



Jack Sloan made a fateful decision to go back and confront a gang of desperadoes at the site of what is now the Old Holy Cross Cemetery. People say his ghost has been spotted nearby.

SANTA CRUZ

Ghost Stories

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DO DEAD MEN STILL
WALK? WE HAVE SOME
SPINE-TINGLING TALES

Santa Cruz doesn't have many ghost stories.

"Santa Cruz is such a sunny, happy environment, even the ghosts are laid back," says Ross Gibson, a Santa Cruz historian.

Even so, there are tales that make the spine tingle just a little: stories of the tall man in the broad-brimmed hat who haunts Arana Gulch, of the voices that whisper in one house, of the spirit of a young girl who wanders a hotel's hallways, and a mysterious mansion on Mission Street.

Gibson says he's not really a believer in

ghosts — he's never seen one — but he keeps an open mind.

A tall, wire-thin man with a storytelling voice, Gibson settles back in a chair in his Spanish-style house that overlooks the sea and begins his tales.

Of the dead who came back.

Of the spirits who, some think, may still be among us.

The legend of Jack Sloan

It was a February evening in 1865, and Jack Sloan was headed back to his farm after dinner in town.



The ghost of a girl named Sara is said to haunt the Brookdale Lodge.

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Ghost stories: Voices, ghouls and a love that lasts forever

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He and his friend, John Towne, were probably talking as their horses trotted down what is now Soquel Avenue toward the rickety wood bridge that spanned Arana Gulch.

It was a spooky place, even if you didn't know that robbers sometimes hid in the brush to waylay travelers.

Fog would sneak in from the ocean and curl around the willow trees and dying oaks, so it looked like ghostly fingers. A cemetery hugged the road nearby.

But Jack was not the kind of man to be afraid. So when he spotted a small band of desperadoes hiding in the willows, he called out and demanded to know why they were there.

The men had gotten into an argument at an adobe tavern on the banks of the San Lorenzo River and were waiting to settle the score.

They told Jack and his friend to leave. They were not the men they wanted, they said.

But instead of leaving, Jack got belligerent, and the desperadoes fired their guns into the air.

The noise spooked the two riders' horses and sent them flying up the hill into the spot where the Old Holy Cross Cemetery is now.

By the time Jack got control of his horse, he was angry.

He turned and thundered back down the hill, where he grabbed one of the desperadoes by his gun and began to whip him with his lariat.

But Jack must have forgotten about the other two men, who promptly shot Jack dead.

One of the gang members, 18-year-old Pedro Rodriguez, was arrested as a witness soon after.

But the fact he only witnessed the killing didn't seem to matter to an angry crowd that stormed the jail where the parking lot of Holy Cross Church is now, and dragged Pedro from his cell.

They hauled Pedro to the Santa Cruz wharf, where they tied weights to him and heaved him into the sea.

The real killers were never arrested.

It must have angered Jack's spirit.

Four years later, folks walking at the corner of Pacific and Soquel avenues heard a terrible clatter through the dark and narrow covered bridge that went over the San Lorenzo River.

A horse-drawn wagon thundered out of the bridge carrying a woman and her young daughter.

They had been crossing the Arana Gulch bridge when a figure had passed in front of them, they said.

The man was tall and thin and wore a broad-brimmed hat.

He was dressed in an overcoat. Then, the man simply vanished.

That sounds just like Jack Sloan, said a man who had been coroner when Jack died.

More than 100 years later, a couple who lived in a house in Arana Gulch near Soquel Drive and Capitola Road called historian Phil Reader. Some nights, while they watched television after dinner, they would hear noises on their deck, they said.

They thought it was a raccoon at first, but one night, they got up to look and saw a man going across their deck.

Only the man was not walking over the deck. He was passing through it, so only the top half of him showed.

He wore a broad-brimmed hat and overcoat. He appeared to be tall and thin.

Reader spent an evening with the couple, but did not see the apparition.

However, they were not the only ones who had told him of the ghostly man, none of whom had heard the story of Jack Sloan before.

Some high school kids once told him they had gone up to the Old Holy Cross Cemetery to drink one night and had seen a man in a hat walk across Soquel Avenue.

