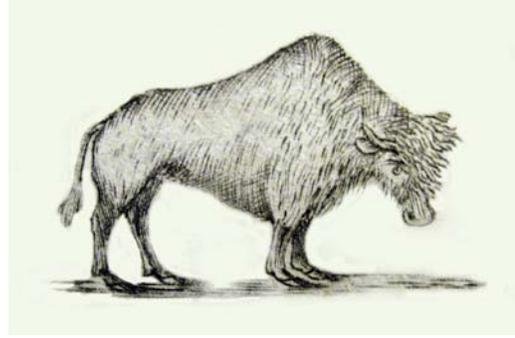


LHQRB



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The Loudun Possessions: Witchcraft Trials at The Jacob Burns Law Library

by

Mary Kate Hunter*

Harry Potter. *Sabrina, The Teenage Witch. Bewitched.* Are there really any “evil” witches anymore? Popular culture has turned once-feared hags and sorcerers into “cool” phenomena. Now it seems we ponder witchcraft mainly for entertainment, during Hallowe’en, or in an election year when a political candidate reveals a youthful dabbling in the satanic.¹ But four hundred years ago, witches were serious business.

The possessions began September 22, 1632, in the west-central French town of Loudun, in a climate of uncertainty. A serious concern which occupied the collective thoughts of many French communities at the time, including Loudun, was the Crown’s attempt to centralize its power by tearing down city walls. The royal order for demolition divided Loudun along the lines of those who wanted to keep the walls – generally, the Huguenots – and those who sided with the Crown and its desire for a strong central government – in large part, the Catholic population. Compounding the distress generated by this political wrestling was a return of the plague to Loudun in May, 1632, which claimed the lives of a significant segment of the Loudun population. These circumstances fueled apprehension about the future, and created an atmosphere of anxiety which set the scene for one of the most notorious witchcraft trials in history.

Urbain Grandier arrived in Loudun in 1617, having been granted two lucrative benefices by the Jesuits: the office of parish priest of Saint-Pierre-du-Marché, and appointment as a canon at the Church of Sainte-Croix. At age twenty-seven, the elegant Grandier was handsome and notably eloquent, with an easy manner, rapier wit, and glamour to spare. Although he had made enemies – he was strongly in favor of retaining the Loudun city walls, an anti-Richelieu, anti-royalist stance

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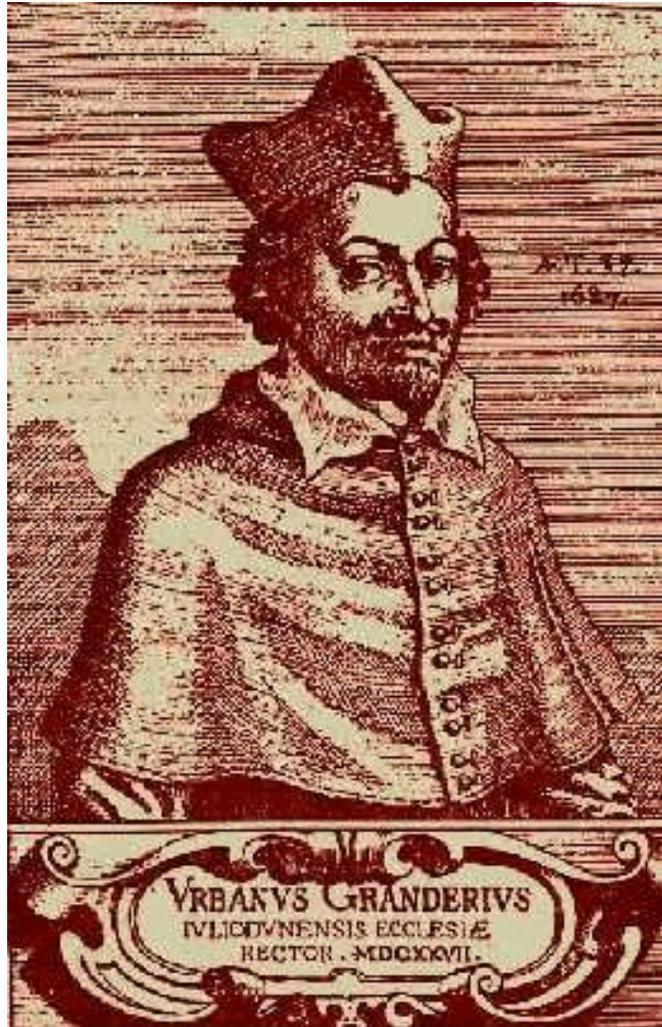
¹ See Brian Stelter, “Political Cauldron Stirred by Old Video of Candidate.” *The New York Times* [updated 19 September 2010; cited 30 September 2010]. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/20/us/politics/20odonnell.html?_r=1&scp=9&sq=christine%20o&st=cse.

– Grandier also had earned the support of many influential men early in his career. For twelve years, he was a grand success.

