**C. Politics, Memory Practice, and Ghost Excavations at Ft. Mifflin**

The presence of ghosts helps to constitute a place, especially the specificity of historical sites whose eventful histories lie in the past, not the present……or do they? By following the ghosts at historical places, can the contemporary visitor identify and record the traces of forgotten people and events, some of whom are even lost to history? In doing so, can alternative stories and other histories be created? When we venture (or investigate) within the spaces of these sites, can we recover “dead” activities that were once performed at these sites? These are questions each investigation must ask. We must be watchful, though, in these investigations. Historicism can “kill” presence. Sometimes, people are located at a place, and during a particular time frame, when they were not actually present!

The “haunting uncertainties” at Ft. Mifflin are NO exception! Time frames and historical personages here are not always contextually accurate. In this view, we can become the created remembrances of contemporary historical presence. This “inauthentic” creativity is the real “ghost” that haunts all of us who come to a place of history and past drama like Ft. Mifflin. We are obligated to tell true stories of any (and all) circumstances of continuing past presence. We cannot be blinded by personal interests, ego, economic considerations, or wishful thinking and “Imagineering”! At the same time, we cannot allow a “carte blanche” approach to those who wish to “witness” and investigate these manifestations. We cannot justify it in contemporary political terms: everyone has a “right”…. Is Ft. Mifflin a “lab” for scientific investigation or merely public entertainment?

We owe it to those that remain to convey their stories accurately, fully, and with authenticity. We must bear witness to the haunting phenomenon in a professional manner. We must translate the cultural exchanges that occur without bias or prejudice. We must tell their stories, NOT ours!

Ft. Mifflin is a haunted, historically-significant site. It’s past (and current state) attests to that fact. The phenomenon of contemporary past presence is a known and recorded there. There have been numerous investigations in the past that have documented, in one form or another, a continuous non-contemporary presence at the fort.

Most of these investigations, however, have taken an allocentric approach to the documentation of these haunting uncertainties. The “ghost hunts” use the contemporary physical environment to record and measure (from a baseline survey) the differences in ambient space within the fort. This allocentric approach assumes a “universal” (non-historical) frame: the “Officer Quarters” is (was) the “Officer Quarters”; a “door” is (was) always a “door” at a particular location and in a particular space, etc.

A “ghost” (be it a residual recording or an interactive presence) uses egocentric space. This is the space that is relative to his (her) cognitive map. This is a very contextual and cultural space, and thus can differ from one culture (or ethnic group) to another and from one time period to another. We, as investigators, are obligated to tell the ghost’s story adequately. These stories must be physically contextual to the time period and cultural behavior that was “lived”.

We need to know why only some historical individuals (the “screaming woman”; the “lamplighter”, etc.), certain activities (“children playing”; “dogs barking”), and particular events (a “hanging”, a “drowning”, etc.) are manifesting at the fort, and not others. Is this an eyewitness bias (or prejudice), an investigative error (compounded again and again), subjective resonance (based on a personal experience), or the real ghost stories? The contemporary meaning of Ft. Mifflin depends upon these ghost stories that we locate in particular spaces within and around the fort. These ghost stories should be the Ghost’s story, not ours. It is their “territory”. They still claim possession of it. We do not need a contemporary sense of “territoriality” that is claimed by those who investigate or administer the fort!

The haunted spaces of Ft. Mifflin require a “ghost excavation”. This is based on its multiple historical occupations and its potential sources of agency (“who” is haunting the fort). There are multiple layers of “haunting uncertainties” that occur on the fort’s surface areas. This means that various agencies may be the cause of the cultural manifestations there. These also include the residual elements and place memories that may be a result of multiple environmental factors, such as geomagnetic activity and the presence of various water sources.

As investigators, we need to address questions on how to treat these archaeological remains of past presence on the surfaces of the fort. We must excavate to “revisit” and recover this “haunting” space. At Ft. Mifflin, we should be able to excavate particular haunted spaces where certain past memories are re-enacted.

The haunting at Ft. Mifflin show conformity to patterned cultural cognitive spaces where specific individuals performed particular tasks, and had personal experiences and emotional events that occurred in their lives. These are the spaces where specific moments occurred and continue to re-occur. These spaces called S.I.M.S. should become the locations where controlled “ghost excavations” are enacted.

Besides excavation, this is also about media, access, and information re-distribution. What we ALL should be concerned about at Ft. Mifflin is the “living” past. This is as much about what has not already gone (or continues to decay and disappear) as who still returns. We cannot let politics, economics, and, most importantly, ego infringe on our obligations to record what happened, and what still remains and IS happening, at Ft. Mifflin!

The contemporary “ghost excavation” of Ft. Mifflin is a question of vestige and trace. Ft. Mifflin is a trace of its former history. There are structures, casemates, and the physical locations of fortified presence. These are the traces of what we preserve and view today. These traces are not functional to us today in the same sense as they were originally in the past. They are still functional, however, to the vestiges or remains of those manifesting presences of the past that still continues to “live” there. To those entities, it is still a functioning Ft. Mifflin in some capacity known to them and their memories!

When contemporary issues interfere with or foreshadow this interactive interplay of past vestige and contemporary trace, we are affecting more than a political or economic arena. We are affecting the social, cultural, and historical atmosphere of a Ft. Mifflin that many consider worthy of preservation. Yet, this is a Ft. Mifflin the contemporary observer does not (cannot) know from first-hand experience or memory practices. Only the ghosts who remain know that particular “presence” of the fort!

The phrase “help to save the Fort that saved America” means more than a contemporary issue or concern. We must remember that it is not so much our fort as it is theirs, especially those who still remain behind. Maybe we should modify our slogan to say: “Help to save a still functioning fort that once saved America!”

A “ghost excavation” is not a form of history that can be used to justify a particular contemporary cause. It is a means to recover memory as a material practice. It allows the ghosts to speak for themselves. It is their voice that we should hear, not ours! The haunting manifestations at Ft. Mifflin, extracted from a “ghost excavation”, is the development of surface histories involving meaningful relationships that are recovered through contextual and resonating contemporary memory practices. It is when our voices blend with those from the past!

**Photo 24: A “contemporary presence” during the “ghost excavation” (2009)**

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