

HAUNTED CLEVELAND

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TWO PSYCHICS TAKE US FOR A TRIP THROUGH CLEVELAND'S CREEPIEST HAUNTS.

Spirits Of The Gospel

A psychic and a skeptic evaluate one of Tremont's historical gems
by *Michael Gill*

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GHOSTS to get spooked at the Union Gospel Press complex. In fact, you don't even have to go inside. The notoriously vacant wreckage of some 15 buildings looms over Tremont like a red and brown brick castle. Its hundreds of odd angles cast deep shadows no matter how far the sun or moon has crept across the sky. There are balconies and broken windows. The grass inside the fence is overgrown. A sign chained across the gate makes it clear that you are not welcome: No trespassing. Private Property. By appointment only.

It's just the kind of place you might want to take a clairvoyant, to see what spooks she might spook up.

The building's history only enriches that mood. First a college, it's rumored to have been used as a makeshift hospital during the Civil War. The most notorious piece of its past, though, came in 1907 when the Rev. William Brunner Musselman brought a group of women — non-denominational Christian missionaries — to print bibles there. In a 2003 interview conducted for CSU's Tremont History Project, Tremont lifer Molly Alstatt said the women were very private, wore blue uniforms with straw hats and high boots. The neighborhood kids called them "Sallies."

According to a history provided by the Union Gospel Press company — which still does business down on Brookpark Road, the Sallies were "zealous in their faithfulness to the mission and to the publishing ministry." They lived in isolation from the world.

It's not much of a leap to believe some of them never left the compound. Ever.

As if this were no issue at all, a group of investors plans to return the place to the realm of the useful. Brothers Myrl and Stavros Roberts bought the gothic hodgepodge for \$1.4 million in 2003 with vague plans to convert it into apartments, condos, and retail space. They expect to start a top-to-bottom rehab by the end of the year, and to spend about \$12 million by the time they are finished.

Before the sound of jackhammers and reciprocating saws chase the spooks away for good — if indeed it works that way — the Stavros brothers agreed to let a reporter, photographer and psychic take a tour. They've seen some odd things in digital photographs taken while planning the renovation. You know: weird stuff you can't explain. Why not bring in someone to get in touch with the Union Gospel netherworld?

So we leafed through a two year-old phone book and began to make some calls. As we dial, we learn that nearly half of the phone numbers listed for psychics in the 2002 yellow pages are now disconnected. No further information available. Go figure.

Then, under the R's, we came to the Rev. Beverly Carole. She had left the business the year that phone book came out, but, as we learn, she's in the process of making a comeback. The building is coming back to life; so is she, in a way. It's not that she turned her clairvoyance off, she says — just her contact with the public. She was getting too many calls from people who wanted to know if they were going to get a new boyfriend soon, and that was just annoying. Besides, she just had to clear her head. She's been working on this book, something about conversations she's had since she was a little girl, conversations with Satan.

She doesn't have a title yet. You know how publishers are.

The Rev. Carole doesn't drive, so we pick her up at her house in Euclid. Her friend Charlotte joins us, just in case things get out of hand, Carole says. You never know what's going to happen in a haunted building.

She's just cautious. In fact there's nothing at all spooky about the Reverend. She's dressed in a white cardigan and faded jeans. Widowed and then divorced, she has five kids and a two-month old grandson. She says



IT'S A FIXER-UPPER

Ghosts like Union Gospel Press so much, its rehab might not scare them off.

clairvoyance has been passed through generations in her family. Her age is none of our business, but she's "old enough to remember World War II." By day the Reverend earns a living reviewing medical insurance claims.

Carole says she doesn't know the West Side much, and when we tell her the name of our destination it doesn't ring any bells. The Gospel hasn't reached her in Euclid, and that's just fine. This is not a witch trial or a test of psychic strength, but still we'd rather she start from scratch.

Myrl Roberts meets us there and unlocks the gate, but leaves us in the hands of a guide. Roberts tells us this guy in the knit cap knows more about the place than anyone. He lived in a small frame house in front of the complex for the last five years, and in the building itself for five years before that. Our guide wants no pictures of himself.

So as we walk into the courtyard, with its giant rusting sculpture of a tree, we get a little more history. Like any spirit worth its grit, the Union Gospel Press complex comes with many names: The Castle, Jefferson Manor, and, thanks to bald and tattooed former owner Joe Scully, the Tremont Cultural Art Center. Scully himself haunted the twisted halls since he bought them in 1986 at the bargain price of \$80,000. An iron worker whose sweat probably started the rust on the skeletons of bridges around town, he used the place as a metal working studio and allowed artists to live there. Now he lives in Youngstown. Our guide is his protégé.



