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'Haunted' House Near Weston, Mo., Has Been Untenanted Since 1851

Legends of Building Keep Children Away, But 'Spooks' Appear Only at Night Neighbors Assert; Former Owner Died in Prison.



What remains of the old Half way house, "haunted" house on the pike road between Platte City and Weston, Mo. The building has been vacant since its owner died in prison following the murder of a neighbor in 1851. This view, looking northwest, shows the front entrance and the east basement, used for a kitchen and dining room.

GHOSTS and goblins are holding high revels these sparkling autumn nights at their ancient rendezvous midway between Platte City and Weston, Mo., on the historic pike road.

The old Half Way house, untenanted by living persons since 1851 when a tragedy caused the permanent closing of the notorious tavern, has long been a gathering place for strange creatures. Ghosts of the long-forgotten dead, rattle their bones in the low attic where cobwebs hang in swaying festoons; witches park their broomsticks beneath the trees while they join the midnight frolic in the old kitchen; grinning pixies perch on the sagging roof and leer at the moon.

Raymond W. Hall, vice president of the First National bank, was born in the neighborhood of the old road-house. He is a practical business han, not given to idle fancies, but he insists that all sorts of queer things occurred at the old building during his boyhood. Doors securely fastened and braced in the evening were always found open and swaying in the wind in the morning; mysterious noises were to be heard about the place as twilight approached, and no child ever thought of going near the building except while holding fast to the guarding hand of a stalwart father.

Visit It in Daylight.

There is much of interest, historical and traditional, connected with Half Way house, and many persons visit this relic of former days, but for obvious reasons it is, of course, always considered advisable to visit the place in the broad light of day.

No one seems to know when the Half Way house was built, nor by whom. The abstract of title to the land on which it stands, now in the possession of Walter S. Davis, one of Platte county's progressive farmers and tobacco planters, extends back to ownership by one John Floersch, who was landlord of the tavern for some time, and according to tradition, conducted it as a place of unsavory reputation.

His career as a tavern keeper ended Oct. 20, 1851, when, accompanied by his three sons and another man, probably a farm laborer, by the name of Loom, he went to the home of Hall E. Wilkerson, his neighbor, to release by force some live stock that had been impounded for trespass. Floersch was armed with a rifle, and the visit culminated in the killing of Wilkerson by Floersch.

Died in Prison.

Mr. Wilkerson, wso was the first clerk of Platte county, had represented his district in the legislature in 1848, and was a major in the state malitia, was a man highly respected in the community. Floersch was tried in Clay county by change of venue, was convicted promptly and sentenced to the penitentiary for a term of twenty-five years. He died after one year of imprisonment, and the property was sold to satisfy the claim of the attorneys who had defended him, and to whom he had given a deed of trust to secure their fees.

From that time until now, except for a few months many years ago when a new owner lived in the house while directing some farm improvements, the old building has been slowly going to pices until now it is almost a complete wreck, and uninhabitable.

The building stands on high basement walls of stone on a sloping hillside north of the highway. Walnut joists of immense size and beautiful grain support the upper structure, the lumber in which is all hand hewn, even the laths that hold the plaster in position having been split by hand from hard wood.

Commodious Rooms.

There is a large central hall, with two commodious rooms on each side. Above these rooms, and reached by a narrow stairway ascending from a small rear hall, is a low attic room, probably used for sleeping quarters by those who could not pay for better accommodations on the lower floor.

A large porch formerly extended along the entire south front of the building, facing the highway, and it is said that there was an auction block for the sale of slaves.

A large room used for both kitchen and dining room was in the basement, ample light being admitted through windows piercing the foundation wall on the east, or lower, side. The large fireplace that served this room, long ago fallen in ruins, now serves a good purpose, the stones of which it was built having been used in the construction of the fireplace and chimney of a Boy Scout cabin at Weston.

Strange Compartment.

There is a strange and mysterious compartment in the northwest corner of the basement, perfect material for the writer of modern detective mystery thrillers. Here is a separate room, or cell, 25 feet long and 20 feet wide with thick stone walls and an arched ceiling of the same material. In the side walls and ceiling large iron rings are set, rusty now, but still moving readily in their hangings.

Here is a fertile field for the imagination. Some say slaves brought to the tavern for sale were chained in this room for safe keeping, others declare the slaves of the owner of the place were confined there for punishment. Others, more practical perhaps, are sure the room was a wine cellar and the rings were of use in moving heavy casks of wine made from the grapes grown in the large vineyard north of the house. Interpret the gruesome room in any way your fancy dictates; there is no one who can with authority dispute the point with you.

In November, 1861, was forged another link in the chain that binds the neighborhood to the historic past. Near the bridge that spans Bee creek just east of Half Way house occurred one of those bloody skirmishes that featured border warfare during the Civil war.

The story of the Battle of Bee creek is not a pleasant one. The spirit of retaliation that prompted shameful deeds may well be forgotten, but the event perhaps furnishes another reason why imps and hobgoblins love to frequent the ruins of Half Way house, for from whose gaping windows they can look down the hill to the narrow stream and chuckle with ghoulish glee at the memory of the blood that flowed there so many years ago.

Thirty Miles From Kansas City.

The highway between Platte City and Weston, adjacent to which the Half Way house was erected, was originally built and operated as a toll road or pike, used for hauling heavy traffic inland from the river landing at Weston and for the transport of supplies to the army post at Leavenworth. The toll gate was located about one mile west of the tavern near what is now known as the Siler farm.

The gate was tended and the tolls collected by Mrs. Peyton Randolph Waggener with the assistance of her son, the late Hon. Balie P. Waggener, who many years afterward became prominent in legal and political affairs in the state of Kansas.

With the progress of railroad building and the cessation of traffic on the Missouri river the revenues from the toll road ceased, and the highway was thrown open to public use free of tolls.

The Half Way house is only about thirty miles from Kansas City over a fine concrete pavement with the exception of three miles of unimproved road from Highway 71 just beyond Platte City. One may enjoy a pleasant hour prowling through the old ruin, and neighbors declare the spirits that haunt the place are never visible in daylight!

COSMETIC USE UP.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29.—Business depression or no, milady last year consumed cosmetics valued at $163,418,455, an increase over 15.1 per cent over 1927, the last preceding year for which data was collected, census bureau statistics revealed today.