

M O R E

Chicago Haunts

SCENES FROM
MYTH AND
MEMORY

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NEW
STORIES!

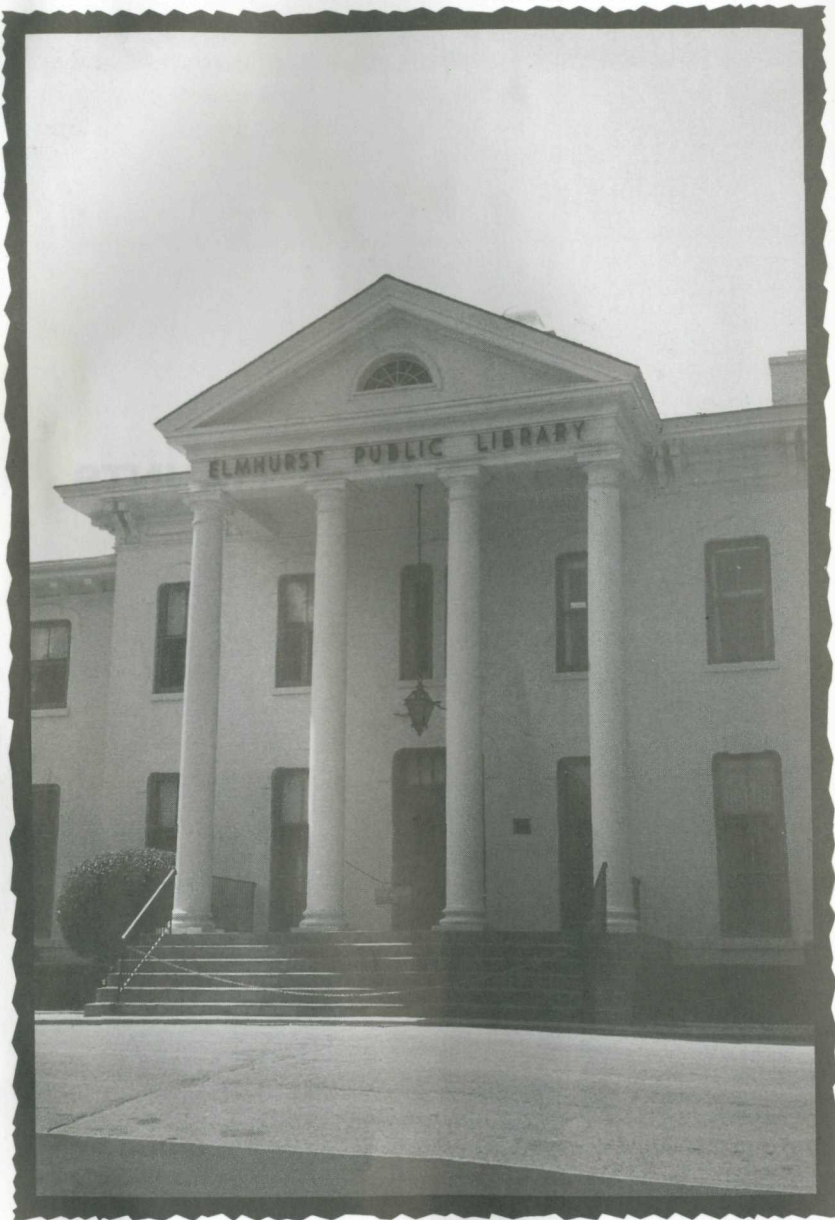


Photo by D. Cowan.

This stately village landmark shelters a bookloving phantom.

A Bookloving Ancestor Refuses to Check Out

WHEN, IN THE LATE 1860s, Elmhurst resident Seth Wadham built a home for his family, little did he guess that this house, which he christened White Birch, would one day become the town's public library. Little, too, would he have believed the popular rumor that he himself haunts it.

From the 1880s to the early 1920s, the Wadham home title passed through a number of hands. In 1922 the Elmhurst Library moved its several-thousand-volume collection from a tiny room in the old Glos Building into Seth's old homestead.

In the late 1920s, fire damaged the north roof, and the building was rewired and redecorated. Previously, the library had occupied only the ground floor, but after the renovation, part of the second floor was opened for library business.

Despite the overhaul, by 1936, the Elmhurst Library faced serious space problems, and the building fund started an eight-month renovation, in hopes of making room for the ever-expanding collection, now numbering more than 17,000 volumes.

The frequent and major alterations to the library structure began in the 1950s to give rise to rumors regarding the haunting of the building, a typical consequence of extensive renovations. Patrons and employees reported unusual goings-on: books flying from the shelves of the stacks, or stacks of tomes carefully shelved by unseen hands; lights found on in the morning after evening closings; feelings of being watched.

When, in the 1960s, another expansion project was approved, frequenters of the library braced themselves for a fresh onslaught of ghostly activity. Reports did multiply as more and more patrons heard

stories of the library's unpaid employee; soon the library was marked as haunted, a reputation that spread among west suburban bookworms and ghost lovers.

Today, electronic and other modern collections, thousands of additional volumes, and an ever-increasing clientele are making another, unprecedented expansion of the Elmhurst Library inevitable. This time, a new building may be the only way to make enough room for the future, leading some to wonder where Seth, who has lived in the building's attic since 1922, will go. Librarians, who joke about Wadham but credit his phantom to a creative librarian who invented the haunting years ago, say don't worry: the house's builder has been in his grave since his nineteenth-century passing.

But patrons know the truth. A dictionary falls to the floor for no reason; a reading lamp suddenly flickers on; invisible footfalls echo in an adjacent aisle. With a thoroughly modern future ahead, Elmhurst Library patrons are loath to give up their ghost.

The Elmhurst Library provided background information on the library and its alleged attic inhabitant.

MAXWELL STREET HAUNTS