



Music Row mansion was home to heartbreak, hauntings

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In the mid-1960s, while we were living on 16th Avenue South, there was a large two-story house on the corner of 16th and Edgehill that had once been quite impressive. But it was showing its age and lack of care. Two sisters lived there, but no one saw much of them except as they might pass by an upstairs window. The story was that their father, who for some reason was not in the “social register,” gave an elaborate ball for them one year and no one attended. After that time, the sisters rarely left the house and had no contact with anyone other than their parents. The parents died before the 1960s sometime. The sisters still lived in the house, virtually forgotten by everyone. Can you find their story? -LaVelle Boyd, Nashville.

The grand stone house with its two-story portico at 1111 16th Ave. S. no longer stands, but few Nashvillians who saw it or heard the facts surrounding it can forget it completely. Aspirations, cruelty, revenge, loneliness, determination, even questions about the afterlife- all these are woven into its unique tale pieced together here largely from newspaper accounts in 1974, '77, and '85.

Jacob Shcnell, an industrious German immigrant, was part of Nashville's growing Germantown suburb just north of downtown. He established himself as a grain merchant. On Sept. 30, 1873, he was married to Jennie Powell.

The happy couple produced four attractive offspring, a son and three daughters. They lived, as was the custom in those days, above their feed store on Jefferson Street.

Jacob's hard work resulted in great financial reward. Wanting the best for his family, he bought property in a fashionable early 1900s development southwest of downtown where he built a spacious home. (The street is now known as Music Row, but that is another story.)

With his daughters nearing the age when beaux should be coming to call, Jacob decided to play host in the new mansion to an appropriate party marking what he saw as

their debut in the Nashville society of the day. An orchestra was employed, food was ordered and all details tended to.

Unfortunately, the time was not a good one for people- however industrious- of German descent. A war had given Nashvillians, even those of inherent good intention, a suspicion of people from that part of Europe.

Hardly anyone, and certainly no one of note in Nashville society, attended Jacob's ball in his third-floor ballroom. He was furious that his daughters should be snubbed in such an uncaring way.

Jacob decreed that his new and expensive mansion in its fashionable area from that day forward should be allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. It would become a constant reminder to anyone who passed of the injustice his daughters and family had suffered at the whims of Nashville society.

Jacob moved back to Jefferson Street above his business, leaving his wife and children in the grand home. His son, later a city councilman, eventually moved away. One daughter later married and left. The two others, Lena and Bertha Schnell, stayed put and carried out their father's directive, even long after his death.

Paint was not applied. Pipes that burst in winter cold were not fixed. Buckets caught roof leaks. Pigeons took up residence. Draperies were allowed to rot and fall.

Lena died. Bertha- described as well-educated and genteel by the few who came to know her- kept largely to herself. She closeted herself and her dog Andy in winter in a single room with functioning heat. She often wore rags. Water was hauled in. Many neighbors, even into the 1970s, remained horrified at the state of the house.

Bertha's death at the age of 84 on June 30, 1974, brought an end to her father's curse on Nashville-or did it?

Rat-infested furnishings, including mahogany furniture, were sold at auction late in 1974. Any salvageable features of the house were removed and also sold before its demolition in the spring of 1977.

A large office building was erected on the site, becoming the Nashville home of Capitol Records. The newly occupied building soon began to raise concern among its tenants.

Certain second-floor rooms would remain icy cold, even when controlled by a common heating system. Computers and printers would misbehave in bizarre ways. Unexplained minor fires and pipe breaks occurred. Some employees became spooked.

A psychic who claimed knowledge of ghostly things was brought in to exorcise any ill will remaining. Spirits were supposedly detected and coaxed into leaving. Remaining Capitol tenants reported few problems.

Footnote: The office structure is now known as the 1111 building, housing Big Loud Shirt, Big Loud Bucks & Extreme Writers Group.