



# Is This Place Haunted?

Connecticut Landmarks Finally Answers the Question Visitors Have Been Asking for Years.

by Barbara Lipsche

This spring, Connecticut Landmarks (CTL) will team up with Connecticut Paranormal Research Investigators (CT-PRI) to gather evidence in an attempt to prove whether or not the rumored paranormal presences in their historic house museums are true. Four of the 12 Landmarks will be investigated on Saturday nights at 8 pm in May and June: Hempsted Houses, New London, May 2nd; Bellamy-Ferriday House & Garden, Bethlehem, May 9th; Nathan Hale Homestead, Coventry, June 6th; Butler-McCook House & Garden, Hartford, June 13th, 8 pm. The investigations will not be open to the public.

For decades, the staff at Connecticut Landmarks' have collected spooky ghost stories and numerous reports of unexplained phenomena. During tours visitors frequently ask the question, "Is this place haunted?" Guides often respond with chilling tales of ghost sightings, strange noises and objects moving on their own. However, nothing has ever been substantiated – until now.

Public interest in the paranormal is on the rise as evidenced by the growing popularity of TV shows like Paranormal State, Ghost Hunters, Most Haunted, and Destination Truth. "We are responding to trends and striving to be as visitor- and media-driven in our programming as possible. Conducting paranormal investigations of our historic sites - and reporting the results - is what many of our visitors are clamoring for," says Sheryl Hack, CTL's Executive Director. "Ghost stories and folk tales that are rooted in real history are a fun way to tell the Connecticut Story."

CTL, Connecticut's largest state-wide network of historic properties, landscapes and collections, dedicates

itself to preserving, presenting and promoting the Connecticut experience through new and innovative programming. Throughout the 2009 season, CTL and CT-PRI will present the results of each investigation through fire-side chats, parlor talks and lectures.

Over the years CTL has been approached by many local ghost hunters requesting permission to investigate the museums for paranormal activity. When asked why CT-PRI was selected to perform the investigations, Rochelle Simon, Director of Communications & Marketing, says, "Most paranormal groups that have approached us in the past didn't have the same level of experience and professionalism that CT-PRI has. They are all volunteers, have a genuine passion for the paranormal, take it seriously and use a highly scientific approach. Plus, they are well respected in their field and in the media."

CT-PRI is headed by founder Christine Kaczynski, who has more than 35 years of experience in paranormal research. She began CT-PRI in 2004 as a means to investigate paranormal activity and to help others experiencing issues with "unexplained phenomena." The five member investigative team uses digital



photography and EVP equipment (electronic voice phenomena) to record evidence of paranormal activity. Photographic and audio evidence from previous investigations can be seen on their website, [www.ctpri.org](http://www.ctpri.org).

Some of the folklore surrounding CTL properties revolves around old ghost stories and experiences witnessed by both visitors and employees alike. Rick Spencer, Site Administrator of the Hempsted Houses in New London, says that members of his staff have personally witnessed unexplained phenomena. The Hempsted Houses feature two historic buildings: Joshua (the diarist) Hempsted's home which dates to 1678 and an adjacent stone house, built on the property for his son Nathaniel Hempsted in 1759.

Spencer describes how one of the guides, Nan Brown, feels a ghostly presence in the caretaker's apartment, an 1860 addition to the original house. "Nan prefers not to spend much time in this room; she feels a disturbed presence and refers to it as Phoebe," Phoebe, Joshua's sister, was born in 1676 and lived until 1725. At the time of her death Joshua, the diarist, was her guardian. Phoebe has been described as 'simple' and once fell out of a window. Brown also claims to feel a presence in the stone house. However, it seems to be "very benign."

Last October, a restoration crew replacing a roof on the Joshua Hempsted house witnessed a strange woman walking around inside the house. When the staff arrived, one of the workers asked if there was anyone living in the house. Spencer says, "They saw, through the windows, a blonde woman slowly walking from room to room, but I can assure you there was nobody there! The house was locked up tight!" Despite the reports, Spencer doesn't look much into these events. He says, "For me, being insensitive to paranormal activity has saved me from having my pants

frightened off. I don't know how I'd react if I saw something I couldn't explain."