Only, his feet did not touch the



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Looking down from this spot, a group of high school students saw a man cross Soquel Avenue, only his feet didn't touch the ground.

ground.

Before he died, an old Portuguese man also told Reader of how, as a child, he and his sister would play in Arana Gulch.

Sometimes, he said, a man would come down the hill to play with them.

The man was tall and thin.

He wore a broad-brimmed hat.

The voices in the wall

Little Phyllis Patton was sitting in class at Holy Cross School in April 1898 when she looked out the window and thought she saw spirits passing by.

They looked like little tails of light that danced in front of the windows.

Then suddenly, all the windows blew in.

The Powder Works at the site of what is now Paradise Park had suffered a huge explosion, first sending sparks and then the concussive force of the blast two miles into town.

A rider galloped into Santa Cruz shouting for people to flee to the beach.

There was a fire, he said, that was threatening the powder magazine where barrels of gunpowder were stored.

That blast would be devastating to downtown.

The Powder Works had been established in Santa Cruz in 1864 when the Civil War cut off gunpowder supplies to the West. The rooms where they mixed charcoal, sulfur and saltpeter were made of brick with one wooden wall so any blast would be forced into the high banks of the San Lorenzo River canyon where damage would be less.

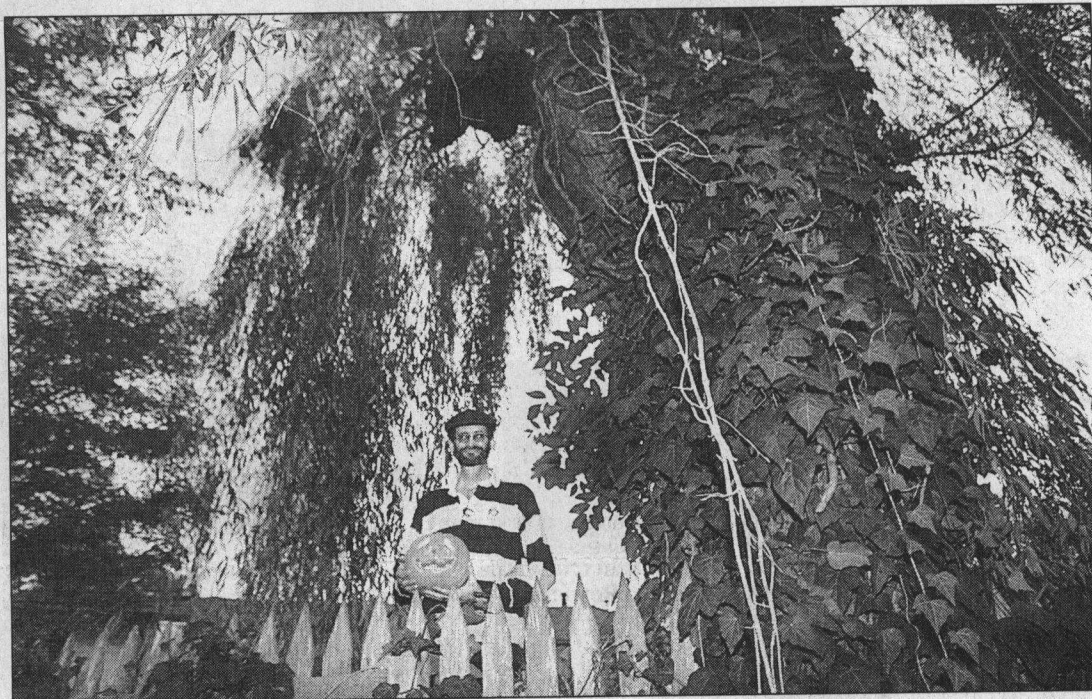
But this was a terrible explosion that demolished a number of buildings and set off a fire.

It was 10 p.m. before residents filtered back to their houses after the powder magazine was spared and the Powder Works fire contained.

But 13 people died, all of them Chinese workers. Another 15 were injured.

In 1925, the Masons bought the property and turned it into a campground and later a small cluster of quaint homes.

The old powder magazine was restored into a beautiful dusty-pink home with thick brick walls



Historian Ross Gibson stands by the last weeping willow tree that graced the land owned by the tragic 'Crazy Wright.'

and a view of the river. A couple lived in it.