HAUNTED HALLS

Will the ghosts move on when the Tremont landmark's renovation is complete?

nuns?"

"Would there have been a blacksmith at one time?"

We're wandering from room to room. I'm casting a flashlight down hallways ahead of us. Down a few flights, we come to a tunnel. It takes us under the courtyard to another building. It looks like the spooks might come flying out of the walls any minute. Like clockwork, the psychic begins to narrate snapshots from her spiritually acquired grasp of what went on here.

"Somebody was killed in this house," she posits. She doesn't return to the thought.

"Did you ever have cults?"

Our guide balks at the rapid-fire chestnuts. "You know, there's always weird stuff. It could be here for you all the time, or it can be here when you need it, or it can be here when you don't pick up your foot in time to get over something on the floor."

It's a touchy business with a skeptic in the room. But he does address the thoughts of death that have come over the Rev. Carole.

"In ten years I've been here," our guide says, "no one has died that I knew of. They used to keep animals downstairs. If they killed them and ate them, I don't know."

The Reverend isn't certain what she sensed, but she reasserts the feeling. "There's a lot of unrest here, and it's coming from the main floor."

Scully thought of the Union Gospel Press as an art colony. A few artists lived there. Some other people, too. In an interview shortly after he sold the place, he said over the years he'd occasionally wander into a room and find blankets nested on the floor. Mostly the buildings sat empty, except for the wandering cats. Floors got soft here and there. Sections of the roof fell in. As our guide introduces the place, we're standing under a massive rusting sculpture of a tree, its limbs crossing the October sky like a spider web.

Our psychic has questions for our guide right away, and it's clear this will be a difficult relationship. It's not that he doesn't believe in spooks. He's seen plenty of weirdness in his day, and he'll admit to it. But she keeps asking questions.

"Was there a young 8-year-old girl a long time ago, possibly with the

We walk through more corridors and shadowy rooms, making our way toward the center of the building. It's hard to conceive the purpose of such convoluted space. It all seems designed to promote wanderlust. We stop at another intersection, where our guide tells us that once, he saw an apparition.

"It was a green and beautiful woman in a low-cut dress. It may have been a hallucination. I wasn't on anything at the time. Then again, it may have been oily soot from LTV, caked on the window just right."

"I see a woman that's going to smack you," the clairvoyant says. "And she's not wearing a low-cut dress."

THEY CONTINUE TO SNIPE unproductively at each other as the tour goes on. Their conversation ends when he asks what she senses from the next room.

"Nothing," she says quickly. "It suits you well."

So she's talking to anyone but him when we get back to the main floor, to the heart of the compound, where we plan to sit in silence and allow whatever spirits may dwell to come out of their hiding places.

"He can get lost," she says. So our guide goes away to wrestle with a ladder.

The heart of the compound dates from the 1830s and was built as a college, which left a collection of street names as part of its legacy. College. Professor. Literary. The interior is orange glazed brick, vivid as a tangerine. The psychic and her sidekick stand in the middle of the room, and the rest of us give her some space. A flesh-and-blood cat slips quietly behind us. We get quiet. We wait.

It's not long before Carole begins to report a steady stream of what's flashing through her mind.

She sees a soldier who has his head bandaged, and he's going on and on about how the blood ran and how they couldn't stop it. He just wants to be remembered. She thinks he's a local soldier, but the spirit isn't forthcoming with a name. She says there are operating tables almost everywhere you turn. The medics were doing things they didn't know how to do. They buried the dead in makeshift graves. Some people came and dug up their relatives.

"It could be built over a graveyard," Charlotte offers.

The Rev. Carole doesn't respond, but continues. "There are forgotten people here. They just want to be recognized. I told them I'd do what I can do to get some kind of memorial."

But enough of the Civil War. Carole wants to get back to the women of the Gospel Press. That little girl is driving her crazy. She thinks she was here at the same time as the missionaries, either in spirit or in the flesh. She sees her in a black dress that hangs down to her boots. It doesn't quite match the historic description of the Sallies, but it's not far off. She has light brown hair.

"She wants me to find her mother. Her mother is buried in Lake View Cemetery. I'm trying to get her name, and it sounds like Anabella. Her last name . . . I'm not going to get the correct spelling, but she keeps saying Egert."

The spirit of the little girl tells her something bad has happened, but beyond that the information is scarce. She keeps saying it's got to stop. Our psychic can't tell whether the ethereal evil happened in the past or is yet to come, but the little girl is over by the window watching the street.

