

## GHOSTS IN GLASS ONCE GLIMPSED IN WINCHESTER

By Ellen Knight<sup>1</sup>

“Ghost hunters are plenty in town this week,” Edwin Wadleigh reported in the *Woburn Journal* in 1880. The reason was a story titled “GHOSTS IN THE SUBURBS,” published in the *Boston Courier* on May 9.



The site of the reported “singular and mysterious phenomenon” was a house on the hill between Washington and Highland streets, south of Swanton Street.<sup>2</sup> Reportedly begun by a man named Parks who was killed on the railroad before it was finished, the building was then about two years old and was one of only four houses on the street. It had been vacant for about eight months.

Two other houses had a particularly good view of what we’ll call the Parks house. One was on the opposite side of the street about 50 yards up and was occupied by a family named Stone who lived in town just a few years. Directly opposite the Parks house was a large vacant lot beyond which was a house which fronted on the next street, but from its rear windows the residents could see the Parks house about 300 feet away.

This was the home of a retired sea captain named West. “One morning,” the anonymous reporter wrote, “about six months ago, the Captain while looking out of a back window in the second story of his house was surprised to see the figure of a man standing at the hall window of the unoccupied house, looking up the street towards the Stone house.”

Thinking it might be a potential renter, he gave the figure no further thought until the next morning when, “looking out the same window, he saw the same man standing at the same window and looking in the same direction.” The next day it was the same and again day after day.

The only things that changed were his collar and hat, sometimes resembling an infantry cap and sometimes the slouched hat of a cavalry-man. Capt. West identified this figure as Parks, whom he had known and who used to wear a similar cap.

The window had four panes. Over time the lower part of the figure gradually faded leaving a half-length figure distinctly visible at the upper pane. In a lower pane, the full-length figure of another man developed, also gazing up the street.

“One day, the Captain, who had become intensely interested in watching his two uncanny neighbors, was surprised to see the upper one had made a complete change in its position and was looking down the street as intently as it hitherto looked up.”

Alert for new developments, about a month before the *Courier* article was written, the Captain saw that a third form, a woman, had appeared in another pane. Finally, an unpleasant looking man with a haggard face appeared in the fourth frame of the window, reportedly very visible from the Stone house. Much annoyed by the repellant fourth face and believing it to be occasioned by dust on the glass, Mrs. Stone went inside and cleaned the window. No change. “She is positive that [on] several occasions she has seen the head move.”

### THE REPORTER INVESTIGATES

The reporter himself investigated. “The figures were seen as described” from both neighboring houses. While standing in the street, he saw nothing unusual.

“The haunted house was inspected, the mysterious hall and window were examined, neither of which offered any clue to the origin of what had a few moments before been so distinctly seen. The glass in the window was found to be of a cheap kind, containing many flaws, but no figures were visible.” If the positions of the sashes were reversed, he said, the figures disappeared, but they returned when the sashes were returned to their proper positions.

A former resident, a Baptist deacon then interested in Spiritualism, also visited the house “in obedience, he believed, to a communication received from a prominent physician, long since dead, whose spirit directed him to make an investigation of certain spiritual manifestations which it was said the house would afford.” The deacon also saw the figures and expressed a desire to hold a séance in the house.

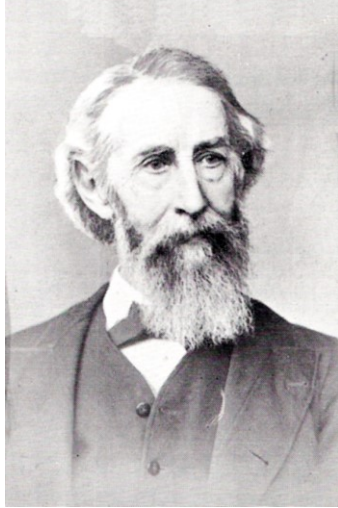
For months prior to this, not wishing to become the victims of morbid curiosity and an invasion of ghost-seers, the persons involved had foregone talking much about the phenomena. Reportedly, the deacon disclosed the story, thus creating the alleged “intense excitement in Winchester.”

### WADLEIGH'S STORY

So, does Winchester have a haunted history? Perhaps, but not this house, according to what Wadleigh wrote in his Winchester column for the *Woburn Journal*.

First, he related, there had been no excitement or stir in town until the *Courier* article appeared, nor had the visions been witnessed by “large numbers of people for months past at all hours of

the day and night.” Simply, Wadleigh stated, in that vicinity “certain persons had seen visions on a window pane.” He reported that a former resident of the house said his family was never troubled while they were there. A well-known townsman, superintendent of the waterworks, Wadleigh reported, saw one of the ghosts but opined that it was due to imperfection in the glass.



Wadleigh made his own investigation. From the street, “With the naked eye, what looked like a blur or stain in the glass could be seen, and with a good imagination no doubt a spectre could be constructed.” From inside the Stone house, “A blur in the glass was all that could be seen, and it was said that the face didn’t show as plainly as usual.” Over at the Captain’s, he was told that “the ghosts were not showing up well there either, as they needed cloudy weather for their best phase.”

He concluded that the honesty of the neighbors who believed they had seen certain forms and figures “cannot be doubted,” but “it is probable that this is due to natural causes aided by the vivid imagination of individuals.”

Clearly, Wadleigh deemed this simply a case of optical illusions. He commented, “That there is a peculiarity in the glass of these windows is sure, but that it is anything but inferiority of quality we are not prepared to admit.” The house was soon to have a tenant. “We presume the ghosts can easily be removed by putting new glass into the affected window.”

The “ghosts” had become a nuisance to the neighbors. “One of the residents thinks it will pay him to charge an admission fee to his yard if the thing goes on.”

Apparently, no séance was held. The ghost craze ended on May 15. That morning, after 70 more people visited the “ghosts,” the owner took out the upper panes of glass and shut and nailed up the blinds.

“The glory of the ghost has departed,” Wadleigh announced.

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<sup>1</sup> This article © 2021 by the author Ellen Knight is a revision of an earlier article by the author published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Oct. 26, 2020. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

<sup>2</sup> The house and the two others mentioned are still standing but have not been identified to forestall any new nuisances, although the ghost stories disappeared along with the glass long ago.