



The ghosts of Ohio[®] Newsletter

Volume 16 Issue 5

www.ghostsofohio.org

IT'S SUMMER READING TIME!



James

With school being out for the summer, it was only a matter of time before all the Summer Reading programs started popping up. It never fails that every time I see one of those announcements, my mind wanders back to simpler times when I was but a wee lad in

upstate New York. How I loved those Summer Reading programs! They were, after all, directly responsible for setting me down the spooky path of life!

What I would do is go to the local library and try to find books about haunted or weird places in the United States. I would take them home, devour them, and then beg my parents to take me to the spookiest/weirdest places I had just read about. Once I got them to agree, I would go back to the library and try to find as many books about where we were going, just so I could read about them beforehand to ensure I didn't miss a single bit of weirdness on the trip.

Of course, my dad had, as they say, "little time for fooling," so more often than not, we would end up going on a "normal vacation." But even in those cases, I would go back to the library and stock up on ghost books to read

on vacation, thereby setting me up with a whole slew of potential places to visit next summer!

So you see, Summer Reading programs will always be special to me. And with that in mind, I thought we'd include a couple of summer reading-type articles in this newsletter. They might not always be winners, but as anyone will tell you, reading even a bad book about ghosts can't be that bad!

Cheers,

James A. Willis

Founder/Director



BOOK REVIEW:

THE HAUNTED by Danielle Vega

Published by Razorbill in June 4, 2019



Samantha

The promotional quote on the cover said, “*The Haunted* is the scariest book you’ll read this year.” I’m always looking for a good scare, so... challenge accepted!

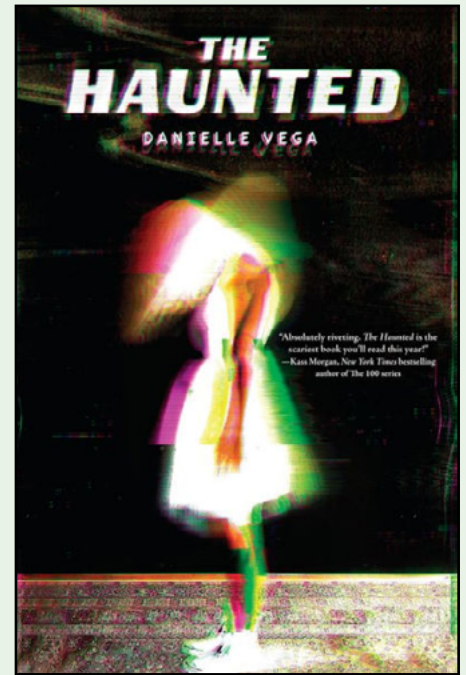
The basic premise of this book is simple. A depressed teenage girl moves into an old house in a small town, soon discovering that the house may be haunted by a violent entity that means to do her harm. With seemingly nowhere else to turn (not her parents, not her school, and not her new friends), she winds up relying on the school outcast to help her deal with her haunting.

Unfortunately, this novel is as formulaic as you can get. Many teen novels follow this same pattern, making the plot painfully predictable. The girl (whose name is Hendricks) is a typical mopey, broken teen who tries to fit in at school. The ghostly activity at her house, though, makes her nervous and secretive; and as usual, the only person who seems to know (or care about) what’s going on is the mysterious (yet somehow attractive) school outcast named Eddie. And as predicted, they team up in an attempt to get rid of the ghost(s) that haunt the house.

The whole thing is pretty straightforward, even the discovery that Eddie’s little sister had been murdered in that house, and his older brother (who was accused of the crime) hung himself in the living room.

What wasn’t predictable in this novel, however, was the revelation that the house was haunted long before Eddie’s sister was murdered. It turns out that (spoiler alert) three popular teenage boys had been tortured and murdered in the house many years ago—by Eddie’s own mother! The spirits of those boys have been exacting their eye-for-an-eye revenge on people in the house ever since, starting with Eddie’s sister and brother. They want just “one more,” and it’s not Hendricks they’re after. It’s Eddie.

