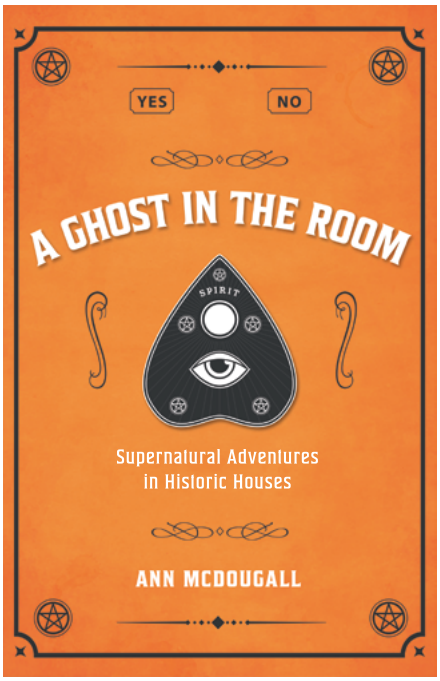

A Ghost in the Room

Supernatural Adventures in Historic Houses

by Ann McDougall

CA $24.95, 236pp, 5.5" x 8.5"
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Thema

VXP Psychic powers and psychic phenomena
VXQ Unexplained phenomena / the paranormal
WTHM Travel guides: museums, historic sites, galleries etc

BISACs

OCC023000 BODY, MIND & SPIRIT / Supernatural
OCC018000 BODY, MIND & SPIRIT / Psychic Phenomena / General
TRV016000 TRAVEL / Museums, Tours, Points of Interest

How, exactly, does one contact a spirit? Hoping to be haunted, Ann McDougall has tried everything from seances to automatic writing.

"Is this place haunted?" Staff at historic house museums are asked about ghosts on a daily basis, and these small museums strive to satisfy the public's appetite for the occult with ghost walks, paranormal investigations, seance recreations and other supernatural programs. But what is it about historic spaces that sparks our interest in connecting with the other side? Author Ann McDougall explores their tales of the supernatural and investigates our enduring desire to communicate with the dead.

Reviews

This fascinating work explores why historic houses compel us to connect with the "other side", and dissects the hows and whys of talking to the dead . . . Underpinned by personal experience, shot-through with personality, and written in a compellingly companionable style, *A Ghost in the Room* has huge appeal for those who are drawn to the spookier side of historic house museums and ghost walks. Full review. LoveReading

. . . this book is an interesting mixture of primary and secondary sources along with McDougall's own firsthand accounts. She subjects herself to numerous seances and Spiritualist meetups, goes to classes and retreats designed to make a medium of her, etc. She is, as my podcast friends would say, left of skeptic: she wants to believe, yet she is always willing to entertain more rational and mundane explanations before she accepts an outright supernatural one. I appreciate both of these desires, and I enjoyed the open-mindedness on display, Full review. KaraReads

Excerpt

The Fatal Toronto Séance

In the late summer of 1874, 31-year-old Torontonian John Saunders became interested in communicating with the dead. Not entirely convinced by Spiritualism, but *wanting* to believe, he started attending seances around the city and, to his surprise, spotted the faces of several prominent local figures in the dimly lit rooms. Perhaps these respected men lent credibility, because Saunders kept returning to watch mediums make contact with the spirits.

Seances of the 1870s were often conducted in the dark, but could be visually spectacular nonetheless, with eerie spirit lights twinkling in the gloom, and glowing spirit hands or faces manifesting and drifting about the room. In London, England, the famed teenage medium Florence Cook would lie down in a cabinet or adjoining room, enter a trance, and manifest the full corporeal body of a spirit named Katie King. Barely visible in the darkness, Katie King would walk around the seance room, speak with and touch attendees, and even hold babies before retiring to the cabinet and melting away to the spirit world. The fact that Katie King reportedly looked a lot like Florence Cook wrapped in a white shawl didn't seem to bother believers. They were certain Katie was a real spirit visiting the living world through the efforts of a divinely gifted teen girl. And in any case, they argued, Katie was taller than Florence.

Back in Toronto, John Saunders attended a seance in a room above Morrison's clothing store on King Street that had been renovated for the purpose, with an expensive custom spirit cabinet built in. Spirit cabinets were spaces where a medium could be partially or fully concealed from sitters. They were sometimes actual wooden cabinets, but might be something more temporary, such as a curtained-off area or even an adjoining room. Mediums claimed that the cabinets served to concentrate their spiritual energies, or to protect them from supernatural injury as they worked. It was common for a medium to be tied up in full view of the audience before the cabinet was closed to prove that they weren't creating any of the seance's eerie phenomena themselves. Of course, critics pointed out that the concealment of the cabinet offered a perfect opportunity for trickery.