Grandier's favored status did not last. Part of his Hollywoodesque persona was an apparent predilection for philandering. A pivotal event contributing to Grandier's downfall was the "seduction of Philippe," the daughter of the prominent Louis Trincant, a king's prosecutor in Loudun and one of Grandier's staunchest friends and supporters. Although it cannot be proven, it is likely that Philippe was impregnated by Grandier. After Philippe became pregnant, Grandier's life began to unravel.²

The first trial in which Grandier was a party (1629) involved Jacques de Thibault, a probable relative of Philippe, who beat Grandier with a cane outside the Church of Sainte-Croix, where Grandier was headed to attend a service.³ The caning was in response to Grandier's angry demand that Thibault explain himself regarding his broadcast of tales of Grandier's lechery. Grandier's case against Thibault was heard before the Parlement of Paris, and plaintiff Grandier seemed well-positioned to prevail. However, after regaling the court with tales of Grandier's indecent behavior with women, defendant Thibault dramatically produced an order for Grandier's arrest for immorality signed by Grandier's bishop. He read it to the judges, who then ordered the delivery of Grandier to his bishop to be tried in the ecclesiastical court. As a result of the ecclesiastical court's decision, Grandier was barred from performing the public functions of a priest for five years in the Diocese of Poitiers, and forever in Loudun.

In the wake of this devastating decision, Grandier and his allies worked diligently to restore his livelihood and reputation. His case later was presented at the Parlement of Paris, and was referred to the court at Poitiers (with the possibility of appeal to the Parlement of Paris). Many of the witnesses against Grandier retracted their statements, perhaps because they felt uncomfortable about lying before a royal court.⁴ The case against Grandier was set aside, leaving open

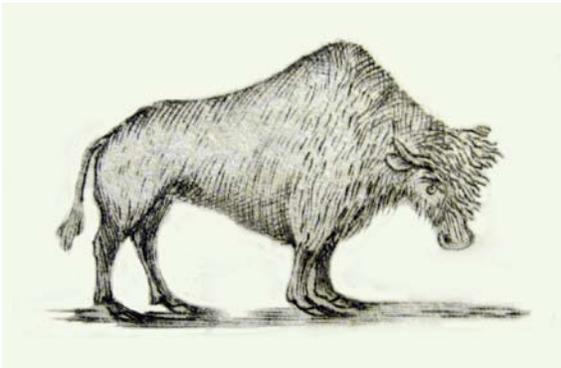


Urbain Grandier

² It is no wonder, if Grandier's seduction of Philippe were a fact, that the coterie of Loudun men who aligned themselves as bitter foes against Grandier bore close ties of family or friendship to Philippe and her father Louis Trincant, as Robert Rapley shows in *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 25-29.

³ *Ibid.*, 223, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.



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the possibility that the court could review the matter in the future if new evidence were presented. Momentarily, at least, Grandier had succeeded in staving off ruination or possible execution – but finally, possessions would lead to his undoing.

A relatively new religious order, the Ursuline Sisters, had opened its first convent in Loudun in 1626. By 1632, the young Jeanne des Anges as prioress headed a convent of seventeen similarly youthful nuns whose average age was twenty-five.⁵ She has been described as “strong willed, manipulative, highly strung, and a brilliant actor in the parts she designed for herself. When she set out to assume a particular character, whether one of great charity, great learning, great mysticism, or great possession, others would follow.”⁶ It is not difficult to imagine how Prioress Jeanne’s powerful position in the convent combined with her charismatic role-playing might have persuaded the other nuns of their own possession.

The possessions commenced shortly after the plague struck in 1632. They began when a junior nun, Sister Marthe, had a vision of Father Moussaut, the nun’s recently deceased confessor. The visions of Father Moussaut soon transformed into erotic visions of Urbain Grandier, whom the nuns never had met. Lustful dreams of Grandier spread among the nuns, including Jeanne des Anges, who became the centerpiece of the later public exorcisms; she was considered the most thoroughly possessed. As the possessions progressed, many began to view them as the revelation of God’s will, showing the Protestants that God was indeed with the Catholic Church. Successful exorcisms by the priests would demonstrate the Church’s power to overcome the Devil and bolster Catholicism, and perhaps even encourage conversions. On the other hand, pronouncing the possessions a hoax would be tantamount to a declaration that the nuns from a convent of well-brought-up young women from privileged backgrounds were either ill-meaning pranksters, or insane.

The exorcisms were impressive, and the lewd and bizarre behavior of the young nuns during the exorcisms attracted an ever-increasing audience. The nuns shouted expletives, barked, exposed themselves, spoke a garbled form of Latin (which they did not know), and contorted their bodies into obscene positions.

Finally, the Crown and Cardinal Richelieu intervened. Their decision to bring the royal presence to bear may have been sparked by a desire to maintain stable relations between the Huguenots and the Catholics in Loudun, or perhaps they had concluded that a priest’s seduction of a parishioner was conduct too egregious to ignore, and so felt compelled to assure Grandier’s punishment.⁷ On a personal level, Richelieu had suffered a humiliating public slight by Grandier some years before his ascent to power as the King’s first minister.⁸ And politically, Grandier had guaranteed Richelieu’s abiding animosity when he vociferously opposed the royal order to demolish Loudun’s city walls.