Up to this point I was okay with the plot (if a little disappointed). But in the last couple of chapters, the whole thing went off the rails, as though the author was in a rush to cram as much into the climax of the novel as possible. (More spoilers here, but that’s okay. I wouldn’t recommend reading this book anyway.) Hendricks—thinking her house is finally free of ghosts after she and Eddie performed a ritual in the cellar—decides to throw a party while her parents are away. (Typical teenage stupidity.) The party is broken up by a torrential thunderstorm that appears out of nowhere. As people are fleeing the rain, the animated skeletons of the three murdered teens (yeah, that’s right) claw their way out of the ground and start grabbing onto party-goers. Hendricks runs into the house looking for Eddie, who had gone in earlier looking for his lighter. It’s absolute chaos as all of the windows suddenly explode, and the torrential rain floods everything inside. As Hendricks climbs the stairs to find Eddie, the house catches fire, which quickly spreads despite the fact that the house is currently flooding. (Go figure.



It’s ridiculous.) Anyway, the two of them realize that the spirits want Eddie, and he winds up plunging scissors into his chest to sacrifice himself. Hendricks grabs him and dives out the window to save them from the fire. In the end, Eddie’s dead and Hendricks’ family moves across town. There’s nothing more to the story!

I wish that this novel could have lived up to the hype. I had seen it advertised in several library-related resources, and it sounded intriguing. I was excited to read it! Unfortunately, it followed a predictable formula (never a good sign) and wound up getting...well... ridiculous.

Life’s too short to read bad books. My advice is to skip this one.



Interview with JAMES A. WILLIS

To celebrate the recent 20th anniversary of The Ghosts of Ohio, we forced our Fearless Leader, James A. Willis, to sit down with one of his friends who also happens to be a reporter. He was reluctant at first, but Willis' friend got him to open up about what it's like to run a ghost organization, the current state of the field of paranormal research, and even whether or not he believes he's captured evidence of a ghost.

What made you decide to start The Ghosts of Ohio?

Ignorance and arrogance (laughs). Honestly, that's what it was. I had been involved with a variety of loose-knit paranormal research groups prior to my moving to Ohio in 1999. My initial thought was to just join an Ohio group, but there were very few in existence at the time. I think there were like three or so. I was a member of the American Ghost Society and even the International Ghost Hunters Society, but I still couldn't find an Ohio-based group that I felt I clicked with. So, I thought the heck with it, I'll just start my own group. How hard can it be?

And now The Ghosts of Ohio just celebrated its 20th anniversary. What's the secret to your success?

I think I'm going to have to go with ignorance and arrogance again (laughs). Maybe a little bit of stubbornness because I just can't seem to stop.

Have you seriously thought of stopping?

Of course.



How often?

(Pauses). If I'm being honest with myself, I would say a few times a year. And I probably have to talk myself off the ledge, as it were, at least once a year.

That's surprising to hear.

Yeah, I guess so. It's just that in recent years, the field of paranormal research has just become so... nasty. And personal, too. People in this field just seem to love to pick fights with each other. I'm not sure why, but I think maybe there's this desire to be the best group out there and that the only way to achieve that is to have the best evidence and so-called proof. So in order to achieve that, you need to trash what all the other groups are doing. Then, with social media, it's only a matter of time before things get personal. Me, I'm too old for that stuff. I just prefer to put my head down and keep doing what I'm doing. But it starts to weigh on you, especially when you see how people's actions and claims are resulting in this field having a less-than-stellar reputation.

Have you or The Ghosts of Ohio been attacked?

No, nothing like that. At least nothing worth mentioning. I mean, there were instances where we weren't allowed to investigate certain places because they had another group that claimed to be the official ghost group for the place. But I've gotten to the point in my career where I just shake my head, put the money back in my pocket, and look for some other place that will let us investigate. Life's too short.

Has anyone ever questioned any of your evidence?

