

Ghosts on the Coast

Coastside history is filled with vivid stories of the vivid people who lived here. Those who have passed are no longer here bodily, but might some still be here, in some form? A few hauntings, reported by various sources...

The Blue Lady of the Moss Beach Distillery is notorious. During Prohibition, a young married woman often visited what was then Frank's Place. She always dressed in blue. She and the bar's piano player began an affair that ended badly when, during a late-night tryst on the beach, they were assaulted by the woman's husband. They say the piano-player survived, but the Blue Lady died of stab wounds. Or... did she die in an automobile accident on her way to meet her lover? Both stories have been told. However she met her corporeal end, her spirit walks the Distillery to this day.

The William Simmons house on Kelly Avenue in Half Moon Bay was built in 1865. Simmons was one of the first Anglo-Americans in Spanishtown, as Half Moon Bay was commonly called at the time. He was a carpenter, and in addition to building houses he used his skills to make coffins. He was the town's first undertaker. Early visitors said they saw the ghostly figure of an old woman dressed in gray gliding along the halls. The current resident reports seeing fleeting images of a teenage boy... could the undertaker have taken somebody under too soon?

The house on the northwest corner of Fourth and LeConte in Montara was built in 1912, and was first owned by a German couple. In 1936 Walt and Agnes Ballard bought the house, and Mrs. Ballard reported that she often felt a ghostly presence at the foot of the bed. Mr. Ballard didn't believe it, but the family sold the house after his passing in 1969.

After World War II, Albert and Eva Schmidt bought the once-elegant Palace Miramar. The hotel had been used during World War II to house soldiers assigned to defend the coast, and the new owners went to work cleaning the place and restoring it. They opened Albert's restaurant, then things started getting weird. Chandeliers swung as though blown by wind, but the windows were closed. A hooded, transparent face peered through second-story windows. Connecting rooms 6 and 7 seemed occupied, with candles alight in the night, but nobody was there. Theories of the ghostly presence abounded—a soldier? A guest? A fisherman from the pier? A passenger from the train? The old hotel burned in the 1960s, but... what happened to the presence?

In 2002, Penny Gilly was a security guard at the Pillar Point Radar Station, and reported strange goings-on in the telemetry building. Heavy chairs were inexplicably rearranged, and she had cold feelings "like someone's watching you." A former graveyard shift guard reported seeing an eerie greenish light that looked like a floating head, also in the telemetry building. "...after I looked at it, it was gone," he said, "and so was I."

Meanwhile, over on Grove Street in Half Moon Bay, a local psychologist had to sign a disclaimer—a ghost disclosure—when she sold her home there. The spirit, named Peter, lived in the 1920s cottage behind her house. In the 1980s a medium connected with Peter, who reportedly didn't care for the Pumpkin Festival because it was too chaotic.

Other rumored hauntings include a house on Miramar Drive, where a woman ghost occasionally appeared and played with the dining room lights. During a backyard party, guests who arrived late told the owners "The lady let us in"... although the house was locked, and everyone was outdoors.

Ghosts on the Coast abound, some stories told and some not. Do you have a Coastal Ghost story? Let us know! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org.

-- Ellen Chiri, Communications Chair