DAYS AFTER OUR TOUR, Carole talks about how the building will fare after its renovation. She says the place is haunted, but not in a bad way. The building is not dangerous. It's not the kind of thing you'd board up and sell admission tickets to at Halloween.

The Stavros brothers will be happy to hear that.

Our psychic tells us, however, that "even after they get the whole thing together, they're still going to have problems. Plumbing problems. Electrical problems."

The developers won't be so happy about that.

She says they might improve relations with the spirit world by satisfying the Civil War soldiers' need for recognition. Maybe put up a plaque or something.

"It's not because they lived or died there," Carole says, "but just because they served."

In the days since the visit, she's had a chance to check the building out on the Internet. She found the Union Gospel Press web site, which says the missionaries' first U.S. location was in Annandale, New Jersey. That must



REV. BEVERLY CAROLE

"There's a lot of unrest here, and it's coming from the main floor."

be the name the little girl gave her. We won't bother to check listings at Lake View Cemetery.

The question that must be on the mind of anyone who might move into apartments in the building is, will the ghosts move on when the renovation is complete, or will the new tenants have to live their lives in the midst of the very old ones?

"Nothing is 100 percent," Carole says. "They can return. It's like they live alongside us. Just like a person can return because they have an interest, so can a spirit. It's basically their choosing. People get attached to places. They have their reasons, just like we do."

GHOST TOWN

Spirits aren't always attached to the creepiest old building in town
by *Amy Starnes*

IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ORANGE-TINTED October day, as the Lake Erie wind gains enough chill to make you wrap your jacket even tighter, Sonya Horstman walks slowly toward a Cleveland street so busy it squeals under the weight of all its traffic.

Her long dark hair rides the shifting breeze around her. At the edge of West 25th Street, near Detroit Avenue and St. Malachi Roman Catholic Church, Horstman suddenly leans back and then steps back.

"Was it a bomb?" she asks turning back toward the safety of the sidewalk. "I'm sensing a bomb."

She pauses. "He didn't know it was coming. He had no clue."

What Horstman, known around Cleveland more commonly as Psychic Sonya, didn't know at the time was that she had been driven to the location where notorious Cleveland mobster Alex "Shondor" Birns turned the key on his Lincoln Continental one spring night in 1975. Pieces of him reportedly fell at St. Malachi.

Sonya had only been told she was in the general location where a terrible crime killed someone who was not so nice.

She explains her sense: the evil, the force, the energy, the whatever-you-want-to-call-it that's created when something bad happens to someone seeps into the ground like fresh blood. It's impossible to erase. Neither time nor new asphalt, fresh parking spaces nor even the constant roar of daily life can pull that stain from the earth.

"I was able to pick it up. It will always be here," she says, returning to the quiet and warmth of a nearby car.

THE COMMON GHOST STORY or spirit tale, the reports of cold rooms or of hair-raising chills, seem to be most often attached with the creepiest old house on the block. It's as if ghosts come packaged with the 100-year-old mansion, its wall-climbing ivy and rickety wrought iron gates.

Why are there no ghost stories about an average street corner? The laundromat? The convenience store? To our knowledge there's not yet a tale about the mobster's ghost haunting a Cleveland corner. And Sonya, who didn't know where she was being taken before arriving at Detroit and 25th, notes that she didn't feel Shondor's or anyone else's presence on the street, other than the negative residual energy.

But the psychic asserts that if the mobster did not "cross over into the light," he certainly could visit Detroit and 25th if he wished — or his favorite nightspot or his former home.

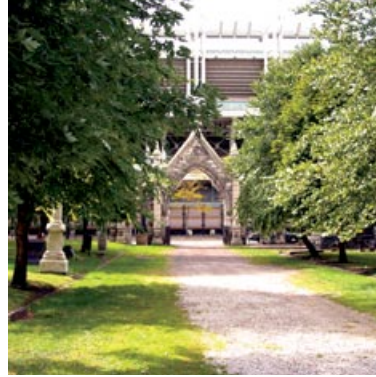
Sonya, who calls herself "one of Cleveland's top paranormal investigators," believes spirits can choose to stay on Earth rather than moving through the light when they die. Some dead feel they can't leave because something horrible has happened to them. Some can't bear to leave children or a loved one. Others, à la *The Sixth Sense*, don't seem to understand they're dead, she says.

But once they're here, they have free will, Sonya claims. They're not stuck where they died or where they lived. They can venture where they wish; even follow a stranger home, she says.

SONYA'S BELIEFS MAY BE BACKED up by Mitch Tolliver's somewhat scientific findings.

