

A Tourist Guide to Haunted Houses and Unexplained Mysteries—  
New England—New York



by Andre Norton

HEADING AND ILLUSTRATION

BY ROBERT E. JENNINGS

Though one is inclined to think of haunted houses, inexplicable mysteries, as being British and European rather than native to this side of the Atlantic, even the most limited research will provide the seeker with a list of such sites to visit. New England and New York have them in plenty.

Begin at Machiasport, Maine, where the first recorded American ghost made her upsetting appearance, held gracious meetings with many spectators, staged special performances for the skeptic, and ended by arranging a new marriage for her bereft husband!

In the house of Abner Blaisdel (much to his subsequent discomfort) Nelly Butler first made her return known on the night of January 2, 1800, when she asked that her father be summoned to speak with her. Since Nelly had been safely in her grave for some time, the situation was delicate. Yet David Harper, her father swore it was Nelly he spoke with. She made several appearances during the following months, mainly in the cellar, because, as she explained, she had no wish to frighten the children of the house.

Abraham Cummings, pastor of the Congregational Church, coming as a skeptic, went away a convert. Later he was to set his story, together with those of others, in the first known published account of an American ghost.

The ghost made herself visible not only to members of the Blaisdel family (who came to look upon her continued visitations as a curse because of the notoriety) but showed herself to the many curious visitors attracted by the tales. In addition she urged marriage between her former husband and Lydia Blaisdel. When the censorious gossips suggested that Lydia herself might be responsible for such an odd proposal, Nelly considerably appeared when Lydia could not have possibly acted the part.

Having achieved her purpose Nelly finally left the exhausted Blaisdels and the overwrought neighborhood in peace. But she was not to be forgotten.

Pass on to Kennebunkport, to the ghost house now part of the theater holdings. We are told that the attic is the focal point of the haunting, as well as the second floor front bedroom. Though old lady Wells, a herbal wise woman,

lived the last twenty years of her life in that room, dying at the age of a hundred and twenty-four, she is not the "good grey ghost." That is another "Nelly", a woman wearing Quaker garb, sometimes accompanied by "Ned", her male counterpart. Their history is unknown, but still they peer from windows or walk the night.

Wiscasset next, and the Lee-Payson-Smith house on High Street. The old lady who appears when the family is not there, rocking in the front parlor, is reputed to be of the family of Governor Samuel E. Smith who bought the house in 1836 (it was built in 1792). There is a door also, leading to a wing since burned, where a dog scratches for entrance (he is said to have been the only companion of a recluse who once lived in the vanished wing). But the old lady who sits in the parlor with gentle satisfaction comes, they say, because having suffered many grievous family losses, in the end she had only the house to love. She does not intrude, she just wants to be home.

The old Shaw Place at Newfield has good reason to be haunted if ever a house did, for Hannah, a daughter of the house, is buried within its walls, her tombstone a corner of the kitchen floor. One of the rare instances of such an interment.

Yet the same is true of the famous house of Ocean Born Mary at Henniker, New Hampshire. Mary's story is fabulous enough to be fiction, still it is rooted in fact. It begins on July 28th of the year 1720. The ship *Wolf* bearing Scotch-Irish emigrants to the new world was in sight of the Massachusetts coast when it was overhauled by pirates. Captain James Wilson, without any defenses, had to stand by helplessly when Captain Don Pedro and his men boarded. The Captain's plight was doubly painful at that moment for his wife was in child-birth in his cabin.

In fact the arrival of the pirates was heralded by the wail of the new born. Don Pedro, demanding to know the source of the cries, was visibly affected when told. He straightway asked that the Captain's new daughter be given the name "Mary", and when this was agreed to, ordered his men off the *Wolf*.

However, he returned again to Wilson's command, this time bringing a jeweled bracelet, a length of fine brocade for Mary's future wedding gown, as well as other gift items from his loot.

Don Pedro kept in touch with Mary through the years, and when he came to retire after what was reputed a fruitful career, he decided to build a home near Hanniker, importing ships' carpenters for the task. Mary married at eighteen, with a family of four sons and a daughter, had recently left a widow. And Don Pedro sent for her as a housekeeper. In due time he died, and, according to legend, lies buried under the hearth stone in his house, which he left Mary and in which she lived until she was ninety-four. Also, according to rumor Don Pedro was stabbed to death by those seeking the gold he had brought with him, and only Mary knew the secret of its hiding place. That she guards; at least, by a wealth of stories, she has from time to time appeared to save the house from disaster, remaining even in death its guardian.

