

Sunday, October 17, 1993

Couples  
celebrate  
weddings  
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# Generations C

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## Old haunts help good causes

By CARLA CHANCE  
The Daily Nonpareil

Considering its notorious and often gruesome past, the Historic Squirrel Cage Jail — built in 1885 — seems the perfect location for a haunted house.

Part of the jail's lore is that it is haunted, according to David Lee.

But the public can see for themselves as the steely doors of the cages swing open, the cobwebs remain unswept, the rats scurry through cracks in the walls and the former jail is transformed into a historic house of horrors with several unexpected "death" appearances.

The Second Annual Haunted Squirrel Cage Jail, sponsored by the Westend Optimist Club, will be held Thursdays through Sundays the last three weekends of October.

Proceeds from the event will help support the Southwest Iowa Special Olympics, which each year enables special education children to compete in track and field events.

The Southwest Iowa Special Olympics was founded by the Westend Optimists more than 20 years ago, said Lee, who serves as club president.

The program is now federally funded, although members remain a major sponsor, he said.

But the hauntings, he said, were the brainchild of member Vicky Smith, who received a service award from the Optimists for her efforts.

For the past three years prior to joining the club, Smith transformed her backyard into a haunted attraction.

The oldest of her three children is disabled and she wanted to bring the party to her, she said.

Each year the party got larger and larger, she said.

But it didn't help matters when she told her children they could invite 10 friends and they ended up bringing home 10 friends each.

But a yard full of children didn't seem to scare Smith. In fact she relishes Halloween.

Her house is "totally Halloween" for two months prior to the event as she

and her family and friends set to the task of making ghoulish costumes and conjuring some of their special, hair-raising effects.

Of the 60 different costumes for this year's event, almost all of them, she said, were hand-made.

As for the special effects, such as haunting sounds, strobes and colored lighting, it doesn't hurt to have a husband who is a whiz in electronics, she said.

When the members began looking for a place, the Historic Jail which had haunted houses in the past, was their premier choice.

"It has a spooky aura about it," she said. "We could have an older house but it wouldn't be the same."

Besides the jail cells and dingy dungeon make the perfect setting for some of the club's ghoulish displays, Smith added.

According to last year's body count, 3,500 people ventured through the mazed mirage of monsters, spooks and goblins, she said.

Those who made it through helped raise \$7,000. Half of the proceeds go toward the preservation of the Historic Jail.

This year they hope to raise between \$10,000 to \$12,000, Lee and Smith said.

Although the intent is to scare people, in no way do the Optimists want to promote violence.

Their house of horrors will feature old-time spooks like Frankenstein, his lovely bride and Dracula, they said.

But to add to last year's thrills, members have also summoned some new additions.

The couple, at the top of the stairs where the tour begins, took marriage as an institution a little too seriously as on-lookers will gaze at their skeletal remains.

In addition to watching their footing, tour members may also want to keep their eyes peeled for Uncle Fester, although he has been known to light up the room by inserting a light bulb in his mouth.

Other Addam's family members will also be on hand although Thing will also be the only thing grabbing at you, Smith said.



Nonpareil/Carla Chance

Vicky Smith adds a little more stuffing to the scarecrow as she gets the haunted jail ready to spook the public.

## Jail held notorious criminals

By CARLA CHANCE  
The Daily Nonpareil

Ever since tours began of Historic Squirrel Cage Jail, people have confessed to inexplicable feelings of discomfort, seen doors slam and heard footsteps without any evidence of anyone being there.

"The jail," according to curator Rodger Gerberding, "is supposedly truly haunted."

Although Gerberding has witnessed, seen and heard some of the peculiar activities at the jail, he said, he has never felt threatened.

"It seems as though whatever haunts this jail is not an ex-prisoner."

However many theories exist about the "ghost" considering the incarcerating circumstances and some of its notorious prisoners of the past, he said.

Built in 1885, it is one of only 17 rotary-type jails built in the United States, the only one with three floors and one of three still left standing, he said.

The first person to live in the jail, on the top floor in the jailer's apartment was J.M. Carter, chief architect of the exterior, he said.

