

Tavern Tales - The Buckeye Tavern

by Sarajane Williams (with contributions by Jennifer Rodgers)

Buckeye Tavern owner Terry Bender isn't sure what he believes, but he admits that his customers' and staff's stories are "very interesting." His own experiences of flickering lights, items disappearing and then reappearing, and unmanned doors suddenly opening to assist his entry when his arms were full, have not yet convinced him that there is paranormal activity occurring within the historic tavern's stone walls. He has a collection of photos, depicting floating orbs and streaks of light, taken inside the tavern that were given to him by customers and friends. Moreover, at least six paranormal investigative groups have spent countless hours recording sounds (EVP) and measuring electromagnetic fields (EMF) in the dead of the night.

Terry even heard an older-sounding female voice on one of the barroom recordings that screamed, "Get out of here!" As the investigators walked out of the room another male voice said, "Come on back." In addition, another recording of a young woman's voice, from the loft area, identified herself as, "Susan," after investigators tried to speak to the spook.

A huge spike appeared on the EMF meter as it was passed over one of the bar stools on the main floor. Instead of getting the creeps, Terry creatively placed a brass plaque on the back of the bar stool, to honor "Screaming Susan."

The tavern has provided food, warmth and shelter for thousands of people for more than 200 years and it has played an important part in the region's history. Sometimes the smell of bacon unexpectedly wafts from the basement, where an early kitchen was located. Formerly known as the East Macungie Hotel, the Buckeye Tavern has been continuously operating as an inn, with upstairs apartments, until five years ago, when Bender purchased the property and did extensive renovations.

During his first month of business, the lights flickered "all the time," as if a bad storm was brewing. Terry said, "It was really bad." Then suddenly the flickering stopped and hasn't occurred since. Perhaps it was a welcoming gesture from the unseen world?

The Buckeye's manager Waynette Nothstein, who has worked there for 18 years, thinks there are at least three entities residing there. She said, "One is a little girl and there's a tall one. I often see movement out of the corner of my eye, and then it's gone. I won't go upstairs at night."

Some of the previous tavern owners have reported seeing apparitions and a few employees have seen the little girl upstairs at night.

Head chef Neil Leidheiser, who lived on the second floor when his family owned the tavern in the 1990s, reported he once looked up from the street below his second story window and saw the silhouette of a young girl dressed in colonial type clothes.

"I remember thinking she was dressed in old fashioned clothes because her sleeves were really puffy — it looked colonial," Leidheiser said.

When he got to his room, no one was there. He asked his sister, who lived in another apartment in the tavern, if she saw or heard anything but she said she didn't. He said he believes it was a young girl because her head and shoulders were visible in the window and the top of the window is only as high as an adult's chest.

The owners before the Leidheiser family told him their cats would sit in the room below his apartment and look up and cry, for no apparent reason. Leidheiser wasn't scared by the girl and he never saw her again.

Other witnesses have reported seeing an older gentleman on his way to the front door, from the parking lot.

Unexpected drafts of air can send a chill up one's spine any time of day or night, but when one of the wait staff reports that her hair has been pulled or the bartender reports that he has been touched by something invisible, it feels creepier.

Another oddity is a toy parrot, located upstairs, that's supposed to talk. It never talks, except when the last lights are turned off at night. There's also a small horse figurine that was left on the bar by investigators for the little girl. The next day, no one could find it. After an extensive search, it was found propped up against the farthest wall underneath the loft stairs.

Regardless of Terry Bender's desire to reserve judgment, there are things at the Buckeye Tavern that apparently do go bump in the night.