New Hampshire does not only have its ghosts-in-residence it also had one of the major historical mysteries of the east in Pattee's Caves, now known as Mystery Hill, near North Salem.

Does this crumbling range of rocky walls represent the remains of a Phoenician-Carthaginian settlement? In 335 B.C. Aristotle in his list of one hundred and seventy-eight marvels, names as item eighty-four, a mysterious overseas land which the Phoenicians kept a strict secret because of trade. His description as cited might well be that of Mystery Hill. Though unfortunately,

took ship and headed north-west. He coasted along England and Scotland, and then ran into such storms as his merchant ship had not faced before, driving him ashore on one of the rock toothed Faeroes. Wrecked ships were fair game. As for the foreigners who manned them, if they were stupid enough to crawl out of the pounding waves, let them be knocked on the head and thrown back again.

However, at that particular wreck looting, Prince Henry and his knights arrived in time to save the lives of the survivors. Which was an excellent piece of luck for all concerned. Prince Henry was trying to build a navy to police his island holdings, and in Niccolo he found the commander he had long been looking for. So pleased was Niccolo with the profits of such an association that he wrote home and urged his brother Antonio to join him, which he did.

But there was one idea which had long fascinated the Prince. Years earlier one of his fisherman subjects with a boatload of his fellows had been blown far off course and ended on the beaches of an unknown western country. There he had been well treated, but upon voyaging farther south with the natives, he and his friends had been recaptured by a new tribe who were cannibals. The fisherman purchased his life by showing them how to weave fishnets, and because of his knowledge he became a tribal treasure, several times wrest from one set of captors to the next, always to the south. After some weary years he managed to work his way north and to his original landfall. There he built a boat and finally regained his homeland.



it has been "mined" constantly for the stones which must have made it a most impressive sight a couple of hundred years ago, the remains are unique enough to continue to draw speculation. It has many features of the well known Megalithic stonework of Europe and the British isles including a sinister altar in proper proportions for human sacrifice, with speaking tube arrangement through which voices may be eerily projected.

Not only the Phoenicians are given credit for some of the features nearby. There are a number of structures which resemble very closely the beehive dwellings of the Celi Dei, the Celtic Irish Christians who fled first to the Orkneys, then to Iceland and even to Greenland, always in fear of the Vikings. They had reached Iceland in 874, before the first Viking settlement there. And when the first long ship nosed into harbor at Greenland in 986, the men on board found recently abandoned Celi Dei dwelling cells. Did they come to the American continent, discover the long abandoned settlement of stone walls at North Salem, and settle there awhile in uneasy peace?

Massachusetts also has such a mystery. The Sinclair Rock is indeed most provocative. One can find it at Westford where it may have existed since about 1400. But the tale begins in the Orkneys at the court of Prince Henry Sinclair of Rosslyn, Earl of Orkney, and Ciathness, Lord of the Faeroes. And in those days, 1390, the Faeroes were less than hospitable, as we discovered by Niccolo Zeno of Venice.

Inspired by the same wanderlust which sent Marco Polo east, young Niccolo

Prince Henry was excited about the land overseas. But, though Niccolo was fired by his enthusiasm, their fisherman guide died before they could plan to embark. Determined, Prince Henry sent his first scouting ship, commanded by Niccolo, which made a landing at Greenland and returned safely. However Niccolo came home ailing and died within the year.

It was not Antonio who took his brother's place in the proposed expedition. In the summer of 1395, Prince Henry himself with a force of his guard, set out to the west. They made several landfalls of which Antonio kept a record. Then they lost one ship and Prince Henry decided to remain for a while, sending back half of his men with Antonio. The return voyage was made in safety and Antonio returned to Venice. His account was kept in his family and finally published in 1558.

But what happened to Prince Henry? We know that he was again in the Orkneys for his death there in 1404 is a matter of history.

