

WOBURN'S URBAN LEGEND

By Marie Coady

Every city and town can lay claim to their very own Urban Legend, and Woburn is no exception. Woburn's Urban Legend originates from a family tale told to Anna Lascurian and Anita Stratos as children. The tale tells of a haunted house on Everett Street.

The house at 17 Everett Street no longer exists, because it was too dangerous to be allowed to co-exist alongside perfectly respectable houses that had the decency to keep their spooky secrets to themselves, while this bold dwelling sent tenants packing after only a few days.

I became aware of this Woburn-ville Horror about a year ago when an e-mail from Anna Lascurian, which originated in New Jersey, was forwarded to me in hopes I could help her uncover information that would validate a legend repeated at family gatherings: A legend that has plagued their family for three generations.

It was Anita who filled me in on the details and described “a rather strange house that existed in Woburn sometime in the 1930s”, and Anita's tale goes something like this.

The house at 17 Everett Street was once a large and beautiful home built by a doctor at the end of the nineteenth century. When the doctor died, his wife vacated the house immediately and rented it out in hopes of bringing in some revenue. But, in spite of the fact she arrived in person each month to collect the rent, she “refused to cross the doorway” and would routinely wait outside till the tenant handed her the rent money.

As it turned out, the turnover in tenants was frequent and no one lasted longer than 9 months. There were many times the house went unoccupied until a tenant could be found who was unaware of its reputation. During those interludes, neighborhood boys would sneak inside to play only to be frightened away by ghostly happenings. One young man was so desperate to escape one of these spectral beings; he jumped from a second floor window, breaking his leg in the process.

But Harry (Aristides) and Foutoula Paris were “stubborn disbelievers” and refused to believe the ghost stories. They were recently married and determined to enjoy the large house and low rent and not look a gift horse in the mouth. In fact, they remained in the house for 2 or 3 years rationalizing the unexplained and denying the possibility those ghosts existed.

When Harry and Foutoula were moving in, the moving men had a dog with them that refused to enter the house. When he was finally coaxed just inside the door, his hackles rose in alarm, and he ran as if being pursued by the devil, yipping all the way, never to be seen again.

If that wasn't enough, that first night in their new home was interrupted when both sat bolt upright in bed at exactly the same moment. When they compared stories, both told of the same nightmare, which featured a bony-fingered hand grasping at their necks and refusing to let go.

The following morning Foutoula found all the pictures she'd hung so carefully the day before, turned and facing the wall. But most frightening of all was that their son, only 9 months old at the time, would often sit bolt upright in his crib and stare off into space telling an unseen entity, “Shhhhhhh”. Overnight guests heard more than bumps in the night. Often they would wake sleepy-eyed and ask why Harry and Foutoula allowed people to make all that noise on the attic steps all night.

Once, when Foutoula was relaxing in the living room, she heard someone enter the basement and assumed it was the meter reader. But when she didn't hear him leave, she went to investigate.

“When she reached the bottom of the stairs,” Anita reports, “she felt all the energy drain from her and her knees turned to jelly and she collapsed onto her knees. She felt a sense of dread come over her, a sense of evil.” As soon as she composed herself, she clawed her way back up the stairs as if struggling to get free of some ghostly grasp. When she reached the top of the stairs, she discovered her fingers were bleeding.

That frightening episode was enough to prompt Foutoula to call a priest to bless the house. But after only a few minutes across the threshold, he turned to her and said, “Move away from here”.

Still unconvinced, it took one final episode to make believers of the Parises. As they sat eating dinner one night a man suddenly appeared out of nowhere, passed through the kitchen door, strode across the room, passed through the cellar door and thumped down to the stairs without a word.

That was it for Harry and Foutoula. They gathered up their two sons and ran from 17 Everett Street, leaving Harry's week's pay on the kitchen table and never looking back.

Harry and Foutoula had almost lost something more valuable than a week's pay though. Their seemingly perfect marriage had begun to show signs of strain. They began to argue over inconsequential matters. But, according to relatives, once they moved out of 17 Everett Street, they picked up their perfect marriage where they left off and got along just fine.

Rumor has it that the doctor and original owner of the house had performed some ghoulish experiments on some unfortunate souls he believed wouldn't be missed, and buried them in the basement. When word leaked to police, they launched an investigation which ended with them taking the house at 17 Everett Street apart "brick by brick". But they found nothing and no record was kept of any investigation.

In my research, I did uncover an Aristides (Harry) and Foutoula Paris listed in the City Directory as living at 17 Everett Street in 1932. Their son Arthur was the husband to Barbara Haynes and father to Florence, Katherine, and Harry Paras and died in 1984. He is buried at Woodbrook Cemetery and with him, Woburn's Urban Legend of the house at 17 Everett Street.

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