In 1997, Gibson traveled to the private Paradise Park to give a lecture about the history of the place.

After, the couple who lived in the powder magazine house came up to him.

Sometimes, they said, they would hear what sounded like the soft babble of voices inside their house.

But they never could understand what the voices were saying.

It sounded, they said, like the voices were speaking a foreign language.

The girl with long hair

In 1902, Judge John H. Logan decided to rename the little mountain resort he had created and call it Brookdale.

It was a beautiful place where people would come to spend summers in the shade of the redwood trees.

Eighteen years later, a Dr. F.K. Camp decided to build a lodge on the site and have it straddle the bubbling creek.

It was a beautiful place, and Dr. Camp opened it on Friday the 13th in the middle of Prohibition. Friday the 13th was Dr. Camp's birth-

day, but it might have been a portent of the trouble ahead.

There was no alcohol allowed at Brookdale Lodge at first, even though there were speakeasies up and down Highway 9. Because of that, the lodge drew a sophisticated crowd including Hollywood stars and politicians. Herbert Hoover even visited there, reportedly trying a hand at trout fishing in the creek inside the restaurant.

But in 1945, the lodge was sold and entered a period of decline. Gangsters began to fill the restaurant and secret passages became the provenance of shady characters. Alcohol flowed.

It was sometime in those years when the young daughter of the Lodge's owner mysteriously fell into the creek and drowned inside the restaurant.

Her name, it's said, was Sara.

The lodge is now a respectable gathering place again, where diners and wedding parties gather to celebrate. Where people come for drinks in the evening.

But over the years, there have been stories of the sound of a child's footsteps scampering past the tables in the restaurant. Of lights and jukeboxes that turn on and off by themselves.

Of the scent of gardenias or the

faint sound of Big Band music in a place called the Mermaid Room for the window that looks into a pool.

And there have been people who've said they've seen a little girl wandering in the halls.

A little girl with long hair.

But when they go to find her, the little girl is gone.

Weeping willow

Ernest Otto was a newspaper reporter who spent decades telling the stories of Santa Cruz.

But he was just a boy in the 1870s when he met a man everyone called "Crazy Wright."

Crazy Wright walked around town with his coat thrown over his shoulders like a cloak. He had long hair and a matted beard and wore smelly, lumberman-style clothes.

He lived in a rundown cabin on Mission Street near the corner of what is now Laurel Street. It huddled next to a beautiful, Southern-style mansion — a mansion Crazy Wright had built.

But it was boarded up tight.

It was rumored that Crazy Wright had killed his wife and hidden the body in the house. There was also talk that he had a trea-

sure hidden there.

So one night, the young Otto and two of his friends took a candle and sneaked into the house. The thought that they might come face to face with a ghost was not enough to deter them from the idea there might be a fortune inside.

The boys pried open a boarded-up window, silently slipping past a beautiful stained-glass window of a woman they decided must have been Crazy Wright's wife and under elegant chandeliers into the huge parlor where there was an iron fireplace that had been boarded over, too.

That would make a good vault to hide a treasure, one boy said.

Or a body, another replied.

But greed got the better of one of the boys, who pried off the board to release a Pandora's box of bats that flew into the air with a roar of wings.

The boys ran screaming from the house only to meet Crazy Wright.

He stood on the porch ominously while they fled into the night.

The next day he went to each of the boys' families to ask the boys not come to the house again.

It was only then that Otto learned the true story of Crazy Wright, a man whose real name was Alan Gilmore Wright.

Before he was Crazy Wright, people called Alan Wright, "Honest Wright" for the integrity he had.

He had fallen in love with a woman who was in delicate health and decided they would live in Santa Cruz where the climate would be better for her.

As a surprise, he built her the beautiful house near a bubbling creek lined with graceful weeping willows.

But Alan Wright's wife died before she could move into the house, and he boarded it up and went to live in the cabin, letting his hair and beard grow wild.

He was not crazy, just broken-hearted, said Otto's parents, and the boy went over to apologize.

Alan Wright died later and his beautiful mansion was torn down.

The only thing left now are memories — and a lone weeping willow tree that hangs next to the creek.

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