So the Sinclair Rock. Marks supposed of be of Indian origin were later definitely found to be the outline of a fourteenth century sword. This known, the rock was cleaned—to discover on it the outline of a six foot knight in armor, not only equipped with the sword in question, but also with a shield bearing the heraldic insignia of the Sinclairs.

Since one of the landfalls described by Antonio has been identified with a point in Nova Scotia, had the Prince perhaps built a ship, nosed southward

along the coast before he started home? Is one of his knights buried somewhere near the rock so unmistakably marked?

Though no knight walks here to regret his long exile, there is a ghost very much at home in the Huntington House at Hadley. This dwelling was built in 1752, but its proud owner did not enjoy it for long. On September 8, 1755, he was killed in an Indian ambush. A friendly Indian returned his sword to his wife, traditionally passing it through one of the windows of a lower room. Since that day someone seems to sleep in the fourposter bed beneath the same shuttered window, for the bed from time to time shows the impression of a light body. There are footsteps heard ascending to the attic. Children are often visited in their rooms. A friendly ghost.

Cohasset seemingly has a ghost who resents change and would make it known. The Ships' Chandlery, built in the late Seventeenth century by the Bates family, was later the property of John Bates who also owned a fishing fleet and was a most substantial citizen. But when the old building was moved from the water front in 1957 to become a museum, the trouble began. Heavy footsteps were heard, doors opened and closed. It would seem that John Bates, is not at all satisfied, if the disturber of the peace is John, with the change in location.

Rhode Island may have ghosts, but it also gives earth room to one of the most talked of of all American mysteries, the Newport Tower. Though it is claimed that this was built in the seventeenth century as a mill, several of the premises on which this claim rests have since been proven false. Such as the Powden Paper granting the land to the Plowdens in 1632, quite a while before the tower was supposedly built, and yet making mention of it.

So we can return to 1121 when the Pope appointed Bishop Eric Gynupsson to the See of Greenland and Vineland, the recently discovered land to the west. Bishop Gynupsson's appointment records exist to this day. But was there a colony in Vineland?

Move to Norway in the eleventh century. Harald the Severe, king of that land, took a fleet of ships to cross the Atlantic. The records thereafter are obscure. That Harald was moved to make such an expedition at all argued he had good cause. And there is speculation that he did establish a trading post colony, which he preferred, as many others have done, to keep a secret.

But what has Harald's possible colony and the Bishop got to do with a tower on Rhode Island? Just this—that the tower itself so follows the pattern of Christian churches of Scandanavia of that period that if it stood anywhere else it would be instantly hailed as such. Also, the windows in it are so set that they can be used for signalling and lookout to the sea, not to the land—a watch tower for a port.

So do we have the oldest church on this soil in Rhode Island? Aerial photographs recently taken disclose odd lines under the turf, perhaps further exploration might prove the truth one way or another.

New York State and City seems to favor Revolutionary ghosts. There are the "site" ones, such as the headless soldier who is said to appear out of a rock crevice at midnight on Watch Hill in Yorktown Heights. And the pitiful ones who re-enact the terrible massacre of Cherry Valley with sounds of shots, screams and a wailing in the night.

In New York City itself is the famed Morris-Jumel Mansion which is apparently well occupied by a shade. Built in 1765 by Lt-Colonel Roger Morris, it passed into other hands in 1783, the Colonel, a Tory, withdrawing to England at the close of the war. In the interim it had successively served as headquarters for both General Washington and Sir Henry Clinton.

Madam Jumel herself was a figure out of gothic romance. Born in the slums of Providence, her beauty and determination brought her a husband, Captain de la Croix, and a short visit to France. Having shed the husband during her travels, she returned to her native land and Steven Jumel, a refugee from the slave rising in Santo Domingo, where he had been a planter. However, Jumel adapted well to the change and made a fortune in his new homeland as a wine merchant.

Eliza, his mistress, played the finest role of her checkered career in 1800. Posing as being on her death bed, she persuaded Jumel to marry her. Her recovery was quick, and with name and position she once more went to France. But her past closed the doors she wanted to open and she returned to a lonely life at the manor. After a questioned death of her husband, she increased his

fortune by shrewd dealing, enough to buy herself, when she was fifty-eight and he was in his seventies, Aaron Burr for a new mate. Though he was one time vice-president, he was now thoroughly discredited, and their marriage ended in divorce.

