



12-15-1988

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Recommended Citation

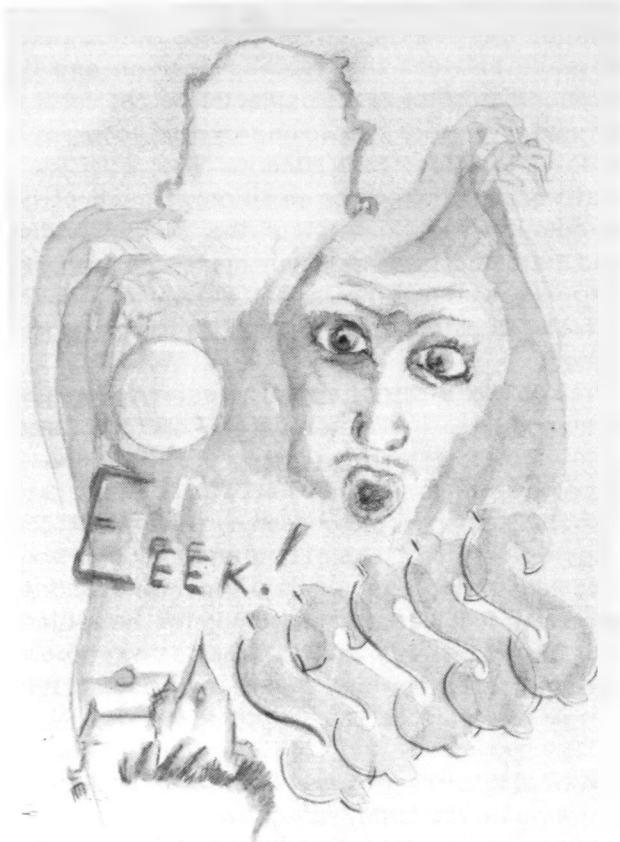
Mills, Elmer M. (1988) "The Haunted House," *Westview*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol8/iss2/8>

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NOVELTY

surprise. . .sleepwalker



The Haunted House

By Elmer M. Mills

I shall never forget this story Papa used to tell, especially when company came to visit. He told it to be true, and I always believed my daddy.

Many years ago around the turn of the century, about 1898 to be more exact, a man rode into Western Oklahoma, near where Weatherford now stands, and filed on one hundred and sixty acres of land where I was later born. He came in after the "big run" and had to take second choice of land. He held his claim by staying on it so long each year for a certain number of years. The rest of the time he punched cattle over at the Cole Ranch not far away.

Mr. Cole owned lots of land, buying up homes from disheartened settlers. One of these purchases was nearby which included a large deserted home with many rooms. It was a big house, empty and forlorn. Because of the mysticism surrounding the place, Mr. Cole could rent it for but only a short while. People would move out saying it was infested with ghosts and strange happenings.

This moving in and out was getting on George Cole's nerves so much that it got to the point where one morning at the breakfast table he spoke his piece. "Boys," says he, "I have a proposition to make. I'll give any one of you the sum of fifty dollars (which was no small amount in those days) to stay all night alone in the old house and see what's going on." There was a short qualm then my dad, the man to whom I referred you at the beginning, Dave Mills, was there with them at the time, and being desperate in need of money grabbed at the chance. He told Mr. Cole he would go and

bring him his ghost the next morning.

That evening, carrying his bedroll, he hoofed it off to the old relic of the past not quite a mile away. "It was getting toward dusk," he remarked, "and thank goodness it looked to be a clear night with a full moon showing well up in the east. It was a creepy ole' house," he would tell us repeatedly, for we loved to hear him tell it over and over again to us kids and all the others at times, "and it took plenty," he'd say, "of all I had, I must admit, to enter and cautiously air each room and conceivable place. And upon climbing those creaking stairsteps," he'd say, "oh my, how those goose pimples did stand out, like quills on a porcupone's back!"

Finally, an upstairs room was his choice for the waiting room and thereby laid down his pallet and stretched himself out for a sleepless night. He was alert to the utmost as he lay on his back with his head cupped in the palms of his hands, gazing at the dim ceiling above. For hours only the usual sounds of the prairie land prevailed. There he lay motionless, and it was not until the moon had finally crept its way westward to where it was beaming its light across the room and onto his body where he lay that the spell was suddenly broken. There came a slow grinding of the gravel outside the house below. Papa always had the biggest ole' eyes and I suppose, the way he told it, that at this moment they must have almost rolled from their sockets. He said he lay mortified as the goose pimples gathered fast!

