

GHOST
STORIES

OLD SANTA CRUZ HAUNTS

by Gregory Jon Harbert

In Santa Cruz County, spirit runs deep. And it seems to last. There are many stories to prove it. What's unfortunate is the lack of written materials on local ghosts and haunts in the area. In the Old World, localities are still often defined by the ghosts and other world personalities that inhabit them. But here in our culture, those with stories to tell often feel ashamed, or too frightened themselves to share their experiences. The interviews that I have conducted have provided results that show many of those who have ghost stories to tell experienced circumstance related to the recent death of a loved one, making it, at the least, difficult to discuss with anyone outside the family, and certainly not suitable for print. Also, most local ghosts seem to be created as the result of a traumatic death, like an accident or suicide. This is different than the Old World, where many locations have spirits whose stories make them completely disconnected from the human history of the place. Faerys and faery mounds, tree spirits and water spirits, for example.

Yet, some stories have been recorded most others are told by word of mouth. Many of the following examples of local ghost stories come from the Santa Cruz Public Library, where they keep Santa Cruz Sentinel clips. The clips of which the following stories are derived from were dated mostly in the mid-seventies. It is with respect to the families of those written about that these stories are re-told. Enjoy them

as unusual pieces of Santa Cruz history, told at this appropriate time of year. And perhaps they may make great additions to that campfire or fireplace storytelling pantheon of ghost stories.

Local Ohlone spirit tales are among those stories that are told mostly by word of mouth. Very few Ohlone stories about Santa Cruz have remained. One story regards the snake that lived in the Santa Cruz Mountains, a giant serpent that lived deep within the redwood forests, eating anyone who chanced upon it.

Yet, over the years various parts of a puzzle have drifted through about an area we now know as the Pogonip. Pogonip is the area that stretches between UCSC and the San Lorenzo River. There are many days when a drive through the area reveals a fog shrouded portion of the highway; even when Felton to the north and Santa Cruz to the south are bathed in sun. Locals have related various stories, or versions of stories, that deal mostly with the flat area from Highway 9 to the river. There lies a large sycamore grove, and within it seems to be a dark energy that haunts the grove. It's been related that the Ohlones told a story of giant spider who inhabited the grove. This spider would catch unsuspecting passers-by in its huge web, jeweled from dew drops captured from the fog. It's even been said that the spider's web would only capture those who had a hidden darkness in their soul. Some tales exist about some of the souls taken, possibly still wandering through the forest.

Perhaps the last story of such a soul regards a priest from the mission. A version of this was told by an old Ohlone woman known as Old Chepa. A much more extensive version, from which the following derives, is available in the book *Santa Cruz is in the Heart*, written by Geoffrey Dunn (published in 1989 by Capitola Book Company). Old Chepa described how an evil priest, who beat the Ohlone children routinely, was finally hung by the Ohlone when the priest raped an Ohlone woman. Old Chepa described the ghost of the priest, still hanging from the tree behind Mission Hill, swaying in the breeze. The story also relates how some of the priest's body parts were removed, and one version of the Pogonip tale tells of the priest still wandering through the Pogonip, looking for his missing parts.

A local described how, just ten years ago, she met 'a dark energy that seemed to follow her from the Pogonip.' So the stories continue, as does the Pogonip.

Across the San Lorenzo River, past the cemetery on Ocean Street Extension was a house known as "the white lady's house." Now only a cement foundation remains, but for over 40 years adventurous young people went to the house to meet the white lady, named so because of her filmy gossamer dress and her pale complexion. She was known to look from her upstairs window upon onlookers. But one young man told of a drunken night when he found his way to the house and passed out. He was awakened by a loud jolt, which turned out to be an ax that had been thrown towards his head, or so he said.

In 1892, Golden Gate Villa was built on Beach Hill by Major Frank McLaughlin. In 1896 he suffered a 12 million dollar financial loss and was personally crushed. He turned down offers to run for governor, as well as to join the cabinet of President McKinley. Very soon after, his wife died. Two years later to the day he went upstairs and shot his daughter and poisoned himself. It has been said that the daughter's ghost still wanders through the elegant drawing room, and hovers near its gold plated chandelier.

