

Geointeresting Podcast Transcript

Episode 25: STL Ghost Tour

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NGA: Is NGA at Second Street haunted?

SANDY: I don't know that it's haunted, but it must certainly be inhabited.

NGA: Welcome to GEOINTERESTING, presented by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. NGA's campus on Second Street in St. Louis is located at what once was the St. Louis Arsenal. Buildings on the campus are nearly 200 years old and are some of the oldest still standing in St. Louis. From 1828 on, the site was used to manufacture small arms and ammunition as a Civil War garrison, as an Army medical depot and as an Army Quartermaster depot. At various points in history, buildings on the campus have served as stables, a jail, a firehouse and in the basement of the largest building on the campus, a morgue. [An] NGA predecessor agency, the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center, moved into the arsenal in 1952. Ever since, employees have told stories of unexplained noises, visions and presences in various places on campus. Are there permanent residences that roam NGA's St. Louis home? We're talking to Sandy, NGA cartographer and amateur ghost historian. Join us as we roam the halls with Sandy to learn more about the history of NGA's former, or maybe still present, occupants. Stay tuned for Geointeresting.

SANDY: I'd like to start out by giving a little history of the location, so you can figure out for yourselves what kind of ghosts may be where, because not everything here is a Civil War ghost. So in 1826, the U.S. Army bought this property from two farmers, and before that, it was nobody's property, and the Indians occupied [it]. And the Mississippians were here for thousands of years, and they had burial mounds all over St. Louis. The only [one] that is existing today is Sugarloaf Mound, and that's just a little bit south of here at 4500 South Broadway. So here we can have any Indian burials. We could have any family plots. We could have soldiers that were here. Or anybody.

NGA: We start the tour in the middle of NGA's campus. The Second Street campus is made up of many different buildings — each housing different NGA offices. Sandy explains a little bit about their history.

SANDY: In 1827, we started constructing the buildings here, and the limestone buildings you see were taking mostly from limestone here on the property and from local quarries. But the limestone buildings were constructed between 1827 and 1835. Building 12 used to be three buildings, and the center building was perpendicular, and that was a hospital. And it burned down [in] about 1915, and when they were deciding what to do, they decided to reconstruct the building as one long building.

NGA: Building 12 runs alongside the parade grounds at the center of campus. The story of its construction highlights the rich history of many of the buildings. In fact, 22 acres of the original arsenal were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The buildings are still in use today. For example, the original Commander's House, built in 1907, is now the NGA Museum. Next, we turn to Building 26, the Main Headquarters Building. This is where most of the "activity" occurs.

SANDY: In 1918, they tore down the original building here and started the construction of Building 36. Building 36 was built in stages. A, B and C were built pretty much at the same time. And it was built in three pieces because of the seismic activity in the area. So if one section fell, they didn't all fall. Then, in

[the] 1960s, D Wing was built, and [in] the late 1980s, E Wing was built. Now I was here in 1985, and lots of commotion was going on one day, and then I heard two construction workers were working in the elevator bays, and they fell into one of them, and one of them died. So let's go to the E Wing elevators, and we will see if we can get lucky.

NGA: As we walk to the elevators, Sandy breaks out her EMF meter. It measures ambient electromagnetic fields and is used to detect changes in temperature and electromagnetic energy, which some people equate to ghostly presences. As we reach the elevators, it [the EMF meter] starts going off.

SANDY: [Beeping from EMF meter] Here it is going off. You guys must have electrical personalities. So here on 4E, we have a couple of stories. The elevator that the gentleman fell into is the elevator here, Elevator 1. And we will hear stories of people getting on an elevator, and you'll push a button, and it won't go the floor that you want; it'll go someplace completely different. And sometimes you'll push a floor, especially if you're on five or six, and you'll push any floor, and it will just speed all the way to the basement like there's nothing holding it back. So a lot of time people will just get off the elevator and find another way, or they won't take these elevators at all. I had one lady tell me a story — she was up on 6E. She was only here for a few days. It was here first few days here, and her boss wasn't in yet. He was on vacation. So she was talking to her division chief, and she was supposed to come in on Sunday. So she came in on Sunday, and she get in [at] about six o'clock, and [at] about eight o'clock, she's sitting at her computer, and she hears commotion from her boss's cubicle. She hadn't met him yet, but she knew where he sat. She heard the keyboard going. She heard the chair rolling a little bit, the drawers opening and closing, and then papers shuffling about. So she sat there, and she was getting a little ticked off, because he had to have walked right past her, and he hadn't said good morning, so she kept thinking what kind of rude jerk is this who wouldn't say good morning. So she finally stewed on it for a while and got up and walked over to say hello, and there was nobody there. So she went back to her desk and gathered up her things, then went home. The next day, she came in, went to the division chief and told her, and she said, "Well, let's go tell the boss; he's in now." So her boss said, "Well, what happened?" And she told him, and he said, "Oh, don't worry about it. That's just the ghost." So it happened frequently, and I've heard other people that worked on that floor at the same time tell me the same stories. Another one — I think it was the second year I was doing the tours, and I ran into a couple of guys who used to be janitors, and they would start cleaning the floors or cleaning the stairwells, and they started on the sixth floor. They got around to the fifth floor, and they thought they heard babies crying, and they stopped and thought, well, maybe sirens, maybe the alarms, maybe ... who knows? So they went back to work, and they got down to about 4E, and they heard babies crying. So they stopped, and yup, it's babies crying. So they took all of their supplies, and they went down to the first floor. They were done with the E Wing stairwell for the night.

