

IT WAS AFRAID OF THE DARK, SO IT TURNED ON THE LIGHTS

By Henry King

Arthur Cox used to run a little store along the road between Cedar Falls and Franklinville in Randolph County. Sipping a cola there late one afternoon, a customer casually said, "Mr. Cox, in a hour or so your day will be over. When you close, do you have to travel very far to get home?"

"Oh, I don't leave here when I close," he said. "I live in the back room."

"Oh? Have you always lived back there?"

"No," Cox said. "That little white house across the road is mine. My wife and I raised our kids there. But we moved out years ago. Had to. I just couldn't stand lights coming on at night and strange noises that made no sense. I told my wife I was fixing a bed in back of the store and sleeping over here from then on. The goings-on never seemed to bother my wife, but about a month after I came over here, she said I shouldn't be alone, so she joined me."

Cox and his wife didn't speak of ghosts, but rather hauntings, manifested by lights and noises. "We'd lock the house, turn out all the lights at bedtime and turn in. Quite often we'd see a light under the crack at the bottom of the door. I'd get up, go out in the hall and turn the light out. Sometimes the light would come on somewhere else."

Cox hired electricians to check the wiring and switches, but nothing was found out of order.

"What bothered me most were the noises," Cox said. "Lying there in the dark it sounded like someone tossing pebbles across the bedroom and they'd be hitting the floor"

The late Mary Cox Pierce lived in the house after her 1940s marriage to the Cox's son, Bill. She didn't notice anything amiss for a long time. But one night when the couple returned home, Bill stopped in the driveway to let his wife out while he put the car in the garage.

"The moon was shining real bright and I could see clearly. I saw a big ball of light coming right toward me," she said.

Once, daughter-in-law Mary Cox Pierce heard noises outside the bedroom window that sounded like horses or cows milling around. She also "felt a presence" as if something were lightly treading on her.

Arthur Cox had bought the frame house in 1906. He had noted nothing unusual about it while raising his family, but when the children married off, strange things began to manifest themselves.

Arthur Cox died in 1962. His wife went to a rest home. The family packed the household items for an auction.



Mrs. Pierce, who worked at a second shift job, was coming home after work late one night and as she pulled into the driveway to her new home across from the Cox house, she saw a light at the old place. The back bedroom of the Cox house was brightly lit. Family members still working to assemble auction items, she mused.

"You-all sure did work late last night," she said when she saw some of the family the next day.

Her remark met a sea of puzzled faces. They hadn't been there after dark. They finished packing before dusk, they said.

Historian and folklorist Henry King is giving readers a Halloween treat this year with the publication of his eighth book, "BOO: N.C. Ghost Guide."

The book includes some new and familiar stories, an index of hauntings, bibliographies of ghostly articles and books, and a list of places with spooky names. King, 85, collected many of the tales during his 30-plus years as a newspaper columnist.

Henry King's new book, "BOO: N.C. Ghost Guide," may be ordered directly from King's Possum Press, 137 Church St., Franklinville, NC 27248. They are \$12.95, plus \$1.42 for postage.

This is an excerpt from one story, entitled "It Was Afraid of the Dark, So It Tuned On the Lights." The setting is near King's home in the riverside town of Franklinville, where--appropriately enough--he lives across the street from a graveyard.

—Mark Brumley, Asheboro