

How to Live in a Haunted House

BY SUE HERTZ



Historic family photo courtesy of Josh and Jennifer Clark. Shot sometime around the turn of the century, this photo taken in the side yard of the Peter Hobart House in Danvers features, left to right, Gertrude Clark, unknown person, Carrie Jean Clark, George Henry Clark, and William Hobart Clark. Descendent Josh Clark and his wife Jennifer wonder if Carrie Clark is responsible for the mysterious sounds and invisible presence they have often heard and felt in the house.

What's a homeowner to do if they suspect that they're not the only ones inhabiting their house?

Jennifer Clark felt a presence in the second floor bedroom, no doubt about it. Not every time she crossed the threshold, but often enough during the two years she spent cleaning out the antique saltbox her husband's family owned since 1728. It happened when she rifled through boxes of old letters and books in the room. It happened when she lifted up century-old corsets and dresses from the trunk. It happened when she stood up and caught her reflection in the antique dresser's mirror. There was nothing there, of course. But she could feel a woman's eyes boring into her, watching her every move, neither approving nor disapproving. Just watching.

There were other episodes, too. Like the time her dog Tabasco charged down the stairs from the second floor and out the side door. He refused to come back inside. Or the unexplainable pockets of frigid air in the attic on a stifling July day. Or her husband Josh waking one morning years before to pressure on his chest and opening his eyes to see a white blur the size of a cat dash out the bedroom door and down the stairs.



Photo by Jodi Sammons Feil

Neglected for more than a decade, the 277-year-old Peter Hobart House was renovated inside and out this past year. Owners Josh Clark, a descendent of Peter Hobart, and his wife Jen were careful to follow the local historic district guidelines for renovating the exterior of the saltbox, shown above. Inside, despite moving walls and changing the layout, they suspect that family ghosts may still linger.

He followed the sound, but found nothing. No animal, no creature. All the doors were locked and the windows closed. Nothing could get in or out. Or so he thought.

If Jen, 29, and Josh, 31, were the only ones to experience the unnerving, she wouldn't be so worried. But, it seems, that almost anyone who has spent time in the 277-year-old house on Hobart Street in Danvers, Massachusetts, has a story. Doors that open and close without reason. Footsteps. Voices. After three years of demolition and renovation to her husband's ancestral home, Jen Clark wants to know what she's dealing with before she and Josh move in next month. She wants to know what awaits her and the baby daughter she will deliver in July. Even though the home's interior has completely changed as they've torn down walls and added windows and exposed beams, she wonders if spirits still reside.

So she's recruited some ghost hunters.

Tonight, when the moon is full — according to paranormal researchers, ghosts are most active two days before, the day of and two days after a full moon — Mollie Stewart, a licensed ghost hunter with the International Ghost Hunters Society, and two apprentices will set up their infrared cameras and super-sensitive tape recorders and temperature gauges and let the ghosts speak for themselves.

Or not.

Why ghosts in this house?

It comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with old houses in New England that a house built in the early eighteenth century may harbor a few lingering ghosts, particularly a house that sits on land that was once part of Salem Village, the epicenter of the 1692 witch hysteria. Built by the Rev. Peter Hobart 36 years after a group of adolescent girls blamed their odd behavior on witchcraft and ignited the tragedy that left 19 men and women swinging from the gallows and one man crushed to death, the house stands less than a mile away from the tavern where the accused witches were examined. It stands a short jog from the Rebecca Nurse Homestead, home to the 71-year-old woman who was renowned for her piety but was hung as a witch on July 19, 1692, and the site of the Salem Village Church where the Rev. Samuel Parris's sermons fueled the witchcraft fervor. And while neither Rev. Hobart nor any of his descendants have been accused of witchcraft, it's hard to ignore the neighborhood's formidable past.

That's not to say that all the houses in Salem Village, which became Danvers in 1757, are haunted, but ghost hunters in the know recognize that the Salem area is full of spirits. Some ghosts are believed to be remains of people emotionally tied to a property, person or object, where others

Jennifer Clark felt a presence in the second floor bedroom, no doubt about it. It happened when she rifled through boxes of old letters and books in the room. It happened when she lifted up century-old corsets and dresses from the trunk. It happened when she stood up and caught her reflection in the antique dresser's mirror.