NGA: Next, Sandy takes us to that stairwell.

SANDY: So here we have the 4E stairwell, and the guards have to check every floor every night and have to sign off on the emergency doors and start on the sixth floor, and they work their way down. So a guard was just on the other side of the doorway here trying to get on four, and he couldn't get the door open. He was pulling it open, but he could only get it open a few inches. And then he finally got it open about a foot, and then, all of a sudden, the door started rattling, and it slammed shut and kept rattling [door slamming and rattling sound]. And he decided to go down to the next floor. So as you can see, this door [beeping from EMF meter] has a lot of activity. So we had a couple of women working on evening shift and night shift that would come out here and go down the hall to the restrooms. Anybody who worked on this wing, on the D Wing, knows that when you open one restroom door, the other one

opens a little bit from the air pressure. But for them, when they would go to the ladies room, the door just opened ... slowly for them. And then they would walk in, and it would close. Sometimes when they were in there, it would open and close ... open and close, and sometimes it would open so hard it would bang on the wall, and then it would close again. So they eventually decided not to go to the restroom here — they found some place else. They've seen a character or a guy — a vision of a tall guy and kind of thin and wispy at the bottom: dark, misty, not a solid shape but not completely opaque. But they would see him walking up and down this hallway, so I'll tell a little more about him. I also forgot to tell a story at the stairwell when the guards are checking the doors. One night we had a guard coming out of 4D, and she got right about to the doorway, and she felt something, so she turned around, and she saw a lady — real bright with blonde hair, but where her skirt or legs would be, it was just rays of light. So this lady with the torso was behind her, so she stepped it up, and she was walking quicker to the E Wing stairwell, and it kept up with her. So she made a mad dash run for the stairs, ran all the way downstairs, and she told them, "I'm not doing this anymore. Find me another job." And they did. So that lady has been seen also in 4E, and she's been seen here in 4D a lot — mostly near the entranceway, so I don't know if there was — we don't know. But I have found out — like I said, I know a whole lot more about this stuff than I thought, but I found out that while we didn't have a building this tall, it was the original commander's house, so why she's here on the fourth floor, we don't know, but I have found that sometimes these visions can manifest like that, because the ground level was lower, and the current ground level is probably three feet high, so all she has left is her torso. Something interesting. Who knew?

NGA: Next we move into an office space.

SANDY: Ok, we're in 4D-12, and right here is the light table.

NGA: Light tables are used by imagery analysts to look at hard-copy film of satellite images. Although they're not used as much today, they remain an imperative part of imagery analysis tradecraft.

SANDY: And this table had lots of binders and charts and paper on there. One day, there was a supervisor in here, and he was just sitting and watching, and there were two kiosks here that were always dark — you know, until somebody uses them. So one afternoon, he saw the lights come on in both kiosks, and there was nobody there. You see something out of the corner of your eye [and] you look. So he lifted his head, looked at the kiosk, and there was nothing there, but next to it were three of these 3-inch binders and a big empty plotter tube.

NGA: The plotter tube Sandy's talking about is a container for large rolls of paper that go into a plotter printer. NGA uses plotters to print maps and charts requested by various customers.

SANDY: So, all of a sudden, this plotter tube rolled up all of those binders and then fell onto the floor. So he came out, and he thought it must be Carl. Carl was over here, and he heard the bang, and he came over, and he asked him, "Did you do this?" "No. What happened?" And they tried to reenact it with wires or something you couldn't see, and they just couldn't figure it out. This happened in November after I started giving the tours in 2014. A couple more stories here, but the story with these two offices — at one time we had bosses working on second shift. They would rotate working second shift, and it was his turn, and she was gone for the day, and she always locked her door. So he's in here and about 11:30, 12 o'clock, he comes running out and yelling at the people working out here. [He] says, "What are you doing? Stop playing games. This is why I have to be here on second shift." So he thought they were playing with him. And they didn't know what he was talking about. So he said, "You know; ya'll [are] in

her office making all of those noises.” So they came over and tried opening her door, but it was locked, but they could hear things moving around — papers flying and things pounding on the wall — but they couldn’t get in. So the next morning, she comes in, and her chair is on the side on the floor, and books are off the shelf, and things are off the wall, and papers are all over the place. So from then on, if he had to work second shift, he made sure he was working out in the cubicles with everybody else working and not sitting in his office by himself.

