



## Where do the stories come from?

By Rhonda Watters

Rarely can ghost stories be traced back to specific facts.

Sylvia Grider, an assistant professor of English at Texas A&M University who has a doctorate in folklore, said part of the fun of ghost stories is not having any definite facts. "People are terribly entertained by this," she said.

Grider said that although interest in ghost stories usually rises and falls periodically, this fascination for the unexplainable can be traced all the way back to the witch hunts at Salem. Many of the stories around now originated as far back as World War I.

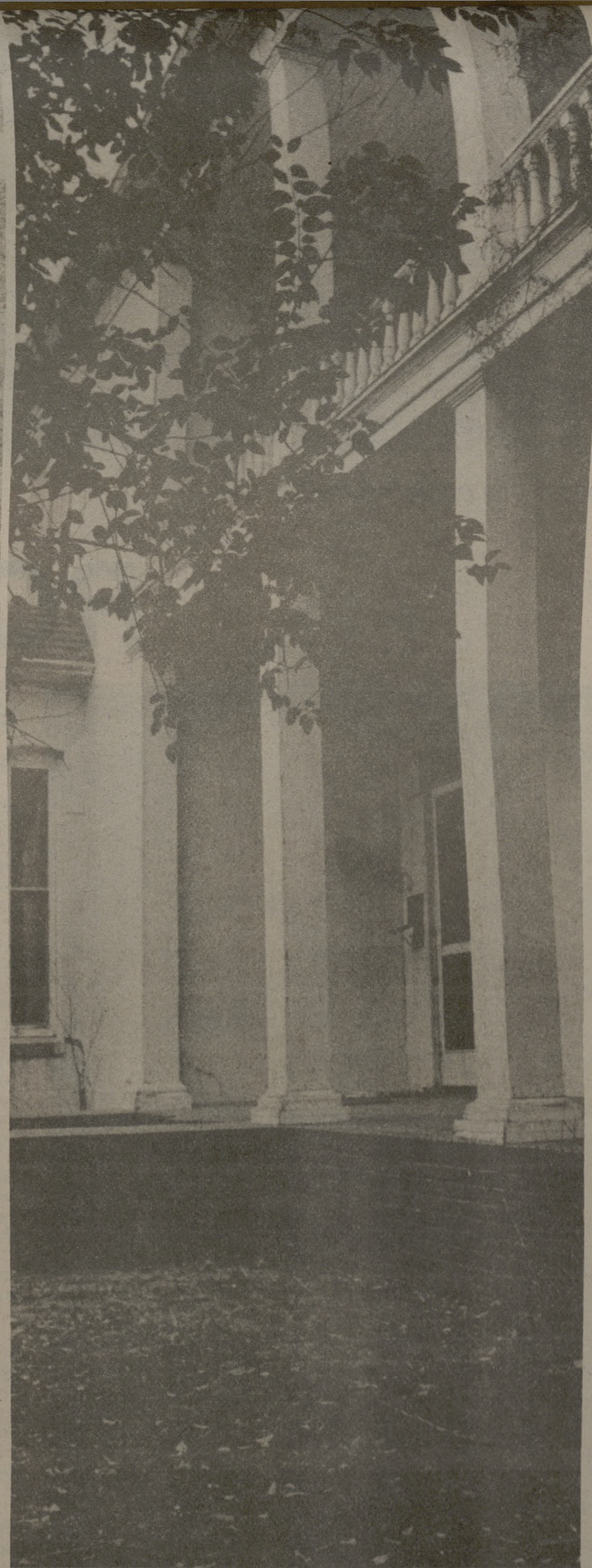
But as people become more educated, more mobile and more scientific-minded, legends such as these become more of a pastime than something that people take seriously.

Ghost stories are especially popular among high

school and college-aged people. They are also found more often in smaller towns than in cities. Grider said a possible reason for this is that in many small towns there is little to do, so teenagers must create their own entertainment.

She said mosty stories have some basic elements in common. Usually there is a mysterious or eccentric person involved, and some unusual phenomena such as flashing lights or weird sounds that take place only late at night. The entertainment lies in the fun of believing the stories and that they can not be explained.

Evidence that belief in ghost stories is a real part of the folklore of an area can be found in the fact that adults recognize this interest and commercialize it. Grider said that such things as commercial haunted houses and ghost towns are the "institution of a custom that already exists."



**THE CEMETERY** is an old one, as can be seen by the style of the tombstone above, so if there is a ghost he must be experienced. The tree at left shows one problem with the accuracy of ghost stories: to see the light in the cemetery, one must drive between the two largest trees, but which two are larger could be a disputed question. Another shot of the haunted house, right, this time the front, gives the viewer a feeling of desolation, desertion — and sometimes a little fear.

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