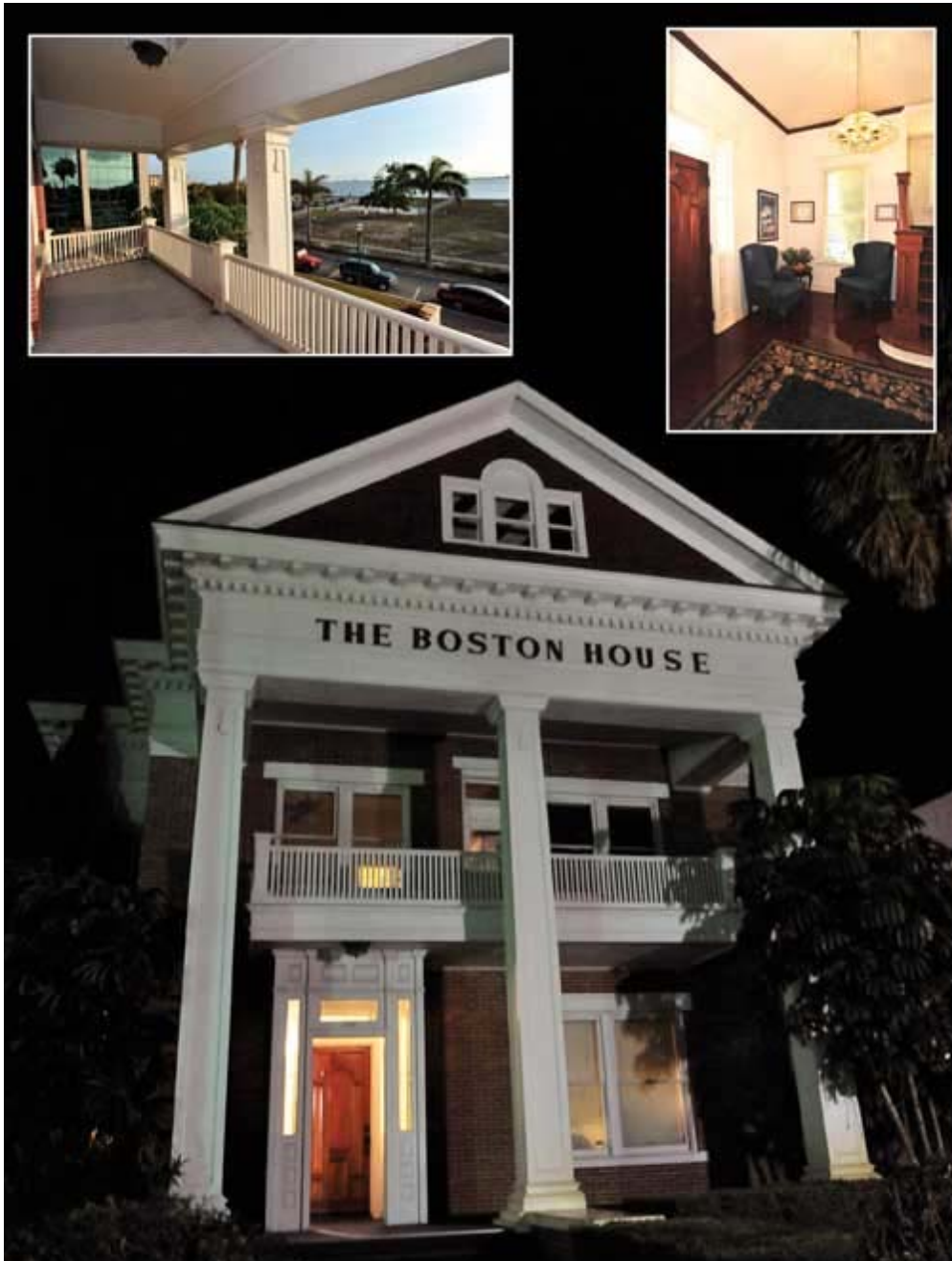


LIVING HISTORY



BOSTON HOUSE HOME TO HAUNTING TALES

BY CATHERINE ENNS GRIGAS

The Boston House doesn't look like the typical haunted house.

There is no spooky glow. It's not at the end of a winding country road. It hasn't been abandoned, and it's not in disrepair.

In fact, the three-story brick house is one of the most well-preserved buildings in Fort Pierce and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The city has grown up around it, and its commanding spot overlooking the Indian River is in the heart of downtown. The building's windows aren't cobwebbed or cracked, but are open and covered with typical office-style blinds. Now an attorney's office building, the house seems a more fitting place for practicing law than for holding séances.

But local lore has dubbed the Boston House as haunted, though not necessarily in an evil way. Those who say they've experienced the ghostly activity characterize it as more mischievous than menacing.

But tragic events have been associated with the 100-year-old house, and its past is mysterious enough to associate it with restless spirits.

