

# WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Ghosts of the St. Croix Valley

This time of year ghost stories always circulate across Washington County and environs. Some of the best ones, of course, are told at night during a rainstorm, with the haunting hoots of an owl offering a spooky backdrop.

Some of these stories have been captured in several books that relate the stories and legends. In *Haunted Heartland*, authors Beth Scott and Michael Norman chronicle several Minnesota stories. For example, there's the one about Mary Sharpe, a fourteen-year-old girl who lapsed into a coma in her Stillwater home. During an "out-of-body experience" she reportedly met someone named Edwin Emeny. When she regained consciousness, she told the doctors about the man she'd met. One of the physicians, Dr. Cora Emeny, appeared much shaken by the child's story. It seems Edwin was the doctor's brother who had died fifteen years earlier.

Another book written by the two "ghost" writers is *Haunted Wisconsin*. In this book, there are two stories from St. Croix County, Wisconsin. One legend is about the Aldrich family. An early settler in Hudson, Dr. Philip Aldrich made quite a name for himself as an active community leader during Hudson's formative years. When Aldrich died, his possessions were passed down to his son Paschal. However, the luck of the father was not passed on to Paschal. The young man and his family moved to a small house at the head of Coulee Road, near present day Interstate 94. Paschal farmed a large area of land for many years until he became seriously ill and was forced to sell much of his property. After he died in 1860, Paschal's house became known as the haunted house. Members of his family, and some neighbors, claimed to have seen Paschal's ghost wandering the area at night, supposedly keeping a watch over his family. Have you seen Paschal's ghost?

Another tale - *The Cantankerous Ghost of St. Croix County* - tells about a mischievous spirit that tossed things at the Lynch farm in Cady Township. On August 30, 1873, Richard Lynch and his neighbor Frank Duffie were out in the fields cutting hay. Suddenly, the men heard Mrs. Lynch's screams coming from the farmhouse. The men sprinted to the house arriving in time to see chairs jumping to the ceiling and crashing back to the floor, and tin ware and cooking items flying through the air and landing in the far corner of the room.

After this incident was reported, journalists from the Dunn County News visited the family homestead. During their inquiry, other odd occurrences were witnessed, including an egg zooming through the air, soon followed by a potato masher.

However, when a reporter from the big city St. Paul Dispatch stayed with the Lynch's on November 3 and 4, 1873, he concluded it was a hoax, created by Mrs. Lynch to get her husband to move from their backwoods home. Still, many people to this day still believe that the Lynch home was haunted.

In a Stillwater Gazette newspaper article published on March 5, 1984, writer Joy Powell talks about some of the haunted houses in the Stillwater area. The Rutherford House on Manning Avenue is thought to be haunted. Margaret Seifert, who formerly lived in the house, recalled hearing footsteps on different occasions when on one else was home.

### **Ghosts of the Warden's House**

Early in the history of Minnesota there was a call for a prison in the new territory. The prison was located on an old battleground in northern Stillwater. The prison opened in 1853 with Francis Delano as the first Warden.

From those early days until the prison was moved to its present site in Bayport, thirteen wardens and their families occupied the mansion on the hill. It is true that there was much heartache and suffering in the prison next door, but there was similar pain felt in the

Warden's House as well. Some say that pain is still being felt today.

In 1941, the Washington County Historical Society purchased the Warden's house from the state and opened it as the second house museum in Minnesota. Over the years, there have been unusual happenings in the museum; items mysteriously moved, cradles seen rocking for no reason. There have even been sightings of a young woman wandering upstairs from room to room.

Because of these unusual circumstances, the Warden's House has been a site of several gatherings by so-called psychics. Some of them have felt the presence of a young woman complaining of stomach pains and fussing over an infant child. Though it has been difficult to determine the reason this alleged spirit remains, several people believe her name was Trudy.

Could it be true? Let's examine the history of the Warden's House. The last warden to occupy the stone mansion was Henry Wolfer. He lived in the house for 22 years, raising his children and some of his grandchildren there.

Wolfer had three sons and a daughter, Gertrude, who married and moved away from the house when she and her husband started a family. After the birth of her son, Gertrude suffered appendicitis and died. Her son came back to the Warden's House and lived with his grandfather, Warden Wolfer, until the family moved west in 1914.

Some people believe the spirit that roams the house is that of Gertrude "Trudy" Wolfer, fussing over the young son that she left behind after her untimely death.

The ghosts of the Warden's House are not just in the museum. Some people say there is a spirit hanging around the carriage house still doing the job that he was assigned as a prisoner many years ago.

Along the southside of the carriage house is a cave that was carved out for a trustee to

occupy while he tended to the horses and carriages. This was such a treasured prison job that one inmate found it difficult to relinquish. The story goes that upon his parole, he returned to Minneapolis. Struggling with life outside the prison, he reportedly threw a brick through a jewelry store window so he could be arrested and returned to Stillwater prison and, hopefully, the trustee job he loved.

Did this man get his wish? We don't know, but some say he returned in his afterlife and still hangs out in the backyard of the Warden's House, tending to the horses and carriages of yesteryear.

Many more ghost stories exist throughout Washington County, helping make the learning of our history more fun. If you know of any particularly good ghost stories, please pass them along via the Washington County Historical website at [www.wchsmn.org](http://www.wchsmn.org).

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