

Campus News

Can you handle extreme urban legends?

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Colson Hall Ghosts

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* In the fall of 1984 there was a rumor going around campus about a ghost living in Colson Hall. Although the building has been abandoned for a few years, this is one story that was told to *The News Argus* and still remains a mystery.

When the movie "Ghostbusters" came out, everyone who went to see it apparently enjoyed it. On the other hand, the ladies of Colson Hall seemed to be reliving some of those incidents from the movie.

There is a rumor going around about how the ghost arrived in Colson Hall. The construction workers who tore down the old Atkins Hall apparently didn't know that someone was still living there. It seems that the "Atkins ghost" is upset and is taking its anger out on the ladies of Colson. Right after the old Atkins building was demolished the scary stuff started to happen.

On October 14, 1984 around dinner time, two residents of the hall entered their dormitory after a meal in the dining hall. As they entered their room they claimed they saw a woman rocking back and forth in a chair. At the sight of this they both were very frightened and ran out of the room.

This incident has apparently alarmed some of the ladies of the fifth floor. Some wanted to move off the floor while some wanted to move out of Colson Hall.

Another sign of the ghost was through a tape recorder. Regina Mack, a sophomore claims that some very mysterious noises were coming through her cassette as she attempted to play it and it sounded very frightening. Mack recalls that it sounded like a ghost talking to her in a very angry tone.

No one has ever seen or heard signs of the ghost but these three ladies and it is unknown whether or not the whole thing is just a big joke or a figment of everyone's imagination.

A Scary Encounter in Pegram Hall

For the ladies that reside in Pegram Hall, it is off limits to go onto the first floor of the building. The first floor of Pegram is part of the Physical Therapy department here at the university and after hours, students are not allowed in that particular area, but unfortunately that floor is the only one that has vending machines. One resident of Pegram told *The News Argus* staff of her scary encounter on the first floor.

One night to quench her thirst "Terry", although prohibited from being on the first floor, went downstairs to get a drink from the soda machine. Although she believed that she was the only person on the floor at that time of the night, she felt a strange presence and felt that she wasn't alone on the hall. Frightened, "Terry" quickly got her soda from the machine and was too frightened to wait for her change. As she hurried down the hall she says that she remembers saying to herself; "God please let me make it to the door." "Terry" says that she recalls as she closed the door behind her she began to hear a loud noise, as if the doors on the hall were being slammed shut over and over again, and then she heard a large crash as if something had fallen off a table. When she told friends what she had heard they said that it was probably her imagination or maybe someone from

Campus Police was patrolling the building and was checking the rooms to make sure that no one was downstairs. Although no one believed "Terry's" story no one would go back downstairs to investigate the matter.

Was there really a ghost downstairs and slamming the doors was its way of telling "Terry" to get out or was it just Campus Police patrolling the building?

The Hole That Will Not Stay Filled

As told by Kathryn Windham

Nobody has ever actually seen the ghost of Bill Sketoe, but people going along the road from Newton near where the old bridge crossed the Choctawhatchee River can tell that the ghost has been there. Invariably the hole under the tree where Sketoe was hanged is clean; as clean as if a brush broom or a pine top had swept it out.

Even if the hole is heaped high with dirt during the day, the dirt disappears during the night, and the next morning the hole is there again.

Bill Sketoe, whose ghost is believed to keep the hole cleaned out, was born in Madrid, Spain, on June 8, 1818. When he was just a little lad, he came with his father to Dale County and settled near Newton, a small town in the Wiregrass section in Alabama. There were not many Spaniards in that part of the country, and some people were suspicious of foreigners. But Bill was a good boy who won the respect of his neighbors, and when he grew up, he became a Methodist minister.

After he entered the ministry, Sketoe became known as "the Bible-reading preacher from Spain," and he was invited to preach at churches throughout the area. He was made pastor of a log-cabin Methodist church at Newton, and he was a kind pastor as well as a powerful preacher. It was while he was preaching in Newton that he met and married an attractive girl and the two built a home in the community.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Sketoe was one of the first men from his country to join the Confederate Army. He fought bravely for three years in the thick of many battles, almost miraculously escaping serious injury. Then in the fall of 1864 he received a message that his wife was very sick.

