



Ghosts at Toad Hall

by Fran Mark

I believe there are friendly ghosts who come and go at Toad Hall, who check on how we are caring for the house and the old general store in which they lived out their lives. John LeRoy, a successful merchant, built the rambling house in Frost Mills in 1820. In 1837 he contributed funds to build the Pleasant Plains Presbyterian Church where he served as an Elder. Both places are very dear to me and they must have been to the LeRois as well.

Only three families owned the property over the century and a half before the Mark family moved in. We purchased the property from Sadie Battenfeld in 1967 and named it "Toad Hall" after the house in our favorite children's book, Wind in the Willows.

Sadie's husband, Frank, had died in the house a year before. We were told he was meticulous in caring for the house and store all through his life there – and we came to understand that he continued to be after his death.

There was nothing scary or spooky about Frank's activities. There were many friendly signs and signals that some invisible – but benevolent – presence was about: water faucets turning on and off, lights going on and off, voices speaking in an empty room. One particular inci-

dent, however, stands out: We were once leaving for a week's vacation at Christmastime and were just about to go out the door. We had checked all the lights, the furnace in the basement, the stove, doors and windows. Just as we were leaving, my husband noticed that the small red light near the basement door – which always shone when someone had left the light on down there – was glowing brightly. "I know I shut that light off when I checked the furnace, but I better take a look down there" muttered Ralph – and he went down the stairs. He found that a water pipe had suddenly sprung a leak after he'd just checked on the furnace. Had it not been for Frank turning the light on, we would have returned home a week later to a real disaster.

Another incident, which stays with me, occurred on a dark night when my youngest daughter, Charlotte, was only a year old. I arrived home in the evening to a dark, empty house. No cars in the driveway and no lights anywhere. I hurried inside to change the baby and rushed upstairs to the bedroom (which has a small bathroom adjoining it.) As I entered the dark bedroom there was a light clearly shining from under the bathroom's closed door. With my back to the door, I laid the baby on the bed and shouted with annoyance, "Whichever one of you got home

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first should have had the thoughtfulness to turn on some lights!" I heard the bathroom door creak slowly open and, turning to see which one of my children I'd be yelling at, saw the bathroom was dark – there was no one there – and no one in the house.

I don't know what exactly the significance of that visit was – but if it was to let me know without a doubt there was a ghost in residence, it was a successful visit indeed. I don't know if it was Frank in the bathroom that night, but he did seem to favor them. My husband and two houseguests, on different occasions, heard voices in the downstairs bathroom and then there were, of course those faucets going on and off.

A friend and houseguest of my daughter Carol, coming in late one night, went to the kitchen for a snack (the bathroom is right off the kitchen). Turning on the light in the kitchen and heading for the refrigerator, she observed the light in the bathroom was off – and then it was suddenly on. She told us the next day she ran upstairs to my daughter's room and jumped under the covers. She may have evaded the ghost's presence by running to the bedroom but my daughter, Carol, awoke in that room one night and saw a figure standing at the foot of her bed. Thinking it was one of her brothers, she said, "Oh, stop kidding around and go to bed!" The figure vanished instantly – and then it was Carol's turn to hide under the covers. Carol's room had been Sadie's when she was a girl – but whether the ghost was male or female we never did get out of her.

The most recent visual appearance of a ghost was in 1988 when one of my sons was painting the back of the house and sensed someone standing below him watching as he stood high on the ladder completing a bright yellow clapboard. When Josh looked directly down he saw what seemed to be a young, sandy haired man smiling up with pleasure at the newly painted portion of the house. The apparition then faded away.

I'm not sure what all these spirits are doing with their time at Toad Hall when they're not flipping light switches, warning us of possible dangers, and other activities or if they're supposed to be off

somewhere else – but they seem to like it here well enough – as we do.

A few lines to reflect upon from Thornton Wilder's "Our Town", Act 3 "There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.....And they stay here while the earth part of 'em burns away, burns out; and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's Corners. They're waitin' for something that they feel is comin'. Something important, and great. Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in them to come out clear?"

Fran Mark is a long time member of the Clinton Historical Society. She continues to live at Toad Hall.

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Clinton town history – summer reading

Everything you wanted to know about the town? Not quite, but close. Clinton: A History of a Town, published in 1987, is chock full of solid history. Each of the 19 chapters in the 321 page publication details a specific aspect of town history. Who were the Nine Partners, where were the 11 schools, the old roads, early settlers, hamlets, mills, post offices, government and religion are some of the topics covered. Reviewed in the Hudson Valley Regional Review, the summation "a community expects a great deal from local history" and Clinton residents have "received all of this and more... Lucky Clinton," recommends the work. The book can be purchased from the Clinton Historical Society at \$14.95 soft cover or \$19.95 hard cover.

This is only one of a number of publications the Society has produced. The history of Dutchess County railroads, diaries, history of the Creek Meeting House (society headquarters) and observations about life in Clinton Hollow in the 1820s are among booklets produced by the Society at \$5.00 to \$8.00 each. Call Louise at 266-3819.