Questioned? You mean like saying we faked something? No, that's never happened. Besides, we don't typically share things like that on our website or social media. In some instances, we've gotten permission to share some of our findings with the general public and we'll show it during our presentations. But as a rule, we don't call it evidence. We just say it's something we can't explain and leave it up to the audience to either accept it

(continued on page 4.)

Interview with **JAMES A. WILLIS** (continued)

as unexplained or else explain it. We actually welcome people trying to explain it, especially since we're just calling it unexplained. So for that reason, I don't think people think we're faking things.

Talk about why you generally don't share evidence.

Because I don't see the point, really. At least not the type of evidence I've collected over the years, anyway.

Put it this way. For our private investigations, we go in and try to find answers for the property owners. Now if we were to gather anything strange during the course of our investigation, it would be presented to the owners as something we are, at present time, unable to explain. But is that evidence of a ghost? That's up to the owner to decide, especially since they live there. They are the ones who ultimately will either accept or reject what we present as evidence of a ghost. So showing that sort of thing to people who are in no way, shape or form involved in the investigation doesn't make sense to me.

Same thing with our public investigations. We might share things from those since they are public locations, but we're not going to call it "evidence." Just "unexplained."

You don't think sharing evidence would help the field of paranormal research progress?

Personally? No, I don't. Not at present time, anyway.

Why not?

Because as I mentioned earlier, this field has a nasty side to it and it wouldn't be long before I would be deluged with emails claiming I faked

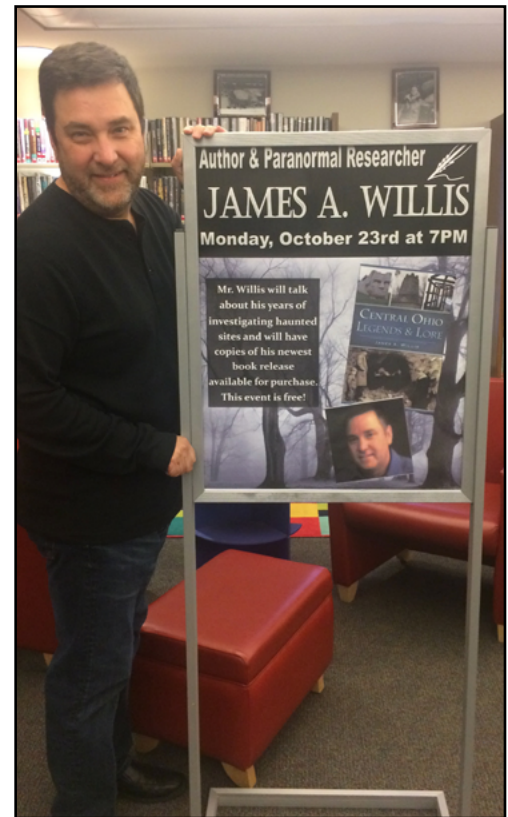
the whole thing. And I don't have time for that. From my perspective, the field of paranormal research feels fractured. And things that are being presented as evidence are either being peddled to the plethora of ghost reality shows out there or are being used to put the group presenting it up on a pedestal. I'm not interested in either because I don't think that's going to help the field of paranormal research move forward.

So are you saying that you would never submit any of your evidence for review?

No, no, no. I would love the opportunity to have something I thought was worthy of submitting to some sort of peer review or even a scholarly journal for publication. That, for me, would be the ultimate goal. But I'm a long way from that because I need empirical results. Repeatable results. Those are the things that real research is comprised of. Without those things, you just have an odd experience that can't be explained.

Do you believe you've captured evidence that ghosts are real?

That's a tough one. Personally, I have collected things that over the years, have convinced me that there's something out there we can't explain. I just can't call it a "ghost" because I don't know what a ghost is. (Pauses). And there's that statement that tends to get me in trouble whenever I say it in public because I honestly don't think anyone knows what a ghost is. Lots of people and TV shows will claim they know exactly what a ghost is, but for me, if that were true, we'd all have



evidence ghosts were real. No one could doubt they existed because we'd all know exactly how a ghost worked and what it was and was not capable of doing.

