

**BEALL-DAWSON HOUSE  
INITIAL INVESTIGATION  
CASE FILE  
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**BY**

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## **BEALL-DAWSON HOUSE INVESTIGATION CASE FILE**

### **LOCATION**

103 West Montgomery Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850

### **WEBSITE**

<http://www.montgomeryhistory.org/bealldawson.html>

### **HISTORY**

The Beall-Dawson House was built in 1815 for Upton Beall (pronounced "Bell"), Clerk of the Court for Montgomery County and a man of wealth in county society. In addition to his court duties, Mr. Beall was available to give legal advice and serve as an executor for wills and deeds. Clerk of the Court was a lucrative job, and the Beall family was very well off.

Jane Robb Beall, Mr. Beall's wife, was daughter of one of Rockville's tavern owners. Upton and Jane Beall had three daughters, Jane, Mathilda and Margaret.

The house was built overlooking one of the main roads into town and was an impressive sight. Rockville, while a crossroads, was still a rural town with only 200 residents and 35 houses. The Beall-Dawson House, larger and more impressive than the other houses in town, was built of brick, a rare thing at the time. The house was designed in the Federal style which was popular in Georgetown where Upton Beall was raised. It was common for politicians, land owners, etc. to move to small towns in order to be known as the wealthiest man in the area.

The house was originally designed with three exterior entrances, but the Adams Street entrance was made into a window in the 1940s. The original Adams Street entrance was the business entrance to the house, admitting those who came to visit Mr. Beall on court business, the courthouse being only a block away. The second entrance was for casual business, and the third was for servants and slaves.

The drawing room was the most public room in the house. All the rooms in the house have elaborate moldings, but the trim and the fireplace mantel in the drawing room are the most elegant. This room would have been used for entertaining.

In the dining room, the table between the windows was part of the original dining table set owned by Upton Beall. The photographs on the mantelpiece are of Margaret Beall and the Dawson Family.

The original house had a kitchen wing. The second floor of the kitchen wing included living quarters for the six to eight household slaves who worked and lived in the main house. There were also other slaves on the property that maintained the nearly seventy acres of fields and orchards and cared for the farm animals. The slaves section of the house is the most altered. The space originally consisted of two rooms that were

partitioned from the rest of the house by a wall. A ladder-stair from the room led to the kitchen below and provided access for the slaves to the main house.

8 to 15 slaves total lived on the premises. As far as we know, the Bealls were relatively kind slave owners. In a town that was mostly Confederate, the Bealls were very much Union during the war, even allowing General George McClellan of the Union Army to spend the night at the house. During the civil war, the women decided to free the slaves. When the slaves were freed, Washington DC had an "incentive program," where if you freed your slaves, you'd receive compensation.

None of Upton and Jane's daughters married. There's much speculation as to why they didn't. One theory puts forth that in the period of history when Upton Beall died, women had no legal rights. If they did marry, the husband would then take control of the entire estate, and maybe that's something the daughters didn't want to see happen.

By 1870 Margaret was the last surviving sister, and at age 57, felt she should not live alone. She invited her cousin Amelia Somervell to live with her. Amelia met John Dawson, a farmer and landowner in Rockville. They married and continued to live in the house with Margaret Beall. The Dawsons had nine children, eight of whom lived to maturity—five boys and three girls. On her death, Margaret divided her estate among the children and left the house to the three daughters, Margaret, Mary and Priscilla.

Many renovations were done in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also the 1940's, when there were periods of technological development (plumbing, electricity, etc.)

The Davis family lived in house from the 1940's to 1960's. They were the only family not related to the Beall-Dawsons to live in the house.

Mr. Davis was a wood worker with an enthusiasm for historic preservation. When he died, the house was sold to both the city of Rockville and the Montgomery County Historical Society. An odd legal quandary now exists where the city "owns the outside," and the historic society "owns the inside." The historical society runs programs and can do whatever it wants inside, but there's always the problem of who's responsible financially when something goes wrong with the electricity and heating.

Only a few items in the house are actually from the Beall-Dawson family...a piano forte, a table, and the clock. Everything else is provided by the Montgomery County Historical Society.

### **PARANORMAL HISTORY/ACTIVITY**

The major paranormal story is of a "ghost brick layer." Since 1965, sightings have occurred at least twice, the most recent being in 1986. In both cases, people were in the kitchen, and they saw an African-American man in the archway entry way. In both accounts, it was put forth that it looked like he was working on the bricks. Both times when spoken to, he didn't respond. And on both occasions, it was reported that upon looking away, then looking back, he was gone.

The original bricks were laid in sand, then in the 1940's, they were reset in cement. One theory is that the apparition is a slave from the 1800's who helped set the original bricks.

