



A house of Mystery



In 1884, heartbroken Sarah Winchester left her home in Connecticut on the east coast of the USA as well as the graves of her husband and only child, and travelled across the country to California where a strange obsession awaited her. Did she know that it would last for the rest of her life?

When her husband passed away, Sarah inherited the Winchester gun and rifle company, which had made the Winchester family very wealthy. After the deaths of her child and husband, Sarah fell into a deep depression and decided to consult a medium. According to some sources, the medium explained that her family was being haunted by the ghosts of American soldiers and others killed by Winchester rifles. Supposedly the deaths of her daughter and husband had been caused by these spirits and Sarah Winchester might be the next victim. The medium said that to keep the ghosts happy, Sarah had to build a huge house for them. As long as she never stopped building the house, her life would not be in danger. Sarah left Connecticut for California.

There, in 1884, she bought a small unfinished farmhouse and over the next thirty-eight years, she employed builders around-the-clock to add on room after room, and storey after storey. The building work never stopped, not even for weekends or holidays and it produced the house known today as the Winchester Mystery House™. It originally had seven floors, but after an earthquake in 1906 it was reduced to four. Apart from the house's strange architectural features including a staircase that leads up to the ceiling, doors that open onto walls and secret passages that run between rooms and behind walls, it was also unusually large. At the time of Sarah Winchester's death, it had 160 rooms, 2,000 doors, 10,000 windows, 47 staircases and 13 bathrooms! Sarah Winchester had strange habits, too. Apparently, she never slept in the same bedroom two nights in a row because she wanted to confuse any evil spirits that were waiting for her. She also used to visit the Blue Room at the centre of the house every night to communicate with the good spirits. She would ring a bell at midnight to call them and again at 2 am when it was time for them to leave. She would wear one of 13 special coloured robes and ask them for guidance on her construction plans.

A year after Sarah's death, the house was opened to the public. Since then, many people have described strange experiences there. Neighbours claimed to hear a bell ring at midnight and at 2 am. A caretaker heard the sound of a screw slowly turning, then hitting the floor. He looked everywhere, but found nothing. Tour guides have reported seeing a ghostly workman with a dark moustache in the basement of the house. Is the house truly haunted? No one can say with any certainty, but it is a fascinating story and the Winchester Mystery House™ is still open for visitors who want to find out for themselves.

A) Read the article again and choose the best answer A, B, C or D.

1 What does 'it' at the end of the first paragraph refer to?

- A travelling
- B California
- C Sarah's life
- D an obsession

2 According to the medium, why did Sarah's daughter and husband die?

- A The ghosts of gun violence had killed them.
- B They were very depressed about the war.
- C So that Sarah could make the ghosts happy.
- D Both had been shot dead by soldiers.

3 What did Sarah Winchester find in California?

- A a house with seven floors
- B a house she could continue to build
- C a house full of mysteries
- D a house damaged in an earthquake

4 What are we told about the Blue Room?

- A Sarah kept her clothes there.
- B Bad ghosts were unable to enter the room.
- C She went there to get advice.
- D Sarah sometimes slept there.

5 What happened at the house after Sarah died?

- A There were unexplained events.
- B Guides had strange visitors on the tours.
- C Workmen continued to build on it.
- D People were too scared to visit it.

B) Choose the correct words.

- 1 An obsession is a strong _____ you feel.
- 2 A medium _____ with dead people.
- 3 The word 'spirit' is another name for a _____.
- 4 A victim is someone who _____ a bad experience.
- 5 A passage is an _____ in a building.
- 6 An incident is _____.