

“Dancing Ghost”

Excerpt

From The Hartford Courant, June 10, 1895

“Ghost Expert” Says Old House is “Haunted”

A self-described “spirit investigator” has determined that a long-abandoned house on Portman Street is haunted by ghosts.

“After rigorous testing, using the most modern scientific instruments available, I find the evidence overwhelming,” declared Henry Cleland, president of the World Society for Harmonial Inspiration. “In all my vast experience with the supernatural, never have I encountered a private residence more patently associated with elements from the spirit world.”

Rumors have swirled around the decrepit mansion in West Hartford for decades. Skeptics laugh, but neighbors and passersby regularly report mysterious sights and sounds emanating from the house, including weeping, knocking, rapping, and the passing of disembodied shapes in the windows.

Last year, the Hartford Society for Enlightened Spiritualism decided to investigate the odd goings-on. According to Mrs. Horace T. Beckingham, the Society’s chairwoman, their investigations were inconclusive, and “as a result, we decided to engage an expert.”

Enter Mr. Cleland, lately of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Haven, and author of the monograph “Examinations of the Metanormal with Scientific Proofs of the Odic Force.”

“I spent several nights in the house,” said Cleland, “performing experiments and gathering data.”

“He had a lot of equipment, machines and gauges and devices for detecting things out of the ordinary,” Mrs. Beckingham confirmed. “In the end, it was the photographs that convinced us.”

Cleland would not supply photographs to this newspaper. “They’re proprietary,” he explained. “Plus I may write a book.”

He and Mrs. Beckingham both claimed the photographs showed “numinous images” and “orbs of pure psychic energy.”

For now, the Society has no plans to continue the ghostly experiments, citing financial considerations. “We’re a small organization with limited resources,” Mrs. Beckingham explained. “Ghost experts don’t come cheap.”

Not everyone is convinced the Portman Street house is haunted.

“Ridiculous,” said Arthur M. Mordecai, vice president of Hartford Mercantile Bank & Trust, holder of the house’s mortgage. “Absurd. No such thing as ghosts.” Hartford Mercantile has been trying to sell the mansion for many years. Will its new designation as a “haunted house” lessen its chances of sale even further?

“Of course not,” scoffed Mordecai. “Unless everybody’s gone completely insane.”

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14 Lexington Street
Paulton, Massachusetts
June 14, 1895

Mr. Henry Cleland
Post Office Box 127-B
Boston, Massachusetts

My dear Mr. Cleland,

Mrs. Horace T. Beckingham was kind enough to send me your new address. I had written to her after reading in the Courant of your extraordinary work in the matter of the haunted house in Hartford, Conn.

I am sure a gentleman of your exceptional background and talents is extremely busy, beset no doubt by appeals from a public eager for your unique skills and advice. Even so, I hope you will entertain one more humble request, and consider a commission not unlike the one you performed for the Hartford Society for Enlightened Spiritualism.

Many of us here in Paulton believe Willow House, my late grandparents’ home, is inhabited by spirits from the beyond. A number of witnesses, yours truly among them, have observed many extremely convincing manifestations that cannot be explained otherwise. I have a personal interest in getting to the bottom of this mystery, and I believe you, Mr. Cleland, are the perfect, indeed the only person who can help me.

I have taken the liberty of making a discreet inquiry of Mrs. Beckingham, who suggested (with similar discretion) that your time and services might be secured for a certain remunerative consideration. Please see the attached, which details what I hope you will deem a suitable recompense.

I implore you to help me, Mr. Cleland. Time is of the essence. Your kind and expeditious reply will be most appreciated by

Your humble servant,
(Miss) Angiolina Darlington

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Post Office Box 127-B
Boston, Mass.
June 16, 1895

Miss Angiolina Darlington
14 Lexington Street
Paulton, Mass.

Dear Miss Darlington,

Thank you for your kind letter. It is true that the particular services I am able to offer are much in demand, and only grow more numerous as time passes and human enlightenment expands. Ordinarily I would be unable to accommodate you on such short notice, but as it happens, I do find a small window of time has unexpectedly opened in my busy schedule.

As to recompense, my own needs are trivial—spartan—but my work is, as you say, so unique, so specialized, I am afraid I couldn't think of offering it at a discount. Please see the attached re. the matter of my fee.

Certain we can come to an agreement in this matter, and looking forward to a productive and mutually satisfactory spirit enterprise, I remain

Very truly yours,
Henry Cleland

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14 Lexington Street
Paulton, Massachusetts
June 18, 1895

Mr. Henry Cleland
Post Office Box 127-B

Boston, Massachusetts

My dear Mr. Cleland,

Thank you so much for your prompt reply. Words cannot express how glad and grateful I am that you will be coming to Paulton, and not a minute too soon!

Alas, my personal circumstances are such that I am unable to offer you more than the amount mentioned in my last (see attached). But I have it on excellent authority (dear Mrs. Beckingham) that besides being brilliant in your unique field of endeavor, you are also a most kind, most generous person. I am praying that that generosity of spirit will impel you to help me, Mr. Cleland, for I desperately need your help!

Yours most sincerely,
Angiolina Darlington

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Post Office Box 127-B
Boston, Mass.
June 20, 1895

Miss Angiolina Darlington
14 Lexington Street
Paulton, Mass.

Dear Miss Darlington,

You are, of course, not aware that I am obliged to move about with an enormous amount of special scientific equipment, all of a very delicate nature. As a consequence, travel expenses alone take up the vast bulk of the modest sum I request (see attached) for my services. And then there are the extra requirements for the transport of Astra, a vital part of any investigation I perform.

Since I will be a newcomer, I rely on you solely in the matter of accommodations whilst I am in Paulton. (And I hope I need hardly mention that financial responsibility in that regard will be yours, not mine. But I am a very simple man, never fear, so I assure you that burden will be light.)

Thanking you for your kind consideration, I remain,

Yours,
Henry Cleland

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14 Lexington Street

Paulton, Massachusetts
June 22, 1895

Mr. Henry Cleland
Post Office Box 127-B
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Cleland,

It is so unpleasant to speak of financial matters, is it not? Especially when the “product” one is discussing is a matter as abstract and precious as the Truth itself!

And how dearly I wish it were in my power to come to terms with you in the matter of your quite reasonable request. But, tragically, it is not. Once again, I can only rely on your good nature, generosity, and the unquenchable intellectual and philosophical curiosity I am absolutely assured you possess, dear Mr. Cleland.

One good thing—perhaps you don’t own a map?—Paulton is just over half a day’s train ride from Boston, thus very economical. You’ll also be happy to know that, upon inquiry, I have learned that freight charges for passengers traveling on week days are extremely reasonable.

As to lodging, I’m sure you will find Mr. Smoak’s Boardinghouse for Gentlemen on Lexington Street will not overtax your pocketbook, especially for a man of such spartan tastes. It will be convenient also, being adjacent to my own rooms here in a similar establishment for ladies.

Looking forward with hope and eagerness to our meeting, I remain

Yours with great sincerity,
Angiolina Darlington

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June 24, 1895

Miss Darlington:

Arrive 27 June, 1:28 p.m., on Boston train. Trust conveyance from station to Smoak’s won’t put you out.

H. Cleland

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