

# Lady of the Night, A Haunting Tale

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Mother McGann's shuffling bedroom slippers can be heard crossing the floor in the upstairs apartment. The footsteps continue across the floor into the hallway. A door quietly closes behind the footsteps that continue down the hallway. This is not unusual as her presence is often heard and felt in the upstairs apartment. But Mother McGann is never to be seen because she died decades ago.

Mother McGann resides at 24 Armstrong Street in Keyser, West Virginia-Mineral County's most populated city. Her residence is above a former saloon, a typical gathering place for Keyser's railroad, coal, and timbering workers who prospered at the turn of the 20th Century when local industries boomed and jobs were plentiful. The saloon apparently accommodated a house of ill repute operated by Mother McGann and associates in the upstairs rooms. The hostess must have been satisfied with the living conditions at the address as she still resides there, according to several former employees of the *News-Tribune*, a daily publication that occupies the old saloon location on Armstrong Street. In fact, it has been determined by one ghost hunting group that the *News-Tribune* building is haunted by Mother McGann or others.

Accounts of unusual happenings in the building stretch back at least 60 years to former employees Claude and Banty Barrick, brothers who worked there as a typesetter and press operator respectively. Both workers reported unexplained noises. More recent accounts have been experienced by Rob Tetrick, former advertising manager; "I was in the dark room at about 10:30 pm one evening looking at photo negatives from a football game. There were no other people present except for the photographer, Mark Harris. There was a large box nearby that suddenly flew across the floor and landed against the wall. The box couldn't have fallen off anything because it was on the floor. Mark turned white and said, 'You can look at the negatives. I am heading out.'" Thinking the incident was a prank, Rob questioned a reporter, Tim Wilson, when he later reported for work at the office. The reporter knew nothing about the incident. "I was a disbeliever for years, but after talking to other people who worked there, I came to believe the stories," stated Rob Tetrick. Other employees noticed items shifting to the side of the room, experienced cold spots in the building, and heard unexplained voices and noises from upstairs rooms. According to Rob Tetrick, when these unexplained events occurred, employees would remark, "Oh, its old Mother McGann again."

James Tetrick, former co-publisher of the *News-Tribune*, explains that other bits and pieces of colorful history have been passed down concerning Mother McGann, who is said to have raised two children. Apparently not content to acquire money solely through her night-time business, Mother McGann instructed her two boys to hoist themselves over transoms, into patron's rooms, to steal belongings and money. Upon Mother McGann's passing, a funeral service occurred in the building. Her two mischievous boys began to argue near the coffin

and later accidentally set the draperies on fire. And Mother McGann's ever-present slippers walking the upstairs floors have been reported ever since.

These unexplained events were sufficient to attract the attention of Dr. Susan Crites, author and founder of the West Virginia Society of Ghost Hunters, whose members use scientific methodology to determine if sites are haunted. Several similar ghost-hunting groups exist throughout the United States. Dr. Crites prepared a report to determine "whether there really (were) spirits inhabiting the 100 year old building. Equipped with electromagnetic readers, digital thermometers, compasses and cameras, the team measured and registered baseline readings in all areas of the building." They did find ghosts or traces of them in several areas within the *News-Tribune* building.

Evidence of the haunting included a temperature drop of 26 degrees within one room, a compass spinning 120 degrees off north, and digital photographs of a seemingly empty area producing faint but distant "wisps of smoke." Photographs also showed white dots similar to golf balls, which are known as "orbs" to ghost hunters. Orbs indicate the presence of a ghost or ghosts. A strong smell of fruit also permeated the air in a second floor room. Upon mention of the odor, the party returned upstairs to check the room only to find a single photograph of a cantaloupe lying on the floor that apparently had been torn from a magazine. The room was bare when checked

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earlier in the evening by the ghost hunters. Susan Crites concluded that “Keyser is alive with supernatural energy.” A plaque presented by the society indicates the *News-Tribune* location is indeed haunted.

The ghost hunting society also stands ready to train anyone interested in locating illusive spirits by providing certification programs for Paranormal Investigators. According to the society’s website, it holds weekly paranormal investigations of haunted houses and conducts research into issues vital to the society. “Founded in 1989 by Susan Crites, the West Virginia Society of Ghost Hunters has conducted over 1,000 paranormal investigations and interviewed more than 5,000 people who believe they have encountered the supernatural.” The society also invites interested persons to submit their own stories.

Fortunately, for ghost hunters in general and Keyser residents in particular, Mother McGann does not appear to be mean spirited or ill tempered because no one has reported damage or physical harm caused by the ghost residing on Armstrong Street. And while not all residents are convinced that Mother McGann’s adventures are genuine, there is little doubt that true believers will continue to make contact with her spirit. Meanwhile, slippers shuffle across the upstairs floor...

*Mountain Discoveries expresses appreciation to reporter Del Malkie, whose articles published in the News-Tribune provided valuable information for the preparation of this article. Jim and Rob Tetrick, former co-publishers of the News-Tribune, were also generous with memories of their experiences at 24 Armstrong Street.*

*We would like to thank Patty Manown Mash for modeling as our ghost. We would also like to thank Jonathan Kessler for the use of Smiley’s Old Time Photo studio at Deep Creek Lake.*



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