



www.nps.gov/ncptt

You Oughta Know
Louisiana Series: Volume 06

THE LEGEND OF THE GHOST OF EAST HALL

Project Lead.....Jason Church (NCPTT)

Written by.....Debbie Smith (NCPTT)

Designed bySydney Andrea Landers

In Collaboration withNational Center for
Preservation Technology and Training
.....NSU's Cammie G. Henry Research Center
.....Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc.



www.canerivernha.org/zines

Social Media:   [ncptt](https://www.facebook.com/ncptt)  [@ncptt.nps](https://www.instagram.com/ncptt)



"Some said that she had become quite mad, while others said that she walked under the trees to meet the spirit of her lover who waited there."

-Normal's Ghost Story,
Ora Garland Williams

Cover Images: Left - Debbie Smith, NCPTT
Right - 1956 Edition of Potpourri, Northwestern State
University Yearbook

THIS EDITION BROUGHT TO YOU BY



CONCLUSION



The legend of Isabella is more than just a ghost story; it is a reflection of NSU's history and student traditions.



Isabella's handprint was moved with her to Nelson Hall. The handprint now resides in the Cammie Henry Collection.

Whether a product... of imagination or a true haunting, her story continues to captivate and connect past and present members of the NSU community.

Through storytelling, artistic representation, and annual events, Isabella remains a vital part of campus folklore, ensuring that the Ghost of East Hall will never be forgotten.

ISABELLA IN CAMPUS CULTURE

Help us welcome
ISABELLA
to her new home!

NSU's favorite ghost is ready to move
into Nelson Hall-but she needs your help!

WHEN: Halloween Night at 10:30 pm
WHERE: Meet other students at one of
three locations:

*The Student Union, the IM Bldg., or
the three columns (by Russell Hall).

Come join the excitement and fun!

Do not miss being a part of the
Legend of Isabella!

For questions please call Susanna Dehorel in the Office of
Student Activities: 357-6511

(Ghost Moving Collection, Cammie G.
Henry Research Center)

The Student
Government
Association honored
her legacy by
commissioning a
portrait in 2019,
placing her among
other notable figures
in university
history.

Beyond the ghostly
encounters, Isabella
has been deeply
ingrained in NSU's
culture. Students have
dressed as her for
Halloween, written
articles about her,
and even engaged in
treasure hunts like
the "Chasing Isabella"
contest.



(Debbie Smith, NCPTT)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Early History of the Campus and the Legend...	4
Evolution of the Ghost's Identity	5
Multiple Versions of the Legend.....	5
The Ghost's Residences on Campus	6
Hauntings and Mysterious Occurrences	7
Isabella in Campus Culture	9
Conclusion	10

INTRODUCTION

The legend of Isabella, the Ghost of East Hall, is one of the most enduring and celebrated traditions at Northwestern State University (NSU) in Natchitoches, Louisiana.



(Jason Church, NCPTT)

Spanning over a century, the tale of the ghost has evolved, capturing the imagination of students and faculty alike.

Debbie Smith from the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) recently presented a lecture that delved into the origins, transformations, and impact of this spectral presence on campus culture.



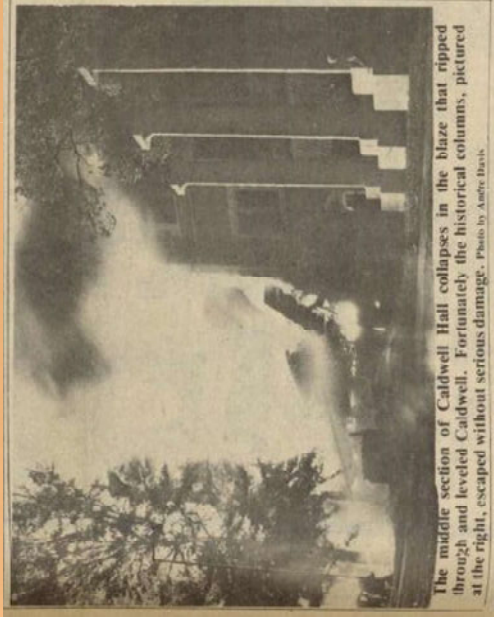
Another frequently cited haunting involves the former women's gymnasium, now known as Nelson Hall. Staff members working late have heard unexplained whistling, disembodied footsteps, and even distant laughter echoing through the empty building.

A particularly eerie event occurred when a staff member and her daughter reportedly heard an old-fashioned telephone message play, despite there being no such phone in the building.