So you have captured evidence of a ghost?

Again, I don't know what a ghost is. So how can I tell you I captured evidence of something if I don't know what that something is? All I can say is that I have captured some strange things on audio and video and in photographs that I haven't been able to explain. And if you come to one of my presentations, you'll have the chance to see this stuff and decide for yourself if it's a ghost or has a logical explanation.

(continued on page 5.)

Interview with **JAMES A. WILLIS** (continued)

Speaking of your presentations, how long have you been doing them?

In Ohio? Over 20 years. Maybe throw in another couple of years that I was doing them before I moved to Ohio. (Pauses). Maybe 27 years or so.



Do you ever have any skeptics in your audiences? How do they react to your presentation?

Oh sure. It's actually quite common to have couples in attendance where one believes and the other doesn't. And I love that. Like I said, I just set the stage by telling people where I was when I recorded, for example, a piece of audio, and then play it. I don't tell them it's a ghost or anything. Just set the stage and then present what happened. The skeptics in the audience tend to like that because they can try to figure it out and come up with a logical explanation themselves. I think that's important because I'm not trying to convince anyone. I'm just looking for answers. And if the answer ends up

being I mistook an ordinary occurrence for something paranormal, I'm cool with that. I just want answers.

Have you ever presented something at one of your presentations that turned a skeptic into a believer?

Not sure. (Pauses). I think I have certainly given some open-minded skeptics something to ponder. But I don't think anyone is capable of turning a skeptic into a believer just by showing them something. Personally, I think people, including skeptics, don't start believing in things like ghosts until they have their own personal experience. Then, there's no denying it was real because they were there and experienced it for themselves.

One last thing about your presentations. I've noticed that you've started giving presentations on topics that aren't necessarily related to ghosts. There's one on UFOs and you even have one where you say Paul McCartney is dead. Is this because you've gotten tired of ghosts?

(Laughs). First off, I've never said Paul McCartney was dead. That particular presentation is about this sort of conspiracy that made the rounds in the late 1960s that Paul McCartney had died in a car crash and the remaining three Beatles secretly replaced him with a look-alike and then hid clues to what they had done in their songs and on album covers. But they're not my clues. I believe Sir Paul is alive and well. I'm just fascinated with how such a weird rumor was able to take hold and spread as wide as this one did.

(Pauses). And now I've totally forgotten the second part of your question.

Are these different presentation offerings a sign of you growing tired of talking about ghosts?

Yeah, that was it. And no, I haven't grown tired of ghosts at all. And even the presentations I do give about ghosts change every year just to keep them fresh. The Greatest Hits remain, of course, but I do change it up. As for the presentations about Paul McCartney and cryptids and UFOs, those came about simply because I'm into anything that's weird. Turns out, a lot of my fan base is, too. So I just figured if people want to hear something totally different, why not give it to them? But ghosts will always be something that's near and dear to my heart.

Back to The Ghosts of Ohio. How has your group changed through the years?

Well, I think the easier question to answer would be how have we not changed. I think one of the things I am proudest of about The Ghosts of Ohio is that we, collectively, embrace change. The way I see it, until someone invents a gadget that captures ghosts and puts them in jars for all to see, then it's safe to assume there's still much to learn in this field. You're not going to last long if you don't study the field, question everything, and then modify your investigative practices until you hit on something that works for you. We've just recently started doing self-guided meditations before each investigation in order to re-ground ourselves and it seems to be paying off in that we're getting results—EVPs, weird noises, etc.

(continued on page 6.)

Interview with **JAMES A. WILLIS** (continued)

Over the years, The Ghosts of Ohio have gone from being full-on using every single piece of equipment known to man to the total opposite and relying on nothing more than our intuition and senses.

