

MIDDLE GEORGIA GHOSTLY SAMPLER

By Paige Calvert Henson

The Banshee, Miss Sue
and Honest Jack

In Irish and Scottish legend, a banshee, or "faery woman," is a spirit which attaches itself to a particular family. She makes unsettling, periodic appearances to warn of impending death or to vocally mourn (wail) the death of one of the family members. She has no interest in strangers, is very loyal, and has been known to follow "her" family from one home to another. She often wears a gray cloak over a green dress.

A small lady in gray is just one of three spirits which, for years, have haunted the Williams/Jones/Ferguson/Lewis House in Milledgeville. The woman's appearances, indeed, have coincided with family tragedy.

In 1819, Peter Jones Williams, one of Milledgeville's early power brokers, built his sizeable, Georgian-style home on West Washington Street. Purposely built on the crest of a hill halfway between the Capitol and the Governor's Mansion, it was a house from which prestige, grandeur, supremacy emanated... a house built for entertaining. A house built to impress others.

Having lived for some time as a young man in the Savannah/Brunswick area, Williams modeled his house after others he had seen in coastal Georgia. It was given a Federal-style portico (two slender columns and a balcony) and a basement—an odd addition for a house in the midstate, especially one built on a hill. The Williams family owned the entire block on which their fine, new house stood. He and his bride, Lucinda Parke of Greensboro (Georgia) lived happily there with their children, one of whom was Susannah, or "Miss Sue." Sue would eventually marry and inherit the house (and the block), being the first of three female members down the family line to do so. After the death of Peter Jones Williams, the house on West Washington Street would never again be owned by a male.

Today, with "Miss Sue" and her buried up the street in the picturesque Memory Hill Cemetery, antique broker Ray Olivier lives in and acts as caretaker of the house on West Washington. Also occupying the house is its present owner, Miss Frances Lewis, great-great granddaughter of the builder, Peter Jones Williams. Neither current occupant is unsettled about the hauntings—ghostly occurrences which have been reported in and around the house for years by visiting friends and neighbors. As a matter of fact, Ray Olivier feels quite at home and reports he has a strange affinity for—an "attachment" to—the old house even though he is not an "official" family member.

"Others have come here and sensed immediately that they were not welcomed. One spiritualist felt threatened and refused to spend even a night here," he said.