Photo by Jodi Sammons Feil

Jennifer and Josh Clark standing in front of their home's side door, from which their dog once raced to escape something it had heard or felt in an upstairs room.



Seated on the front porch that was added to the house in the late 1800s in this photo taken around the turn of the century are, left to right, unknown person, Carrie Jean Clark, Gertrude Clark, and unknown person. Carrie Jean Clark died in the second floor's bedroom on the left side, a room where her descendants have often felt a presence. Historic family photo provided courtesy of Josh and Jennifer Clark.

are said to be those of people who died suddenly or violently and for whatever reason — confusion, anger, retaliation — remain in the spot where they died. And Salem, like many early settled towns, boasts a history of hardship and violence, from hanging innocent people to deadly disputes among neighbors to Indian raids to pirate attacks. Robert Ellis Cahill, former Essex County sheriff and author of numerous books on North Shore history, including *Haunted Happenings*, a collection of his

ghost hunts in Massachusetts and southern Maine, says a priest he once knew who performed exorcisms didn't like to visit Salem "because there are so many evil spirits."

There's the Joshua Ward House ghost that terrifies residents by overturning wastebaskets and levitating paper. The eighteenth-century brick mansion in downtown Salem is built on the foundation of the home of George Corwin, the sheriff that prosecuted accused witches. So reviled, he was buried in the basement by his family so that his enemies couldn't dig up his remains. He was later exhumed and moved to a cemetery. Still, a ghost-hunting friend of Robert Cahill claims that he was being choked while touring the house. Corwin, Cahill says, was known as "the strangler" for his tactics to elicit confessions.

There's the ghost of Jacob Goodale, who was beaten to death in 1675 by his Salem Village neighbor Giles Corey, who went unpunished. Seventeen years later Giles Corey, at age 80,



Visit our fine furniture galleries and custom design your home office or library. See for yourself why the most discriminating buyer's in the seacoast keep returning year-after-year.

And don't forget to ask about our In-Home Design Services



AMERICAN TRADITIONS, INC.

FINE FURNITURE

Route One, 72-74 Lafayette Road
Hampton Falls, NH 03844

Phone 603 -926-3007

Hours: Mon- Sat 9-5pm, Thurs 9-8pm



Photo by Jodi Simmons Fall.

Mollie Stewart, a paranormal investigator and owner of Spellbound Tours in Salem, MA, re-enacts testing for cold spots, an indication of a ghost's presence, in the Peter Hobart House. During the night Mollie and two apprentices studied the house, they felt cold drafts on the first floor in the former birthing room. Not a window or door was open.

was accused of witchcraft and became the only man ever pressed to death in North America. Witnesses said that Jacob's ghost floated over Corey's death scene. Goodale family lore says that the visit with Corey was merely a side trip, that Jacob has forever haunted the home that his father Robert built, even after it was moved to Ipswich in 1929, chattering in walls, turning off lights, flipping

on radios. He even, according to Connie Arets, who served as caretaker of the property for eight years, popped champagne corks after her wedding ceremony in the side yard. But Jane Goodale, whose father moved the house in 1929, says no one in her family had any such experience.

And then there are less fabled Salem hauntings, stories of a home with a boy ghost

dressed in Colonial-era garb who pulls the hair of the family's daughters and elbows the sons, stories of crayon scribbles on walls in a home where there are no children or crayons, stories of a ghost cat that streaks across the ruby bedroom in the Stephen Daniels Guest House.

The Clarks' ghost hunt gets underway

Growing up in Danvers, Jen Clark was aware of some of the ghost tales and she was aware of the Peter Hobart House. It scared her. As the years passed and the Clarks either died or moved out, the house stood neglected, save for summers when Josh would move in between college semesters or the seasonal help of the

They experienced cold spots, temperature drops of 20 degrees in the birthing room, the kitchen and the attic, all the places Josh says he has felt or heard something odd through the years.


