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Halloween: Spooky stories about haunted houses — and some other landmarks — on Staten Island



The Campus House at Wagner College, circa 1920. *Courtesy photo*



This Sea View Hospital building was built at the turn of the century. *Staten Island Advance file photo*



The Alice Austen House in Rosebank, circa 1980. *Staten Island Advance file photo*



The Italianate Gustav A. Mayer house in New Dorp as it looked in its heyday. *Staten Island Advance file photo*



The Billiou-Stillwell-Perine House in Dongan Hills. *Staten Island Advance file photo*



The Kreischer Mansion in Charleston. *Staten Island Advance file photo*

Where the ghosts live

Compiled from Staten Island Advance archives

It's Halloween, perhaps the spookiest day of the year, and we have some real ghost stories for you. Staten Island is home to more than a few specters. The borough has become something of a paranormal destination, with historically haunted houses and other landmarks. Here are some of the best scary stories we could unearth for your holiday reading.

ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE

Alice Austen's grandfather bought the home, at the foot of Hylan Boulevard in Rosebank, in the 1800s. But there were other residents before her.

Neighbors claim that, after midnight, they could hear the clanking of chains coming from the cellar, the ghosts of slaves who were kept there during the American Revolution.

According to a report on thiscityishauntednyc.blogspot.com, a British soldier — spurned by a woman who lived there — hung himself from a beam in the parlor. It is said that the sound of his military boots and the clinking of his spurs may be heard in that room and down the hall.

BILLIOU-STILLWELL-PERINE HOUSE

Built in the 1600s, the Billiou-Stillwell-Perine House in Dongan Hills is the oldest standing building on Staten Island.

Commenter Laural writes, "I can remember touring the house with my parents many, many years ago (this would have been in the early '70s) and hearing the guide tell the story of a ghost that was said to haunt the grounds."

COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND

From 1930 to 1987, several buildings on this campus (before it was CSI) housed an institution for developmentally disabled children called the Willowbrook State School. The hospital became notorious for its inhumane conditions and was shut down after a now-famous investigation.

Television host Geraldo Rivera gets all the glory, but the Advance's own Jane Kurtin was the first to expose horrible conditions at the Willowbrook home in 1971. Her efforts contributed to nationwide reforms in mental healthcare. The school was closed permanently in 1987, after investigative reports led to U.S. Supreme Court landmark rulings, setting the stage for deinstitutionalization

across the country.

Then, in 1988, grounds worker Andre Rand was convicted of kidnapping, and is suspected of murdering, 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger, who went missing the year before. The so-called "Hannibal Lecter of Staten Island" is still believed to be responsible for the disappearance of numerous children from the institution.

Some students at the college say they see shadows and hear strange noises at night, sometimes accompanied by unsettling feelings. Some say they feel as if something is watching or following them as they walk the campus after dark.

CONFERENCE HOUSE

In 1680, English Royal Navy officer Christopher Billop built what is now the grounds of the Tottenville Conference House. Haunted Staten Island has written about the various legends regarding the house.

One such story is that Billop killed his maid by stabbing her or by throwing her down the stairs after catching her trying to signal the Americans. There are reports that at night you can see the light of her candle in one of the windows. Another story says that Billop abandoned his fiancée and she died of a broken heart inside the house — and her calls and pleas can be still heard throughout the house. Others say they've seen ghosts of British soldiers wandering the grounds at night.

"Built near an ancient Indian burial ground and known for a failed attempt to end the revolutionary war, this might be one of the most haunted places in America," Haunted Staten Island writes.

CUNARD MANSION

In 1852, shipping magnate Edward Cunard built a mansion on Grymes Hill for his daughter. Soon after, a man committed suicide in the house, the legend goes.

"Built near an ancient Indian burial ground and known for a failed attempt to end the revolutionary war, this (the Conference House) might be one of the most haunted places in America"

Some report seeing the man's face in the top floor window. Others say that when inside the house, you can hear a woman's voice calling from upstairs.

