

The Bonson Mansion © 2007

Richard Bonson was born in Yorkshire England, and came to Dubuque in 1834. He became one of the area's most successful miners. In 1878, Bonson built a mansion on Asbury Road between Dubuque and the town of Asbury. The area was practically wilderness then. When Richard Bonson died, he passed the mansion to his son, Robert, who was a judge in Dubuque. In 1916, the mansion became The Good Shepherd Convent, and in addition to a residence for nuns, was used as a shelter for wayward girls. St. Rose school was built next to the mansion in 1930. St. Rose contained the chapel, and was connected to the mansion by a tunnel. Today, the original mansion houses One Mean Bean, an excellent coffee shop. The chapel features a restaurant, and occasionally is used as a theater. Both buildings sit in the Fountain Park complex, where you can also find Northeast Iowa School of Music and other businesses.

The tunnel has been sealed off by the owner for safety reasons, but also for other reasons. There are all sorts of rumors about the convent in its early days. The basement of the mansion was said to have been used to punish pregnant nuns and keep them from public view. Anyone held in the basement was subject to very harsh conditions. Whether it was pregnant nuns, or just regular unmarried pregnant teens, or just incorrigible young girls, or just girls who were abused or abandoned by their families, there is no doubt that the level of emotional trauma inside the building was elevated almost every day. There is also little doubt that the austere rooms in the basement were reserved for the most unmanageable of the lot.

There have been several reports of paranormal activity. The current owners have reported being nudged or pushed when no one was there. Fans turned off the night before are found running in the morning. There have also been sightings of phantom priests, and other strange occurrences.



This view of the old mansion building on the left shows the former St. Mary's school and chapel on the right.



This view of the old mansion building shows the Northeast Iowa School of Music building behind it.