Whatever the reasons for taking an interest in the affair, the Crown’s intervention sealed Grandier’s fate. A group of local magistrates was assembled by the King’s commissioner, the *intendant* Laubardemont, to preside as judges. In all, seventy-two witnesses appeared at the trial. Anti-Grandier evidence and testimony included assertions that Grandier had invited someone to a sabbath, that he had made a pact with the devil, and that his body bore insensitive “devil’s marks.”

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷ Richard Golden, ed. *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, c. 2006), s.v. “Loudun Nuns,” 671.

⁸ Rapley, *Case of Witchcraft*, 16.

The trial record was recorded in about five thousand legal-sized sheets, and lasted eighteen days.⁹ Grandier appeared before the judges from August 15 through 17. He was found guilty of sorcery, placing evil spells, and possession of the Ursulines, as well as certain nonreligious women. On August 18, 1634, Grandier was tortured and burned at the stake.

The possessions were not extinguished with Grandier's gruesome death; they continued, and the last exorcism was conducted in 1638. At the trial, the nuns were determined, by both church and state, to have been possessed. Only later did people believe that the nuns had been chosen to endure the possessions for the glory of the church.¹⁰ The prioress Jeanne des Anges emerged from her possessions with great notoriety, and her celebrity only continued to grow after Grandier's death. She became renowned for the healing power of her chemise and the miraculous markings which appeared on her hand bearing the names of Jesus, Joseph, Mary, and Saint François de Sales. The King and Queen, as well as Richelieu, insisted upon meeting her when she traveled to Paris, where she also visited with Parisian nobles. Jeanne des Anges was considered saintly by many; after her death, her head was preserved in a reliquary, and venerated. The Ursuline convent at Loudun was recognized widely as a holy place.¹¹

Witchcraft at The Jacob Burns Law Library

The Jacob Burns Law Library's Special Collections at The George Washington University Law School holds a number of witchcraft-related titles in its collections of trials and criminal law. In addition to the rare materials, the Law Library collects not only translations of the original texts where available, but scholarly writings about the original works. Of the rare witchcraft titles, the most important is the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, which marks a turning point in witchcraft writing. The *Malleus* served as a manual which explained in detail how to identify, prosecute, and kill witches. It served as a guide for later witch trials, and the third part of the text offers advice on legal procedures. The Law Library owns a number of early printings of the *Malleus*, including three incunable printings.¹²

The Law Library holds many excellent examples of the story of Urbain Grandier produced in the years following the Loudun possessions. These books illustrate the extent to which the possessions took form, and also allowed contemporaries to penetrate the workings of a seventeenth-century trial. The materials relating to Grandier and the possession of the nuns proliferated dramatically in the wake of his execution in August, 1634, and the texts themselves show the "splits in mentality that diversify the public" and highlight the "textual modifications due to changes of milieu, interests, or periods."¹³

The Law Library holds several "editions" of *Histoire des Diables de Loudun*.¹⁴ This work first was published in 1693, and its title page features a wolf investigating a beehive in a tree. In 1716, its

⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 208, 207.

¹² One of the incunable *Malleus Maleficarum* copies owned by the Law Library (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1494) is accessible online through the LLMC-Digital database (Law Library Microform Consortium).

¹³ Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 184.

¹⁴ Aubin, *Histoire des Diables de Loudun, ou, De la Possession des Religieuses Ursulines* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1693).

title appears as *Cruels Effets de la Vengeance du Cardinal de Richelieu*. The title change indicates a willingness to recognize the political overtones of Grandier's trial. Grandier's encounters with the local authorities and the problems arising from his conduct created a stir in religious and secular circles that branded him not only as dangerous in Loudun, but as a threat to royal values and initiatives. The author, Nicolas Aubin, was a Huguenot minister who had lived in Loudun, and wrote this book about fifty years after Grandier's execution.¹⁵ Aubin describes the seduction of Philippe, which had been simply a rumor. As a Huguenot, Aubin told the story of the possessions from an anti-Catholic perspective. Although later Catholic authors disagreed with Aubin's version of the possessions, they did not call into question his account of the seduction of Philippe. This seemingly pointed omission makes it appear likely that the story of Philippe's seduction was true.

A 1735 title attributed to Aubin is *Histoire d'Urbain Grandier*.¹⁶ He calls into question the guilt of Grandier with the first sentence of his work: "s'il est vrai qu'Urbain Grandier ait été innocent du crime de Magie..."¹⁷ Aubin still believed that possessions were real and therefore, exorcisms were necessary.

La Menardaye's *Examen, et Discussion Critique de l'Histoire des Diables de Loudun* presents the Catholic position on the possession and is a response to Aubin's works.¹⁸ La Menardaye presented his book in five parts. The first part or "premier entretien," is styled as a dialogue between an uncle and his nephew. La Menardaye supported the Catholic view by stating that the evidence presented at trial was valid; the nuns' erratic behavior was due to their possession; Richelieu was not motivated by personal vengeance; and the individuals involved in the trial, including the nuns, exorcists, judges, and Laubardemont, were beyond reproach.¹⁹

Histoire Abrégée de la Possession des Ursulines de Loudun, et des Peines du Père Surin was published in 1828.²⁰ Father Surin wrote this piece after leaving Loudun as Jeanne's exorcist in the late 1640s. Like many others of his time, Surin believed in possessions and demons, and as Jeanne's long-term exorcist, he sincerely believed that she was possessed.²¹ The first half of the text focuses on Loudun and his experiences as Jeanne's exorcist; in the second half, Surin describes his own possession.

