

HAUNTED CANADA 5

TERRIFYING TRUE STORIES

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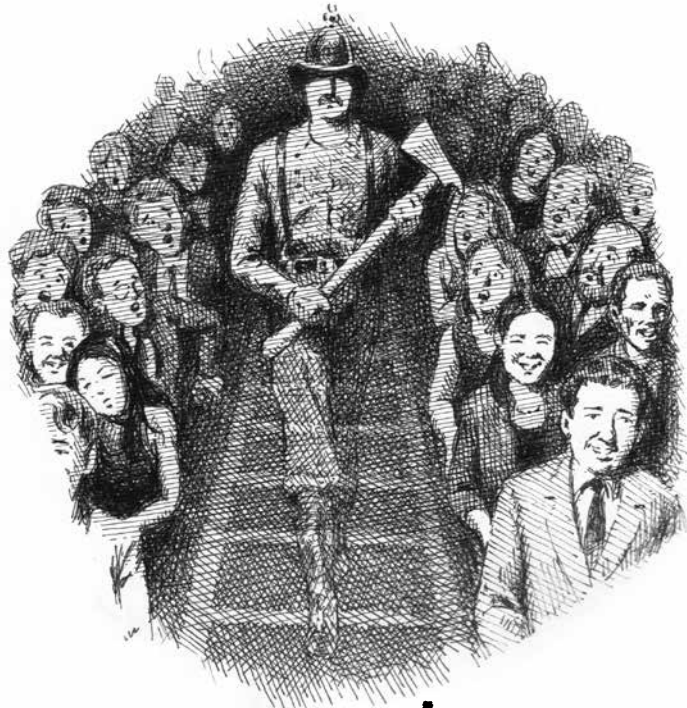
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STAGE FRIGHT

Edmonton, Alberta

As if the stress of performing live on stage in front of an audience of 145 people weren't enough to deal with, a ghost has been disturbing actors in the Walterdale Theatre for years. Stage hands say not a week goes by without some sort of paranormal activity being reported in the theatre. Most members of the theatre group try to ignore the unexplainable sights, sounds and sensations, particularly during performances, but that's not always possible. Sometimes, the ghost tries his best to stop the show from going on.

One night an actor was getting ready in the second-floor dressing room before taking the stage. No one else was with her. She slipped into her costume and applied makeup while going over her lines. She stood and turned

her back to the dressing table for just a moment, but that was enough time for the theatre's ghost to act. The woman returned to the table only to discover her wig had been taken. A quick search of the dressing room turned up nothing. That's when panic set in. She needed the wig and was due on stage in thirty minutes. She ran around the theatre rounding up everyone who could help. They searched every square inch of the building. Finally, just moments before the curtain was set to rise, the wig was found on the main floor near a pile of stage props. Although the actor was relieved, no one could say how the wig had gotten there.

That hair-raising experience is just one of the many times the ghost, nicknamed Walter after the theatre he haunts, has interfered with a show. It's believed that he's the spirit of a volunteer firefighter who died in 1909 while the building was being constructed. The building was originally home to the oldest fire hall in Alberta. The fire hall was in operation until 1954 when it became a furniture warehouse, followed by the Walterdale Theatre in 1974. Since that time the theatre has become a major part of Edmonton's thriving arts and culture scene despite Walter's presence.

He's often seen floating through the theatre's halls, dressing rooms and stairwell. He's fond of moving important props and costumes, like the runaway wig, when they're needed most. Lights flicker and cold spots envelop theatre-goers. The piano occasionally plays itself and people have heard the Tower Bell ring loudly without anyone near it. As if that wasn't enough, Walter is also known to



Walterdale Theatre

walk loudly throughout the building at inopportune times.

Richard Hatfield, the theatre group's technical director, recalls the time that Walter tried his best to interrupt a show. Along with a few other crew members, Hatfield was in the theatre's sound booth on the main floor. All was going well until they heard footfalls directly above their heads, loud enough that Hatfield feared the audience would be distracted by the noise. He immediately called the crew that were upstairs and told them to stop clomping around. Their response was unsettling to say the least. No one on the second floor had moved in a long, long time. They'd all been still throughout the performance. In order to calm the crew and not create any fear, Hatfield brushed the phantom footfalls off and tried to convince the others that it might have been crew members on the main

floor that they heard. But even as he said it, he knew it couldn't be true. The main floor was made of concrete — a surface that wouldn't produce the hollow *thud-clomp-thud-clomp* they had heard — and everyone agreed the footfalls had definitely come from above. Distressingly, this wasn't an isolated incident. Hatfield has to work late from time to time, and often alone. Or so he would like to believe. Sometimes, when the theatre is dark and quiet, he suddenly hears the same heavy feet stomping across the floor above. He stops what he's doing and rushes upstairs to investigate, but all he ever finds is an empty room. The place is quite dead.

Dead, maybe. But silent? Not in the Walterdale Theatre.