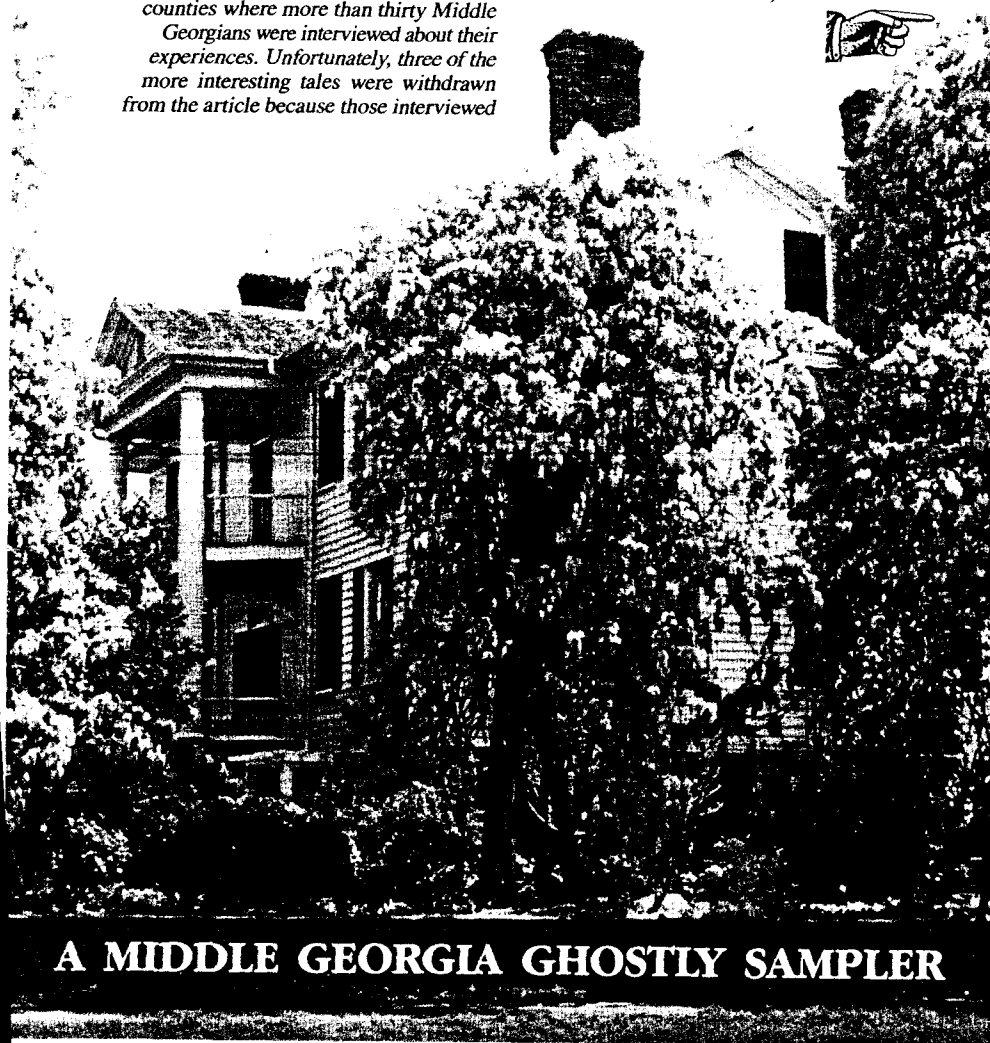
Perhaps Ray feels comfortable because of the strange and very real "dream" he had the very first night he slept in the house. It was 1973 and Ray, at that time, knew nothing of the history of the house. He was awakened by violin music and the clatter of horses' hooves on the street outside. In his "dream" he got out of bed, crossed the hall and walked to the window of a bedroom which faced the front of the house. Outside he saw horse-drawn carriages stopping in front of the house. Gentlemen in uniforms and ladies in long dresses were cheerfully coming up the walkway, past the crape myrtle, past the bay tree, past the wisteria. From his side-angle view from the upstairs window he could easily glimpse the bottoms of the ladies' long, full dresses as they floated toward the front door. But that would be impossible, he thought, because the stone buttresses would block his view! Ray left the window and walked to the top staircase landing. A tall, blonde, stately woman ("Miss Sue") was receiving guests at the door. Shortly, she turned to Ray and said, "Welcome, Cousin, we've been waiting for you." As the music swelled, Ray descended the stairs. He peered into what is now the library and saw in the corner of the room by a desk, a small lady dressed in gray. The old woman pointed in his direction and Ray turned to the hostess and questioned, "Who is that?" "There's no one there," replied "Miss Sue" Jones. The older lady whispered loudly to Ray from across the room, "You'll never have to worry." Then she pointed past him to the doorway as a young man in uniform entered. At that moment the music

ABOUT THIS STORY...

The foolish, brave writer of this article ran a month's worth of ads in a local shoppers' paper requesting information about "haunted" sites in this area. Over a two-month period, she received dozens of calls—some sincerely helpful, some misleading, some merely curious and some downright bizarre...but all highly intriguing. From those contacts, she received approximately eleven "good" leads which she set out to investigate. The ghostly trail took her to five counties where more than thirty Middle Georgians were interviewed about their experiences. Unfortunately, three of the more interesting tales were withdrawn from the article because those interviewed

decided later that they did not want the publicity (or ghostly disfavor) their story might generate. This collection of tales only scratches (screech!) the spectre surface. For every five people you talk to, three can relate a personal, chilling experience, or close encounter with the Middle Georgia "unknown." The writer has attempted here to recount a few of the lesser-known ghost stories in this area.

NOW TURN THE PAGE, IF YOU DARE!



