

# Sleep undisturbed in a haunted house? He bet he could

**T**here was a haunted house in Yorkville in the last century, according to Dr. Maurice Moore (1795-1871).

Moore located "the red house" on the "cross street," presumably at the juncture of Liberty and Congress streets. The house was built by John McKnight, a carpenter. Not long after, McKnight moved to Florida and the house "passed from one hand to another," Moore wrote in his book "Reminiscences of York."

There were numerous stories of

strange noises within.

One day a former sailor by the name of Abernathy came to Yorkville from Charleston with some trunks of dry goods that he hoped to sell. Accompanying Abernathy were his wife and his mother. They ended up renting the house McKnight built. The bottom floor was used to display the merchandise on tables. The Abernathys slept upstairs.

Soon, stories circulated about weird noises in the house. Although the house was locked with no way for intruders to enter, the Abernathys would wake to noise from downstairs. As soon as a candle could be lighted, they would investigate. They found tables overturned and clothing scattered.

Sometimes there were rappings

in different parts of the house. Finally, the Abernathy family could stand it no more and moved out.

The house was acquired by a Dr. Crenshaw, who decided to remodel. He hired Abernathy to replace the glass missing from almost every window. One day while working, Abernathy drank more than usual and lay down in front of a fire he had made and went to sleep. He slept all night without being awakened by any noises. Abernathy woke the next morning and was thrilled to find that he had slept all night in what he thought of as a haunted house.

Abernathy sought out Moore, then a young fellow who had not yet gone to medical school, and tried to set up a bet with Moore that he could sleep at the house all

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night without being disturbed. At first Moore resisted but finally decided to humor Abernathy.

"The stake, by his own choice, was a fine hat, and a condition of the bet was that after he once laid down that night, he was not to rise," Moore wrote.

Moore asked three or four friends to help him play a trick on Abernathy. Their weaponry was one of the cats belonging to a Mrs. McCall. Moore and some friends tied to the cat's tail a bladder holding gun shot. William McCaw had a syringe that would hold a quart of water ready to spray Abernathy.

Because Abernathy was drunk, pranksters managed to pry off the wooden shutters that Abernathy had nailed shut. He woke to the

noise of shot rattling in a bladder as it was pulled by the terrified cat. At first Abernathy assumed that, indeed, there were pranksters. He shouted, "I know you boys are trying to scare me! I'll shoot you!" The cat again frantically dashed about.

Finally, Abernathy abandoned his post and lost his chance for a good hat. Eager to leave the house, he managed to get the nails off the barred door. As he stepped outside, McCaw caught him square in the face with his syringe of water.

With that, Abernathy dashed into the street. The pranksters liberated the cat and waited in the weeds beside the house. Soon Abernathy was back with his landlord, a Mr. Smith.

Smith tried to convince Aber-

nathy that "it was just some of the boys who were trying to scare you," but Abernathy would have none of that notion. Abernathy was sure there had been noises like "40 wagons running away."

Abernathy showed the landlord how wet his shirt was and how clear the sky. Smith had to admit that something unexplainable had happened.

Moore concluded his story with the observation that "Abernathy never said 'hat' or 'bet' to me afterward, and never again did he try the experiment of sleeping in the 'haunted red house.'"

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