Alphonse Bleau's *Précis d'Histoire sur la Ville et les Possédées de Loudun* (1877) departs from earlier publications on the possession of the nuns of Loudun.²² Bleau argued that sickness and possession both were present in the nuns. Also, he stated that Urbain Grandier died the victim

¹⁵ Rapley, *Case of Witchcraft*, 25.

¹⁶ Aubin, *Histoire d'Urbain Grandier* (Amsterdam: Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1735).

¹⁷ "If it is true that Urbain Grandier is innocent of the crime of sorcery..." *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ M. de La Menardaye, *Examen, et Discussion Critique de l'Histoire des Diables de Loudun* (Paris: Chez Debure l'Ainé..., 1747).

¹⁹ Rapley, *Case of Witchcraft*, 215.

²⁰ Jean-Joseph Surin. *Histoire Abrégée de la Possession des Ursulines de Loudun, et des Peines du Père Surin* (A Paris: Bureau de l'Association Catholique du Sacré-Coeur, 1828).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

²² Alphonse Bleau, *Précis d'Histoire sur la Ville et les Possédées de Loudun* (Poitiers: H. Oudin Frères, 1877).

of a “judicial assassination.”²³ This book bears an especially droll title page featuring a crafty-looking little devil wrapped around the “P” in “Possédées.”

The Law Library also holds a copy of Jeanne des Anges’ autobiography, *Soeur Jeanne des Anges, Supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun*, which she wrote around 1644.²⁴ Grandier is barely mentioned; Jeanne mainly focuses on her possession and how she overcame it. The true target of her book appears to be the Huguenots rather than the Devil or Grandier.²⁵ At the close of this book, two of Jeanne’s letters are reproduced in fold-out format. They are the “Lettre du Démon Asmodée – Écrite de la main de Soeur Jeanne des Anges” and “Lettre de Soeur Jeanne des Anges à Laubardemont.” This work is part of a larger set of works from the publisher entitled the *Bibliothèque Diabolique*, which includes another work about a possession of a nun entitled *La Possession de Jeanne Fery*.

The notoriety and lessons of the case of Urbain Grandier have lived on through books, a play, a movie, and even an opera.²⁶ And at The Jacob Burns Law Library, they thrive through rare book collection development, research in Special Collections, and writings such as this article. Witch hunts in their many forms have yet to be eradicated from modern societies worldwide. But perhaps the most entertaining form of witch mania we encounter today accompanies the release of the next Harry Potter film.

²³ Rapley, *Case of Witchcraft*, 217.

²⁴ *Sister Jeanne des Anges, Soeur Jeanne des Anges, Supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun* (Paris: Aux Bureau du Progrès Medical, 1886).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁶ The most popular nonfiction book rendition is Aldous Huxley’s *The Devils of Loudun* (1952); its most recent appearance is Harper Perennial Modern Classics’ new edition, 2009. John Whiting’s 1960 play, *The Devils*, was based on Huxley’s work. In turn, Ken Russell’s *The Devils* (1971), in which Vanessa Redgrave appears as Jeanne des Anges and Oliver Reed as Urbain Grandier, was based on both Huxley’s and Whiting’s works. The Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki’s opera (based on Whiting’s dramatization of Huxley), *Die Teufel von Loudun* [*The Devils of Loudun*], premiered June 20, 1969, in Hamburg. Scholarly treatment of the subject includes two works used in preparation of this article: Robert Rapley’s *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), and Michel de Certeau’s *The Possession at Loudun*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

From the Editor

Boo!

Welcome to our special Hallowe'en edition of *LH&RB*. This is the first such issue for this publication; hopefully it will not be the last!

If you are looking for our usual non-spooky articles, book and program reviews, membership and exhibit news and SIS information, that will be included in our Fall/Winter issue which will, as usual, be available in early December. **The deadline for that issue is November 22nd**. In the meantime, please enjoy this issue of *LH&RB*, and best wishes for a happy Hallowe'en!

Any complaints regarding the content of this issue should be directed to the editor or to his ghost writer!

Mark Podvia



Ghostly Tales of Law and Justice: Courthouse Hauntings*

by

Kurt Metzmeier, with Nancy Vinsel and Roberto Campos *

Nothing is more irresistible than a good ghost story. It is hard to find a historic building or residence without at least one spectral gray lady on the stairway or a mysterious poltergeist that opens and closes doors in the dead of the night. In my home town of Louisville, Kentucky, a local author has written three books alone on the ghosts who haunt our sprawling Victorian district.¹ While Georgian mansions and turreted Queen Anne's houses get most of the attention, public buildings associated with the law—courthouses and jails—hold their own in the ghostly real estate market. As places where lawyers re-enact human tragedies during the daylight hours, it is perhaps not unusual that the folk imagination carries that drama into the twilight hours.

