to our research, was born in 1878 — making her 20 years old by the time the house was completed, not a teenager, as reported in the stories. She was married in 1903 and later had several children.

While the Phi Mu Alpha brothers will concede to the ambiguity of the "Eva" legend, many remain convinced that supernatural phenomena have occurred in the house. As one alumnus states, "Only one thing was certain, and that was that something was there, did frighten some people, and seemed to be comfortable enough around some of us to manifest its presence on repeated occasions."

Phi Mu Alphas still refer to a section of the basement as the “grave room,” and are familiar with the story’s gruesome details. A current resident even claims that “happenings” still occur. The most rational explanation for the persistence of this belief is that it is simply a fraternal tradition unifying brothers across the generations.

One eerie physical fact does contradict such rational explanations, however: the basement’s mysterious sinkhole. The fraternity has finally given up trying to pave over this alleged “grave.” Now only a simple panel of plywood rests atop the legendary final resting place of a girl whose ghostly existence lives on at the house on Chestnut Street.

### **Ghosts in Triplicate**

Not just one, but three spirits are said to haunt another campus residence. Adams Hall, at 1401 N. Main Street, was acquired by the University in 1965 and is currently the home of the Acacia fraternity. Legend has it that three women, each named Frances, haunt the house. As the story goes, the first Frances was hit by a carriage and carried into the house, where she died. Although the circumstances of their deaths are less clear, two more Franceses — a young girl and an older woman — are also said to have perished in the house.

I spoke with Darcy Greder, associate dean of student affairs, about the Adams hauntings. As a hall director, Greder lived in an apartment on Adams’ first floor from August 1977 up until about five years ago. While Greder admits she doesn’t know quite what to make of her experiences, she did describe some unusual phenomena that occurred while she lived in the house.

She remembers hearing footsteps go up the stairs and the sound of a rocking chair coming from the unoccupied room above hers. Greder also recalls returning from an evening out and finding lights switched on in the upper-floor rooms, which were also unoccupied at the time. Such strange activity supposedly prompted two students to move out of Adams to different campus residences.

Greder also told me that “Frances” seemed most active when the Adams Hall residents weren’t taking care of the house. “I admit I’d use this to my advantage,” Greder confesses, explaining how she would warn students of Frances’ displeasure if they failed to keep the hall in shape.

A story from *The Argus* further details paranormal experiences at Adams Hall, such as when a resident was staying alone in the house in August 1970 and experienced a series of phone calls that he assumed were pranks. Frustrated with the constant ringing, he removed all the phones from their hooks and then took a nap. Awakened by more ringing, he was startled by the realization that all the house’s phones had been disconnected for the summer. Others relayed stories of stereos being turned on and off in unoccupied rooms, cold blasts of air coming from the guest bathroom, and, of course, the proverbial footsteps on the stairs.



The antique ambience of an old house can materialize into ghostly apparitions. Katie Campbell '05 catches a glimpse of the "Lady in Red" reflected in the mirror of her former room in Kemp Hall.

Maybe the most interesting aspect of all these stories is how, with the exception of the Phi Mu Alpha residents, they seem to draw so little interest among current students. In researching the I-House ghost, I asked the men living in the former ballroom if they ever encountered phantom dancers waltzing in and out of their rooms. The idea struck them as being more than ridiculous, and they laughed at me for even asking.

The reaction is understandable, but nonetheless a bit disappointing. Mrs. DeMange, Eva, and Frances are now novelties instead of the real presences they were in decades past, when supernatural fodder such as *Poltergeist* captured the public's imagination and *The Argus* devoted detailed articles to chilling campus legends.

In this less mystical age, residents seem determined to find a rational explanation for any strange occurrence they may experience. Visions of ghostly specters are quickly recognized as white bath towels hanging from door hooks. And yet the pull of the irrational is still with us, as I saw when I spoke to one former I-House resident who lived in the room where Mrs. DeMange's ghost was said to appear in

the mirror. I asked her if she had seen anything strange in the room. "Not really," was the unromantic, post-modern reply I was expecting, but instead she shrieked, covered her ears, and insisted that I stop my line of questioning.

That the mere suggestion of ghosts in the mirror can feel as terrifying as the presence of an actual ghost reveals that, despite our scorn for superstition, we haven't been able to fully reject its allure. Whenever there is a strange glint in the mirror, looming shadows in the stairwell, displaced bricks in the basement, or footsteps on the ceiling, our first reaction gives us away — that, deep down, we really do sense that Mrs. DeMange is following us up the stairs.

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