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On a Minersville garage door, an image of the Virgin Mary?

Hundreds of faithful flock to see what some say is the Madonna.



Adrian Datta, 9, of Pottsville, touches the image in Minersville on Friday. (John T. Sanders/Special to The Morning Call / September 1, 2007)

By Jeff Christman | Special to The Morning Call
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Some say there's a miracle in Minersville, while others dismiss it as an optical illusion.

Each day, about 400 people in this Schuylkill County town of 4,500 come to see a mysterious image that appears on a garage door in an alley.

To some, it's an image of the Virgin Mary that has appeared at 6 p.m. each day since Aug. 15 -- the day of the Feast of the Assumption of Mary. To others, it's just a reflection of light from the setting sun.

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On Friday, the image appeared at 6:16 p.m. on a door of the three-car garage, and the crowd of nearly 400 people gathered in a tight semicircle on Lewis Street near Front Street to see for themselves.

Most carried still and video cameras, while others brought rosary beads, pictures of the Virgin Mary, flowers and crosses, ready to share in what some believe to be a religious experience.

The crowd in the street grew as 6 p.m. neared -- young and old, children and the elderly, believers and skeptics.

"Yeah, we're waiting for Jesus," Evan Ponter, an 11th-grader at Minersville High School, told someone who had called him on his cell phone.

Ponter said he and his friends came out to see for themselves if what they were hearing about was real -- or just a tall tale from those who want to believe.

"I think that people are digging into it a little bit too much," he said.

Dozens lined the sidewalk facing the garage where the image is said to appear, others

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packed balconies and rested on lawn chairs. Hundreds more stood in the street, closing it to traffic while drivers on side streets slowed down to try to figure out was going on.

"There she is!" shouted Tim Heckman, founder of the Coal Region Ghost Hunters, who's doing his first investigation in Minersville.

He said he detected spikes in electromagnetic fields and energy that spirits use to manifest themselves. He said the coal region is a hot spot of paranormal activity because of the tragedies that befell coal miners decades ago.

Before hundreds of people -- the curious, the devout and a number of journalists -- the mysterious image appeared, albeit 16 minutes late.

As the evening wore on, the image climbed higher on the door. Dozens touched it with their hands, with their rosaries, with crosses. Others prayed, snapped photos and shot videotape.

Some expressed their skepticism -- suggesting the image is just a reflection of a statue of the Virgin Mary in the second-floor bow window of a home across the street.

Others said they're not sure what it is, but say it has a meaning.

"It makes you think about your faith," said Joan Bettinger, who said she's seen the image twice. When asked if it could be the real thing, she said, "It could be. Anything's possible today. It does look like her."

"There has to be a reason," said Yolanda Demcher of Minersville, who was surprised to see so many young people in the crowd. "There has to be a reason."

She speculated that the purpose of the appearance might be to draw young people back to their faith, to church and to prayer.

Nine-year-old Adrian Datte of Pottsville, who had bought a video camera with his Holy Communion money, gently touched the bright and blurry image.

"It's like, like it's weird that it's here," he said. "Like it's really interesting to see. I think it's something like a ghost or a spirit or Jesus."

Jeff Christman is a freelance writer

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