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Circle City's spooks

We shed light on Indy's darkest local lore, tall tales and frightening sightings.

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Footsteps in the night, lights flickering on and off, floating orbs and transparent people.

Thought you'd outgrown ghost stories, huh? Once you find out how many reportedly haunted sites there are in Indy, places you've probably been at least a time or two, you might reconsider.

Paranormal activity isn't just for scary movies; some say it's a regular occurrence at many historic spots. And groups like the Indiana Ghost Trackers are using modern equipment, like digital cameras, audio recorders and electro-magnetic field detectors to find out if there's really anything going on at some of these spots.

According to Lorri Sankowsky, co-director of the Indianapolis chapter of the Indiana Ghost Trackers, Downtown Indy is "crawling with ghosts."

With all its Civil War and Underground Railroad ties, as well as its share of gang wars in the early part of the century, Indianapolis has had its fair share of death. And it seems many have yet to pass onto the other side, or they just like visiting some of their old stomping grounds.

BEGINNINGS

Nicole Kobrowski, who began Indiana Ghost Walks and Tours two years ago, became interested in the paranormal while growing up in a haunted house.

Her older sisters had both reported seeing a caped man with a bayonet, but the young Kobrowski figured it was just a prank to scare their little sister. But when she was about 11 or 12, she too saw the caped figure. And at a teenage sleepover some years later, one of Kobrowski's friends was so petrified after seeing the same figure in the room, that she refused to stay over at Kobrowski's house after that.

"She was speaking so rapidly in Spanish that I couldn't even understand her," Kobrowski said. "She was that scared."

But ghosts, in and of themselves, aren't usually bad. In fact, their mere presence is what usually frightens people, not anything that they are doing, Kobrowski said.

Think "Beetle Juice," not "Poltergeist." Well, not Betelgeuse himself, but Geena Davis' and Alec Baldwin's characters.

And the extent to which people are open to believing in or experiencing contact from the spiritual world is completely individualized.

"Like with anything, not just with ghosts, you can only see what you can handle," Kobrowski said. Some people sense a



Dance into the fire: Model Tom Burnes portrays Jolly Werner, a drunk who was said to have fallen into a fireplace and died at the Athenaeum in Downtown Indianapolis. -- Illustration by Arnel Reynon and Michelle Pemberton / INTake

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SIGNS YOUR HOUSE COULD BE HAUNTED

Lorri Sankowki, co-director of the Indianapolis chapter of the Indiana Ghost Trackers, said the group offers free, confidential home and business investigations for people who believe they have ghosts. Here are a few things to look for if you think your place has spirit



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