You were seeking out the paranormal before all of the ghost reality shows were around. Do you still see the same level of interest in ghosts as, say, before the shows hit?

It's funny, but right before TAPS and Ghost Hunters came on the air, there were maybe 5 or 6 members in The Ghosts of Ohio, including myself. After the shows hit, there were so many applications to join The Ghosts of Ohio that we probably, at one point, had close to 30 members. There was also a huge spike in people requesting investigations, to the point where we needed to create 3 divisions within The Ghosts of Ohio—Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati—in order to better meet the needs of the public.

Is that demand still there?

No, it's not. One of the by-products of all the ghost shows was a lot of people deciding to start their own ghost group. In much the same way that I think paranormal reality shows have gotten to the point that there's just way too many of them, I think the number of ghost groups have grown to the point to where most people think they can ghost hunt on their own—and they can. And most people are fine with visiting a haunted location on their own, snapping a few pics, and hoping for a good jump scare or two. The Ghosts of Ohio, on the other hand, offers in-depth research and a rigorous multi-night investigation designed to

find answers. There's still a demand for that, but most people today are fine with a ghost hunt as opposed to an investigation.

Any new books in the works?

Yes, but I'm not under contract for any of them. In the past, I'd go under contract for a book and then write it. That tended to get rather stressful. So now, I decided to go the other route and write things I'm interested in without the stress of a looming deadline. It's actually quite liberating. It's resulted in me working on two different series of books simultaneously. I'm probably about three quarters of the way through seven different books right now.

Seven? How do you find the time to write 7 books?

Sleep is overrated.

What are they about?

You'll have to wait and see (smiles).

Can you at least tell me if they are about ghosts? Fiction or nonfiction?

Ghosts are certainly a part of it, but it's on a much broader scale than anything I've done before. Definitely a whole bunch of strange and spooky stuff. As to fiction or nonfiction, I guess that depends on whether or not you think ghosts are real.

Since it's been 20 years since you started The Ghosts of Ohio, where do you see yourself in 20 years?

Hopefully still above ground (laughs). That's a tough one to answer. If you had told me as a child I would grow up, write a bunch of books and run a ghost group for 20 years, I'm not sure

I would have believed you. Even now, it's kind of hard to take it all in. And I didn't really plan any of it. It just sort of happened. So I don't know where the next 20 years are going to take me. But that's what makes things exciting.

Last question: If you had the chance to do it all over again—The Ghosts of Ohio, your books, everything—would you?

That's a heck of a question to save until the end (laughs). That's not something I could answer with a "yes" or a "no."

But you know, it's funny, because the first thing that popped into my head when you asked the question was a rather famous interview with the late, great Freddie Mercury. He was asked a similar question, so perhaps the best way to end this interview would be with the words of Freddie Mercury.

So to answer your question about if I would do it all again, as Freddie said, "Yes, why not? But I'd do it slightly differently."

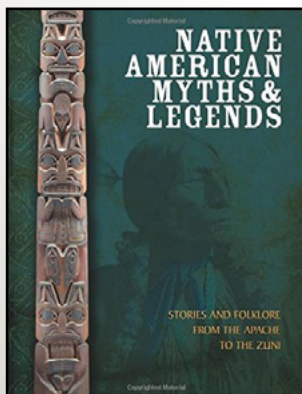
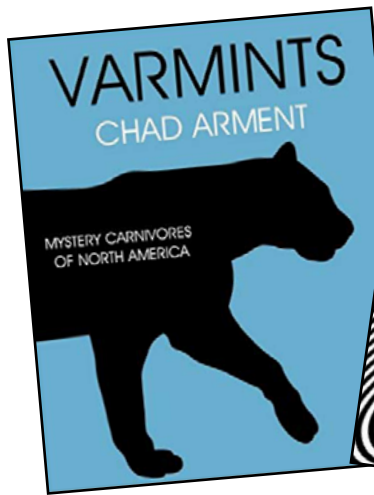
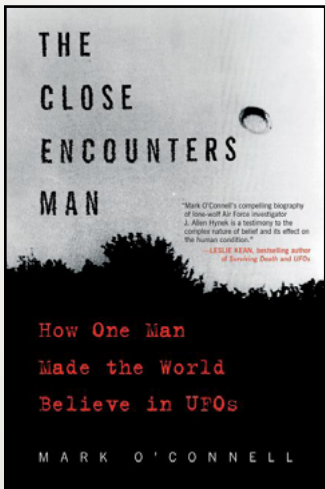


