

Haunted houses of Santa Cruz

Stairs creak, doors slam and things go bump in

WHAT'S HALLOWEEN without ghosts stories? Here's a few spooky stories from Santa Cruz on this All

Hallow's Eve: —

Kathleen Edwards prefers not to call them ghosts.

"When you say 'ghosts,' you think of evil, but you don't get any cold, chilly feelings here," she says from her north county home.

"It doesn't frighten us or the children," she adds. "We don't even investigate it anymore."

Whatever "it" is, it has been a source of fascination, amusement, and annoyance for Ralph and Kathleen Edwards and their five children since they moved to the house five miles north of Santa Cruz in 1966.

Kathleen says she has seen objects flying across the room, pictures fall off the wall, perfume bottles jiggle atop table tops, doors slam and mysterious lights appear on the hill beside their house.

Different people visiting them say have seen the figure of a mysterious sea captain in a raincoat wandering along the coast.

The Edwards children told their mother their beds would vibrate in the middle of the night for no reason. Covers would be pulled back off them while they slept.

Their house at 5021 Coast Road has been written up in the book **HAUNTED HOUSES AND WANDERING GHOSTS OF CALIFORNIA** by Antoinette May and has been featured in numerous newspaper articles and San Francisco-based television programs, says Kathleen.

She and her husband expressed reticent at recounting — for the umpteenth time — the phenomenon at the house that has led them to believe they are not the only ones residing there.

"The last time someone did, we couldn't even sit down to dinner without people peering at us through the windows like they're 'on something,'" said Kathleen. "It was pretty awful."

Hence, they asked that no photos be run of the house or themselves.

The Edwards are most commonly known as the proprietors of the Red, White and Blue nude beach. So named for the distinctive mailbox outside the entrance, the beach is "the only licensed nudist beach and campgrounds in the United States."

"We didn't know what was happening when we first moved in," says Kathleen. "Ralph would put something on his dresser and it would just disappear."

After awhile, they noticed the objects would return just as

mysteriously as they vanished.

These phenomenon tend to happen in cycles, says Kathleen, and especially around holidays.

On Thanksgiving in 1975, Kathy was had opened the refrigerator door when a large potted plant left its stand and flew towards her — a distance of 12 feet, she says.

Kathleen says she caught the pot but the dirt and the plant "ruined all my Jello salads and hors d'oeuvres. I didn't appreciate that." She describes the event nonchalantly, as if discussing the misdeeds of an errant housepet.

Her daughter Ronda was the object of one prank which occurred around Christmas in view of nine persons, according to Kathleen. Her daughter was sitting in the living room when a glass of wine flew through the air and poured itself down the front of Ronda's dress. "We have theories about that one," Kathleen says. "Maybe the ghost was jealous or maybe in life she had been very flat-chested — Ronda definitely is not!"

When author May was researching the house for her book she enlisted the aid of Sylvia Brown, co-founder of the Nirvana Foundation, a non-profit group which does psychic research.

Brown and her fellow psychics came up with similar impressions after visiting the house. They all picked up the image of an old sea captain, and a little girl who had been murdered on the property.

They also "saw" the image of a mentally retarded boy.

"He's the prankster. He doesn't realize people can't see him so he gets very frustrated — like he'll jerk something out of your hand or tear up paper and rearrange things," Kathleen says.

"I had one visiting relative go into hysterics because every time she'd try to fill a bottle of water, something would jerk it away from her," says Kathleen.

"We've had quite a few friends who were made believers in a hurry."

Brown, a Saratoga-based psychic, told the Sentinel the house was so filled with the presence of old souls that she and the psychics who visited there were feeling its presence for days afterward.

"That house has a lot of eerie influences," she says. "But they're not negative ones. I told (Kathleen) not to be afraid."

In doing research, Brown and author May found that the cove had been threatened by pirates in an earlier century.

The house also showed the "classical" signs of a haunting: ob-

jects moving, lights flashing, and so on.

Kathleen's youngest daughter Janie wrote about her experiences growing up in the house for a report in Cabrillo College instructor Andy Neher's class on the paranormal.

"It's not haunted by anything mean or bad," Janie said. "And everybody has their own interpretations of what happened."

To her recollection, the potted plant did not come flying across the room. But it did fell off the refrigerator, for no apparent reason, she said.

She recalled one instance where her bed would vibrate in the middle of the night, as if their were an earthquake. And only the bed would be shaking.

"It was always when I was really tired and just enough to keep you



Pat Wilder in ornate sitting room

a Cruz

the night

awake," Janie says. "I got mad and told them to stop, and they did."

Neher, Janie's instructor, has other explanations.

The resident skeptic at Cabrillo College, Neher has a standing offer of \$2,000 for anyone who can prove the techniques of holistic health work the way practitioners say they do. He is similarly skeptical about the supernatural.

"No one has been able to document to me that a haunting has occurred," he says. "Certainly people do have experiences, but the interpretation that it has been caused by disincarnated spirits has never been proven."

Neher himself spent a night in the Edwards' home three years ago at the invitation of Janie, his student.

"I slept in supposedly the most haunted room in the whole house but



nothing happened. I was very disappointed."

"I keep hoping to find some real proof of ghosts, but I'm getting pretty discouraged," he said, laughing.

You can't talk for more than a few minutes about reputed-to-be-haunted houses in Santa Cruz without at least mentioning the old McLaughlin house on 924 Third St., also known as Golden Gate Villa and Palais Monte Carlo.

Now owned by Patricia Wilder, it sits atop Beach Hill with a magnificent view of the city and the river. Some 22 rooms — more than 10,000 square feet — the structure is nothing if not impressive.

Its history is equally impressive. It was built in 1891 by Major Frank McLaughlin, an engineer, railroad entrepreneur and investor in those days of wildcat capitalism.

His undoing was a project to mine gold from the riverbed of the Feather River in Oroville. He undertook the project in 1893 and spent years and \$12 million of his investor's money building a flume and a dam to divert the flow of the river.

Little did he know the same project had been tried before — by the Forty-Niners of the Gold Rush days.

When the day came that the riverbed was dry, instead of gold nuggets, workers found old picks, shovels, buckets, and the scraps of previous mining expeditions.

His investors were furious. McLaughlin was stung by ridicule. He ordered the flume dynamited in 1897 and returned to Santa Cruz, to his Golden Gate Villa, to brood.

On November 17, 1905, his wife died after a lengthy illness. Faced with the financial disaster, and mourning the loss of his wife, two years to the day after his wife died McLaughlin went upstairs, shot his daughter once in the head with a revolver. Then he went downstairs where he drank a cocktail of lemon juice and potassium cyanide.

McLaughlin painstakingly planned the murder-suicide, having left 15 letters with instructions on what to do with the estate.

"He didn't want to have his daughter have to face poverty," says Wilder, one of seven owners of the home.

But ghosts? Well, Wilder prefers to call it an "essence."

For example, Wilder says she bought the house on November 17, 1968 — the same date as when McLaughlin killed himself. And she was surprised to learn the colors she decided to repaint the house were those which it had originally been painted.

"There's an essence here, though not in the sense of seeing someone," she says. "I've often had the feeling someone was watching."

Actually, the house felt more like — to this reporter — a museum, which is what Wilder is planning to turn it into.

"There is a spirit force in the house, but it's nothing evil."

McLaughlin had a motto for his house which is inscribed in calligraphy and displayed prominently in the front hall.

It reads:

"He who enters here leaves all cares behind."



om of her house on Beach Hill.