Steve Ziskinder, the attorney who owns the Boston House, has worked in the building for more than 20 years and has

never witnessed anything unusual. "I have been there at all times of the day and night," he says. "But I have heard all the stories and I have heard them from some very reputable people."

Kendall J. Phillips, his former law partner and also an owner of the house for 25 years, has his own tales to tell about the house. He is convinced the place is haunted and says he even witnessed the apparition of a woman standing at a third-floor window.

RESEARCHERS

James and Tamara Dourney, a Fort Pierce couple who run the G.R.I.M. (Ghostly Research and Investigation into the Metaphysical) Society, are paranormal investigators who say the Boston House is high on their list of places they would like to examine with their cameras and sensors. They have never been inside the house to investigate, but they have done extensive research on the home's history.

"There are reports of paranormal activities there going back to the 1970s," says James Dourney. "There were apparently séances held there in the attic and there are stories of repairmen going to work on things in the building and having experiences there. There are stories of doors locking, and unlocking, things moving, and the scent of rose perfume." The two say they witnessed a blue light floating through a hallway as they observed the house from the street one evening.

More researchers, historians and investigators than ghostbusters, the Dourneys have used newspaper articles, property deeds, public records and archives to piece together a history of the house that debunks some myths but raises even more possibilities for a ghostly presence.

"The real stories of the house are even more fascinating," says Tamara. "It doesn't diminish that it didn't happen; we just don't have any historical records to prove it."

GHOST OF A GHOST

Most glaringly, in all her research, Tamara was never able to track down Aleaceon Perkins, who is supposedly the female specter who waits at the attic window for the return of a husband and son lost while fishing. "Perkins, to the best of our knowledge, never existed," she says.

Her presence could possibly predate the house itself, according to Phillips. Since the house was built on the highest point in Fort Pierce, it was the best vantage point to look out over the river, and it makes sense that someone looking for lost loved ones would wait there. Phillips says that in all his encounters, he has assumed that the spirit "described by one person who had an encounter with her as wearing Victorian dress" was Perkins.

FIRST OWNER

The builder and first owner of the house suffered his own tribulations. Born in Georgia, William Turbin Jones was an engineer for the Florida East Coast railroad who came to Fort Pierce in 1900 to operate the trains between Jacksonville and Key West. He was seriously injured by an explosion of dynamite carelessly placed on the tracks by workmen. With the \$6,000 he received as a settlement, he built his new home on a high ridge overlooking the Indian River. The home, which he called Cresthaven, was completed between 1907 and 1909.

With five bedrooms and 4,300 square feet, it was considered a palatial mansion and architectural marvel of its day. Jones was apparently a friend

of railroad magnate Henry Flagler and was able to bring in construction materials from around the country, including its distinctive red Georgia brick, by railroad. Its architecture is a mix of Georgian and neoclassical with a two-story portico lined with columns.

The floors were hewn of Dade County pine. Jones and his wife raised their five children there. He retired from the railroad to grow pineapples and sell real estate, and eventually became the third sheriff of St. Lucie County.

FAMILY TRAGEDIES

According to the Dourneys' research, the house's association with tragedy began on a night in May 1913. Jones' son, Fred, then 17, and his best friend, Raymond Saunders, decided to go for a moonlight motorcycle ride. On the back of Fred's motorcycle was his fiancée, Ada Daniels. Ada's sister, Nola, was on Raymond's motorcycle. The couples left Cresthaven and somehow ended up colliding with each other in a deadly accident. Nola died at the scene, and the other three were seriously injured. Fred and Ada never married.

Five years later, while Jones was serving his first year as sheriff, his youngest son, Clifford, about 9 years old, was playing in the parlor with his friend, William Fee. With his father's gun, Clifford accidentally shot Fee, who was also 9 years old. Fee died shortly after.

Many members of the Jones family met untimely deaths. One son died after a motorcycle accident. A daughter died of a heart attack, and Fred, of the ill-fated motorcycle ride, committed suicide in 1957.

THE BOSTON HOUSE

The most unlikely occupant of the home was its next resident, a retired schoolteacher and spinster from Massachusetts. During the Depression, Jones had fallen deeply into debt. He borrowed money from a friend, Irving C. Whitney, using the house as collateral. According to Dourney, Whitney either died or was incapacitated from a heart attack, and his sister, Rose, called in the note, giving the Jones family a week to get out of the house.

Rose moved in with her older sister, Isabelle. According to Rose's obituary, she died at the house in 1954 at the age of 86.

The house became known as the "Boston House" around the time of Rose Whitney's residence there. Boston Avenue, the tiny side street that runs parallel to the Indian River, might have been the reason for its name, but it is more likely that the street was named for the house. It may have been called the Boston House because Rose Whitney hailed from Massachusetts. Perhaps she didn't want her home to be known by the name given it by its previous owners, whom she had tossed out on the street.

