

General Lore of Keystone College



Written by Steve Skierski

Founded in 1868 as the Keystone Academy, the school was intended to serve Civil War veterans returning home and looking to pick up where they left off before the conflict. John Harris was an ordained minister and taught young men about their faith in Christ in addition to other subjects of importance at the time. The first building on campus was dedicated in 1872 and named “Harris Hall.” It still stands today and makes many appearances in postcards and other official propaganda. The building’s remarkable brick façade looks great.

Harris Hall sits atop the aptly-named Harris Hill, a steep knoll that also houses the Art Centre on the lefthand side, as well as Capwell Science Centre on the right. The hill was once home to Moore Hall as well, which sat next to Harris such that the two structures formed an “L.” At the base of Harris Hill are Ward Hall and the Kemmerer Centre on the right, and Brooks Theatre on the left. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the majority of hauntings at Keystone are alleged to occur on Harris Hill.

Every old building with reported ghosts has a story. In Pennsylvania, the classic explanation is that it must sit on an “Indian Burial Ground” (hereafter: First Nations burial site). Various First Nations once lived in PA, including the Allegheny, and the Iroquois. I’m no expert, but these people lived and died for generations in the lands they called home just like we do. Just as we become attached to our homes, I’m sure they did. Just as we revere and visit the dead at their gravesites, the First Nations probably held their dead in high regard. Finally, even as our cultural identity is very strong, I’m sure theirs animated them and gave purpose to so many lives.

So, it follows that if my home was dug up, my remains were discarded and thrown in a trash heap, and then a monument to someone else’s progress was erected over my grave, my spirit would be mildly irritated. If Harris Hill was once a First Nations burial site that was destroyed and replaced by a Christian college, this closes the case on WHY the school is haunted. The Harris Hill complex overlooks the mighty Nokomis Creek and holds a commanding view over the whole valley. It seems to fit all the stereotypes of a sacred site. I cannot confirm this is true, but some of the hauntings appear to be of First Nations spirits, so the pieces fit together quite naturally.

The College started in 1868 and has operated continuously since, growing in size considerably since those early days. With this simple fact in mind, consider how many young people have walked Keystone's grounds and passed under the shade of its Hemlock forests. If you believe in spiritual energy, the passing and activity of so many people leaves indelible traces on the land itself and in the objects around the campus. The volume of energy in a public place like a college seems like more than enough fuel for spirits to manifest. Further, the ANGST present among 18-22 year olds only adds to this fire.

The last theory I'll present is my own. It's reported that occult practices have taken place on campus since the beginning. I once processed an incident report in Campus Safety regarding a "wizard in the woods who taught about Satan and offered LSD" to students. While this is almost certainly exaggerated, other stories of witches' covens meeting in the woods of back-campus are believable enough. Any college is going to summon together a wide range of people with different ideas of right/wrong, fun/danger, and good/evil. In my own beliefs, it only takes one instance of dabbling into the occult to invite an otherworldly being into a place. Like a fly that gets stuck in a window when you're driving down the highway, such demonic forces get into our lives extremely easily and are almost impossible to remove. I have little doubt some kind of evil force lurks on the campus, but I'm not going to speculate too far into that here.

I know from resident assistants and area directors of the campus dormitories that seances, Ouija board sessions, and other dabbings into the occult happen consistently if not frequently. The change in the air as summer loses its grip carries a certain promise and certain sense of mystery that gently nudges curious minds. Once people hear the school is haunted, the rumors only multiply.