

Alexandria Times

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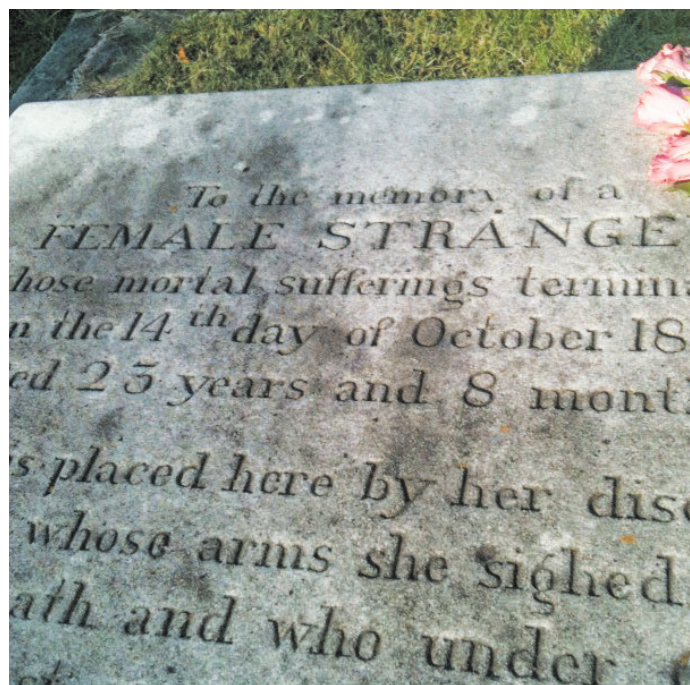
Ghosts of Alexandria's past

Long-time residents of Alexandria probably know of the Female Stranger, who visits what is now Gadsby's Tavern Museum. Others might have heard of the tale of a spirit walking by St. Paul's Church on Pitt Street. An ambitious student recorded Alexandrians' ghost stories as part of the Bicentennial Project in 1976. This week, Historic Alexandria offers you a brief synopsis of three famous ghost stories within our city limits.

While there are many versions of the Female Stranger story, the basic story is as follows. In 1816, a gentleman and his sick female traveling companion arrived at the city hotel, now known as Gadsby's Tavern Museum. Here, at least one doctor and nurse attended to her; however, they were curiously sworn to secrecy regarding the identity of the sick woman.

On that fateful October day, she died, leaving the gentleman heartbroken. He ordered a very fine, expensive table-top grave, then promptly left town without paying his bills. Today, people can still visit this grave in St. Paul's Cemetery, where she is listed as "The Female Stranger."

Post-Civil War Alexandria also had a ghost story, having nothing to do with the war at all. The July 20, 1885, Alexan-



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

The Female Stranger's grave in St. Paul's Cemetery.

dria Gazette reported:

"A year or two ago several individuals, at different times, were scared out of seven year's growth by catching glimpses, after nightfall, of a somber-clad tall figure, supposed to be of the feminine persuasion, whose wont it was to glide noiselessly along the pavement in front of St. Paul's church or to suddenly emerge from either of the alleys on that thoroughfare and stand in front of some belated pedestrian until each separate hair on the latter's cranium assumed a perpendicular position."

Sightings of the apparition had died down in the early part of 1885 until the Gazette reported:

"Last Saturday night, the 'ghost' made its appearance to Mr. James Wood, who was on his way home ... It was twelve midnight, that lonely hour when graveyards yawn, when this gentleman, with a box of oysters under each arm, started from the Opera House Restaurant for his home. Like others, Wood spotted the 'irrepressible figure' as he passed by St. Paul's. Wood claimed to not believe in the supernat-

ural, and hurried his gait to catch the apparition, but found his efforts frustrated when he got within five feet of the specter, when it vanished."

Alexandria secondary school students composed the Alexandria Bicentennial Youth Commission and received the support of the Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, who thought it would encourage youth participation in the Bicentennial. One member of the youth commission, Eric Segal, felt a special connection to the project. It led him from lengthy interviews at the library to appearing on a television news program. The end product is a 20-page booklet with a collection of six ghost stories and a summary of other stories he encountered.

The most famous story in the booklet is "The Teller of Tales and the Devil-Bat of Market Square," which is referenced on page one's 'Haunted Tale: The devil-bat.'

Segal's version was related to him by Louie Robert, who owned a frame shop in Old Town.

Whether you believe in ghosts or not, Historic Alexandria wishes you a Happy Halloween!

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.