



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“What is a library, after all, than a place where the dead, neatly coffined in their separate volumes, continue to speak.”

-Brad Leithhauser, *The Norton Book of Ghost Stories*, from *The Whole Handbook 3*

My mother always claimed our house was haunted. She even knew the name of the ghost – Mabel – although I can’t remember why she knew. Misplaced items, footsteps and a strange feeling in the room provided support for her theory and I have to admit I think she might be right. So, I was immediately interested when I read an article about haunted libraries in my library school book *The Whole Library Handbook 3*, by Eberhart.

This wonderful book is full of all sorts of interesting facts about libraries. For instance, it has an article by Joanna M. Burkhardt, called “The do’s and don’ts for moving a small academic library,” which includes such useful tips as “Visit the new site frequently while it is under construction....One day it’s all I-beams and concrete, the next day the walls are in place.” There’s also an article on compact disc repair and maintenance, which includes

how to repair a scratched CD.

Anyway, I immediately looked to see what a haunted library is and where the nearest one is located. Unfortunately, California isn’t teeming with haunted libraries, which is too bad, because I’d love to visit one.

You might be wondering who would haunt a library. A booklover, who couldn’t think of a better way to spend eternity than in a building full of books? Or maybe a night janitor, practicing his violin, like the ghost in the Houston Public Library? Or Ben Franklin, as seen by a cleaning lady at Library Hall at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia?

According to this book, there are haunted libraries all over the United States. The more interesting ones include the Hutchinson (Kansas) Public Library, where the ghost of former head librarian Ida Day Holzapfel has been seen and heard and the Historical Society

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of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, which seems to have a persistent cataloguer ghost, Albert J. Edmunds.

A particularly active haunted library is the Willard Library in Evansville, Indiana. There is so much ghost activity there that a webcam has been set up, so ghost watchers can keep an eye out without actually having to be there. According to the website dedicated to this library (wlghostchatters.com), “there are likely 9 ex-persons haunting those Hallowed Halls.”

The most famous is Louise Carpenter, known as the Grey Lady, and there are pictures of what might be her ghost on the website, sent in by people who seem to spend a lot of time watching. Webcam tips are given, and they include “...look for mists, formations, and movement of objects when the room is empty.” Also, there’s a portrait on the wall in

the children’s room at this library that tends to look like a ghost when viewed on the webcam. I mention this because it’s a portrait of Gray Davis Williams, who was head librarian there from 1941 to 1956, and there have been reports that her face in the portrait changes and “one person...has seen it turn into a man.”

This week’s book review is from Ann and the book is Connie Willis’ *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, which is “set in the future, where time travel is a common method of historical research.” It is about “one historian sent back to Victorian England to join a beautiful colleague who may have destroyed the space-time continuum by rescuing a drowning cat.” Ann says it is “hilarious, clever, not sci-fi and has wonderful characters!”