WHAT'S BEEN CHECKED OUT OF THE STRANGE & SPOOKY LIBRARY?

Hidden deep within the bowels of Willis Woods lies a cursed library, filled with ancient texts and mysterious books. OK, gross exaggeration. It's actually in a fully-finished (and well-lit) basement and as far as we know, there's no curses attached to it. But it's still pretty impressive: The Strange & Spooky Library of James A. Willis.

Our founder got his first ghost book when he was 4 years old. What followed was an unhealthy obsession to collect not only ghost books from all 50 states, but also any book directly or indirectly related to anything paranormal. The result is a collection that is closing in on 2,500 books (not to mention close to 500 movies) The best part is that all members of The Ghosts of Ohio are allowed to check all this cool stuff out whenever we want!

With warmer weather (allegedly) approaching, we've started checking things out for a little vacation reading. And we thought it would be interesting for you to get a peek at what The Ghosts of Ohio team members are currently reading. So here they are, in no particular order:



BOO! IN THE LOO:

THE JAPANESE BATHROOM GHOSTS



Wendy

Imagine this scenario. You are at a mall, or club, or, well it doesn't really matter where as long as it is a public place. You find a restroom, inspect the stalls and settle on the last

one. While in your stall, you hear a voice ask, "Do you want a red mantle?"

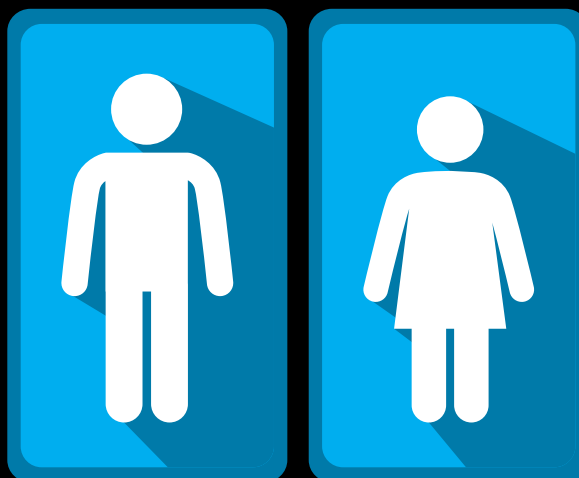
Curious, many a toilet sitter has said "yes" wondering what a red mantle was, only to have their skin ripped off their backs. They then have a "red mantle." That person has just encountered Aka Manto, a very good-looking young man who apparently likes to torture people. This spirit is also known as Akai-Kami-Aoi-Kami, who you will read about further down.

Of the many places to encounter a ghost, a bathroom is the one I choose as the scariest. There you are at your most vulnerable...you are usually naked or at least have your pants down. From seeing a dark "something" through the shower curtain only to pull it back to find nothing, to seeing Freddy Krueger's knife fingers pop up in your bath water, it is the worst place to run into a malevolent spirit. We in the states don't have many bathroom ghosts in our folklore. In fact the only one I can think of offhand is Mary Worth. Many a pajama party involved daring your friends to go into a dark bathroom, close the door, and chant "I don't believe in Mary Worth," or in some cases "Bloody Mary" three times, and Mary would come out of the mirror and scratch up your face. But usually its serial killers lurking in our public bathrooms (Scream, Michael Myers), not ghosts.