A MIDDLE GEORGIA GHOSTLY SAMPLER

house—the unoccupied upstairs area has, in the past, been notoriously “active.”

Macon resident Roberta Burch did not fare as well as Penny Harris, however. In 1982, she and her family rented the house with hopes of later purchasing it. They stayed just four terrifying weeks. In June, Roberta had just moved in and was setting up her new kitchen. Standing at the washing machine, she suddenly felt an eerie breeze at the back of her neck although there were no doors or windows open in the room. She turned, and saw a young man with curly, blonde hair emerge from the kitchen nook just a few feet away from her. (Roberta learned later that the nook used to be the area leading to the back porch.) To the woman's amazement, the man, dressed in farmer's clothes, stepped through the doorway and vanished before her eyes!

After that incident, Roberta and her family began to feel that the house was, in some unexplained way, evil. One Sunday, Roberta's husband, John, while painting an upstairs bedroom, had moved all the furniture into the middle of the room. Later, finished and exhausted, he went downstairs to bed only to be awakened, along with the rest of the family, in the middle of the night. Someone or something was moving the furniture around in the room above! The next morning the family found the furniture squarely lined up around the four newly-painted walls.

The family was growing more frightened as each day passed. The children dreamed of heads rolling down the stairs. Doors were slammed shut for no reason and locked doors came inexplicably unlocked. One hot July afternoon, Roberta was overcome with a sleepy feeling that she could not shake. It was as if something was willing her or forcing her to sleep in the middle of the day. As if drugged, she staggered into the master bedroom downstairs, and murmured a prayer to God to protect her before she yielded to this unnatural, unholy state of sleep. After what seemed to be twenty to twenty-five minutes, she awoke, groggy and frightened. On the bed was the impression of an invisible someone seated next to her. The “thing” rose (the impression lifted), and Roberta followed the sound of a woman's footprints across the room. Immediately following this, the thunderous sound of many heavy footsteps was heard coming from the upstairs vestibule. Roberta held her breath in fright as the group, which seemed to be made up of a dozen or so soldiers with rifles, marched down the

CLOCKWISE The Old Bond House, Twiggs County. □ The site of a UFO sighting, James, Georgia. □ The old Danville Hotel, Twiggs County.

stairs. Roberta buried her head in her pillow, her heart pounding. She was too frightened even to scream. The marching stopped outside her door and one of the “soldiers” entered the room and approached Roberta—her whole body shaking, her head still buried face-down in her pillow. Without saying a word, he paused a moment beside the bed, then left. The rest of the troupe marched after him out the door and across the porch, never to be heard from again. Roberta and her family moved immediately.

A witch, an unwell baby and the “dead hole”

Danville residents can cite several other notoriously “haunted” sites in Twiggs County. James S. “Preacher” Kitchens, born in 1900, can recall a “witch house,” located near Cool Spring Church. Supposedly a notorious witch named Polly Ann Price could conjure up spells to make local residents do her bidding. “Everyone was afraid of her when I was a youngster,” said Kitchens. “Later her house burned to the ground and no one saw hide nor hair of her after that—she just disappeared.”

A water well located at an old house near Prospect Church is haunted by the unearthly cries of an infant who was accidentally knocked in while his mother was drawing water. The horrified mother ran for help, but by the time help arrived, the baby had long drowned. Its pitiful little spirit still haunts the site.

Around 1928-29, the bodies of three young black men were found washed up on the sides of a deep pool of water near a remote, old sawmill on Turkey Creek. The sawmill had not been in operation since the turn of the century and was an “ideal” spot to commit a murder. The men, apparently victims of an angry lynch mob, had been hanged, disemboweled, bound in iron, and thrown into the 30-to-40 feet water pit at the site of the old mill. Today the body of water is known as the “Dead Hole” and is said to be haunted. The infamous “Dead



Do you have a favorite haunted house in Middle Georgia? If so, contact the writer by mail in care of MACON MAGAZINE.

Hole” can only be reached by foot or in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Very few people visit the spot after dark.