In 1903, Sarah Agnus Cowell, the youngest child of Henry Cowell, was in her teens on that May morning when she took out a buggy and horse from the stable. Her father had warned her not to take it out, as the horse was not broken in to the harness. She was accompanied by the ranch housekeeper, and the purpose of the ride was to pick wildflowers. A they drove the upper kiln road, the horse apparently bolted. Sarah and the housekeeper were thrown from the carriage. The housekeeper was injured; Sarah was found lying face down on a pile of rocks, still breathing. She died an hour later.

Sixty years later, Cowell Ranch became UCSC. Exploring this flourishing legend, upperclassmen would lead freshmen through what was then known as Haunted Meadow. They would sit and wait for the ghost of Sarah Cowell to appear. In 1971, an anthropology class compiled student accounts of the Sarah Cowell legend. She was described as "a transparent cloaked figure casting an uncanny shadow." The carriage that Sarah rode was stored in what is now the "H" Barn on campus.

Perhaps the most frightening story found in the clip files took place on Red, White and Blue Beach. It was written by Antoinette May, in a book called *Haunted Houses and Wandering Ghosts of California* (published in 1977 by California Special Projects, Examiner Special Projects). It seems that during the mid-seven-

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ties, Ms. May was somewhat a 'ghost-hound.' The way she begins this story echoes the ring set forth by the spirits, "I haven't seen ghosts, but I've surely felt their presence. One even accosted me at the nude beach in Santa Cruz. It was the scariest night in my life."

While May was at Lake Tahoe, she met a couple that described a haunted house in Santa Cruz where things flew around the room, lights would go on and off, and the ghost of an old sailor walked around the campground. They also talked about the window of a house that would light-up at night above Red White and Blue beach; but by day there's no building there.

Later, May visited the campground, and interviewed the owners of the house and the campgrounds. The story began simply enough; the sounds of loud footsteps at night and slamming doors, but it happened almost every night. But then the story gets unusual. The owner claimed, "my perfume bottles dance around a lot, and we hear the sound of crystal shattering, but we never find anything broken. But when the girls were living at home, that's when the house was really active." She went on to describe how her daughters had their covers yanked away from them every night, and their beds would shake so much that it would nearly knock the girls out of bed. And even after the girls left,

no visitors would sleep on the first floor. One visitor related seeing the outline of a rooster crowing, but there were no roosters anywhere on the property. This first story ends with, "If you think any of this is funny, don't laugh too loud. I told a visitor about our ghost once and he laughed at me. That skepticism didn't amuse whatever lives here one bit. Suddenly a drawer opened and a baby shoe flew out and hit him on the side of the head. That stopped his laughing in a hurry."

These entities made entertaining rather difficult. On Thanksgiving Day in 1975, when opening the refrigerator, a potted plant flew twelve feet, and though the pot was intercepted,

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HIGH SPIRITS AT BROOKDALE LODGE

by Gregory Jon Harbert

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May was very uneasy. In an attempt to feel a less oppressive atmosphere in the house, she began to feel a danger, which she said was not normal for her generations of spiritual phenomena. As she was cowering under a chair, she said at this point, the investigator said, 'There has been evil in this house'."

the plant and soil made its way into the refrigerator from its high velocity, ruining the food with soil. One daughter was the target of another attack during a dinner party. In front of nine witnesses, a glass of wine flew from the piano to where she was sitting at the table, and poured itself down the front of her dress. There does seem to be at least a partial explanation for why the daughters were the subject of the attacks, which will be revealed later.

After this initial interview, May returned with a group of investigators, including some mediums,

who reported energies regarding blinking lights around the property, which of course were confirmed by both the owners of the house and corroborated by many campers. Next, one psychic 'saw' an old man wearing a raincoat and hat. That was also corroborated by others, including the owner of the house who claimed to have found an old rain slicker and hat hanging on the back porch. The owner claimed the house was built by a sea captain in 1857. At this point of the investigation, it was now dark outside, and animals began to howl. One investigator began to offer the essence of a story about the house and its spirits. She stated, "I see an older man wearing a long coat who walks about the grounds. In his life, he killed an intruder. He doesn't like company even now. The people who lived here before were an angry and unhappy family... I see unhappy young people... a beautiful girl... blood. There was a stabbing here. A baby died here, too. There were evil acts committed in the past."