The location of the apartment, according to Gerberding, was simply a major design flaw.

All the others have the jailers' apartment up front.

It is in the apartment, Gerberding said, doors have been known to slam and rocking chairs simply start to walk.

Perhaps it is the architect, simply doing time for an ill-conceived plan who haunts the place, he said.

Although no one has previously been reported dying at the jail, Gerberding has discovered two related deaths.

In 1955 one man died of a heart

attack in his cell.

However the rotary cage, which is man powered, had fallen off its track and it was three days before the body was discovered, he said.

In 1958, when major criminals were still not separated from lesser criminals, an 18-year-old climbed to the top of the center drum.

He lost his footing, landed head first and then later died in a hospital, he said.

Other jail occupants included Jake Bird, one of the first serial killers in the area, who axed 44 victims before his death, he said.

The jail also housed Eva Alice King, dubbed "Midget Queen of the Box Car Thieves" from 1921 to 1924.

Eva was married to Thomas King, leader of a boxcar thieves gang, bootlegger and involved in the first national auto theft ring that originated in Council Bluffs, he said.

When the railroad cops came to arrest Thomas, whose house on Woodbury Avenue overlooked the rail yards below, he summoned Eva to hand him his gun.

With at least one cop killed, Eva was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

She was later paroled after seven years, became a Catholic school teacher and disappeared in 1933, he said.

A disturbing presence has also been felt in the children's quarters, he said.

Back in the 1880s, judges thought it was unwise to break up families so children were often sent to jail along with their parents, he said, although they were housed in separate quarters.

The first child, whose parents were arrested for larceny, entered the jail on Sept. 11, 1885, he said.

The jail also housed, he said, Charles Brown and Charles Kelly, the last two men to be hanged in Iowa in 1962.



Nonpareil/Carla Chance

David Lee gets prepared for his role as the Swamp Thing.



Nonpareil/Carla Chance

Rodger Gerberding has a blast in the electric chair.

### MONDAY:Oakland man adopts healthy lifestyle

#### Topic

##### Haunted jail open on weekends

The Second Annual Haunted Squirrel Cage Jail, sponsored by the Westend Optimist Club, will be held Thursdays through Sundays the last three weekends of October.

Hours for the Haunted Squirrel Cage Jail will be Thursdays and Sundays from 7 to 10 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from 7 p.m. to midnight, said David Lee, Westend Optimists president.

Cost is adults \$3; children 5-11, \$2 and children under 5 and those in special education are free.

Although the haunted jail may scare the life out of some of the faint-hearted, the event is intended to get people in the giving spirit.



Nonpareil

##### All aboard

Tory Christian Miller, son of Kallie Miller, 217 McGee Ave., adjusts his cap as he looks ready to take over as engineer aboard a Union Pacific train.

#### Today

##### Today's birthdays

Playwright Arthur Miller is 78. Actor Tom Poston is 66. Newspaper columnist Jimmy Breslin is 63. Daredevil Evel Knievel is 55. Actress Margot Kidder is 45. Actor George Wendt is 45.

##### Bible digest

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6)

Jesus can give us just what we need. Let us share Him with others.

##### Today's barb

If someone says, "I'll be honest with you," hold on to your wallet with both hands.

#### At your service

##### Weddings:

Wedding news is accepted up to three months following the wedding. Photographs will be printed up to six weeks after the event. Forms are available in the newsroom. The deadline is noon the preceding Monday. The Nonpareil is pleased to print your quality photograph without charge.

##### Engagements:

Submit news of your engagement up to six weeks before the wedding. We will be happy to print a quality photograph. Forms are available in the newsroom. The deadline is noon the preceding Monday. There is no charge for engagement pictures.

##### Milestones:

News of birthdays will be published beginning at the 75th and every fifth year thereafter. News of wedding anniversaries will be printed beginning at the 25th anniversary and every five years thereafter.

##### Baby Banter:

Photographs are taken at The Daily Nonpareil Wednesdays between 1 and 3 p.m. Children should be between 12 and 20 months of age.