The psychedelic phantom of College Street

A local arts aficionado who wishes to remain nameless, resides in one of the several haunted houses on College Street in the historic district of Macon. But spectres, however spooky, are “old hat” to him, and he remains unfazed by his experiences.

“I’m from James, Georgia, and all the houses in James are haunted,” he said.

As a youngster he “talked” to the ghost of an old woman, a relative, five or six times before he learned that she had died long before. His aunt, in whose James house the ghostly relative resided, took him aside and made him promise not to tell his mother about talking to the old woman. “Just think of her as your ‘secret’ friend,” said the aunt.

If Our Friend grew up comfortably around ghosts, it is certainly not surprising to know that he lives with one now. What is surprising is the type of ghost it happens to be. His two-story, Victorian home, built around the turn of the century is haunted by a ‘60s-style female “hippie” spirit.

“There were manifestations going on all the time upstairs,” said our Friend.



This is the photo in which Ray Olivier realized his dream might be real—wooden railing, not buttress.

stopped, the lights went out and Ray “awoke” downstairs in the library, clearly shaken by his peculiar, lifelike dream.

Approximately five years later, he came across a photo of the house taken at the turn of the century. The balcony, where the Jones girls had once presented the Confederate colors and waved to soldiers passing below them, was there. There, too, in the photo, was a wooden railing where the buttresses now stood! Ray realized now that he had been able to “see” the bottoms of the dresses the night of his dream because the house had had no buttresses during that time to block his view! What's more, he began to find early family accounts of the appearance of the small lady in gray and learned that “Miss Sue” and her husband, “Honest” Jack Jones (Georgia State Treasurer during the Civil War), had lost three soldier sons in that war.

Today, “Miss Sue” (1854-1906) still walks the grounds of the house. Newspaper accounts even as late as 1984 describe an apparition, a “tall, distinguished lady with a bonnet and button shoes” who weaves in and out the maze-like pattern of boxwood which was planted the same year the house was built. When Sherman's army marched through Georgia, the family silver was buried in the boxwood and later recovered. No one knows exactly where

it was hidden, but there is a strange (coded?) etching on the upstairs window which might have marked the spot. Neighbors can sometimes see “Miss Sue” emerge from the basement area in the early morning hours only to disappear like a vapor into the shrubbery.

Several strange occurrences have been associated with “Honest” Jack Jones, too. His death in 1893 was tragic. During a raging fever, he was strapped to a four-poster bed in the West bedroom to keep him from harming himself. In his delirious, supercharged state, he pulled free and jumped to his death from the bedroom window. Today, Jack's ghost is said to walk the upstairs floors at night and he has frightened several visitors by slamming doors, making pictures fall face-down on the floor and moving the furniture around in an eerie little doll house. Indeed, visiting psychics have confirmed that the spirit of a bearded man in a shabby, worn Confederate uniform unhappily roams the house.

Peter Jones Williams' dream home in mid-Georgia, which had at one time been alive with festivity and lighthearted family fun, would—like many other grand homes in the South—be tormented years after by the grave injustices of a cruel and bitter war.

At This Ghostly Hotel You Get Rooms With A “Boo”

Everyone knows a ghost presupposes murder, or at least an unusual death, and the Leverett House, formerly the old Danville Hotel, has no lack of either. The house, which sits right across the railroad tracks in Danville, off Highway 80, can boast a long list of violent deaths. According to residents of the small town, at least 15 people have died inside, victims of suicide or murder.

Built around 1887 or 1888, the hotel was once a busy, thriving establishment, a hub of activity fed by the comings and goings of the locomotives. When the trains stopped, the little town simply folded. Today Danville has settled into a peaceful, serene homeland for families who have lived there for generations—families with no good reason whatsoever to leave.

Penny Harris and her four children, ages four to 14, currently rent the Leverett house from its Macon owner. Penny has heard the rumors surrounding the house but as yet, after eight months, has not been bothered by anything more malevolent than slamming or strangely unlocked doors. She does, however, keep the upstairs closed off from the rest of the



PHOTO BY PAIGE HENSON

"But when I moved from upstairs to down, she moved with me. I had heard there was a suicide in the bathtub upstairs."

