

Ashland's girl ghost was real

By Julia Spitz/Daily News staff

[The MetroWest Daily News](#)

Posted Oct 31, 2010 @ 12:18 AM

Last update Nov 02, 2010 @ 10:50 AM

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ASHLAND — Some say Mary giggles, casts shadows and disappears into walls.

Some say she's a figment of overactive imaginations or perhaps a marketing ploy.

Liesa Healy-Miller wasn't out to prove whether or not Mary's ghost is actually roaming around Stone's Public House.

She just wanted to see if Mary was real.

"I had heard about the reported hauntings at John Stone's even before I moved out to Framingham" seven years ago, said Healy-Miller. "I've read accounts over the years," and talked with staff while dining at the Ashland restaurant.

When she saw a promo last weekend for the Discovery channel's "Ghost Lab" that included a feature on Stone's Public House, "I said, there's no better time to answer some questions for myself."

Was there any evidence a girl named Mary was hit by a train and taken to die in the inn only steps away from the tracks?

"Being a skeptic, I was fully prepared to learn this never happened," said genealogist Healy-Miller. "I thought it was a colorful myth. Imagine my surprise to find a death record for this little girl," the one named Mary J. Smith.

Healy-Miller said she found a record of Mary's death in the Ashland town clerk's office, and "there is also a record at the Massachusetts State Archives" in Dorchester. "She was a few months shy of 11 years old when she died on June 11, 1863." The cause of death: "Killed by RR cars in Ashland," the record shows.

Mary's parents are listed as Michael and Elizabeth, and it says they were from Ireland, but that Mary was born in Boston.

"Here's where things get murky."

After scouring Boston's Registry of Vital Records, "There is no birth record for Mary Smith in Boston. I've also checked in all the obvious places, city directory, federal census. Her family doesn't pop up.

"So I'm starting to think her father was some sort of itinerant worker and they never really settled in one place.

"The town of Ashland (report) states she was buried in Milford. It did not give the name of the cemetery," so she contacted Milford genealogist Lyn Lovell, who's also a member of the Milford Historical Commission.

Lovell didn't find any record of a Mary J. Smith buried in any of the Milford cemeteries, and no record of Michael or Elizabeth, either, said Healy-Miller.

"We couldn't find who she was looking for," Lovell said Friday.

"I've not seen or heard of a document that verifies that this little girl was taken into Stone's, or that people tried to revive her," Healy-Miller said. Newspapers of the period were not routinely archived.

"But the part about a girl being hit and killed by a train is definitely true."

And then there's the pinafore.

Healy-Miller went to Stone's Public House Tuesday night to take photos of the pinafore, which is kept in a frame on a wall upstairs at the former tavern built in the 1830s.

It's only been displayed in recent years, but "it had been in the attic for years," said Healy-Miller.

Manager Ben Stoetzel "has been very accommodating," and allowed her to photograph the garment for analysis by Maureen Taylor, a Westwood resident and photo identification expert known as "the historical photograph detective," in the quest to prove it could be Mary's. The first step is seeing if anything would rule out the possibility.

"I'm very intrigued by the pinafore," said Taylor, author of the recently published "The Last Muster: Images of the Revolutionary War Generation."

"The four-holed button on the back, and the fact it's linen, is intriguing to me."

Cotton would have been more typical.

"Linen manufacturing in New England pretty much fell out of favor by the 1860s," and yet "it does appear to be machine-made. It's a machine-made button on the back."

"I've given her some angles to track down," such as checking into the Stevens Linen Co. of Dudley, one of the only area businesses

making linen clothing at the time.

"She's got some more work to do," said Taylor, "then there's the whole story of why did somebody keep it?"

"Somebody kept (the pinafore) for a very long time. It must have some significance."

But if the Smith family didn't stick around, who might have kept it in the inn's attic? And are the stains on the hem really blood?

"The reason I chose to pursue the story of the little girl is, in terms of genealogy, it's something you can prove (if it's real," said Healy-Miller.

"Despite the obvious issues with the (very common) name, I plan to continue doing a search. ... You keep moving forward, hoping those payoffs (of information) will come. When they do, they're amazing."

This isn't her first foray into being inspired by something she saw on TV.

"I have the regular client work," said the New England Historic Genealogy Society member, "but when I learn of mysteries like this, when genealogy can be applied, I dive right in."

Earlier this month, she saw a news story about vandals breaking into a mausoleum in Harwich. No one seemed to know anything about Ida Chase, the woman whose casket was opened. Healy-Miller hoped to find out if Ida and her husband, George, were related to Caleb Chase, a co-founder of the Chase & Sanborn coffee brand.

"Even the folks at the Chase Library didn't know if George was related to Caleb. I couldn't just let that go."

She learned they were distant relatives, George's grandfather and Caleb were stepbrothers, but George and Ida left no children, and the only kin with a claim as an heir would be the descendants of George's second wife.

While delving into the past to satisfy her own curiosity isn't a paying gig, "sometimes you have to do some pro bono work for the good of the field ... to educate the public about what you can do through genealogy."

The mother of a 3-year-old daughter admits there's something else drawing her to Mary's story.