Even Caldwell Hall, Isabella's former residence, has had its share of paranormal occurrences. When the building caught fire in 1982, several witnesses claimed to see an apparition in the top window, believed to be Isabella herself, watching as the flames consumed the structure.



Some believe she has never fully left campus, instead continuing to wander the grounds in search of her lost love.



The middle section of Caldwell Hall collapses in the blaze that ripped through and leveled Caldwell. Fortunately the historical columns, pictured at the right, escaped without serious damage. Photo by Andre Davis

(The Current Sauce, Northwestern State University of Louisiana)

REFERENCES

EARLY HISTORY OF THE

CAMPUS AND THE LEGEND

Northwestern State University's origins date back to 1884 when it was founded as the Louisiana State Normal School for teacher training. The Bullard Mansion, built in 1832, became part of the campus and served as an important landmark. Adjacent to it, the Sacred Heart Convent was constructed in 1857 and housed the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who provided religious education. The convent played a crucial role in shaping the early identity of the campus.

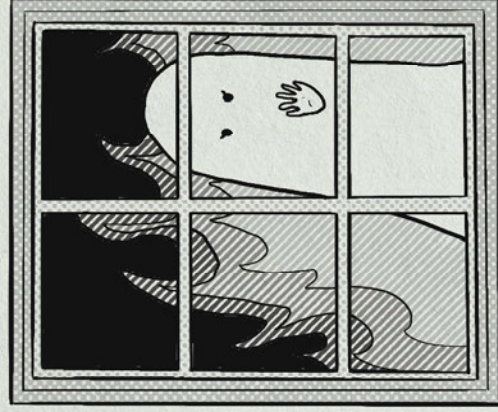
The first recorded mention of a ghostly presence on campus appeared in an 1895 diary entry, later discovered and published in 1912. The entry described students witnessing a spectral figure, believed to be a mourning nun, wandering the grounds at night.

The legend grew as students shared their encounters, and by the early 20th century, it had become deeply embedded in the university's folklore.



(Cammie G. Henry Research Center)

Numerous reports over the years have claimed ghostly activity on campus. Students and faculty have described eerie experiences, including unexplained noises, apparitions, and objects moving on their own. Some of the most notable incidents include a nun-like figure appearing in mirrors, strange noises in Varnado Hall, and a mysterious phone message playing in an empty building.



Residents of Varnado Hall have frequently reported unsettling experiences, including doors slamming shut on their own, whispering voices heard in empty hallways, and personal belongings mysteriously relocating. One of the most chilling accounts involved a student who awoke to find an imprint of a hand on her mirror, appearing as if someone had breathed on the glass. Additionally, in the basement laundry room, multiple students have claimed to hear footsteps approaching, only to find no one there.

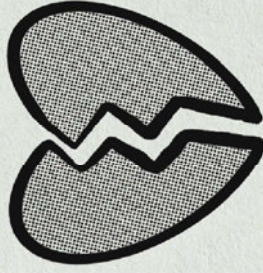
HAUNTINGS AND MYSTERIOUS OCC

EVOLUTION OF THE GHOST'S IDENTITY

Over the decades, the ghost has been called by various names, including the Ghost of East Hall, the Old Soc. Ghost, and the Ghost of Caldwell Hall.

However, it was in the 1970s that students began referring to her as **Isabella**. The Legend has been kept alive through literary works, including poems and ballads, most notably "The Ballad of Isabella" written by Julie Kane in 2009.

MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF THE LEGEND



There are four primary variations of the ghost story, all sharing common elements: a young woman in love, a tragic separation, a life dedicated to the convent, and an untimely death.

The different versions provide alternate fates for her lover, ranging from execution by guillotine to death in a duel. Each version reinforces themes of love, loss, and eternal searching, which have resonated with generations of students.

As the university expanded and buildings were demolished or repurposed, students carried on the tradition of "moving" the ghost.

Her known residences include:



Bullard Mansion and Convent (Pre-1913)



East Hall (1913-1927)



Music Building (1927-1940)



Old Social Hall (1940-1949)



Caldwell Hall (1949-1982)



Women's Gymnasium/Nelson Hall (1982-Present)

THE GHOST'S RESIDENCES ON CAMPUS

Each move was marked by elaborate student-led ceremonies, reinforcing Isabella's significance in campus culture.

Historic Photos (Cammie G. Henry Research Center)
Contemporary Photo (Jason Church, NCPTT)