This paper is a modest first effort at collecting and characterizing some of the representative specimens of the genre. Drawn from about thirty collections of ghost stories from my personal library, the stories may be somewhat biased toward the South and Appalachian region (a prime area ghost-rich for Scotch-Irish folklore) but they show most of the motifs that would be found in a more extensive study. With research assistants Nancy Vinsel and Roberto Campos, I have searched these collections for any ghost story that reflected on the law or legal processes. The theme of "justice" is widespread in ghost-lore but too broad as many such stories involve extra-legal retribution. When that justice involved the law, it would be included in our survey. For example, the story of the ghost who returns to reveal his or her murderer is very common.² If that revelation led to a trial or legal punishment, that would meet our criteria. If it led instead to a suicide or some kind of magical retribution, it would not. Courthouse and jail-house hauntings were the most common theme, and are thus the subject of this paper. The other themes will be developed in a future article in this publication.

The ghost story could be defined as any folktale or popular account that involves a manifestation of the dead, usually in disembodied form, to the living. Such stories serve many functions in a culture. They may provide cautionary tales, explain natural phenomena, or reinforce traditional viewpoints. The telling of these tales traditionally has provided a means for knitting together bonds across generations and, more recently, ghost stories often are used to help engender interest and

* © 2010

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¹ Domine, *Ghosts of Old Louisville*, 2005; *Haunts of Old Louisville*, 2009; *Phantoms of Old Louisville*, 2006. See Bibliography for full citations.

² Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.

respect for historic buildings and districts.³ However, among the more serious functions of such tales is as a means of transmitting cultural norms and showing that these norms will be punished—if not in this world, then in another spectral sphere. Indeed, it is surprising that we don't see more ghost stories that explicitly reference legal procedures, which are, after all, the earthly—and frailly human—mechanism for enforcing societal norms. Perhaps it is because the procedures of courts don't easily translate into the mythic idiom of the folk-lore. Or maybe it is that the Scots-Irish wellspring of American ghost-lore was itself a legal frontier.

Nonetheless, many ghost tales do involve legal themes. These tales can be placed into two broad categories: (1) stories where the undead return to deal with unfinished legal business and (2) tales where the places associated with the legal processes—courthouses, jails, prisons and even law schools—are haunted because of known or unspecified acts that occurred there.

While this survey is mainly concerned with the latter category, I'd like to describe a few stories of unfinished business of ghostly parties as exemplars of this type of ghost tale. In his still-influential *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Stith Thompson divided ghost stories into two categories, “malevolent return from the dead” (E200-E299 in Thompson's number scheme) and “friendly return from the dead” (E300-E399). However, the same themes come up whether or not the ghost is angry or friendly (and often the mood of the spirit may be ambivalent), so there is some overlap. In a common “angry” ghost motif, a victim returns to avenge his or her death (E231), either revealing the name of the murderer (E231.1, E231.2), or by causing him to confess (E234.5). In one Georgia tale, a ghost appears and reveals a man as his murderer. The man is arrested and tried, but his lawyer convinces the jury that “ghost evidence” cannot be accepted in a court of law.⁴ In the story of Jim Shuck Peeler, conveyed in ghost story and folk-song, the murdered Kentuckian taps out the name of the man who killed him.⁵

Another class of story involves a ghost who returns to see that his will is respected (E236)—the proverbial “dead hand control” of the testator made literal. In one case cited by Thompson, a presumably “angry” ghost appears and foils a crooked lawyer who is forging a will for the decedent.⁶ In another story from Georgia, a Savannah lawyer who is representing a family in a probate matter is visited one night by “Mrs. Jane,” the ghost whose estate he hopes to settle the next day. The grey lady looks sadly upon him at his desk, with papers from the file all around him and disappears, apparently satisfied that “her” attorney is hard at work.⁷ The lawyer assumed her presence was benign, and thus she might be classed among the friendly ghosts that Thompson calls “the grateful dead” (E341), although no guitar solos were reported.⁸

Courthouse Hauntings

By far the most common law-related ghost story involves the hauntings of courthouses, with most of these stories falling under general motif that Thompson calls “ghost haunts place of great accident or misfortune” (E275 or E334). However, many of these haunting stories also touch on

³ No major historic district in America is without a popular ghost-tour company, and they are usually promoted by tourism authorities, area hotels and often local history societies.

⁴ Music, *The Telltale Lilac Bush*, p. 86.

⁵ Montell, *Ghosts along the Cumberland*, p. 139.

⁶ Thompson, *Motif-Index*, notes to E236.

⁷ DeBolt, *Savannah Spectres*, pp. 160-62.

⁸ Thompson, *Motif-Index*, notes to E241.

other themes, including the above mentioned “ghost returns to reveal murder” (E231) and the “ghost re-enacts scene from his own lifetime” (E337) motifs.

