



DEAD-EYED DOLLS

Ottawa, Ontario

The Bytown Museum couldn't have a more picturesque location in our nation's capital. Housed in the oldest stone building in Ottawa, the museum is on the lower locks of the Rideau Canal at the Ottawa River, nestled in the heart of downtown between Parliament Hill and the Chateau Laurier Hotel.

But the petite museum's beauty and charm are in direct contrast with the truly terrifying experiences that visitors and employees have reported. In fact, it's considered by many paranormal experts to be the most haunted location in the entire country. Something lives in the museum's displays, skulking through the artifacts and taking possession of the antique dolls that sit in silent rows, watching everyone who wanders up to the second floor unawares.

The building was constructed in 1827 by the British military as a supply storehouse and treasury during the construction of the Rideau Canal. Death was always hanging over the building in those early years, as nearly one thousand workers died in gruesome construction accidents and from diseases such as malaria. Undeterred by the tragic deaths of so many workers, the military continued work on the canal under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel John By in order to defend against invasion from the United States. Although Lt. Col. By died in 1836, some believe his ghost still lingers by the still waters of the Rideau Canal.

Today the Bytown Museum houses a permanent collection of artifacts celebrating Ottawa's history, and it's not uncommon for visitors to be overcome by an uneasy feeling while they're observing the displays. On the second floor is a collection of antique dolls that has caused some of the greatest unease. If it's very quiet and you're all alone, close your eyes and strain your ears. You might hear the faint sounds of a child crying. Open your eyes and you might even catch one of the dolls winking at you as if you're in on some ghastly joke. Those who have heard the crying and seen the blinking eyes believe the spooky porcelain dolls are possessed by the spirits of dead children.

Other visitors have said they have been pushed, grabbed or tripped from behind when alone, typically in the creepy old money vault and the stairwell. Some museum-goers have heard an angry, bodiless voice shout, "Get out! Get out!" But the majority of the paranormal reports come from the museum staff, and the most hair-raising activity tends

to occur after the public has left for the night.

One employee noticed a man sitting in the library after she had closed up. She asked him to leave, and he obliged without a word, silently walking to the door. A second after he stepped outside, she realized she hadn't seen the man enter the museum while they were open — an impossibility in such a small, intimate building — so she flung the door open to ask how he had gotten in. Although it had only been a brief moment since the man had left and she could see a far distance in every direction, the man had completely vanished.

Glen Shackleton, chairman of the board of directors, has no doubt the Bytown Museum is haunted, and he has a couple of chilling stories to back up this claim. One night he and three others were the only four people in the building. They closed a sliding door and it immediately began to vibrate violently as if someone on the other side was hitting it. A review of the security camera footage showed that no one was there, but as soon as the assault on the door ended they heard heavy footsteps walking away. The late-night encounter with an unseen presence was enough to send Glen's three companions running from the museum.

Glen believes, as many others do, that the ghost who causes these disturbances is Duncan McNab. Duncan was a supply manager during the construction of the Rideau Canal. But Glen also thinks there might be at least one other prominent ghost within the walls of the museum, someone who had a much larger role in the canal's construction.

Another night he was having a casual chat with a

museum employee about the ghost of McNab when the woman's computer inexplicably turned off. A moment later it turned itself back on, but her normal desktop didn't appear. Instead, the monitor was blank other than the words "Lt. Col. John By" repeated over and over on the screen. It was as if the colonel himself was listening in on the conversation and wanted to make it clear that McNab's ghost isn't the only spirit haunting the Bytown Museum. Nor does it seem that either man is ready to leave his life's work behind.