

Research group checking Townhall theatre for ghosts

By Bill Rea

It looks like there might be some ghosts haunting the old Caledon Townhall.

The former municipal building, now the theatre for the Caledon Townhall Players, hosted a group of paranormal researchers from The Searchers Group Saturday, and they left the very strong impression that there are presences that might not be normally accounted for.

Medium Joanna Buonopane explored the building and reported picking up four spirits.

She said one met her before she even entered the building. He appeared to be a groundskeeper, whose name might have been David. He was wearing a reddish jacket and cap, had a shovel in his hand, was a smoker and possibly a drinker too. She said he appeared to be 'a bit rough.'

She said she asked David why he was there. 'He said this is all he knows,' she commented.

Subsequently learning that the building had been a townhall and courthouse, she said it made sense that groundskeepers would have been employed.

Buonopane said she encountered another spirit named Henry, and added she had the impression he comes in the theatre and stays in one spot.

'I can't place a look or a face or a date on that one,' she commented.

One the theatre's stage, she said she encountered Rhonda, a female with long, curly-brown hair, who dates from the 1970s or '80s.

'Rhonda's hiding there,' she said. 'She's a nervous wreck.'

The fourth spirit was in the upstairs area at the far end of the theatre from the stage. Buonopane said his name is Bob.

'I feel he's here because of Rhonda, but he's in denial,' she said.

Buonopane said that while she encountered the four, she said there could be more. She added there was nothing ominous or frightening in any of these spirits she encountered.

She not the only one who has reported encountering such entities in the theatre.

Jeannette Massicotte, who handles advertising and publicity for the company, said there have been times when she's had feelings something was going on, but she's never seen anything. She likened the experiences to just having a feeling there's someone there, when there wasn't.

'I don't think it's bad,' she said. 'Maybe a bit of a curiosity. It's never been a bad feeling.'

Janet Clattenburg, who used to be a member, said she's had stronger experiences during a time when she was stage managing a production a couple of years ago.

'It was constant, like constant, constant, constant, from the minute I arrived until the minute I left,' she declared.

Her duties at the time required her to be at the theatre from 5 p.m. to midnight three nights per week, depending on scheduling.

One of the spirits she encountered was a female who seemed dressed in Victorian-type clothes.

'She was extremely aggressive towards me, and I don't know why,' she said, adding the spirit would throw props around, turn lights back on when she was trying to lock up for the night. Clattenburg also said this spirit seemed to have an affinity to metal. If something metal were left on the stage, it would be moved around, she said.

'She was very mischievous,' Clattenburg recalled. 'It was like she wanted attention.'

'I saw her,' she added, 'but she wouldn't talk to me.'

She recalled she had 'kind of a misty black kind of form, wearing what appeared to be a shawl. 'I would never see her face clearly,' she said, but added her hand once materialized fully in front of her, and it appeared to be old and wrinkled.

'I was never frightened,' she added. 'It was sort of like she was calling out for attention.'

Another spirit Clattenburg said she encountered was an old man who appeared once or twice at the back of the theatre. It looked like he was watching the rehearsals. He was dressed in a Victorian-style three-piece suit.

'He was just happy to watch the play,' Clattenburg said.

As well, Clattenburg said she twice saw what appeared to be an energetic little girl. 'She was just hopping and skipping up the aisle,' she said.

She also said there were times when she would see these spirits with other people around, but none of them saw anything. She suggested they might not be as sensitive as her. She said she's been having experiences like this since she was about three years old. She also said there were times when she saw something while other people were around, and she kept that experience to herself.

There is a room on the south side of the theatre on Highway 10 that was part of an addition some years ago, and she said she never

felt the spirits in there. "I always found this area as a safe area," she said.

Peter Roe, a paranormal investigator with The Searcher Group, explained some his colleagues set up surveillance cameras at a couple of spots in the theatre, including on stage and in a ground floor reception area, before Buonopane entered. He also said they made sure she knew as little about the building as possible before going in. That also meant there was no idea what she was going to find. "That's part of the beauty of it," he commented.

Richard Palmisano, director of The Searcher Group, said the cameras would provide audio and visual surveillance, with the microphones set at 15 hertz (Hz), which he said is lower than what most people can hear.

According to material supplied by Massicotte, the hall was built in 1875, and served as a courthouse and township hall until 1963. It was also used at times as a library, social centre and public meeting space.

Paul Palmisano, another paranormal investigator with The Searcher Group (Richard's brother), pointed out that since the building would have been open to the public for a variety of uses, many people would have been attracted for various reasons, and some may still be staying around.

"You don't have to die here to come back here," he remarked, adding some ghosts can follow people home.

Addressing some of Clattenburg's experiences, he said some don't want attention, and don't even want people around.

Buonopane said spirits can be attracted to a place which they loved, although she said not all of the attractions are positive.

Tragedies could be involved too. She said most cemeteries are haunted by the spirits of grieving mothers.

She added that she believes people who were happy or satisfied with their lives are able to find their own reality. It's the ones who might not have been as happy who are encountered.

"They have a story to tell or something to hide," she said.

And some spirits could have been transported to the site.

Richard Palmisano observed the seats in the theatre look like they date back to the 1930s, having been transported from elsewhere.

"You don't know if you brought somebody with those chairs," he remarked.

It's still early to draw any conclusions.

"We're still analyzing everything," he remarked the following day, although he did recount one interesting experience just as they were getting ready to leave Saturday.

"Quite clearly, we heard a female, disembodied voice say, 'Hey!'" he said, adding it was recorded.

He said they initiated the contact with the players, adding they have been looking at old townhalls all over Ontario, really getting interested when they hear about some activity. They have checked out some townhalls and found nothing, adding they never know what they're going to come up with.

"It's like fishing."