

Some Eerie SC Tales

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(X-FILE)

Goblins, Ghosts In The Area

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(First of two parts.)

Ghost stories — are there real apparitions lurking behind the misty screen of fright and half-seen mystery?

Remember those tales of horror, woven into rainy nights around a candlelit circle of wide-eyed children's stares?

"And then a thin, pale hand moved eerily from behind the curtain, grasping her neck as she began to scream, then it tightened its unearthly grip and...BOO!"

The storyteller suddenly grabs a nearby arm and the victim jumps, to everyone's delighted shrieks.

A less familiar scene, but one known to a select (or cursed) few, is the actual appearance of a ghost.

One of the most widely circulated stories of a Santa Cruz ghost is that of the "white lady's house" on Ocean Street Extension, past the cemetery.

Only the cement foundation remains, but for over 40 years adventurous young people made nightly rendezvous there. Being scary, the peeling, greyish two-story lent itself naturally to the urge to hug. "Kind of a smoochin' spot" is how Darlin Rowland of the Sentinel accounting department described it.

Of course, SHE didn't do any of that smoochin' and sparkin', added Darlin.

Peggy Rudnicki, Sentinel reporter, had a more scary experience there but she wouldn't say it was.

the story of a

an alcoholic fog, who was jolted awake by the sound of a "thunk" above his head.

In the tree was embedded a hatchet, its handle still quivering from the impact. So went the story, anyway.

It was said that on certain moonlit nights one could spy the white lady — so named for her filmy gossamer gown and pale complexion — staring down from an upstairs window.

The white lady's house burned to the ground about five years ago.

Wally Trabing reported a good ghost story earlier this year, told to him by Jennie Romano, a Santa Cruz resident since 1907.

"We had just moved into the big old two-story house off Mission on Towne Terrace...it was behind the big house on the corner," she told Wally.

"It was our first night. I was in bed with Joe, my husband. In another double bed in the same room were our two little ones.

"They started to cry that something was choking them — pressing down, like Joe said they were just restless, but I got up and took them in bed with us.

"All of a sudden Joe yelled that something was trying to kill him and he leaped up like a frog and jumped back into our bed.

"And then we smelled something funny — kind of like burning sulfur."

Mrs. Romano said she be-

lieved the children's bed was once the ghost's, because it didn't bother them in the other bed.

Under the Thompson motif system of classifying ghosts, this would be an example of Motif E421.1 — invisible ghosts. The white lady would be an E425.1.1, or revenant as lady in white. Then there's the gruesome story of Major Frank McLaughlin, who built his Golden Gate Villa (since renamed Palais Monte Carlo) in 1892 on Beach Hill.

He spent \$12 million of investors' money diverting the Feather River in a search for gold. It ended after four years in 1896 with the discovery of old picks and shovels lying in the river bed where gold should have been, and the old-timers snickered.

They had known all along that the same thing had been tried 40 years before.

The investors were furious and McLaughlin was crushed by his failure. He retired to the Santa Cruz mansion to brood. He turned down an offer to run for governor of California, and another offer to serve in President McKinley's cabinet.

His wife died. Two years later to the day, he went upstairs to his stepdaughter Agnes's room and put a bullet through her brain as she slept. Then he poured his final cocktail of lemon juice and strychnine.

Does Agnes's ghost still walk

through the elegant drawing room, with its gold-plated chandelier? Does she sit or hover before the lavender tiled fireplace, or stare out from the belvedere gazebo which dominates the huge structure?

Accounts of a lavender-dressed spirit floating about the mansion persist, though Monte Carlo was restored in 1968 by owner Pat Wilkinson. It is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

There are stories about the Scottish castle between Ben Lomond and Brookdale; about a certain Victorian near Highland Avenue; about the Hotel Bay View in Aptos.

The Lodge mansion, now surrounded by condominiums in Capitola, is another likely hangout for displaced spirits. Martina Castro of the famous Spanish family lived there for a time.

Conflict within the Castro family may survive in ghostly form. Another of their residences, the Vincente Castro house, survives in Aptos Village behind the Security Pacific Bank and the new fruit stand.

Across from the new Aptos library is a cemetery, where Ohlone Indian graves rest beneath cypress trees. They were moved there from the confluence of Aptos and Valencia creeks.

And you know what they say about moving graves...

(Tomorrow: the Cowell ghost story.)



It that ghost in front of the old McLaughlin Hill? No, it's a photography gimmick by Sent Bill Lovejoy and "ghost" Sally Moore. Howev spooky stories about the house, and others in t at left.

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