By now, May was feeling very uneasy. She began to feel a heavy oppressive energy in the house, making her feel a sense of danger, which she claimed was not normal for her investigations of spiritual phenomena. A dog was cowering under a chair, she noted. At this point, another investigator added, "There has been evil in this house—murder and incest. I see an angry man who dominated his children. They were virtual prisoners here." The owner then noted that the former owner, a woman in her nineties, was

In 1923, when the quaint Ben Lomond streets were colorful with tourists, strolling in the beneficial ocean redwood air, there came a man of far-sighted imagination and he built one of the few hotels in the world to be included in Ripley's *Believe It or Not*.

The spirited Dr. F.K. Camp constructed the Brookdale Lodge on Highway 9 to be a world-renowned romantic hideaway for honeymooners.

It's possible that he realized the dwelling, with its shadowy crannies, maze-like additions, rambling log rooms, wine caverns, trap doors and attics would eventually be suspect of harboring spirits. Hidden rooms and secret passages are mysterious vestiges of Brookdale Lodge's past.

Over the past, managers such as Jim Jacobs doubted such notions. "The only weird sounds I've heard are the boulders bouncing through the building in the creek, tumbling in the winter rains, shaking and quaking like a bowling alley."

But others disagree. Through a dozen old and new owners, spirit stories steadfastly remain, although Father Kelly of Boulder Creek has blessed the hotel.

For example, some have said they have seen a girl in a formal dress runs across the lobby, then disappear into thin air. Others have claimed that they entered an empty Mermaid Room, and voices and music are softly heard.

There have been many who have seen the little girl. In the lobby by the fireplace, on any soft sofa, near the fern plants, and as the chandelier softly sways, you'll turn your head and she'll be sitting there, hands folded primly on her lap,

the last of a large family who had lived in the house for decades. "The stories she told me of her life were sad. Her father took all the children out of school and refused to allow their friends to visit...he made them wait on him hand and foot...she seemed very bitter."

The investigators continued with more stories, corroborated by the history the owners were aware of. During this time, May began to see streaks and blobs of light outside the window of the house. Another investigator began to feel the presence of something dangerous and oppressive outside. May had not told her about seeing the lights. The seance broke-up around midnight. But the story doesn't end there.

During May's drive home, she felt that something had stayed with her. She saw light streaks and blobs, and strong gusts of wind made driving difficult. Upon reaching her house that night, and for several nights after, May felt a presence looking over her shoulder as she sat at her desk.

By the time the experience seemed to end, one of the investigators called and announced he had gotten back some photos he took of the house that night. He reported lights on in rooms that had been dark to his eyes, as well as to the recollection of the two of them. He also reported seeing light streaks and blobs outside the downstairs room where the seance had taken place. May finishes her story, writing, "Some nights I wonder what they're doing down at the nude beach—but so far, I haven't had the nerve to go back and find out."

If you have any ghost stories, or unexplained mysteries of your own that you would like to share for historical records or for publication, please drop them by the Valley Press office, c/o Gregory Jon Harbert. If you do not want them published, please indicate so.

a Mona Lisa smile on her sweet, young face. A sudden chill and goosebumps accompany her appearance, whether from fear in the beholder, or the natural temperature of ghosts. Then she's gone, without so much as a hint of why she came. Many believe that this is Sara, a little girl who drowned in the creek in the early 1950's.

Then there's the vision under the bridge. This particular vapor, male or female, hovers over the rumbling creek as though walking on water, and is often accompanied by soft orchestrations. Those who have come across this manifestation describe that they felt a sudden draft (although the old hotel has lots of natural drafts), heard the music, and sighted the vapor. "It stays several moments before dissolving," stated one hotel guest. Some believe that this is Sara's mother. Both of them never are seen (or felt) outside or upstairs.

One of the Brookdale employees stated, "None of the Brookdale ghosts seem to have a bone to pick." She and her husband and friends have often heard somebody walking in the billiard room upstairs, while they were playing cards in the lounge. When the hotel was closed for repairs, with only a skeleton staff, the noises seemed more profound. When they went to the source of the sound, they found nothing. Later the footsteps, doors creaking or slamming, distant conversations or music would resume when they were seated again.

One way or another, if you wish to visit the spirit of the past (or the spirits of the past), a visit to the Brookdale Lodge is a must for anyone, visitor and local alike.

"The 'white lady' was named so because of her filmy gossamer dress and her pale complexion."

Fact: Alfred Hitchcock created the film "The Birds" from an actual event in Santa Cruz that was reported in the Sentinel.