

## Something strange is going on in Branford's Harrison House



By Barbara Carlson

POSTED: 07/04/14, 3:07 PM EDT

BRANFORD >> The [Branford Historical Society](#) for years has invited the public to a holiday festival in December at the ancient house it maintains — the 1724 barn red Harrison House.

The house is a two-over-two, meaning it has two big rooms downstairs and two big “chambers” — bedrooms — upstairs. And it also has, right there on Main Street, an old gray barn set in a sweeping green lawn with colonial gardens tended by the garden club. Clearly, the house is the society’s jewel.

And now the society is about to sponsor a program (July 10 at the [James Blackstone Memorial Library](#)) on paranormal events. At that time, it will be revealed that the cherished older-than-the-country Harrison House is (gasp) haunted. Really haunted, scarily, hair-raisingly haunted, according to members of [Northeast Paranormal Investigations Society](#), who recently spent a couple of evenings seeking spirits at the dwelling.

The investigators, it should be noted, don’t use words like scary. They’re interested in linking the, uh, weird and history, and if heavy footsteps come out of nowhere (as they did at the Harrison House), that’s just part of an exploration.

There may have been hints of this peculiarity of the Harrison House many times in the past, but nobody seems to have noticed. Until on a biting cold night last February, Virginia “Ginny” Page, the society’s

president, found herself in the house at 2 a.m. — and, standing outside one of the upstairs chambers, she “got a strange feeling ... do not come in here. It wasn't a voice. I had pins and needles up my neck and over my head. I had the heebie-jeebies.” She went downstairs and was OK.

Page was in the house at that ungodly hour because the house's security company had alerted her that the furnace was off — not extraordinary; a light switch and the furnace switch are side by side. After switching on the furnace, Page had gone upstairs to check if the radiators were heating up. And then ... terror.

It's just coincidence that the NPIS team came to the house only months after Page's encounter; the group has been getting in touch with historical societies to explore old buildings throughout New England and beyond (New York, Pennsylvania). The goal of the investigators is to “document history long after history has been made” by studying paranormal activity; paranormal simply means outside the range of normal experience or scientific explanation.

In their explorations, using sophisticated cameras and recording and heat-detecting devices, they track interesting things like “orbs” that look in videos like small white balls whizzing across a room, but aren't seen by human eyes, or mists or shadows that obscure furniture, but also aren't visible to human eyes. Recorders pick up voices that people don't always hear. People referred to as “sensitives” do hear things that often most people don't hear and that often recorders don't record.

Jessica Berthiaume, who lives in Chester, is a sensitive, “which just means somebody who senses a little outside the five normal senses, connecting to the spiritual world.”

This sixth sense, for example, enabled Berthiaume to hear the voice that Page didn't hear, but that scared the daylights out of her. Both women were standing near the same chamber; Berthiaume heard “an angry man yelling at me to get away from that space. It was his space, his domain; he didn't like us being there. He was mocking us doing the investigation.” The investigators' audio equipment only picked up a few mocking words of the angry man — “we don't have the equipment to catch what I catch,” this “sensitive” said.

And why did Page have those pins and needles when she was standing outside the chamber? Berthiaume concludes that Page “is actually very sensitive herself.” (Ginny, you didn't know ... However, Page's comments, reflecting on her para-experience, suggest an other-worldly interest or “sensitivity” in the paranormal meaning of the word: “I think there's always an interest in what happens after life — do you hang around, where do you go, what do you do...” About the findings that there are spirits — or something — in the Harrison House, she notes that it was built in 1724 so “I think logically there should be some spirits hanging around.”)

Most likely, lots of them, according to Berthiaume. “There's more than one energy in that house, more than one voice.”

Adam Shefts, the founder and director of NPIS and an investigator, listed what some of the recording devices captured: Heavy pounding sounds that he defined as footsteps, or that could be a hammer, and, curiously a one-word answer to the question of what kind of soup they had for supper. “Vegetable,” said somebody, who sounded like a child and whose voice was caught only by the recorder.

In exploring a site, Shefts said, investigators first research the area, and try to find out as much as possible what happened there, and who lived there. When a conversation ensues, investigators will then try to ask relevant questions. They also speak respectfully to the spirits. “We want to get their story. We don't want to provoke them,” he explained.

There can, of course, be moments that might be terrifying to some

people — as when something goes whizzing past one's head in a dimly-lit cellar. Does Shefts get frightened? "It's more of a feeling of apprehension," he said. "Sometimes you feel — I don't know how to describe it."

The unheard sounds that a recorder records and the heard sounds that a recorder doesn't record can be mystifying. And sometimes perfectly logical.

Shefts recalled being in a mansion in Mystic and hearing violent coughing from upstairs. "We were all startled," he said. "The recorder didn't pick anything up. We learned the original owner was a doctor, and he kept patients there who had tuberculosis." Oh.

And that's the way it goes in the paranormal world: often mystifying, usually intriguing, a different glimpse of history.

"There's a lot of confusion in the paranormal field today," said Shefts. "You can think every place on Earth is haunted." And Berthiaume wanted to stress that the study of paranormal events "is not an exact science. It's a very complex field." She has "seen spirits since I was a little kid." She shared a bedroom with her older sister, and when she was about 6 saw some "people" hovering near her sister who looked like monks in robes. She wouldn't go back in that bedroom.

In their work, the NPIS investigators try to re-create unusual experiences or happenings, such as a sudden shadow appearing on video where there was none. If there is no valid explanation, then there is no normal explanation. Just paranormal.

And now Branford's Harrison House has been investigated, and there aren't really any answers to some of the encounters. Who is that angry man in the upstairs chamber? Maybe someday someone will find an answer. Maybe.

Presentation by NPIS at Blackstone Memorial Library, Branford takes place at 7 p.m., July 10, \$5 suggested donation.)

Branford freelance writer Barbara Carlson is a regular contributor to the ShoreLine Times.

#### IF YOU GO

Event: Northeast Paranormal Investigations Society - Evidence of Haunting at Harrison House

When: 7 p.m. Thursday

Where: James Blackstone Memorial Library, 758 Main St., Branford

Tickets: \$5 suggested donation

Info: [blackstone.lioninc.org](http://blackstone.lioninc.org), [branfordhistoricalsociety.org](http://branfordhistoricalsociety.org)