Cynthia Riccio, site administrator for the Butler-McCook House & Garden in Hartford always feels a particular presence in the house, especially when she's alone. "I think its Frances McCook," Riccio says. "The feeling I get is not scary, just distinctive." Frances McCook (1877-1971) was the last resident of the Butler-McCook House. She lived in the house her entire life. Her passion was to preserve the house and the history within. "Frances understood the significance of having four generations of a family in one house. She really made a point to preserve the families' history and legacy by saving letters, diaries and photos," says Riccio. The family stayed true to their roots, remaining in Hartford as the city flourished around them and their neighbors moved to the suburbs. McCook bequeathed the property to Connecticut Landmarks in 1971 with the intent to preserve the home as a public historical museum. All of the contents within the Butler-McCook House are original to the property. "McCook's inherent passion for her home and the town she grew up in kept her close in proximity—perhaps after death as well as in life."



Beverly York, Site Administrator for the Nathan Hale Homestead in Coventry has mixed feelings about the paranormal. "I keep trying to think that these events are explainable and that I don't believe in ghosts. The more things that happen here, however, the harder it is for me to just brush it off." York remarked. The Nathan Hale Homestead is well-known for its ghost stories and York has plenty to tell. The Homestead is the namesakes' family home and looks much the way it did when Deacon Richard Hale, Nathan Hale's father, and his many descendants lived there throughout much of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The house which stands today was built

in 1776 and remained in the Hale family until the 1820s. For decades the house remained a private residence until Nathan Hale enthusiast and New Haven lawyer George Dudley Seymour bought the property, restored the buildings and furnished the house with Hale family furnishings and other 18th-century objects.

York explains that out of the 16 employees that work at the Homestead at least four have had significant paranormal experiences. “Stories include sounds of strange weeping, unexplained voices, coughing, and the rattling of chains.” The Homestead’s most infamous ghost story dates back to 1914. Shortly after Seymour bought the property he brought a friend over to see it. When they pulled up to the house, Seymour’s friend ran up to the front window for a quick peek inside and unexpectedly found himself face to face with the original proprietor, Deacon Richard Hale! The figure stared back at the stunned visitor for a moment then vanished into thin air.



Another story about vanishing figures happened a few years back when the young son of a visiting couple spotted Deacon Hale. The boy had been lingering behind in the Judgment Room, also Deacon Hale’s office, when he ran up to his parents in the hall exclaiming that a man was standing in the room they had just left. The group turned back and found the room empty. York explains that the boy was adamant about what he saw. “He insisted he saw a man. There was no question about it,” she says and shrugs her shoulders. It’s no shock that York isn’t fazed by the incident. “It’s only one story out of many.”

Mysterious lights have also been seen in the attic window. One of the Homestead’s tour guides, Elizabeth O’Brien was participating in a hearth cooking class one evening when she witnessed what York describes as a “glowing light turned on like a light bulb.” York explained that the only light in the attic isn’t visible from the window; it’s blocked by a large chimney stack. The same window drew attention last September when author Thomas D’Agostino conducted a brief paranormal investigation for his forthcoming book *Haunted Connecticut*. D’Agostino, his wife Arlene and

fellow investigator Andrew Lake visited the Homestead to hear the stories and see what might turn up. After hearing O’Brien’s attic window story, the investigators took several digital pictures of it. As the investigators, York and two of her co-workers reviewed the images in the camera, they witnessed a strange sight; the window panes flashed in the still photo. York says, “Six people witnessed it. We initially thought it was video.

Everything was totally still but the window flashed in the image for a few seconds then went away!”

CT-PRI will send a team of 5-7 investigators to each property and will stay for as long as necessary. “Sometimes these things can go all night, or take as little as an hour. One can never know with the paranormal,” says Kaczynski. “Often times we don’t find anything—which can sometimes be just as interesting and can, at the very least, finally provide an answer to the question, ‘is this place haunted?’”

Founded in 1936, Connecticut Landmarks, formerly known as the Antiquarian & Landmarks Society, is the largest state-wide heritage museum organization in Connecticut. The historic landmark properties include: the Amasa Day House, Moodus; the Bellamy-Ferriday House & Garden, Bethlehem; the Butler-McCook House & Garden and Main Street History Center, Hartford; the Buttolph-Williams House, Wethersfield; the Hempsted Houses, New London; the Isham-Terry House, Hartford; the Nathan Hale Homestead, Coventry; and the Phelps-Hatheway House & Garden, Suffield. Connecticut Landmarks’ mission is to inspire appreciation for the Connecticut experience by preserving, presenting and promoting outstanding historic properties, collections and stories. For more information, please visit [www.ctlandmarks.org](http://www.ctlandmarks.org).

Photos:

Dark staircase, Butler-McCook House  
Doorway with bright light. Hale Homestead  
Interior of the Joshua Hempsted House  
Vintage cloth doll, Butler-McCook House.  
Sun-lit attic window at Nathan Hale Homestead.  
Photos by Nick Lacy.