Often these stories involve a courthouse that is generally believed to be haunted, but where there may be more than one ghost doing the haunting. A good example is the haunting of the Decatur County Courthouse in Greensburg, Indiana. Depending on accounts, the specter is either a janitor who was found at the bottom of the steps with a broken neck, or, in a common story in courthouse haunting, a man acquitted of murder who was lynched by an angry mob at a tree in front of the courthouse.⁹ A similar haunting involves the Lander County Courthouse in Austin, Nevada. There the ghost is either a Rufus B. Anderson, a man hanged there who it took three times to kill, or else Richard Jennings, an alleged murderer lynched on the courthouse balcony.¹⁰ Also from Nevada, the former Genoa courthouse and jail complex (now a museum) is thought to be haunted by the ghosts of both an elderly man, perhaps a former inhabitant of the jail, and a laughing child.¹¹

The lynched man motif is common in these stories. In addition to the above-mentioned stories from Greensburg, Indiana, and Austin, Nevada, the Pickens County Courthouse in Carrollton, Alabama, is also said to be haunted by a lynched man. The building has an eerie image on the window of the garret that is thought to be that of Henry Wells, an African American man who was lynched for setting a fire in the building. He loudly proclaimed his innocence as he was hung and cursed his accusers—a curse that is presumed to be fixed upon the courthouse.¹²

However, legally hanged men also haunt courthouses. In Ely, Nevada, the courthouse is thought to be haunted by the ghost of Hank Parish, a disreputable gunman who was tried in short order for the last of his many rumored killings.¹³ The Navajo County Courthouse in Arizona is similarly haunted an executed murderer.¹⁴ A more interesting story is that of Joseph Rover, who is thought to haunt the Washoe County Courthouse in Reno, Nevada. Rover was hanged in 1878 outside the building for a murder he denied committing. A celebrated spiritualist, Eilley Bowers, spoke to Rover in a séance performed sometime after the execution, and he again proclaimed his innocence. Although Bowers was ridiculed she claimed some vindication in 1895 when Rover’s business partner made a death bed confession admitting his guilt in the murder and exonerating Rover.¹⁵

Former courthouse employees are often so reliable that they are thought to refuse to retire—even when they happen to be dead. The ghostly-janitor in Greensburg, Indiana, has a counterpart at the Yuma County Courthouse in Arizona in Adolph Teichman, a former bailiff and elderly caretaker who lived and died at the courthouse. Employees report seeing his shadowy phantom, bent with age, shuffling down the corridors. Another member of the union of spectral government employees is Dr. Willis Butler, the long-serving coroner of Caddo Parish, Louisiana, who died at 103 in Shreveport. Dr. Butler’s kindly figure is seen in various offices in the parish courthouse and its

⁹ Willis, *More Haunted Hoosier Trails*, pp. 150-51.

¹⁰ Oberding, *Haunted Nevada*, p. 102-03.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.36.

¹² Windham, *13 Alabama Ghosts*, pp. 63-69.

¹³ Oberding, *Haunted Nevada*, p. 104.

¹⁴ Garcez, *Arizona Ghost Stories*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁵ Oberding, *Haunted Nevada*, pp. 70-71, 73-77.

annexes.¹⁶ Occasionally, a courthouse is believed haunted but there is no specific suspected ghost; in these cases speculation often centers on an unknown former employee. Such is the case at the Reeves County Courthouse in Pecos, Texas. Several employees have heard ghostly footsteps on several occurrences and attribute it to someone who regularly walked the same halls.¹⁷

Imprisoned Phantoms

Another closely related class of haunting story involves the gloomy building where the legal-process often ends: the jail or the prison. These places resonate as places of “great misfortune” and hardship,¹⁸ especially when they are also places of execution.¹⁹ Prison architecture also may play a part as these grim buildings often resemble the castles of Europe that have long inhabited the Gothic imagination.²⁰ In some of the stories from the American West, prisons may attract ghostlore for another reason; they, along with courthouses, are often the oldest buildings to survive the boom-bust-rebuild history of the area.

A regular characteristic of most ghost stories about jails and prisoners is that the ghosts are rarely identified with a particular individual and often are thought to involve multiple unfortunates. Typical is the story of the Old City Jail in Louisville, Kentucky. The ominous building now houses a law library and other city offices. Security guards and others report odd noises, eerie sounds and phantom footsteps, but blame these occurrences vaguely on “former prisoners.”²¹ Similarly in Brandenburg, Kentucky, the employees at the Jailhouse Pizza restaurant housed in the old city jail believe that the building is haunted by ghostly prisoners who touch customers on the back of the neck, whisper names and set off alarms.²² Ghost hunters in the Caddo Parish prison farm property outside Shreveport also report vague sightings of ghostly former inhabitants, although skeptics point out the striped-uniforms reported to be worn by these shades have never been used in Louisiana.²³

The old State Prison in Milledgeville, Georgia, has long attracted ghost stories, but like those discussed above, they are of the vaguest kind. Even the auditorium at Georgia College, built on the site of the burned antebellum prison, is said to be haunted.²⁴ The replacement prison, built in 1924, is also thought to be haunted. The prison was home to many celebrated tenants, including Leo Frank, a Jewish factory owner who was later lynched for the murder of a young girl, but there are no stories of specifically named ghosts. The crumbling building does have one spooky occurrence: a mural painted along a wall is completely deteriorated except for a pristine section

¹⁶ Joiner, *Historic Haunts of Shreveport*, pp. 54-60.

¹⁷ Williams, *Best Tales of Texas Ghosts*, pp. 364-66.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Motif-Index*, E275, E334.

¹⁹ See, especially Thompson, *Motif-Index*, E274, “ghost haunts gallows.”

