



Ghosts at the Seneca Falls Historical Society Mansion



The Seneca Falls Historical Society mansion at 55 Cayuga Street has more than one “haunted story” associated with it. The house was built in 1855 by Edward Mynderse, son of the successful businessman named Wilhelmus Mynderse. The house at that time was Italianate in style and served that family until 1875. Edward Mynderse enjoyed his family wealth so much that he squandered away the family fortune and the family business became bankrupt. In 1875, Mrs. Leroy (Ellen) Partridge moved into the house and immediately set about altering the house into its present-day appearance as a Queen Anne-style mansion of 23 rooms. Then from 1891 until 1961, members of the Becker family lived there.¹ In 1961, the Seneca Falls Historical Society acquired the mansion and has continued to use this home as its museum and headquarters.

Given that background information, it should not be surprising that one “haunted” story associated with the mansion deals with the ghost of Edward Mynderse. His restless ghost first appeared during the Becker family’s stay, turning pictures around to face the wall and stopping clocks. There is some speculation that the ghost’s activities reflected Edward’s dislike for the changes that had been made to the house. Fran Barbieri, who has worked at the Historical Society mansion since 1988, has said that Edward’s ghost is believed to stay at the house to protect the house. She has also reported that

Edward is credited with helping the staff to find a bat that resisted capture. We get bats in here fairly often and one night we had the police here six times trying to catch this one creature. Finally, on the last visit, the china and silverware on the buffet rattled. We investigated and found the tiny thing hiding there.

Fran explained that the small bat didn’t have the size or strength to make all the dishes move, so everyone assumes Edward alerted them as only a ghost can.²

Another incident involving Edward the ghost occurred shortly after Fran Barbieri began working at the mansion. She said the “closing up at the end of the work day” routine was to set the alarm, lock the back door and exit through that door, letting the screen door close behind. Upon arriving to work one morning, Fran found the screen door locked from the inside with an eye hook. She called for help and that person broke in through another door. “We couldn’t figure out how the hook managed,” Fran said, “to get into that eye. Now, I always make sure when I leave to say good night to Edward and it hasn’t happened since.”³

There is a ghost story associated with Mary Merrigan, who served as a nanny for the Becker children. Mary lived on the third floor and stayed with the family until 1957, when her dementia led to her being admitted to the hospital. On the night she passed away, her ghost appeared to the Becker family, apparently in an attempt to bid them farewell. In August 2001, an Eric Lewis was called to the house by his sister Patricia, “who was clearly upset on the

telephone.” She had been working alone in the house and had heard someone walking upstairs. Eric’s investigation led him to the third floor, past the nursery, to the back corner of the house and into Mary Merrigan’s old quarters. As Patricia was relating how Mary’s spirit is supposed to haunt the area, Eric left his tape recorder (which was turned on) on the trunk by the bed. At the end of the tour, Eric listened to the tape and heard nothing unusual. Later that night, however, when he played the tape at a family gathering, he was surprised by what he heard:

I pushed play. You could hear it was in the maid’s room and you can hear me on tape opening the door, it creaking, then a voice clear as a bell, in a deep raspy vice, said, “Excuse me! You hit me.” Patricia screamed at the sound of the voice on the tape recorder and ran from the room.

This event convinced Eric Lewis that the Seneca Falls Historical Society has a ghost.⁴

A third spirit or ghost associated with the Seneca Falls Historical Society is that of a young Irish girl who served in the house under the Beckers, probably as a companion to the girls. She died of “consumption” at about age 15, and it seems that she had longed for her native Ireland. “We hear her crying on the back stairs, which are the ones she would have used,” said Fran Barbieri. “I would wonder if something was wrong and think—did someone fall? Of course, you don’t find anything, but you would swear someone is just sobbing in the back. We think she wants to go home. She’s been with us a long time.”⁵

In fall of 2002, the Society agreed to host a camera crew and a psychic for an overnight stay. Without prompting or suggestions, the female psychic picked up on all of the spirits in the house. She was unable to sleep because she said that there were three spirits who kept her awake. The psychic said, “There is someone very sad in the house. She wants to go home to Ireland and she needs to be released.” At the suggestion of the psychic, the group held a séance in the hopes that this would enable this person to go home. Fran Barbieri reported that that entire next winter she didn’t hear anyone crying on the back stairs.⁶

In summary, Fran Barbieri has stressed that the Seneca Falls Historical Society mansion is “not a spook house.” She has admitted that she doesn’t like going up to Mary’s third-floor room because of the odd feeling that persists there, but otherwise she finds the spirits are not frightening at all. “It is a very comforting place.”⁷ Philomena Cammuso, the current Executive Director of the Seneca Falls Historical Society, added, “If there are ghosts, they don’t bother us, probably because we find it a nice, comfortable place to work.”⁸

¹ Susan Smitten, **Ghost Stories of New York State**, Auburn, WA: Lone Pine Publishing International, 2004, pp 42-43.

² Smitten, p 45.

³ Smitten, p 45.

⁴ Smitten, pp 43-44.

⁵ Smitten, pp45-47.

⁶ Smitten, p 47.

⁷ Smitten, p 47.

⁸ Interview on October 20, 2009.