



(Left) This venerable, beautiful house is home to more than you would imagine. (Center) Erected in the present, the welcoming sign speaks to our interest in the past. (Right) Rebecca and Nick relax.

PHOTOS BY POLEMIC STAFF

It's not a haunting, it's a visitation

By KENT ANDERSON
STAFF WRITER

Fox Mulder gazes out across a gray, dreary field, a brisk fall breeze gently flapping his black overcoat behind his body. In his hands he holds a cream-colored file he just finished reading. "The truth is out there, Scully," he says, solemn eyes still peering toward the overcast horizon.

Perhaps the truth is even closer to the residents of Harrisville, Michigan than an episode of the popular "X-Files" television program. It appears that the quiet, normal appearance of the Springport Inn Bed and Breakfast in Harrisville may veil a subtle characteristic of the supernatural world.

Built in 1877, it has an old suburban-gothic look that instantly sends the imagination into the shadowy playroom of spooks, graveyards, and things that slither under a child's bed at night. This reach out and give you goosebumps appearance is quite fitting, for, according to one of the inn's owners, Rebecca Stratton, it happens to be the home of a ghost.

The spirit's name is (was) Joseph Van Buskirk, the man who, coincidentally, built the original structure in 1877. Van Buskirk's physical existence began in Munroe County, New York, on April

22, 1836.

He moved to the Harrisville area in 1868 at the age of 32. In the community, he was a prominent lumber baron and owned a mill that was located just a few miles away in Greenbush. Fish barrels were his specialty, though he was also involved in other areas of mercantile and animal stock.

A man who strongly believed in his family and his community, Van Buskirk made a lot of contributions to the local Methodist church and was instrumental in bringing the railroad to the area.

Though most of his years seem to have been spent as a sharp businessman, around 1904 Van Buskirk's businesses began to suffer, not due to economic factors, but simply because he couldn't seem to keep a firm grip on things. It is believed, Rebecca told me, that he may have suffered from what we call Alzheimer's disease today.

On October 9, 1905, at the age of 68, after having injured his head falling down a flight of stairs, Van Buskirk lapsed into a coma for a week and then died.

Rebecca and Ken Stratton have been the proprietors of the inn since 1988. Rebecca said that she first noticed the presence of Van Buskirk's ghost about a month after taking possession from the previous owners.

According to Rebecca, the ghost (who she always refers to very plainly as Joseph) has appeared on a few occa-

sions, sometimes just standing and facing her. However, over a period of several visitations, Joseph kept holding one arm up toward a specific area of a wall in the house. It turned out that he was trying to tell Rebecca and Ken that they had water damage.

"He does more than just appear," Rebecca said. "He's moved things...he whistles." Once, she stated, she watched as a needle-point picture she had crafted appear to lift itself off the wall and hover directly in front of her. That was the only time, she said, that she's ever seen anything levitate.

"He's playful, but he's not menacing," Rebecca told me, ruining my hopes of hearing a really terrifying story.

Apparently, Joseph usually just takes things, hides them, and then places them somewhere obvious so that you'll be sure to find them again. Once, Rebecca said, he turned on every light in the house.

Another time, he tied her shoelaces into a bow and set them at the foot of her bed. One might think that events such as these could unsettle, even terrify, a person. But Rebecca told me that was not so. "I've never had anything like this happen to me before, and I always thought that if it did... I'd turn the palest shade of white and disappear. But curiosity kicks in, I mean, it's just amazing."

Even though they don't actively market their resident phantom, the Stratton's do get visitors who stay at their inn solely because of the ghost. Rebecca said, "We've had people call and say: 'Are you the Bed and Breakfast that's haunted? If we stay there, will you bring the ghost out?'"

The enthusiasm for experiencing a spirit visitation is out

there. People stay at the inn and hope they will see something, however, it is not up to the owners as to when the ghost will make its presence known.

Like any other free spirit (whether it has shuffled off its mortal coil or remains tied to its mortality), Joseph comes and goes as he pleases. Rebecca and Ken can't command him to pop up.

Don't waste your time looking for some kind of pattern to Joe's activities either, for, similar to life, it seems that a ghostly existence may consist of going about your business—just doing what you want or need to.

To anyone out there who may be thinking of taking a little trip to the inn, in the hopes of stirring up an encounter with a resident of the astral world, Rebecca asks that you leave your Ouija boards and black candles at home.

No seances are permitted either. Rebecca does not want anyone trying to communicate with Joseph by way of one of the methods just mentioned.

According to her, Joseph, a friendly ghost, could act as a conduit for some other spirit(s) to enter her home. She could end up with an evil spirit that might not be as playful as her current visitor.

Faced by the glaring leer of our modern, scientific age, it may seem impossible to believe that a ghost can exist. Science has been able to dispel many myths, but ghosts and some other phenomena remain unexplained.

So, do you believe? Rebecca certainly does. "When I talk about it, I hope it is believed, because it is the truth."

"Grab the keys, Scully, we're going to Harrisville, Michigan."

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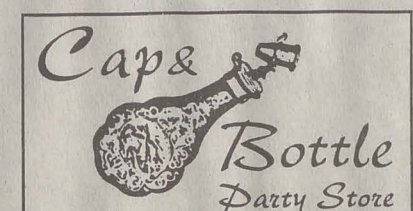
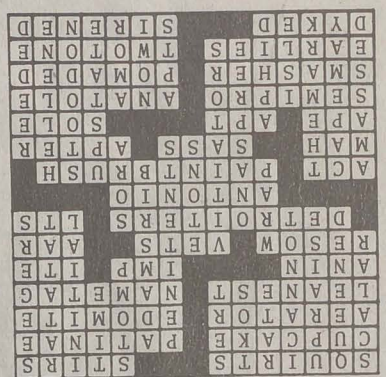
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