

Ghost-hunting team tackles Wrightsville restaurant

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Katrina Pierce, owner of the Riverfront Bar and Lounge in Wrightsville, says she saw a person's shadow drift past the attic window at the bar. It's just one of many experiences that she attributes to spirits. (Michael Felletter Photo)

Katrina Pierce was writing the daily specials on her menu board as she had done every day since Feb. 19 when a man behind her whispered, "What are you doing?"

Pierce turned around. No one was there.

She dropped the marker and ran into the back kitchen.

It wasn't the first instance in her restaurant that she can't quite explain, so she called in the professionals at Ghost Hunters Inc., a group of Pennsylvania residents who investigate paranormal activity.

A team of eight Ghost Hunters investigators will spend Saturday night attempting to contact the spirits Pierce believes are present throughout her restaurant.

Pierce bought the Riverfront Bar and Lounge at 338 S. Front St. in Wrightsville in November 2008. She gutted the top two floors and remodeled the first floor where the bar is. Since then, she's noticed strange things happening.

"Right before we opened, I came in to make sure the fridges were conditioned," she said. "I walked into the kitchen and heard loud, organ music coming from the bar. I looked out in the bar and it stopped."

She has also heard bathroom stall doors whipping open and shut, but stop when she walks into the bathroom. And then there's the walking and mumbling the barmaids have told her about -- sometimes when the bar's empty.

"I do believe," Pierce said. "I don't know if I'd call them ghosts, but I believe there's something out there."

Abel brothers: Pierce, a real estate agent for 17 years, was curious about the building's history. She collected anything she could find to give her a glimpse into the past. Neighbors from the block had given her pictures of the building, one of which she hung out in the bar area. The picture is from sometime between 1890 and 1920, Pierce guessed. It's of some men standing in front of the bar, then called Abel Brothers Storefront. Pierce pulled paperwork from York County and discovered the Abel brothers -- Samuel, Milton and Albert -- owned the building and sold beer, ice cream and milk. In 1937, they petitioned to sell beer, sandwiches and light lunches.



A century-old picture of the building's original owners, below, routinely falls without breaking, she said. Ghost Hunters Inc. will conduct an investigation Saturday. (Michael Felletter Photo)

The picture of the brothers, secured by a picture hanger, constantly falls, Pierce said. But it doesn't fall to the floor and break. It falls straight down, onto a ledge.

Allen Phillips, the founder and lead investigator of Ghost Hunters Inc., examined the picture and the hook. He said it's impossible for the picture to fall the way it does without breaking.

"Someone has to physically pick it up and place it on the ledge," he said. "We're thinking (it's the Abel Brothers)."

Hunting: Phillips started the ghost hunting service in 1974 with his brother and best friend. To this day, it's still just a hobby. The investigators all have full-time jobs and don't charge a fee to their clients.

"We want to get evidence that there is life beyond the grave and to debunk any other kinds of sounds," Phillips said. "We do scientific research in a paranormal world."

The group did a preliminary investigation Wednesday night and said they found heavy activity throughout the building. Investigator Scott Wise said he could immediately feel a presence as he walked up to the second floor.

"I just felt, like a heaviness, then it lifted up," he said. "It's all over."

Saturday, the group will split up into teams of two on each floor. They will use tools to attempt to contact the spirits during the four-hour investigation. An electronic voice phenomenon tool will record a spirit's response to the investigators' questions. The recorder can replay any noise. The electromagnetic field detector will indicate if there is a spirit in the room. On a scale of 0.1 to 50, 50 indicating the most activity, the investigators said the Riverfront Bar and Lounge exceeded the scale during their preliminary investigation Wednesday.

"I kept it to myself until the barmaids said they were hearing things," Pierce said. "I just want to know I'm not hearing things."

Pierce will be part of the investigation Saturday. She said she doesn't want skeptics to write her off as crazy and encourages people to experience what she has.

"They have to come see for themselves I guess," Pierce said. "Just come here and hang out."