Once as he was moving furniture, he saw the spirit out on his lawn. She appeared to be an aging (35-40 years old) Woodstock leftover, unhappy and somber. She wore hip-hugger bell bottoms and a tie-dyed halter top which held up (but barely) sad, sagging breasts. As she slowly looked around, her hair limp and stringy around her face, she said dryly, "Don't mind me, I'm just smoking a cigarette." Then, unbelievably, she faded away before his eyes.

The ghost plays all of the "regular" mischievous, supernatural tricks that ghosts do... lights go off and on for no reason, doors open and shut without the touch of a human hand, and the like. Guests in the house are frequently spooked. Once our Friend rented upstairs rooms to four Mercer basketball players and the whole group left frightened the next morning, never to return. Our Friend has been told by a visiting channeller that the ghost of his house likes men but not women. This must be true because one of his friends, a woman, came to the house for a Christmas party but left shortly after her arrival, telling him, "Something in this house dislikes me... I'm getting out fast!"

Our Friend is often irritated with the ghost's unpredictable behavior, especially when it causes problems with the electricity and plumbing. "Once I got real angry about the lights and just yelled, 'Stop it!'" And it did.

Hay House update

Are there ghosts at the Hay House? Or a better question might be, "Are there *still* ghosts at the Hay House?" Newspaper reports claim that in 1980, when the Italian Renaissance villa was being renovated, many ghosts from eras past were on the prowl. The spirits were seen in several different parts of the mansion, including the basement. Once an apparition dressed in antebellum garb came up to the door in broad daylight, rang the bell and promptly vanished.

So many spirits (at least five) manifested themselves that year that Fran LaFarge, then-Director of the Hay House, held seances to see what the ghosts were trying so hard to communicate. The automatic-writer who conducted one of these events told LaFarge and others in attendance that the spirits were "shouting" at her from all points in the house. Later, as the automatic writing began, the spirit of Anne (wife of the original owner) communicated that the restoration was a "good thing," but that they must stay away from the basement area. Why? "My secret," she answered.

Another ghostly message came from one of the original owner's daughters, Caroline. "My love left me," she wrote . . . then, "I died."

Other manifestations have included the sighting of long skirts moving behind closed doors, brilliant lights going off and on, sudden "cold spots" on the stairs, and swaying chandeliers.

In a follow-up interview, Director LaFarge said that some people had falsely accused her of perpetuating a ghostly hoax to get more publicity for the Hay House. The seances stopped, the renovation was completed, and the house returned to its former quiet state.

In July of this year a spokesperson for the Hay House said that there had been no recent sightings or eerie occurrences at the historic attraction. Well, none to speak of, that is...

The house with "the look"

The very appearance of some houses give rise to the supernatural beliefs surrounding it. Such is the Bond House on Old Meyers Road near Dry Branch. The house is a spider's dream with its 18-foot ceilings, decaying front porch and gray-ing interior. There is much controversy about the "hauntings" in this house, which is, unbelievably, still occupied. Reports of unexplained noises in the kitchen area, strange howlings behind the house and ghostly images seen in an upstairs window from the yard below, contribute to the spooky reputation of the Bond House. Yet at least two families who have lived there claim no strangeness whatsoever.

Bond ancestors came from South Carolina around 1819 to plant and gin cotton in this area. The Bond family had ten children, and unfortunately, their first house burned... and so did their second one. The house which stands today on the same site was built around 1885. Family members say that during the Civil War the house and immediate surrounding area was a center of activity. Cotton was ginned, weapons were made, and a general store stood right across the street. This is surprising news if you visit the area today—a wilderness of trees, a dirt road overgrown with weeds on both sides, a quiet, breezless place. It's remote. It's lonesome. It's downright spooky. Throw in the family plot across the road from the house and you have the setting for an authentic Middle Georgia haunting... all ghosts invited! □

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