The country that really holds the corner on bathroom ghosts is Japan. As with the above spirits, there really is no reason for some of these wandering spooksters to appear in a bathroom...most of them were not killed there, yet that is the place they like to do their haunting. So with a nod to Harry Potter's Moaning Myrtle, let's take a look at some of them.

Probably the most well-known modern-day Japanese bathroom haunter is Toire no Hanako-san, or Hanako. She is the spirit of an elementary school girl who died in the third stall of a school bathroom...some say from a WWII air-raid, others say that like Moaning Myrtle she committed suicide there after being bullied. She can appear in the third stall of any school bathroom and is known by her red skirt. Knocking on the third stall door (even in Japan doing something 3 times seems to bring out the spirits) and asking, "Are you in there Hanako-san?" could result in a ghostly encounter. She may answer yes or she may just reach out and grab you. Going into that stall could involve you being eaten by a three-headed lizard (I think Ghidorah is making an appearance here).

According to legend, Kashima Reiko was a young girl who fell onto train tracks when running from a gang who had raped her; her legs were severed by an oncoming train as she lay there semi-conscious. If you are in a public bathroom and you hear a girl's voice ask you where her legs are, you are encountering Kashima Reiko. Woe to the person who doesn't know the answer, for she will tear their legs off. The proper answer is "on the Meishin Expressway."



You may want to memorize that for any future trips to Japan you are taking.

Akai-Kami-Aoi-Kami is another ghost you don't want to encounter in a public bathroom. This nasty prankster is very similar to Aka Manto above; many say they are the same spirit. As you are finishing your business and reaching for some toilet paper, you better hope you do not hear the question "Red paper or blue paper?" called out to you. Answering red paper will get you stabbed or flayed to death, while answering blue paper will get you strangled. Trying to be smart and answering a different color will get you dragged through the toilet to hell. To remain on this side of the toilet, alive and in one piece, simply ignore the ghost!

Akaname is a spirit that doesn't come in human form, but rather that of a long-tongued goblin. And he is more of a private home bathroom spirit. This ghost doesn't really bother with humans much, he is much more interested in licking dirty bathtubs clean. Harmless, but not exactly pleasant, especially if you see the red-skinned spindly ghoul in the process of "cleaning" your tub.

Public bathrooms can be an unpleasant place with or without these marauding spirits. I guess all I can suggest is the same thing I suggest when talking about Missing 411 cases...take a potty partner with you!

Investigations & Consultations

The Ghosts of Ohio are continuing to schedule investigations and consultations for 2019. If you or someone you know is experiencing something unexplained in a home or place of business, contact us at info@ghostsofohio.org or visit our website to fill out an investigation request. All investigations are offered free of charge, and confidentiality and discretion are assured.

Not sure if you want or need an investigation? The Ghosts of Ohio also offers consultations. Let us sit down with you to discuss your current situation and what help we may be able to offer. For more information, please visit <http://ghostsofohio.org/services/investigations.html>

Interact with The Ghosts of Ohio

In addition to our website, here are a couple of places where you can find The Ghosts of Ohio lurking online:



FACEBOOK

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Columbus-OH/The-Ghosts-of-Ohio/60704381381?ref=mf>



TWITTER

<http://twitter.com/ghostsofohio>

Administration

The Ghosts of Ohio Newsletter is a free, bimonthly email newsletter. To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, please visit http://www.ghostsofohio.org/mailman/listinfo/mailman_ghostsofohio.org Please do not send vacation notices or other auto-responses to us, as we may unsubscribe you.

The Ghosts of Ohio collects your name and email address for the purpose of sending this mailing. We will never share your name or email address with advertisers, vendors, or any third party, unless required by law. The Ghosts of Ohio will never sell, trade, or rent your personal information.

For more information, please visit us online at www.ghostsofohio.org.

Newsletter Staff:

Editor-In-Chief: James Willis

Copy Chief: Kathy Boiarski

Designer: Stephanie Willis

Contributing Authors:

Wendy Cywinski

Samantha Nicholson

James Willis