RACHEL ASHWELL
SHABBY CHIC
EST 1989

Slipcovered Furniture
and Fine Bedding

Appledore Arbor
225 Atlantic Avenue
North Hampton, NH
603-964-4486



Explore 350 Years of
**New England
History** in an original
waterfront neighborhood

Special Programs Daily
Historic Mini-Talks & Demonstrations
Garden Tours: May – Oct. at 1:00 PM

May 1 – Oct. 31 Mon. – Sat. • 10 AM – 5 PM
Sun. • Noon – 5 PM



**STRAWBERRY
BANKE** PORTSMOUTH
NEW HAMPSHIRE

64 Marcy Street Portsmouth, NH
603-433-1100 www.strawberrybanke.org

Josh hopes that Mollie and company find something, a validation of his experiences, although he worries that the ghosts are unhappy with the renovations, that they are confused by the new open layout.

family business, the Clark Farm, camped out. By the time she and Josh married and began looking for a home, the clapboards were cracked, the paint peeling and the brush overgrown. Yet when they priced properties within commuting distance of her job as a Webcast manager for King Fish Media in Salem and Josh's work as a landscape architect in Swampscott, renovating the family home was their most affordable option.

Sometimes Jen wonders if they should have looked harder.

The skies are cloudy, the moon is full on this Sunday evening in late May, and at 10 p.m. Jen and Josh wait in their car in the driveway for the ghost hunters. It seems a little odd for Josh, an athletic looking

man with a confident air, and Jen, who is seven months pregnant, to be outside of their future home on a misty Sunday night and not snug in bed asleep. The Hobart House looms dark, spooky. The contractors have yet to turn on the electricity; Mollie Stewart and her apprentice ghost hunters will have to set up by flashlight. Mollie, who owns Spellbound Tours in Salem, an outfit that escorts visitors to Salem's most haunted spots such as Gallows Hill where the accused witches were hung, has explored more than 100 haunted homes from New Orleans to New England, but she's never explored a home that hasn't been confirmed haunted by other paranormal investigators. This is a first. She doesn't know what she'll find, or if

she'll find anything. The night vision scope may pick up spirit ectoplasm, a fog-like mist, or spirit orbs, blobs of light, or it might not. The digital recorder may pick up otherworldly voices, or it may just record Mollie and her trainees.

Josh hopes that Mollie and company find something, a validation of his experiences, although he worries that the ghosts are unhappy with the renovations, that they are confused by the new open layout. "They're used to small rooms and narrow hallways," he says.

"I know that there's something there," says Jen. "I just hope that they are all good ghosts."



Family Room



Home Theater



Smart Touch



Future-Proof Wiring



**Audio
Video
Systems**
603 433-4393

Theater At Home

Music Everywhere

Lighting Your Mood

One Touch Control

Simple To Use ■ Fits Your Style ■ Way Too Much Fun


If the ghosts are Hobarts or Clarks, she'll be okay. They're family (Clarks have lived in the house since the mid-1700s when Deborah Hobart married Peter Clark). But only half the house is the original two rooms over two rooms built by Peter Hobart. The other half, the home's left side, is the remains of a house damaged by fire and moved to the property sometime before 1800. Who lived there? Jen wonders. Was anyone killed in the fire? She knows that great-grandma Carrie Clark died in her bedroom on the left side. What she doesn't know is how many other Clarks and Hobarts died on that side, or anywhere else in the house for that matter.

When Mollie and company arrive, all dressed in black, Jen and Josh show them around the house, identifying the birthing room, which has become part of their kitchen in the renovation, where Clarks were born and Clarks, most likely, died. Birthing rooms were also used to house the ill and dying. They show them the spot where cell phones never ever work. They show them the room where great-grandma Carrie died and the attic window that is always covered in black flies. And then they stop; they don't want to give too much away. Mollie sets up her tape recorder and the EMF detector that measures electromagnetic movement. Annoyed by all the loose nails and sawdust, she says, "I'm not used to doing ghost hunts at a construction site." She will carry the infrared thermometer that will record temperature drops, an indication of a ghost's presence.

Jen and Josh then leave, to drive to their temporary quarters in her grandparents' Peabody home. Mollie wants quiet.