²⁰ See, *ibid*, E338.1, “non-malevolent ghost haunts house or castle.”

²¹ Parker, *Haunted Louisville*, 82-87.

²² Parker, *Haunted Louisville 2*, 132-37.

²³ Joiner, *Historic Haunts of Shreveport*, pp. 93-101.

²⁴ Duffey, *Banshees, Bugles, and Belles*, pp. 29-31.

depicting the crucifixion of Jesus (an odd theme for a state penal institution that administered executions and housed the state's first electric chair).²⁵

We did find one prison story with a named ghost. The Yuma Territorial Prison is now a state historical park, but over 3,000 prisoners spent time there between 1876 and 1909 when it was an active prison. People in the local town have reported seeing oil lanterns moving through the unoccupied former prison at night. Park rangers willingly acknowledge the presence of a playful ghost who pushes coins out of the cash register who they named "Johnny." Others report hearing voices and seeing a dimly visible man in prisoners garb in Cell 14. Investigators have discovered that a John Ryan was imprisoned at the Yuma prison in 1900 for "crimes against nature," which at the time included rape and other sex crimes. Ryan had hanged himself with his blankets while held in solitary confinement—in Cell 14.²⁶

Law School Spooks

Our research turned up one type of ghost story that perhaps deserves its own motif, "ghost haunts law school,"²⁷ although many law students would likely argue that it fits well in the existing category for "places of misfortune." While at the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law we have been disappointed that the late justice has been content to sleep in his crypt in the school building's foundation, the law students of Mercer have a number of ghost stories. Most involve the Woodruff House, a Greek-Revival mansion built in 1836 for a Macon, Georgia, banker, and later donated to Mercer University. It is located adjacent to the current law school, but was once used for law classes and is still used for formal events. In addition to a poltergeist that sets off alarms, a lady in a long black dress is often seen in the building.²⁸ Another local building is connected to the school through its association with a law student who died in 1873 from meningitis that he contracted while studying at the Mercer Law School. The ghost of the boy's father is seen wandering throughout the house, still anxious over the fate of his son.²⁹

While only one school has a ghost story represented in the thirty odd collections surveyed, I know informally of stories of other law school hauntings. Reportedly former dean William Harrison Hitchler haunts Trickett Hall at the Penn State Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle, pacing the halls and occasionally appearing in his old office.³⁰ Moreover, the University of Kentucky's first law dean, William Lafferty, is said to haunt the anthropology department building that first housed the law school. This topic is definitely one ripe for further research.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 37.

²⁶ Garcez, *Arizona Ghost Stories*, 166-75.

²⁷ I've had several tales of law school ghosts described to me over the years, but have found only the few discussed here in print collections. The collections do document many stories associated with undergraduate institutions (see, for example, McCormick & Wyatt, *Ghosts of the Bluegrass*, pp. 131-50); perhaps most law students are too busy to notice the ghost hovering by the *Decennial Digests*.

²⁸ Duffey, *Banshees, Bugles, and Belles*, pp. 72-76.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁰ From conversations with Mark Podvia, who has conducted ghost tours in Carlisle to benefit the Law School's Public Interest Law Fund. See also the brief mention "South Central PA Ghosts," <<http://www.squidoo.com/haunted-southcentral-pa>>, last accessed October 22, 2010.

There are likely many more law-related ghost stories out there, some in printed collections that I did not consult, and many that have evaded capture between two books covers. After all, ghosts and lawyers have much in common, so it is not surprising that they occasionally meet professionally. They both are often found at scenes of misfortune and spend their most visible hours re-enacting traumas before audiences of the unwilling. When deaths occur, they are there to worry over the intentions of the departed and to impress the wishes of the dead upon the living. And, they both haunt courthouses, jails, and occasionally law schools. The only difference is that ghosts don't huddle in the cold outside of them taking a smoke-break.

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Haunted Justice: The Case of State v. Shue

by

Mark W. Podvia*

Greenbrier Ghost

Interred in nearby cemetery is Zona Heaster Shue. Her death in 1897 was presumed natural until her spirit appeared to her mother to describe how she was killed by her husband Edward. Autopsy on the exhumed body verified the apparition's account. Edward, found guilty of murder, was sentenced to the state prison. Only know case in which testimony from ghost helped convict a murderer.¹

Many ghost stories tell of the return of the restless spirit of a murder victim to avenge his or her death. When Scottish Highlander Duncan Campbell of Inverawe provided refuge for the murderer of his cousin Donald, the dead man's specter appeared to him with this warning: "Farewell, Inverawe! Farewell, till we meet at Ticonderoga!" The cousin's ghost later appeared to the Scottish Laird at Fort Ticonderoga, where Duncan Campbell was killed during a failed assault.² Even the spirits of animals have reportedly returned from the dead seeking revenge; the hunting dogs of a Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, ironmaster, killed by their owner in a fit of rage, hounded³ him until his death.⁴

However, there is only one American court case where the testimony of a ghost was used to convict a man of the crime of murder in a criminal prosecution. That is the West Virginia case of *State v. Shue*, more commonly known as the "Greenbrier Ghost" case.