The mansion is now part of the Wagner College campus.

FORT WADSWORTH

Visitors to Fort Wadsworth, which was first used by the British army during the Revolutionary War to control the Narrows, have described seeing apparitions of soldiers walking through walls.

FYI, it was originally called Fort Richmond, it was renamed for Union general James Wadsworth in 1864.

According to HauntedPlaces.org, one visitor "said she flashed back to wartime where she was apparently inside the body of a curly-haired nurse. She saw wounded and dying soldiers all around, then a soldier grabbed her arm and yelled for her to get down. After a big explosion, she found herself again in the present day. Other witnesses reported similar occurrences, such as suddenly seeing wounded and dead soldiers all over the field and blinking their eyes to find the soldiers had vanished."

GARIBALDI-MEUCCI MUSEUM

A historic Italian landmark, the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum in Rosebank was once home to exiled war hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, in addition to inventor Antonio Meucci.

It is believed that a ghost now haunts the house — perhaps a woman who is upset that her kitchen was removed. Or maybe the spirit is Garibaldi himself.

"In 'Big Book of New York Ghost Stories,' author Cheri Reval questions if the groans and coughing that have been heard are from Meucci's bedridden wife, Ester, who is buried

SEE GHOSTS, C4

From the cover

Ghosts

FROM C1

in the front yard," according to the museum.

And the museum's collections include the death mask of Antonio Meucci.

A few years ago, members of the Island's Scared! crew spent two nights investigating the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum. Formed in 2002, the team studies paranormal activity — "confronting the darkness and seeking truth."

GUSTAV MAYER HOUSE

Built in 1855 and located on Richmond Road in New Dorp, this home was purchased by German-born confectioner and inventor Gustav A. Mayer (think Nabisco sugar wafers) in 1889.

He died in 1918, but his daughters, Paula and Emilie, lived there until they were more than 100 years old. They never married and in their later years holed up in their bedrooms, using an elaborate pulley system to bring in their groceries and mail. It is said their spirits still haunt the house.

Robert Troiano, owner as of 2016, refutes those claims, but admits he feels the energy of the history pass through him and the house.

The house became a designated landmark in 1989 and has been used for high-fashion photo shoots (Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and others). A New York Times article in 2014 called it "A House Fit for Murder, Madmen and Fashion Models."

HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN

A light at the Parsonage House, part of Historic Richmond Town, has been known to flicker at night.

"You would drive by and you'd see the lights on — you'd drive by a little later and the lights would be off," Justin Harden of Haunted Staten Island told the Advance a few years ago.

He also pointed out a few other haunted locations at the historic village, such as the old St. Andrews Church, where he said many have spotted ghosts and apparitions walking around at night.

Further, HauntedPlaces.org reports that Guyon Lake Tysen House, built in 1740, is haunted by Elizabeth Lake Tysen and "some of her many children are suspected to linger here as well, playing with the house museum's toys."

WeirdUS.com mentions a portrait of a woman that was hanging in the east parlor during the time the writer worked at Historic Richmond Town. "If you photograph the expression on her face, it will change. Also, it looks like her face is all bruised," the website says.

Also, the graveyard, next to the old courthouse, is reportedly home to a young girl with a broken heart who wanders around at night looking for the love of her life. Guys beware — it is believe the ghost mistakes those who pass by the graveyard to be her long lost love.

Vincent Carbone, a paranormal investigator, is expected to return to Historic Richmond Town on Halloween night.

KREISCHER MANSION

Balthasar Kreischer, a wealthy 19th-century brick manufacturer, built twin mansions for his sons, Edward and Charles, on the top of the hill off Arthur Kill Road in Charleston, then called Kreischerville.

In the 1930s, one of the houses burned down, and the remaining house, the site of a mob slaying in the early 2000s, has long been rumored to be haunted.

Visitors to the Kreischer Mansion have told of strange happenings in the house, including odd clanging noises and weeping that carries through the halls late at night. Some say they've seen a ghost couple haunting the grounds, believed to be Edward Kreischer and his wife.

