

AMERICAN SPIRITS



“Reindeer Manor”

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**An excerpt from
AMERICAN SPIRITS**

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The dawn of the 20th century was a turbulent time in America, setting in motion forces that eventually led to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Within the century's first 20 years, America endured the San Francisco Earthquake, the sinking of the Titanic, and the Great War. The Ford Motor Company transformed the workplace by inventing the assembly line. During the Roaring Twenties, Flappers cast Victorian regulations out the window and jazz blasted out the music scene as Prohibition came and went.

Meanwhile - in the great state of Texas - the 20th century was defined by one singular event: when oil driller Walter Sharp hit a gusher at Spindletop Field in January 1901. The gusher spewed oil more than 100 feet into the air until it was capped nine days later. That seminal event wrenched the Texas economy from its agricultural roots and flung it headlong into the petroleum and industrial modern age.

It also launched the career and riches of Walter Sharp, who went on to establish the famed Sharp-Hughes Tool Company with Howard Hughes, Sr. in 1909. The partners patented a bit that allowed rigs to drill oil wells under formerly impermeable rock.

(You probably are already familiar with the tragic tale of the Hughes family... how Howard Hughes Sr. and his wife died young, leaving their brilliant teenage son, Howard Hughes Jr., to inherit the family fortune. Junior went on to make millions as a movie producer, inventor and aviator... then to lose it all as he slowly succumbed to mental illness.)

However, this story sheds light on the haunted lives of the Sharp Family, whose fame, fortune and fate intertwined with those of the Hughes clan. Whether the Sharp Family was cursed or their property was hexed is a matter of debate. Perhaps both. You decide.

Like the Midas Touch for fabled King Midas, the Texas oil boom proved too powerful for Walter Sharp. Just three years after founding the tool company, Sharp likely

suffered a heart attack while extinguishing a large oil field fire. He died at age 42 in November 1912.

Howard Hughes Sr. named Walter's brother, James R. Sharp, as new partner at the tool company. Once again, the wiles of Fate brought both riches and woes upon the Sharp Family. Fire was to play a recurring role in their sad saga.

James R. Sharp -- prominent Texas oil pioneer, banker and new partner at Sharp-Hughes Tool Company -- owned a two-story wooden house on Houston School Road in Red Oak, Texas.

Sharp leased the house and property to a family of Swedish sharecroppers while he was away on business. However, in 1915, lightning sparked a raging fire which quickly consumed the wooden house and its inhabitants. The entire family, including several small children, perished in the blaze.

Not to be defeated by misfortune, Sharp rebuilt on the property. This time, Sharp would build his legacy with a grand Main House which would forever be the family home. Sparing no expense -- nearly tripling the cost of construction -- he ensured all the buildings on the property were virtually fireproof, constructing them primarily of concrete, brick, and steel.

However, Fate bypassed death by fire and selected an equally dismal end for James Sharp. Before the Main House could be finished, Sharp was found dead, shot just behind the left ear. Records are sketchy, but he either shot himself or was murdered by his mistress at his city house in Oak Cliff. The coroner's report simply stated that James Sharp's cause of death was due to "the loss of 2-3 ounces of brain substance," without further elaboration.

In 1917, shortly after his father's death, James Sharp's eldest son, James Jr., moved into the newly completed Reindeer Manor. But the mixed legacy of success and misfortune soon took up where it had left off.

Junior prospered by farming the land, ranching, and breeding horses for harness racing. Between 1918 and 1928, he added several buildings to the grounds, including servants' quarters, a carriage house, and barns.

Had the Sharp Family finally reversed the curse? Not so fast.

The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 thrust the once-wealthy Sharp Family into abject poverty. Junior's wife, a prominent spiritualist, was convinced that the family and the Manor were cursed.

With cash dwindling and creditors calling to collect, Junior began to act strangely. As rumors of insanity spread among his staff, Junior spent more and more time with his wife in her "unholy pursuits," as the servants called it.

James and his wife called upon psychics and witch doctors in vain attempts to lift the hex. Mrs. Sharp held séances to contact James' father from beyond the grave, seeking his advice. Potions were mixed and incantations were chanted, but their fates were sealed.

Perhaps they were instructed by a "spirit" or they simply devised their own unseemly solution, but soon Junior's wife was found dead by poisoning in the main dining room of Reindeer Manor. Junior's lifeless body swung from a noose strung from barn rafters.

Was it a double homicide? A suicide pact? Either way, the curse was lifted from the Sharp Family at last. There was no heir.

After that unfortunate series of events, Reindeer Manor fell into ruin. A few brave souls tried to turn this house of disaster into a home, but all failed. The house stood abandoned for decades until 1974, when it became The Haunted House at Reindeer Manor.

As always, entrepreneurs have found a way to make a dime off the backs of others' miseries. Reindeer Manor stands today on Houston School Road along the outskirts of Dallas, billed as "a Haunted House *Abusement* Park which has been open to the public for over 30 years."

Finally, a successful venture operates on the property, welcoming its tortured spirits to manifest themselves among ghost hunters and thrill seekers who dare to enter Reindeer Manor.

Over the years, reports of many strange occurrences have been collected in Reindeer Manor files. Its official website even invites bloggers to share their spine-chilling encounters.

Unearthly noises are heard at night and objects are seen floating in thin air. Eerie lights are caught dancing in building windows during the off-season, when the entire property is vacant. Even a *Dallas Observer* reporter professed to sudden light-headedness and nausea while glimpsing spirits in the Manor. And most all who enter the house alone sense that someone is watching them, or feel "cold spots" in areas known to been the site of macabre events.

As the wheel of Time continues to turn, another new century has dawned and society once again groans under the weight of change, progress and pain. What hauntings will it generate? Whose family will it affect?

Only Time will tell...



Notes

Reindeer Manor is really open to the public. There seems to be no information about why it is called Reindeer Manor

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