

When History and the Paranormal Converge: Three Local Historic Sites with Paranormal Activity

By Steve Dill, Director of Transcend Paranormal



It's been exactly one year since we were here last – and what a year it has been. In the ever-exhaustive pursuit to understand the oddities of the world in which we live, my team and I have spent somewhere over 1,000 hours year-to-date investigating, researching, and attempting to understand the paranormal. This year alone, we have spent that time in old Civil War hospitals, taverns, inns, theaters, forts, insane asylums, and more. In dimly-lit environments, we chase the things that go bump in the night, actively pursuing the things that keep some people up at night.

But first, let's step back for a moment. My name is Steve Dills, and I am the Director of Transcend Paranormal, a team of individuals actively pursuing answers to the questions that lie just outside of the normal scientific scope of understanding. Founded in 2010, we have spent just shy of a decade investigating and assisting those who are experiencing paranormal activity in their homes and locations, both public and private.

Over the years, however, my team and I discovered that we quickly became just as impassioned about the historic locations we frequent as we are with investigating claims of the paranormal. Something became blatantly clear very early on: understanding and immersing oneself in the history of a location is key if you want to truly understand the paranormal experiences occurring at that location. So, we dove headfirst into research and it became apparently clear that some of the spirits we frequently interacted with had fairly tumultuous events that led them to where they are now.

While we consistently unearth more questions than answers, we were finally able to put a single piece of the puzzle into play; some of the spirits we interact with at historic sites are there due to events that occurred during their lifetimes. To explain, let me introduce you to some of the spirits we interact with here in our very own Hanover County.

The "Lady In Black" of Hanover Tavern is oft reported by guests and staff alike, with the same details and descriptions time and time again. The "Lady In Black," as she is now known, is a woman dressed in a black mourning gown, who frequents the Hanover Tavern with some

regularity. She is often seen roaming the 1791 section of the Hanover Tavern, offering only short glimpses and a smile as she passes by before disappearing.

There are two key pieces of information here that assist us in further understanding why our "Lady In Black" is here at the Tavern. First, she is always seen wearing a black mourning gown, making it evident that this woman had family at the Tavern at some point in time, and that a family member had passed away, causing our "Lady In Black" to mourn.

Secondly, and most interestingly, she has only been witnessed in the "Home" portion of the Tavern. Hanover Tavern is really two buildings combined into one; the first being the Tavern Owner's Home built in 1791, and the "New Tavern" being built in the 1820's. It wasn't until years later that the two were connected to become one building, as it stands today. Guests of the Tavern would not have been invited into the home – only family members, friends, and possibly esteemed guests. By combining these two key pieces of information together, we have a much better understanding of who she is and why she is there; far more than just a simple sighting of something other-worldly.

Next, let's hop on Route 54 and head right into the heart of Ashland, to the Hanover Arts & Activities Center. Now a Community Center, this building started its life in 1859, when a group of individuals in the community formed the First Baptist Church of Ashland (which still operates today in Ashland). With Ashland being built right along the train tracks, the church, and a number of other buildings in Ashland, became temporary hospitals during the Civil War. With at least 9 confirmed deaths in the building, the church saw its fair share of activity. Wounded soldiers would be brought into town on the train and moved to the hospital.

It is here that many both men and women endured sleepless, restless nights, wondering if they would ever see their loved ones again. With such high emotions by so many, is it any surprise that guests today never truly feel alone in the building? Our team has conducted a number of investigations here over the past two years, both public and private. Without fail, we have walked away with interesting results every time we have stepped foot into the building. On one occasion, we recorded an interaction with a nurse and a soldier. This conversation lasted for almost 45 minutes in the main hall – the very room that would have been utilized during the war as the hospital. Only by understanding the history of the building could we begin to build context around our interactions. This gave us a platform to have a much more meaningful dialect with these spirits – something one wouldn't have without researching the history behind the site.

Finally, let's head back out of town to a plantation known as Scotchtown. Built around 1720, Scotchtown was home to many families, but most notably the home of Patrick and Sarah Henry. The Henry family lived here from 1771 to 1778, in which time Patrick argued the Parsons' Cause at the historic Hanover Courthouse and gave his famous "Liberty or Death" speech at St. John's Church. Together, Patrick and Sarah had six children, the last being Edward, whom many called Neddy. It was after Neddy was born that Sarah began showing signs of mental illness. At the time, little was known



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about mental illnesses, and treatments were horrible. While today, we know that Sarah was probably suffering from postpartum depression or postpartum psychosis, her private doctor recommended she be removed to the Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg to be treated. Patrick disagreed

with due to horrible conditions at the asylum, but still held concern for Sarah. While there is very little recorded history on Sarah's illness, it was reported that she underwent bouts of violent nature.

As such, Patrick built an apartment in the cellar of Scotchtown for Sarah to live, where she was often confined in a straight-dress to prevent her from harming herself in others. Sarah passed away in 1775 after spending a grueling amount of time in the cellar. While she was cared for extensively, this was sure to be a traumatic and emotional experience for not only Sarah, but the family and caregivers alike. It is this we keep in mind when investigators and guests who visit the cellar of Scotchtown report feelings over overwhelming sadness and grief. When we recorded an E.V.P. (electronic voice phenomena) in the cellar of an individual screaming, we can't help but connect this to the experiences that occurred in the cellar. While we can't say for certainty who we recorded, we do believe that the traumatic history that individuals underwent in the cellar play a part in what we record today. By understanding the history of Scotchtown, we can further understand the context behind this puzzling piece of evidence and the experiences guests report to this day.

Through all of this, we have become more vested in these historical gems, and the spirits that reside within them. Knowing that most of these historic sites don't receive much, if any, local or federal financial support, we wanted to ensure we played our part in keeping these sites safe for not only our community, but for those that still roamed the halls long after the staff close up for the day. Not only did we enjoy these locations and the opportunity to research and investigate them, but we also enjoyed the passion and dedication that the people, foundations, and organizations who tirelessly maintained these sites showed.

While we started by joining the ranks of volunteers for these sites, we quickly found a unique opportunity to combine both history and the paranormal in a way to help raise funds: by hosting public investigations, lectures, and other events at these locations, with all proceeds going directly to the historic sites. In 2019 alone, we have been able to successfully raise over \$10,000 for the different historic sites we have worked with.

It is in this way that Transcend Paranormal has found a way to give back to the community around us and help others fall in love with

these historical locations as much as we have. Not only that, but it allows us the opportunity to continue our research and understanding of the paranormal. As always, we consistently unearth more questions than answers. I suppose that's part of the fun and adrenaline rush of it all though; the curiosity of things unseen and the adventure of exploring places that most have forgotten in history in the never-ending quest to marry the past with the present.

I believe Albert Einstein said it best; "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing". We won't stop searching for the answer. Who knows, maybe one day we will ask the right question, at the right time, and discover yet another piece to the puzzle we call life.

For more information, please visit www.TranscendParanormal.com or www.Facebook.com/TranscendParanormal

