... with a ghostly twist, of course

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 76

Ghosts at Point Ellice

Kathleen O'Reilly is rumoured to haunt Point Ellice House, where she lived until her death in 1945. According to *Ghosts of British Columbia*, a book by Jo-Anne Christensen, Kathleen was said to appear in a blue dress and show visitors around the house.

"I've never seen any evidence of it myself," says Gail Simpson, the co-ordinator for the national heritage site.

Christensen's account of the possible haunting says sightings were no longer reported after 1974, when the provincial government took the house over.

A stepson of Jack O'Reilly told Simpson, she says, that after Kathleen's death his mother Inez used to pretend she was Kathleen by putting on her old blue dress and giving tours of the house. She was trying to make money by running it as a private museum because the family was having a hard time affording maintenance of the estate; the family sold it in 1974.

"Inez was quite a show woman," Simpson says, wondering if the impersonations started the ghost rumours.

But not everyone is convinced the sightings are just rumours.

Richard Martin did maintenance at Point Ellice House from 1996 to 2003. One day, he was working on a light fixture in the hallway and heard voices from two little girls around the corner.

"They said something about 'should we go in the room?' and 'oh, no we shouldn't,'" Martin recalls. But when he got down from his ladder and looked around the corner, no one was there.

Martin also says he witnessed other strange phenomena, like his tools getting moved around, and feeling sprays of water – like from an atomizer – on his skin as he walked down the hall.



Dunc Malcolm/News staff

Does an otherworldly presence linger in the elegant rooms of Point Ellice House? A former worker is convinced he's witnessed a spectral.

Disaster on the bridge

The worst streetcar accident in North America happened within view and earshot of the Point Ellice House, when in 1896 a bridge in the same place as today's Bay Street bridge collapsed under the weight of an overloaded electric streetcar.

As many as 140 people, on their way to Victoria Day celebrations, plunged into the Gorge Waterway when the Point Ellice Bridge buckled under the weight of the streetcar.

"So many victims has it claimed that there is scarcely a home in Victoria that has not lost some relative or friend," the *Daily Colonist* reported the next day.

The article said nearby witnesses "heard the agonizing moans and cries of its passengers" after the bridge rose "like the blades of a jackknife."



Fifty-five people were either drowned or struck by the breaking ironwork of the bridge.

Rescue efforts lasted hours, with citizens diving, swimming and rowing into the Gorge to pull out unconscious bodies, while others scrambled among the dead and injured to identify the victims.

The *Colonist's* article continued, "It was wonderful how coolly and energetically men and women worked. Class distinctions and all were forgotten. Delicate ladies whom one might expect to shrink from the scenes of horror aided in the work of resuscitating the unfortunate victims as one by one they were brought ashore and laid on the lawns."

A coroner's report released about two weeks later blamed the accident on the Consolidated Electric Railway Company for allowing the streetcar to be filled past capacity. The City of Victoria was also found guilty of negligence for not ensuring the safety of the bridge; the report noted the inferior quality of the bridge's construction.

ADMISSION/HOURS

Point Ellice house is open daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. from May to Labour Day weekend, though tea is available only until 4 p.m. Depending on the weather, the house is also open on weekends in September. Adult admission is $22 for the audio tour and tea, or $6 for just the tour. The cost is $18 for individuals arriving in groups of 10 or more, and $11.45 for children 12 and younger.



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