



REPORT

WATROUS SCHOOL HOUSE

INVESTIGATION



*Watrous
New Mexico*

NM0A1

**SOUTHWEST
GHOST HUNTERS
ASSOCIATION**



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The word “investigation” is defined as
“a searching inquiry for ascertaining facts; detailed or careful examination.”

The key word here is “facts”. Do ghosts exist? No, it has not been proven.
Therefore are no facts to investigate.

What we do have is the testimony of the witnesses and this is where an investigational process will work. Investigations are often viewed as a skeptical activity because the main goal is trying to determine what the witness actually saw. Is it explainable or not? This is done through critical thinking and an event replication process developed by SGHA. This is an important concept because what defines a haunting or ghost sighting is “Multiple witnesses reporting unusual phenomena over a period of time”. If these phenomena can be explained, the witness reports are no longer validating paranormal activity as a cause and thus there is no ghost or haunting. Additionally historical research may be done in an attempt to validate facts.

It is important to understand that the goal of an investigation is not to find evidence of the paranormal but to attempt to identify any natural or manmade causes of the reported phenomena

Definition of Terms

Investigation Status: Unsolved investigations will have either an open or closed status. An investigation is given an “Open” status if:

The investigators were unable to replicate all of the witness events. Something significant remains that is still unsolved.

It is important to understand that an “open” investigation does not mean that the unsolved facts are paranormal in nature. It simply means that we have exhausted our resources and cannot solve the “open” items/events.

A “Closed” status indicates that there is insufficient data or confounding variables that prevents replication or identifying possible explanations. This often occurs when investigators do not have direct access to witnesses or some other environmental change has occurred that creates confounding variables.

Confidentiality Notice

Many of the witnesses interviewed have wished to remain anonymous in exchange for presenting their accounts of paranormal experiences. We honor that request and thus witnesses will often be identified by aliases. Any coincidence between aliases and actual persons is unintentional.

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Part 1: Location Information

Watrous School

Watrous, NM

Part 2: Location History

About twenty miles from Las Vegas the highway dips into a beautiful and lush valley where trees abound. This is Watrous, New Mexico.



The town is located at the confluence of the Sapello and Mora Rivers, whose headwaters are in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the southern range of the Rockies. Originally designated as La Junta de los Ríos it was officially changed to Watrous in 1884 by the New Mexico and Southern

Pacific Railroad Company (later the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway) to honor one of the town's early settlers, Samuel B. Watrous.

La Junta/Watrous has played an important commercial role in New Mexico's early history, encompassing its many cultures. Here were located Indian encampments, a Santa Fe Trail resting spot, railroad stops, modern highways, and several nearby Army Posts.

With the opening of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821 La Junta entered into its heyday of commercial significance. The arrival of French and Anglo-American traders and merchants introduced manufactured goods to New Mexico's markets. Manufactured goods were traded for beaver pelts, buffalo hides, wool and other commodities. La Junta was in a strategic location to facilitate these exchanges. It was here that the two main branches of the Santa Fe Trail, the Cimarron Cutoff and the Mountain Branch rejoined before heading either to Taos or Santa Fe. La Junta was also a rendezvous point for wagons to gather before heading east to

markets in St. Louis and Kansas City. Samuel B. Watrous, the namesake for the modern village made his appearance here about 1835. By 1879 the railroad reached La Junta de los Ríos and the name of the settlement was changed to Watrous. Samuel donated ten acres for a station right-of-way. With the arrival of the newest mode of transportation, traffic on the Santa Fe Trail and the stage lines ceased but the town of Watrous successfully made the transition. It became an important shipping point for local products, such as pinto beans and quarried stone, and was used by Fort Union in transporting supplies and personnel, until its abandonment in 1891.



Watrous grew to include several general stores, two churches (Methodist, said to be the oldest Protestant church still standing in New Mexico, and Catholic), a hotel, school, post office, barber shop, blacksmith shop, livery stable, lumber yard, slaughter house, and tavern. Schmidt and Reinken, Hand, and Benedict Marcellin St. Vrain, nephew of the merchant Ceran St. Vrain operated the town's stores. The village was the home of several short-lived newspapers, including the Mora County Pioneer, Pioneer Journal, Northern New Mexico Farmer's Weekly, Arrow, and Pioneer Plains Times.