*Not documented content*

Another puts forth that it may be the 1940's bricklayer named Nathan who is believed to have committed suicide in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Although not part of the Beall-Dawson history, but part of the Historical Society collection, the story of the dollhouse currently kept in the drawing room is interesting. It was built in 1898 for a two year old girl, but she died right before Christmas. It was brought out every Christmas thereafter in her honor. Whenever it was brought out for a subsequent Christmas, none of the furniture would be in the room in which it was originally placed. They then sold the furniture, and gave the house to another family member. The family member then reported hearing the sound of a child crying near the empty doll house. No sounds have been reported since the historical society obtained the dollhouse (but then again, the dollhouse is still bereft of furniture.)

Every now and then someone hears women's voices in the house. Some historical society members have claimed hearing a voice calling "Priscilla!" which is the name of one of the Dawson daughters who died in 1922.

Due to the complications between the city of Rockville and MCHS, all the electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems are old and have many problems, and much of the wiring is unshielded. Which, according to the tour guide, "no one can do anything about." She stated that the plumbing may account for strange sounds and the outdated wiring for erratic EMF readings

Regarding EMF's in general, they're used on ghost tours and they always act up. One story of note is about a paranormal investigator who came through in 2001. It's put forth that even before the batteries were put in the EMF, it "went insane."

Footsteps/strange sounds have been discounted as house settling. Also, since air conditioning didn't exist in 1815, the house is designed to maximize airflow, which may account for strange sounds and doors opening and closing by themselves. Also, many doors that were replaced by Mr. Davis don't close that well.

Items have been reported to have moved from their original places, including a rather heavy dish.

People have reported "weird feelings." There's no one particular location, and they happen throughout the house. An EMF has been used to determine that some, if not all, of these strange feelings may stem from the outdated wiring system.

From time to time a movement-sensitive burglar alarm goes off with no apparent break in. But again, this is most likely due to the antiquated electrical system.

Lorraine Koch, a park service employee states in the October 28<sup>th</sup> 1993 Montgomery County Sentinel "I've run into hundreds that came through the house who've had experiences and even employees throughout the park service."

Several people have died in the house, including at least three children, and wakes were held there. There is no documentation that any of the deaths were out of the ordinary.

Members of the Beall, Dawson and Davis families have left scant records behind, with few clues as to what may be causing any reported paranormal phenomena.

Ghost tours are offered every Halloween by the Montgomery County Historical Society.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S IMPRESSIONS AND ANALYSIS**

Although the Beall-Dawson house is a beautiful building with a lengthy history, this investigator believes that there may be other places that would prove more fruitful to investigate. With the outdated plumbing and electrical systems, the design of airflow, and old wooden floors, it would be easy to disprove many of the claims of paranormal activity.

Aside from the above mentioned complications, MCHS tour guide Shannon O'Rourke stated that the Historical Society itself isn't too keen on having investigators come through. The reason being that they want enough interest for people to show up around Halloween, but they don't want to frighten them from visiting the rest of the year.

Shannon herself did raise some questions in my mind. During initial phone contact, I stated I *may* stop by on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. When I did show up on that day, she almost seemed to be waiting for me, with copies of news articles in hand. I was a bit surprised at her appearance, which was hardly expected for a Historical Society tour guide. She had long purple hair, and was wearing a black full length velvet and lace dress. There were two ear rings in her right ear, one of which was an Egyptian ankh; the other appeared to be a Tibetan eternal knot. My impression was that she was definitely someone with an interest in the paranormal and/or the occult.

During my entire time there, she was very friendly and informative, but had a sense of nervousness about her. If the other tour seemed to even get within earshot of us, she would instantly stop talking. When a gentleman arrived for a tour, she initially told him he would have to wait, and then eventually had him join the other tour which had already started half an hour before.

It was clear that my tour was to be one on one, and that if anything paranormal was brought up, it was to be quickly discounted. My gut reaction is that although she may have an interest in the paranormal, the MCHS may not be too pleased with her efforts in assisting my investigation.

The only possible paranormal event to occur while I was there was when we were in the slave's room. After being in the room for just a few minutes, I felt heaviness in my chest, and started to have difficulty breathing. I mentioned this sensation to Shannon, and she stated it was simply because there was no air flow in the room. I would most likely attribute my feeling to the supposed stagnant air along with thinking about, and empathizing with, the nine slaves who had to share such a small space.

In closing, although one would think the house would be fun to investigate, the number of factors against doing so are many.

## **PHOTOS**

Photography is prohibited at the Beall-Dawson House out of concern for damaging paintings and prints. For photographs, refer to website above.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY/SOURCES**

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