Rose Whitney left assets totaling \$115,000, a small fortune at the time. Boston House was put up for auction after her death, but it didn't sell, and its zoning was changed from residential to commercial.

Local history has the McCarty family, who lived next door, purchasing the house but never living there. There is a gap between 1954 and 1975 when the occupants were unknown.

The Dourneys' research indicates that the house, then zoned commercial, was sold in 1975 to the engineering firm of Wood, Beard and

Associates, who sold it in turn to Leonard Cottem, an accountant, and his wife, Diane, in 1976. Rumors that Cottem held séances there could not be substantiated.

STRANGE EXPERIENCES

In 1983, Cottem sold the house to Kendall Phillips and his law partners, who planned to use it as offices for their firm. Phillips and his partners took the renovation on themselves, and that is when he noticed some odd things taking place.

“The seller, Leonard Cottem, had disclosed to us that he had witnessed instances of paranormal activity,” says Phillips. “We bought the house with our eyes wide open. He told us that the engineers in the firm didn’t like to work on the third floor after 5 p.m.”

As they were painting and renovating the house, Phillips noticed that paint and materials they would put away at night were missing in the morning. Then workers in the building would notice changes in temperature in the building, and hear noises whose source they couldn’t determine.

One of Phillips’ partners had an office on the second floor, accessible only by key.

“He came down one morning and said, ‘Did you go into my office?’” says Phillips. “I told him no. He had put a draft overlay on a table, and when he returned, it had been rolled up into a carrying tube.”

Another time, his young daughter watched a word processor type random letters on a monitor even though it was turned off. He dismissed that, but as he and his daughter were leaving the building, another worker came running out to tell him that the same thing had just happened to her.

SELF-TYPING KEYBOARDS

At one point, a legal assistant got the scare of her life when her keyboard elevated off the desk and an office plant bent over. Once, they heard the sound of books crashing to the floor in one of the upstairs rooms.

Phillips was working in the second-floor office and smelled a flowery perfume so strong it was overpowering. When he sought out the source, none of the other workers in the building were wearing perfume.

Phillips says most of the activity takes place on the second and third floors, especially the third, which was converted from an attic into five offices totaling nearly 1,000 square feet, and in particular, in a northeast corner office.

The “reactivity” so intrigued Phillips that he had two psychics and a number of witnesses come to the building one night. The psychics said that they felt the very strong presence of a woman. When they asked if she would show themselves to them, the presence refused.

Phillips and the rest of the group went outside the building and stood on the sidewalk, looking up at the attic windows in the gabled roof.

“It appears to be the silhouette of a woman standing there,” says Phillips. “We saw the shadow move between the middle window to the

south window. Seven of us saw it, and the eighth person couldn't see it.

LIGHTS ON

One morning, Phillips received a phone call from a man who drove past the house every night when he got off work at the nuclear power plant. He said, "You don't know me, but when I drove by tonight, every light in the building was on. I told him the lights were not left on, especially on the third floor, and when I arrived the following morning, no lights were on," says Phillips.

Perhaps the story that is most told is the one of the copy machine repairman who went to the third floor and saw an apparition that was dressed in Victorian clothes and vanished into a wall.

The present owner, Ziskinder, who has never experienced anything unusual in the building, says he has heard people say they could smell strong coffee being brewed, even though there was no coffee nearby.

He recounted the story of another lawyer who had papers neatly placed in 10 sets of documents. The lawyer returned to his office one morning to find that all the papers had been rearranged in random order, no two papers alike, a task that would have taken many hours.

A friend of the attorneys, who is affiliated with law enforcement and therefore doesn't want his name used, has been in the building four times with the sole purpose of collecting some evidence of a ghost. He says he has recorded the distinct laughter of a woman.

"I was there with another person and we were looking at a door that was closed and we thought had opened. The other investigator's hand was on it and it pulled shut. There were instances of hearing footsteps, and of people feeling suddenly ill. Some of it you can pass off as the psychology of it, but that laugh and the door shutting there is something odd going on in that house."

Because of stories like that, the Boston House has received recognition in a number of books and stories detailing ghosts on the Treasure Coast.

Phillips embraces his association with the Boston House and at one point even had a "Ghostbusters" T-shirt made for his law firm. He gets calls from news reporters around Halloween to tell his stories. But the thing he is most proud of is the work the firm put together to get the Boston House on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985, preserving the distinctive house for future generations.

"I had a long tenure there, and I look at the Boston House as being a magnificent piece of architecture that was part of my success," he says. "I want to make sure that the next generation knows what a treasure we have and to know the story of the house."

No doubt people will be looking up at the attic windows of the Boston House for many more moonlit nights to come, hoping to see its ghost.