Samuel Watrous committed suicide in 1886 at the age of seventy, possibly from being despondent over the death of Samuel Jr. a few years earlier. Also, the bad winter of 1884 adversely affected his cattle and he borrowed heavily from Charles Ifeld Company and the 1st National Bank of Las Vegas, which may have contributed to his decision. He was buried on a hill overlooking the Watrous Ranch. He was described as having had a life that "exemplified the American pioneer of a bygone era." And that "perhaps the greatest thing that Samuel Watrous did was the planting of trees."

The passing of the village's namesake did not diminish the town. On the contrary, families continued to settle in the beautiful valley of the two rivers and businesses flourished. Watrous' son-in-law, Carl Wildenstein, developed a flourmill at Glenwood Farm. The Overton Mining and Tunnel Company commenced operations in 1881. By 1889 the population had tripled to 365.

At the turn of the century there were new merchandise retailers and new partnerships, such as Lang and Tipton. The town supported an auto dealership and at least one attorney.



Samuel's son, Joseph, raised cattle, hay and alfalfa. Unfortunately, a 1901 fire destroyed much of Watrous' business district and several homes, and the flood of 1904 killed eight persons.

Watrous weathered this setback and reached its peak population of 435, as noted in the 1920 census, in part due to the sanitarium residents at Valmora Ranch. Although the village incorporated in 1939, it was beginning its decline, losing both population and businesses. Watrous received rural electricity in 1946, and by 1950 the population had dropped to 256.

Although the railroad made flag stops as late as 1953, Watrous was no longer a key shipping point.

Today the willows lining New Mexico State Highway 161 stand as a mute reminder of the visionary days of Samuel Watrous. Today his beautiful hacienda is the ranch headquarters for the Doolittle Ranch. Hispanics once again make up the majority of its residents. In many ways La Junta de los Ríos has returned to its beginnings as an idyllic, peaceful rest stop, only now for travelers on Interstate 25.¹

¹ <http://www.newmexicohistory.org>

Part 3: Reported Phenomenon

Unexplainable lights seen moving inside the school house at night.

MURDER TRIAL OF REYNOLDS SLAYER TO OPEN AT MORA

Watrous Postmaster Shot to
Death in Row Between Two
Others Over Election

With the completion of the murder trial of Nasario Flores, charged with the fatal stabbing of Eduardo Sandoval, expected today, the Mora county district court is scheduled to begin the trial of Anselmo Trujillo, charged with first degree murder in connection with the death of Charles F. Reynolds, Watrous postmaster and merchant.

Reynolds was killed at the Watrous school house April 4, when he attempted to act as peacemaker in an altercation resulting from an election row.

According to testimony taken after the fatal shooting, Sotero Martinez entered the polling place after the polls were supposed to have been closed and wanted friends to vote. Trujillo is said to have objected and heated words turned to blows with Martinez knocking Trujillo to the floor. Reynolds stepped between the men and had his back turned to Trujillo when the latter fired the fatal shot, which he contends was meant for Martinez, who received a bullet wound in the lung.

The ghost that reportedly haunts the building is the town's old postmaster, Charles Reynolds, who was shot and killed inside the old school house in 1933.

(Las Vegas Daily Optic, 27 April, 1933)

Part 4: Investigation

We sat up an observation team to watch the building to see if we could identify anything that could resemble what was being reported by the witnesses. Our first hypothesis was that the lights from cars could be reflecting off the few remaining windows of the building.

Later, we had a chance to talk to a local law enforcement officer who told us that trespassing at the school has been a problem. People were by-passing the fence and entering the building to explore and look for the ghost.

This became our second hypothesis. The lights that witnesses were seeing were actually the flashlights of trespassers moving about in the old building.

With the assistance of the

officer, we were able to move around just inside the building so we could observe the effects of the flashlight being moved around inside. Our observations of the phenomenon matched the description of what the witnesses had reported.

Part 5: Conclusion

despite having a tragic incident occur in the old school house, it does not appear to be haunted. the only phenomenon reported by the witness (moving lights inside the building) has a rational explanation that was replicated by our team.

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Part 6: Photographs