Tolliver heads up Spiritseekers of Ohio, a Rittman-based group that uses cameras, video recorders, voice recorders and electromagnetic readings to determine if something supernatural is haunting a cemetery, a park, a prison or someone's house.

Tolliver says the group has visited Cuyahoga Valley National Park several times because of Indian legends there. On the most recent trip, he says he had left his tape recorder on as the group was walking out, when suddenly he felt something come up behind him, and he thought he heard something. Others denied hearing anything, but when Tolliver got home and listened to that part of the tape, he heard what sounded like someone running



EERIE ERIE

The Erie Street Cemetery is home to several rumored ghosts.

on gravel, though no one in the group had been running.

When Tolliver started the group about seven years ago, he didn't believe in ghosts. Camera spots could be dust, he says. A rattling door could be from a drafty window. But what convinced him were the EVPs, ghostbuster speak for electronic voice phenomena. He says the recording to this day that gives him chills was captured as he and his sister walked quietly through the children's portion of a cemetery.

Later on his tape: "There was a child's giggle, plain as day. There was no child around."



Tolliver, now, is trying to move his group out of parks and cemeteries and toward home investigations. He says the group does about two or three a month. They do in-depth interviews before accepting a case, and they attack each supposed haunting by trying to eliminate any natural cause.

Tolliver says the group finds evidence of supernatural presence in only about 30 percent of the cases.

The creepiest place in Cleveland, to Sonya, in fact, is not just one old building but an entire section of street.

Asked where she gets the nastiest vibes, Sonya quickly answers, "The street of Franklin, by the Franklin Castle; that whole street, that whole sector."

SPIRIT GUIDE

Sonya offers tours of Cleveland haunts like Grays Armory.

She says not only is the 1860 home the cause of the creep factor, but so is a nearby hospital.

The castle, built by German immigrant Hannes Tiedemann, has several ghost stories attached to it, including stories about Hannes himself, and even of a young girl supposedly found hanging in the home's rafters before 1900. After 1913, the building spent 55 years as a gathering place for the German Socialist Party. It then passed through several families' hands as an intended home. The last few homeowners spent large amounts of money attempting to restore it, but in 1999, the house was gutted by arson. Charles Milsaps, the building's new owner, intends to restore it to its original interior design and use the building for a private dinner club.

Sonya, however, claims the building is cursed. She wishes Milsaps well, but says she's afraid he won't escape the curse.

"It had so much death inside there ... that it creates a curse when you desecrate a body or mistreat a body," she says. "Nobody's ever been able to make anything out of it. It's got a real unsettled history."

Milsaps says he doesn't think the house is cursed. Restoration is about 18 months behind schedule (the building is set to open in fall 2005), but he says, "No, we have not had any cursed things happen to us."

SONYA SPEAKS MATTER-OF-FACTLY about the spirits. To her, there is no question that they exist; there's no doubt that they rush up to her in certain buildings because they know she is a seer of their kind.

A single mother from Oberlin, Sonya supports herself by working full-time as a psychic. She classifies herself as clairvoyant — one who sees, feels or senses not only spirits but auras and energies off other people — rather than a psychic medium, who may predict the future or summon the dead to speak from the other side. She is often heard on radio shows, generally through the month of October and hosts Haunted Cleveland Tours, in which she takes groups three times a week to Cleveland-area buildings and spots where ghosts have been alleged to roam.

She charges for her readings and tours, but can't bring herself to collect for her other occasional service: ghostbusting. For a family or a home plagued by a spirit that's lost its way, Sonya says she can communicate with it and implore it to "find the light" and move on. She says she doesn't ask questions, and she doesn't want to know the spirit's story. In fact, she avoids it.

"I know it sounds odd, but I really don't care what they were or what they did or what their problem was," she says. "The point of why I'm here is 'you've gotta go.'"

She also doesn't hound the police about her feelings or knowledge. For example, she says there's a young boy buried in a barn in Medina County. He's told her he was buried decades ago in winter — a time when it was too hard to dig a grave anywhere else. He was supposed to be moved in the spring, but never was.

"How can I go to the police and tell them I know this kid's buried there? He died in, like, 1900. But he's still



CALMING SPIRITS

Sonya often pays her respects to Chief Joc-O-Sot, the Sauk warrior buried here.

hanging around the farm because his body hasn't been discovered, and I'm not going to be the one to do it.

"Because if I did that I would be so responsible, and you know how many spirits would then come forward and bug me?"

For more information:

Spiritseekers of Ohio: www.spiritseekersofohio.net

Haunted Cleveland Tours with Psychic Sonya: www.HauntedClevelandTours.com or 440-775-1217.

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