"Distraught over the flagging family fortunes and quarrels with employees, in 1894 Edward Kreischer shot himself in the head and died," according to the CrimeLibrary, which names the mansion among the top 10 most haunted destinations in the country.

It was the subject of a Wall Street Journal documentary in 2012.

Earlier this year, a medium named Anna Raimondi was sent to the home by "The Dr. Oz Show." The program said she knew nothing about the location before her visit, but upon entering the building she described a stabbing she said had happened there.

"He was killed, but I feel like a stab. There's stabbing, somebody sitting on somebody, they want him to die. This man, he did not want to die. Blood. So was all blood in here, like bloody, very bloody. Was there more than one murder here?"

In 2005, Bonanno associate Robert McKelvey was stabbed and drowned in a pond on the grounds before his body was chopped into pieces and discarded.

OLD BERMUDA INN

During the Civil War, there was a private home on the site of what is now the Old Bermuda Inn in Rossville. A woman by the name of Martha Mersereau and her spouse used to live there.

But Martha's spouse was called to war,



You may know Staten Island's historic Italian landmark the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum as the home of Italian culture and educational programming for all ages. But you may not know that it is also rumored to be the dwelling place for several ethereal inhabitants that refuse to leave. After lengthy investigations and all-night stake-outs, the Staten Island Paranormal Society, the Eastern Paranormal Investigation Center and Haunted Times Magazine have declared the building haunted. Above, the death mask of Antonio Meucci is lit by candlelight. *Staten Island Advance file photo*



Look closely and you may see one of the ghosts that occupy, rent-free, the Conference House in Tottenville. *File photo*



Visitors walk through the tunnels of Fort Tompkins in Fort Wadsworth. *Alexandra Salmieri, Staten Island Advance*



The shadow of a Garibaldi-Meucci Museum volunteer is seen above Antonio Meucci's bed. *Staten Island Advance file photo*

The Haunt at Kreischer Mansion

Activities include a haunted hay ride and a walk through a real haunted house. (Don't believe it's haunted? Read up on the Kreischer Mansion's history.)

When: 7 p.m. to midnight every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday through Nov. 3.

Where: The Kreischer Mansion is located at 4500 Arthur Kill Road. For more information, email Rispoli at RickRispoliProductions@gmail.com.

Admission is \$25 per person.

SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER

According to legend, in the 1800s the woman in charge of the female staff members at Snug Harbor — the Matron — allegedly had an affair with a man living on the grounds, which resulted in an illegitimate son. In an effort to keep him a secret, the Matron supposedly kept her son chained in the basement until he escaped and stabbed her to death. It is believed that she now haunts the building known as the Matron's House and its surrounding grounds in Livingston.

Also at Snug Harbor is a statue of founder Robert Randall. Last year, commenter JonSnowtheCrow shared this spooky story: "He is buried there, his body was exhumed from its initial resting place in the city, and moved to Snug in front of the Greek revival buildings where there is an obelisk. It's said you can see the ghost of Randall at the water's edge over there, trying to get back to his first final resting place."

Then there's the Music Hall, a 650-seat concert hall that opened in 1892. In 2013, the New Jersey Paranormal Research Organization (NJ PRO) took 20 people on a guided tour of the hall to explore the building from the main floor to the attic, in search for supernatural activity. Although the ghost-hunting group did not see any ghosts, an unexplained presence in the attic scared some skeptics into believing in ghosts.

VANDERBILT'S TOMB

In a tomb located in the Moravian Cemetery lies Cornelius Vanderbilt and his family. The three-story Romanesque tomb was built in 1886 and is gated from the rest of the cemetery, closed off to the public. Trespassers have tried to enter, but to ghostly consequences.

One woman was reported to have died after trying to open the gate.

Since then, visitors say they've seen a light in the shape of a woman near the tomb.

Other visitors say they've been chased away by Vanderbilt.

It is said that devil worshippers have also used the site for their ceremonies.