Having come from a country so far away from Alabama, Sketoe had no relatives to turn to for help. His wife didn't have any close relatives either, at least none whom Sketoe felt he could ask to stay with her in Newton.

He decided that the only thing he could do was hire a substitute to take his place in the Army so that he could go home and take care of his wife. As soon as his substitute reported for duty, Sketoe jumped on his horse and headed for Newton, making the trip back home in near record time. His wife was so glad to see her husband that she began to improve immediately.

The threat of defeat hung heavily over the South in 1864 and the Confederacy was in desperate need of every soldier it could get. Under the circumstances, Sketoe's prolonged stay at home began to arouse some resentment and suspicion among the locals. A few of his neighbors, who knew Sketoe was a foreigner, began to wonder if he might not be a traitor as well.

At Newton a number of men had organized themselves to round up and punish deserters. They called themselves Captain Brear's Home Guard. Some people had made accusations that the guard had been organized for the purpose of keeping its members safe at home while other men were fighting for the South, but the unit's defenders said its members were really too old or

infirm to serve in the military forces and that they performed a commendable service for the Confederacy.

The guard heard about Sketoe's return and came to the conclusion that he was a traitor and made plans to ambush him and give him a deserter's punishment. On the evening of December 3, 1864, members of the Home Guard gathered at the foot of the bridge on the west side of the Choctawhatchee River to waylay their victim.

When Sketoe appeared, two men engaged him in conversation. As they talked, the other men, who had been hiding in a thicket of huckleberry bushes, crept up behind Sketoe and slipped a noose of new rope around his neck. Sketoe was a big strong man but he had been surprised. His captors pinned his arms to his back by a tight cord and tied his feet together. They then shoved him to the ground and took turns kicking him as they forced him to crawl in the deep sand. Tired of the sport of kicking Sketoe around they threw him into a buggy and maneuvered the vehicle to a spot under a stout limb jutting out from the south side of a big post oak tree. This was to be Sketoe's hanging tree.

Alarmed that passersby would see what they were up to, the men hastened their preparations for Sketoe's hanging. They threw the rope over the limb and then asked Sketoe if he had any last words. He replied that he would like to pray. That made the men a little uneasy, but how could they refuse to let a man have a final prayer, particularly if he was a preacher? Instead of praying for himself as the men expected Sketoe prayed for his tormentors.

"Forgive them, dear Lord. Forgive them," he prayed.

This so infuriated the men that before the doomed man had finished praying, Captain Brear gave a sharp lash of his whip to the rump of the red horse hitched to the buggy. The frightened animal plunged forward jerking Sketoe out of the buggy. But Sketoe's neck wasn't broken. In making their hurried plans for the hanging, the Home Guard members hadn't allowed for their victim's height and size. He was tall and his frame was not spare. So the limb to which the rope was tied bent under Sketoe's weight and his toes touched the ground.

Quickly, George Echols, a cripple, grabbed his crutch and used it to dig a hole in the sandy soil under Sketoe's feet so that his toes would not touch the ground and his body would swing from the rope. Finally, the noose tightened and did its deadly work.

News of what was happening near the bridge reached Newton too late for anyone to save the minister's life, but several men went to the spot, took Sketoe's body down from the tree and laid it out in a cotton house across the road. He was later buried in the graveyard at Mount Carmel Church, where his tombstone may be seen today.

But the story of Bill Sketoe did not end with this burial. The six men who had hanged him were never able to sleep peacefully at night after that, and not one of them would walk alone outside after dark. Though they locked their doors and barred their windows, they were tormented by dread and fear. And each one of the six in his turn met a violent death.

One was killed on horseback when a limb from a post oak tree, the same kind of tree on which Sketoe was hanged, fell on him. It was a still day with not a breath of wind stirring, but the heavy limb fell just as the rider passed beneath the tree. Another member of the lynch mob was killed when thrown from a runaway mule that