What the ghost hunters found

Mollie didn't get quiet. While the first hour and a half passed without incident—the EMF meters were still, the orbs they thought they saw in photographs were sawdust specks—things picked up between 11:30 p.m. and midnight. They



FULL INTERIOR DESIGN SERVICES
STUNNING ATMOSPHERES
EXQUISITE FURNISHINGS

Interior Designed by
tj's at the sign of the goose



tj's at the sign of the goose

Interior Design Furniture Showhouse Home & Garden Shop
1287 Route One Cape Neddick, ME 03902 207.363.5673
www.tjsgoose.com

experienced cold spots, temperature drops of 20 degrees in the birthing room, the kitchen and the attic, all the places Josh says he has felt or heard something odd through the years. "There was one point where the hair stood up on my arms it was so cold," says Mollie. They heard low grumbings in the attic and on the second floor. The presence wasn't evil, though, or even mean-spirited. "These are guardians of the property," Mollie says. They won't hurt Jen or Josh. Rather, Mollie says, they will guard their baby daughter.

"We're still moving in, aren't we?" Josh asks the morning after the ghost hunt.

"Yes," Jen says, "we don't have much choice." Part of her is relieved that she and Josh weren't imagining things. Part of her is unhinged; she fears being alone in the house. She dreamt last night that Mollie had found something sinister and woke screaming.

Mollie says that for Jennifer's piece of mind she can do a blessing by sprinkling holy water in all four corners of each room and repeatedly asking all negative spirits to depart and leave only good spirits to protect. She could burn incense. She could talk to the ghosts, and tell them to look for the light and move on to their eternity. Or she could just enjoy them.

Jen's not sure about that. "I guess it's good that they said they weren't evil," she says. She'll research the family thoroughly to see

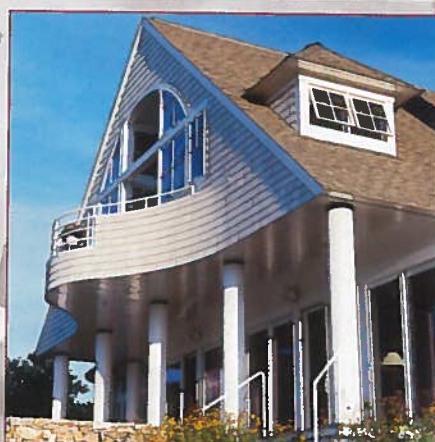
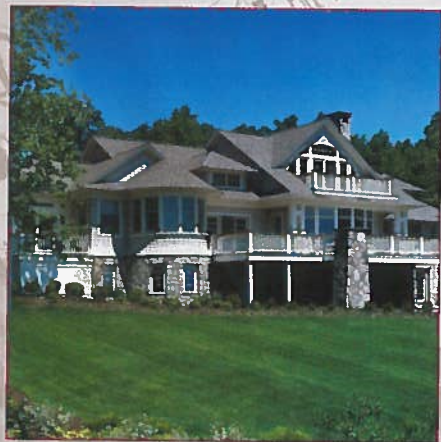
who else has died in the property. She'll try not to think too much of Mollie's findings when she's alone in the house. And she'll remind herself that these ghosts are family, that all of the activity was on the Hobart-Clark side of the house, not the other side of unknown origins. Besides, generations of Hobart-Clarks, including her husband and father-in-law, have lived in the house without harm from deceased family members who refuse to leave.

And she'll wait for more details. Mollie wants to return after they move in. She thinks that after the construction crew leaves and family members once again reside, there'll be more activity.

"I guess," Jen says, laughing nervously, "we'll just live there and see what happens." ■

Sue Hertz is an associate professor of journalism at the University of New Hampshire and author of Caught in the Crossfire: A Year on Abortion's Frontline. Her work has appeared in regional and national magazines, including Redbook, Boston, House Beautiful, Parenting and the Boston Globe Magazine.

Jodi Sammons Feil, a resident of Newburyport, Massachusetts, has specialized in corporate and advertising photography for more than ten years. She is a senior designer and photographer for ACCENT magazine.



Custom builders
Fine cabinetry & interior woodworking
Architectural Millwork

800-899-1664
207-363-7426 - Office/Shop
207-363-8650 - Fax

17 White Birch Lane
York, Maine

www.maine coastbuilders.com