NGA: As we continue the tour, Sandy tells us about a possible encounter with a famous Civil War general.

SANDY: So when we come down the ramp from 4D out in the hallway, we come down the ramp, and there was a woman leaving, and she was wearing a hoodie. She felt something tug on her hoodie. She looked around, and she saw, like, a floating head, and he had longer blonde hair flowing, and she just made a mad dash for the stairwell and left. When I heard that, the first thing I thought of was Custer, and people say, “Ah, no, it couldn’t have been Custer. He didn’t die here.” Well, I have learned that you don’t have to have died someplace to haunt it or inhabit it. It could be someplace you died, you were born, had a great time, you had a bad time, a traumatic experience, or you’re just passing through. But I do know Custer had been through here a few times, and he was up on his way up to the Dakotas when he passed through here to pick up supplies. Now, granted, he got most of them down in Jefferson Barracks, but he had to stop by here. So is it Custer? Is it not? I don’t know, but I like to say it is.

NGA: Now we head down to the basement by way of the freight elevator. [Noises from the elevator] Now we are in the basement. It’s kind of like the basement of an old house — it’s dimly lit with exposed pipes and concrete floors, and you can see some exposed brick from the old Civil War arsenal. There’s a slight chill in the air, too.

SANDY: You can see immediately the difference in construction. We have the old bricks. D Wing was built in the 1960s. And this elevator was here before D Wing. And this is where they brought in bodies for processing down in the morgue. They would bring in military members to be brought down here. They would bring them in here for processing to go to burial at either Jefferson Barracks or be sent to their homes. They used this elevator mostly for that and smaller equipment. [For] the larger equipment, they used the A Wing elevator — that’s where they brought in the ambulances and the big x-ray machines — but this is where most of the bodies came in. So we’ll take the same path, and you can see the pipes and all of the equipment down here, and once you pass the threshold, it feels older. But there are stories all up and down this hallway in these offices of people having — not sightings, but they hear the desks and chairs rolling and papers being shuffled and keyboards. So there’s a lot of that down here. I had a janitor tell me maybe two months ago about being in the men’s room, and it is 11:30 at night, and there’s nobody else around, and he heard all the toilets in the ladies room going off. So he went in there to check — nope, nobody there. So this is the morgue — big refrigerator door. [It] looks like it is very imposing. So we go in, and while you go in, notice the change in the flooring, and look at the exposed cork in the doorway. The cork is for climate control. They didn’t have refrigeration or mass refrigeration back then, so they used cork to keep it cooler. On one of my tours the first week, we had the NGA photographer here, and he had his camera setup. And he went on the whole tour, and he started to get some pictures of us down here in the morgue. And his flash started making noise or the battery pack, and he was able to get one picture off of all of us in front of the morgue door. And before he could take another one, the battery pack started making more noise, and it just made a big POP, and [the] battery died completely. So, nothing. So we went back — I was giving another tour in an hour or so — we went back. [He] got a whole new setup and just met us down here, took some pictures, and the

same thing happened — the battery started squealing. And he got one picture off in front of the door, and POP, and nothing. So he told us that — I didn't find this out just until this year — but he said they wrapped up both camera systems and flashes and sent them back to Nikon and had them check them out, because he thought they were broken. And they sent them back, and they said, "Nope. There's nothing wrong." So one of my favorite stories is a guy was getting off one of these two elevators here. And he stepped onto the basement floor into the hallway, and he described an old-style emergency room — 1920s, 1930s — with the old uniforms, and he saw gurneys going back and forth and doctors and nurses running. And he said, not only could he see it, but he heard it and smelled it. He stepped right back onto the elevator and went to another floor. So I have one more story, but it's down the hall. This is where I normally end the tours.

NGA: Now Sandy takes us to our final stop on the tour.

SANDY: The janitors' offices are just on the other side of the door there. So she came into the doorway or came through the door, and she came walking down the hall. And she was just passing these pipes going up into the ceiling, and she's walking, and she saw something out of the corner of her eye. So she stepped back and turned around and faced it, and she saw a mist. She described it like a swarm of bees moving around. And while she was watching it, they just slowly disappeared, and then she went back down the hall. And she told me this in January of this year. So it's fairly recent.

NGA: Thanks for joining us on our tour. You can decide for yourself about whether ghost tours are true, but one thing is for sure: there's a lot of history at NGA's Second Street campus. Geointeresting is produced by NGA's Office of Corporate Communications. You can like NGA on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, and never miss an episode of this podcast by subscribing on iTunes and Soundcloud. Thanks for listening.