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Something is awry at the Thomas House in Upper Red Hook.
Could it be something supernatural?

There's something spooky in our town

by Clare O'Neill Carr *Gazette Advertiser 10/29/87*

There are some very old places in the north of Dutchess's County — some more ancient than others — where troubled spirits still walk.

There, just before the Feast of All Saints, on All Souls Eve — called Halloween — the spirits of darkness stir from troubled sleep to roam the earth once more.

Then, at the onset of winter, when leaves have fallen from the gentle green canopy of summer to brush and crackle beneath our feet, and the winter solstice is at hand, the forces of darkness stir.

Those who have been especially troubled in life or met with untimely or violent death are uneasy and restless, even here in Hudson's valley.

Only if you walk slowly and listen will they make themselves known. For these spirits shun the fast pace of modern times.

Spirit of Maisefield

If, for instance, you walk quietly by the old brick mansion of Maisefield, that has stood at the western end of the Village of Red Hook for nearly 200 years, you may see standing in a south window the figure of a woman. She is staring out the window, dressed in white and holding a candle.

She is said to be the daughter of David Van Ness, Red Hook's first postmaster and the man who built the house in 1796. Legend has it she died in childbirth there as a young woman.

"I never saw her, but I've felt her presence. There were times when for no particular reason, the hair on the back of my neck stood up and I had that strange feeling of someone following behind me," said Kipp Eggert, the former owner of Maisefield who lived in the house since he was 17. He would not stay in the house alone, however.

But his grandmother, a sensible mid-westerner not prone to tales, did see the spirit.

"She told me many years later. Several times when she came to visit, sleeping in the guest room on the first floor, she was awakened to see a form dressed in white. It was a young woman. She stood looking out toward the brick wall, holding a candle."

A Tory stalks Upper Red Hook

There is another very old place a few miles north of the village, in Upper Red Hook, the hamlet settled in the mid-18th century that first bore the town's name.

There stands a grand brick house on a hill overlooking the old Post Road and King's Highway (now called Route 9) where several spirits roam.

The Thomas House was the headquarters of General Israel Putnam during the Revolutionary War, in the year 1777.

A spirit nicknamed The Tory shares the house with owner John White and his family.

For over two centuries, the Tory has walked on occasion through the foyer, halfway up the stairs to the first landing where he stops. His footsteps echo clearly in the old house, and a metallic clanking something like chain, follows behind, says White.

Legend says he was hanged from a north beam outside the house by General Putnam when his Tory sympathies were first discovered. Still another version, related by former owner Dr. Edwin Losce at an Upper Red Hook Historical Society meeting the 1920s, says the Tory sympathizer was rescued at the last minute from the judgment of the kangaroo court when a judge from Poughkeepsie arrived in the nick of time.

It is generally agreed the man was kept in the house's dungeons which still stand on the ground floor, complete with bars and chain.

"We can't see him. But we really feel a presence," said White. "It's a very creepy cold feeling, an eerie aura settles and there is a distinct feeling that something is there."

"He came one late afternoon, about this time of year. I was in the foyer with my large German shepherd. The dog was so frightened, all the hair on his back stood up, and he cried and yipped and cowered in the foyer," said White.

A party spirit

The Tory is not the only ghost at the White house.

"We have a happy ghost, too," said White. "It loves parties and music, and usually comes when there are people."

A rocking chair by the fireplace is where the ghost usually sits, rocking slightly and projecting a faint aura, like a heat haze, said White. People at parties will not go near the empty chair. Even if they have not heard of the ghosts at the Whites, they have spoken of a strange presence felt in the room, he said.

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The Whites have seen this spirit several times, and heard unexplained music coming from different parts of the house when it is there.

Its origins are not known, but it is a different spirit than the Tory, said White.

Also unexplained is a series of strange incidents that do not seem connected with a Revolutionary presence or a music-loving spirit.

A glass-encased campaign ribbon, said to belong to Abraham Lincoln, was tossed from the wall, not once, but several times, across a three-foot span of stairs. It crashed on a knollpost opposite in such a manner that made it impossible to explain by force of gravity alone, according to White.

But what does a Tory sympathizer care about the Grand Old Army of the Republic? He just may have updated his English sympathies from the Red Coats to the British-backed Confederacy to meet the new century.

In deference to the old Tory — and perhaps to the cost of new framing — the White's Confederate campaign ribbon lies inauspiciously in a bureau drawer.

Restless cemetery

More ghosts haunt the old hamlet.

Just a short walk on a moonlit night will bring a visitor down the road past the church and the cemetery of St. Johns Church. Starrbarrack Road, one of the oldest country roads in the town, is the scene of a restless spirit who met a violent and untimely death one night, when he burned to death in his chair.

So the story goes, an old man lived across from the farmhouse on the old Al Cole farm. Both houses sit in a hollow below the orchards along the road.

He fell asleep one night, his chair caught fire and burned through the floor. Rescuers found the house in flames and him in the basement.

They removed him to the old farmhouse where he died.

But his spirit does not rest.

...the old house attest to

"One night after company had left," said one tenant, who wished, in the best spirit of tale telling, to remain anonymous.

"There was a strange feeling in the dining room where we had just left. It suddenly got very cold and the candles all went out at once," she said, shuddering as she spoke.

"There was definitely something strange that night."

"There have been other strange things, footsteps, voices muffled, like the sounds of music."

"When you go to check, you realize 'Oh, God, there is no music!'" said the woman.

"They were the kind of things which are not always easily explained, but even when they are, they leave you with a haunting doubt."

One time another tenant and his

wife heard the sound of a spice shelf laden with glass bottles crashing on top of their old stove downstairs. When they inspected the damage, nothing was broken, nor were the bottles disturbed from their places. The heavy rope that secured the shelf was intact.

But the shelf and racks were upright on the stove, several feet from their original position, seemingly slammed there with a large crash deliberately.

"I think he wasn't ever supposed to be saved from that fire," speculated the former tenant.

"I think we interrupted his whole death thing, the whole sequence of his death," said the man.

After-hours cleaning
At Rokeby, an old estate by the

river surrounded by long drives with large trees sweeping their shadows on the great lawns at midnight, a ghost sweeps a tower room far into the night, for those that listen.

Jane was an old black servant, born into slavery, who helped keep the house at Barrytown, according to Red Hook Town Historian and co-owner of Rokeby J. Winthrop Aldrich.

She died of pneumonia and is buried in the Methodist Church Burying Ground on Cherry St. in the

village.

But she returns to haunt the big house on the Hudson, constantly sweeping the billiard room in the tower.

Who knows what lurks?

There are other spirits in the quiet places in the valley, where people have lived and died and spent their passions in the courses of their lives. But it is up to you to find them. If they don't find you first.

They walk in search of peace or love too rudely interrupted, in search of a child lost in birth or a mother lost too soon in childish death.

They search to settle old scores or like the ghost of Starrbarrack Road they seek to take up their proper place in death as in life.

They search, like the ghost of Rokeby who forever sweeps the dirt from the corners, for the unfinished business of life.

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