

Yancey tavern: a place that is haunted by benevolent ghosts

Literature



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Yancey's Tavern

The Yancey Tavern, located 1001 Chesnutt Ridge Drive, Kingsport TN, is one of the few places famous for being haunted by benevolent ghosts. If you ask the locals about the tavern, many will claim to hear the music of the many nights travelers spent in the tavern during the Revolutionary War. The place was so beloved by travelers and locals alike that it is said their memories haunt the place even 200 years later. The tavern was built in 1779 by a man named James Hollis and served as a meeting place for the Sullivan County Commissioners from 1779 until 1794, when Hollis passed away. Hollis sold the building to John Yancey of Abingdon (then known as Wolf Hills) Virginia in 1784, who converted the building into a tavern and inn.

There is a small Indian foot-trail behind the inn, which was still frequently used even after colonists moved into the area and set up the local government at the location. Because of this there were many Indian raids on the tavern, and the local militia ended up fighting more than drinking a lot of the time. When the Revolutionary war started, Eaton Fort was erected near the base of the trail, and Yancey's Tavern continued to be a popular place for soldiers to drink. These soldiers are said to be a good portion of the ghosts that roam the tavern.

When travelers and locals were caught in Indian raids at the tavern they would run to the trap door in the living room and hide in the cellar together, waiting for the fighting to stop, strangers, families and neighbors huddled together in the community gathering place. That cellar served as a hiding place long into the Revolutionary war, as well. These people are also said to

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haunt the place, and perhaps some of them are still waiting in the cellar, listening to the bullets of two centuries ago to stop whizzing by.

Half of the tavern was converted to a post office in 1820, which was previously at the Exchange Place much further in town. The rest of the building continued serving as a tavern, and later a courthouse. Locals and travelers alike took solace in Yancey's now quite reputable tavern. The building continued to serve as a post office well into the Civil War, and the cellar again served as a hiding place for civilians caught in the fighting.

Over time additions were made to the building, walls were reinforced, and the original poplar logs were covered in siding. However, most of the original structure remains intact, which is part of the reason it's considered haunted. They say the walls have eyes, and those walls witnessed the birth of a nation, the great division of that nation, and perhaps more bloodshed than any other building in Tennessee.

After the Civil War, Samuel Sherman purchased the Inn from the Yancey family and renamed it Sherman's Inn. From there the building changed hands several times, though it is unclear why. One might speculate that the haunting may have something to do with it, as even at this point in time the building had a rich history and was haunted by countless souls. Sherman sold the inn to the Brown family after a relative married into the Browns, which was not long after he purchased the building. The Brown family later sold it to the Wexler family, who later sold it to Mary Spahr in the early 20th century.

Spahr was a mysterious woman, and from reading about her care or lack thereof for the building, she was likely depressed. She lived there with her nieces, and the building began to crumble around them, a shadow of its former self. After researching Spahr there is some information about her raising cattle at the Inn, but not much else. When she died in 1962, the building was unoccupied for over 40 years. Her nieces inherited the home, but seemed to want little to do with it. After the death of Spahr's nieces, an estate auction was held for the house. A man named Rann L. Vaulx purchased the house, and is slowly restoring it to its former glory.

The final piece in the haunting of Yancey Tavern is the East Lawn Cemetery, which was built in 1940. It is said that the ghosts in the tavern attract spirits from their graves, and so not only is the tavern haunted today, so is the cemetery and the curving roads of Memorial Boulevard and Chesnutt Ridge. Both roads are known for being dangerous, and perhaps the spirits of those killed in car crashes have joined the Indians, soldiers, civilians, and the inhabitants of East Lawn Cemetery.

Yancey Tavern is now a historic site, and seems to have a kind of magnetism for any ghosts in the area. The most interesting part about this building is that it's not the site of some great tragedy, it's a piece of history. It was a gathering place 240 years ago, and here in 2016 it is still a gathering place for the spirits of those long gone. If there is any better kind of haunting, it is yet to be discovered.