Though Madam Jumel surrounded herself with the children of her sisters, her loneliness was legend, she was never relieved by the society she craved.

And, according to report, she has not left the house wherein she lived for so long. One recent story has her scolding children, brought as a class to view the house, for their noisy behavior.

The Jumel Manor is not the only New York house to be favored by Aaron Burr, though he seems to prefer this second dwelling for his ghostly visits more than the first. At Lindenwald near Kinderhook, in the Washington Irving country, he has been seen, wearing a mulberry velvet coat and a ruffled shirt. He shares this estate with a second and perhaps a third ghost. One of these was a former president, an office Burr reached for but never achieved.

Built in 1797 by Judge William Peter Van Ness whose son William was Burr's second in the fatal duel with Alexander Hamilton, Lindenwald is supposed to have sheltered Burr secretly during the time he was being hunted for what was deemed murder.

Later the house was bought and remodeled by Martin Van Buren, eighth President, when his term of office was completed. It was during the latter time that "Aunt Sarah" presided in the kitchen. So famed was she for her pancakes that she was an added attraction for guests. Only it seems that she intended to continue to rule the kitchen, even after death, as the scent of her cooking, to be sniffed now and again today, testifies. Doors open and close without reason, there is a violin heard playing, and footsteps sound. Burr, the President, Aunt Sarah—all are supposed to still make Lindenwald their home.

In Albany stands Cherry Hill on South Pearl Street. On May 7th, 1827 this was the site of a murder which seems to be reenacted in part through the years. John Whipple, manager for the Van Rensselaers who owned the property, was shot through the window by his wife's lover, Jesse Strang, as he conferred with his employer over accounts. Nowdays, someone unseen paces the terrace—Strang awaiting his victim? Who knows?

Fort Ontario, Oswego, has two ghosts by report. One's tombstone can be seen in the military cemetery. George Fykes, in British uniform of Revolutionary times, was known to appear once to every new garrison at the fort, the reason for this strange welcome lost in time. While sentries walking at number two post there in the past have found themselves awesomely accompanied by a light shining over their heads, though explanation for this manifestation has ever come to light.

New York has, in addition, a ghost train which appears in April running along the Harlem division of the New York Central. It is in two parts, both drawn by old fashioned wide smoke-stacked engines of the 19th century. Both are draped in black. Though no engineer nor fireman appears, the first section carries passengers of a sort. Mounted on one of several flatcars a band of skeletons play their instruments. The second section carried a draped coffin mounted on a single flatcar. As the train approaches a dark carpet seems to unroll before it, and clocks along the way stop from five to eight minutes. The date is significant for it was just at this time of year that Lincoln's funeral train moved westward bearing the martyr president to his last home. Is Lincoln's party ever to be engaged in their mournful journey?

This is but a small sampling of ghost and mystery items—there are many more. Research will enable the would be ghost hunter to make out a well haunted itinerary. Such books as the following are excellent sources:

- Boland, Charles Michael - *THEY ALL DISCOVERED AMERICA*  
Doubleday 1961
- Holand, Hjalmar - *EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS*  
Twayne 1958
- Holzer, Hans - *YANKEE GHOSTS*  
Bobbs-Merrill 1966
- Jones, Louis C. - *THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT*  
Hill and Wang 1959
- Smith, Susy - *PROMINENT AMERICAN GHOSTS*  
World Publishing 1967

If you missed the first four issues of COVEN 15, you missed these fine stories:

Sept. 1969: "Odile" by Alan Callou; "Potlatch" by Joseph Harris; first part of "Let There be Magic!" by Keaveny; others.

November 1969: "Rock God" by Harlan Ellison; "Shadow Trader" by Wylly Folk St. John; others.

January 1970: "Leona!" by Alan Callou; "The Little

People" by Robert E. Howard; Pauline Smith; Wade Wellman; Ron Goulart; others.

March 1970: "I, Vampire!" by Pronzini/Wallman; "Convert" by S. M. Clawson; conclusion of "Let There be Magic" by Keaveny; poetry by Robert E. Howard; more! You can have any one of these issues for 60 cents, minimum order \$1.20.

Send your order to: Fantasy Publishing Co. Inc., 1855 W. Main St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801