"Directly, the porch gave way to those creaking sounds,"

he would say, "and I knew right then that Mr. Ghost was approaching the inside." Papa lay rigid, and sure enough the next sounds came one by one slowly but surely, winding their way through all the rooms downstairs and then the creaking stairsteps gave vent to the abominable. Upon reaching the top, it winded its way down the hallway through all the rooms and back again toward the only one left, "Dear Ole' Dad's." It was the beginning of the crucial moment. Papa knew it had to show and sure enough there it stood, erect and motionless in the open doorway. It was the image of a perfect ghost, clothed in a white robe. "I was paralyzed beyond words," said he, "and though I could not see the features of its face too good, I could truly sense its eyes fixed upon me."

"It then began moving toward me slowly, and behold, it actually laid itself down there beside me! Oh, what a moment of desperation it was! 'What is to happen next?' says I to myself, and it did. Lo and behold, Mr. Ghost laid its hand upon my bosom, bless you me, and this hand had a ring on its finger easily seen from the moon's bright light beaming across our bodies. Of course, I was darsin' to move, but yet I did. For I thought, says I to myself, 'If, and I know for sure it is the ghost, that by capturing the ring I can at least prove to the boys that I, although not producing the whole ghost, can at least show its ring.'"

"So gently I moved my hand across this hand and my fingers found that the ring could be removed without effort, which I did with no conflictions. Time was a big element to me, and after a short time, which couldn't have been too short for me, it arose and in its same stalky fashion disappeared through the doorway, down the creaking stairs, onto the porch, and made its final round in the crunching

gravel and then disappeared into where, only God would ever know."

Nothing else happened and at the break of dawn Papa made up his bedroll and struck out to reunite with the living, "mission accomplished." He made it back for breakfast and they were all present at the table intently awaiting his story of the outcome. Then Mr. Cole spoke with a chuckle. "Well, Dave, how did you survive the night and did you bring me back my ghost?" "No, I didn't, Mr. Cole," said Papa, "Not the ghost, but I **did** bring back the ghost's ring," and threw it into the center of the table for all to see. Immediately the whole bunch was startled by the sudden outcry of Mr. Cole's eighteen year old daughter, Mary, as she reached across the table for it. She had missed her ring that morning and assumed that she had thoughtlessly laid it down and consequently had not mentioned it to anyone.

And so there it was! The mystery had been solved. Mary Cole was the sleepwalker, unbeknown to anyone, and had been making occasional jaunts to the old haunted house, her once favorite playground. All of the Cole family and the rest of the threshold were deeply grateful to Dave for solving the mystic happenings. Mary was broken of her bad habit and the Ole' Haunted House once more became the lighted harbor for those seeking lasting happiness and protection from the ravages of the Wild and Wooly West.

ELMER M. MILLS, a 1925 graduate of Weatherford High School, now lives on a farm near Seneca, Missouri. He is happily surrounded by his wife, Betty, their four children, eleven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. One granddaughter, Lori LeBahn, is responsible for submitting Mr. Mills' manuscripts to WESTVIEW. ■

NOVELTY

cooperative spirit

The Highway That Never Was

By Maxine Wilhelm

The 100th Meridian had just been surveyed for the last time. Highway 66, crossing the country east and west, was being constructed. Feeder roads were needed to intersect the new highway, connecting the rural towns together.

The Chamber of Commerce of Erick met with Chamber members and business people in Hollis, May 9, 1929. The object of the conference was to formulate a plan for a State road from Hollis to Erick on north to Shattuck. Everyone was enthusiastic about the road and plans were made to meet with other towns along the route to Shattuck.

A highway sign 12" by 12" reading, "OK Meridian 100 Highway," was designed. This sign was similar to the signs used on state roads at the time. The Erick Chamber of Commerce ordered 50 signs to be made by the State Penitentiary at McAlester.

O. R. Wilhelm made many trips with fence posts, posthole diggers and the signs loaded in his 1927 Chevy. He nailed the signs on posts or set posts at strategic points along section lines generally used for north and south travel. There were lots of square

corners on the route at that time. The signs were displayed from Hollis to Durham.

It was hoped that a bridge might be built on the South Canadian River west of the Antelope Hills, then on to Shattuck. The members of the Chambers thought that a main highway along the 100th Meridian would help the State finances through the gasoline tax paid by users of the road.

However, boosters for a highway connecting all the county seat towns, Arnett, Cheyenne, Sayre, Mangum and Altus had more political influence, so highway 283 got the bridge across the South Canadian at Packsaddle crossing. A bridge was never built north of Durham. A team of mules pulled vehicles across the channel.

Two of the original signs posted on the proposed highway that never was, are now in the 100th Meridian Museum in Erick. ■

Other Erick Chamber committee members were J. W. Gillum, J. A. Ivester, L. E. Thomas, Neal Stewart, R. S. Rowland and Dr. R. C. McCreery.