Elva Zona Heaster and blacksmith Erasmus Shue, known as Edward, had married in November 1896. Zona's mother, Mary J. Heaster, did not approve of the marriage, perhaps because of stories that Edward's previous wife had died under "mysterious circumstances."⁵ Her concerns regarding her new son-in-law were soon validated when her daughter began sporting bruises.

On January 23, 1897, a 12-year-old boy who had been sent to the Shue house by Edward Shue

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¹ Text of a West Virginia Historical Marker located in Greenbrier County near Sam Black Church.

² THE MAHICAN CHANNEL...FORTS, TALES, AND LEGENDS, <http://www.mohicanpress.com/mo08011.html> (last visited Oct. 29, 2010).

³ Pun intended.

⁴ DENNIS WILLIAM HAUCK, HAUNTED PLACES: THE NATIONAL DIRECTORY 358 (2002).

⁵ PATTY A. WILSON, HAUNTED WEST VIRGINIA: GHOSTS AND STRANGE PHENOMENA OF THE MOUNTAIN STATE 9 (2007)

to do some work found Zona Shue lying on the floor.⁶ He summoned the woman's husband and a doctor. When the local physician, Dr. Knapp, arrived at the house, he found an unconsolable Edward Shue holding his wife's head and neck, refusing to allow the doctor to closely examine her. The doctor, unable to locate a pulse, declared that the young woman had died of heart failure.

During the funeral Edward Shue refused to leave his wife's body. Some at the funeral thought it odd that he had wrapped a scarf around the neck of the dead woman as she had never worn scarves in life.

Following the funeral Mrs. Heaster washed the sheets that Shue had used to cover Zona's body. The sheets caused the water to turn pink, then the pink suddenly cleared. Mrs. Heaster saw this as a sign from her daughter that she had not died a natural death. She began to pray that her daughter might reveal to her how she died.

Zona's spirit apparently responded to her mother's prayers. Four weeks after the funeral Zona appeared to her mother, telling her that her husband had attacked her--claiming that she had not cooked meat for his dinner--and that he had broken her neck. To prove this, the ghost turned her head completely around. Zona's ghost appeared to her mother on four separate occasions.

Mrs. Heaster told her story to the county prosecutor, John Alfred Preston. He may not have believed her story, but it did confirm his suspicions regarding the young woman's death. After reinterviewing several people, including Dr. Knapp, it was ordered that Zona's body be exhumed and an autopsy conducted. The autopsy, performed on February 22, 1897, revealed that Zona Heaster Shue's neck had been broken and her windpipe crushed. Fingermarks were found on her throat. Shue was arrested for his wife's murder.

The newspaper accounts issued at the time of Shue's arrest made no mention of the appearance of Zona Heaster Shue's ghost, but did state that "rumors in the community caused the authorities to suspect that she did not die a natural death, and her husband was suspected of the crime."⁷ This was probably because the prosecutor did not want the ghost stories made public, assuming that this would make his prime witness appear irrational.

At Edward Shue's trial, which began on June 30, 1897, the prosecutor did not raise the issue of the haunting. However Shue's lawyer questioned Mrs. Heaster in great detail regarding the appearance of her daughter's ghost, including the following exchange:

Q. "And this was not a dream founded upon your distressed condition of mind?"

A. "No sir. It was not a dream. I was wide awake as I ever was."

Q. "Then if not a dream, or dreams, what do you call it?"

A. "I prayed to the Lord that she might come back and tell me what happened. And I prayed that she might come herself and tell on him."

Q. "Do you think you actually saw your daughter in flesh and blood?"

⁶ DENNIS DEITZ, *THE GREENBRIER GHOST AND OTHER STRANGE STORIES* 12 (4th Ed. 1990)

⁷ *Charged With Murder: The Corpse of a Wife Exumed (sic) at Hinton and the Neck Found Broken*, WHEELING REGISTER, March 1, 1897, at 2.

A. "Yes, sir, I do. I told them the very dress she was wearing when she was murdered. When she was about to leave the room, she turned her head completely around and looked at me like she wanted me to know all about it. And the very next time she came back, she told me all about it. The first time she came, she seemed as if she did not want to tell me as much as afterwards. The last night she came, she told me she had done everything she could, and I am satisfied she did all that, too."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Heaster, don't you know these visions, as you describe them, were nothing more or less than four dreams founded upon your distress?"

A. "No, I don't know it. The Lord sent her to me to tell it. I was the only friend she knew she could tell and put any confidence in. I was the nearest one to her. Shue gave me a ring he pretended she wanted me to have. But I don't know what dead woman he might have taken it off of. I wanted my daughter's own ring, but he would not let me have it."

Q. "Mrs Heaster, are you positively sure there were not four dreams?"

A. "Yes, sir. They were not dreams. I do not dream when I am wide awake, to be sure. And I know I saw her right there before me."⁸

Mrs. Heaster refused to waiver in her account. If the defense attorney had intended to prove her irrational, the tactic did not succeed. Shue was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison on July 11th.

Edward Shue died in prison in 1905. Mrs. Heaster lived until 1916. Until her death she continued to insist that her daughter's spirit had appeared to her.

Zona Heaster Shue's ghost was never seen again.

⁸ DEITZ, GREENBRIER GHOST, *supra* at 20-21.