"From my house, I can hear the train whistles at night, and I couldn't get out of my mind what happened to this poor girl."

"Children ghosts are a little more eerie," said Brad Klinge, the "Ghost Lab" investigator whose infrared camera appears to have captured an image of a child's shadow while filming at Stone's Public House last May.

"We also got the voice of a little girl at the same time," he said.

The Discovery channel will rebroadcast the show that includes the Ashland segment tonight at 7.

As for Healy-Miller, "I'd love to find (out) if there are any living descendants" of the Smith family, she said.

(Julia Spitz can be reached at 508-626-3968 or jspitz@cnc.com. Check metrowestdailynews.com or milforddailynews.com for the Spitz Bits blog.)

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menace

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mary smith is that the female aka for john doe?? hope mary is getting some of the payola type profits at john stons not so public house?? at least 20% of the \$8.00 a glass house wine!!!!
nynlyvs
1 year ago

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thats a cool story and without the pinafore who would believe it, do you think she goes over to the Police Station to keep em all running around like turkeys at Thanksgiving chasing bad guys? Keep the fear alive! Its Halloween!

2000sand

1 year ago

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Other tragic deaths with that RR crossing at John Stone's include a volunteer Ashland fire-fighter whose car was struck by a train in the 1960's. And I believe there was a fatality during a snow-storm in the 1990's at that location also.

Ashlandian

1 year ago

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I'm thinking menace doesn't get out much. The prices at Stone's are reasonable considering that the food is great.

Char

1 year ago

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Too bad no ex-employees are weighing in....weirder stuff has happened there than a giggle or two.

jpgawne

1 year ago

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Did anyone proof the title? Shouldn't it read:
'Ashland's ghost's girl was real'

kdawson
1 year ago
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sPITZ SHOULD STICK TO HER DICTIONERY - SHE IS SOOOOOOOOOO OPINIATED. I HATE PEOPLE WHO THINK LIKE THAT. BOO!

Hopkinton
1 year ago
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I'm with Ashlandian. Stone's prices are very reasonable and the food is outstanding! Anyone check out Ghost Lab last week featuring Stone's? OK show but the 'ghost hunters' are ANNOYING! Tone down the testosterone fellas!

Stoneysays
1 year ago
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One previous commentator said the owner was not a promoter of the ghost stories - if that was true, why would he have all these people coming in to film and have it on TV and all the 'ghost' books? Or did those people just decide to show up, uninvited and unannounced, and swarm through the building with cameras? There is no proof the little girl hit by the train was brought into John Stone's Inn. Let's use a little common sense. They brought an fatally injured girl into the inn and undressed her so she could die naked? How likely is that? And the owners then took the dress and hid it away? And the later owners, who ran an inn, none of them, nor their guests, nor their maids, ever noticed a dirty bloody old rag and tossed it? And no one ever noticed any ghosts until a smart owner started promoting it as inhabited by ghosts? The age of the dress and the blood can be determined within a time frame - just have it tested. Anyone can buy an old dress at any antique or vintage clothing shop and then claim it was from a ghost...

BlackBerryUser
1 year ago
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menace, then dont go to Stone's.

Ashlandian, agreed 100%

2000sand, I know of a fatality during a snow-storm in 1984.

Hopkinton, I saw Ghost Lab last week featuring Stone's. And Ben the manager.

jgawne, Its the MWDN.

Stoneyays, its a conspiracy. Just like the sance held at Stone's in 1984. It was a weather balloon.

Sent from my BlackBerry by Boost Mobile

BusterP

1 year ago

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The ghost of Petrin is also real.

JohnB

1 year ago

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Stoney, who gives a sh*t?

01760DINC

1 year ago

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Ghosts - holy or otherwise - aren't real. Spirits, gods, sprites, nymphs - none of it is real. There is no God, Devil, ghosts, or pixies.

We're in this alone people - work together to make the best of it, and spend what little time you have making it better here - because there just isn't anywhere else.

Stoneyays

1 year ago

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JohnB - You must give a sh** because you not only read the story, but the comments, and then commented yourself. The whole story was about discovering the truth or untruthfulness of the supposed hauntings, and I simply pointed out that taking a dress off a fatally injured girl and hiding it away somewhere upstairs makes no sense, nor does the fact that the owner welcomes and invites the attention and cameras into the place, but supposedly finds all the attention unwelcome. If you don't like my comments, don't read them!

BlackBerryUser - loved your comment! Forgot about the phony seance...and the phony stone thrown through the window from the inside when 'no one was in the building' - remember that one? And didn't there used to be 2 or 3 ghosts? What happened to the others and why didn't the ghost hunters see the other ones?

Historiana

1 year ago

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'Intrigued' by the use of manufactured linen in 1863 because it had gone out of favor? Ummm, last I read, the family was purportedly Irish and of the migrant worker population....don't think they'd have the latest styles. I'm sure hand-me-downs were rife in the 19th century as well.....plus, weren't we in the middle of a war? I admire Maureen Taylor's photographic expertise, but she's not a textile expert.....perhaps one of the local Universities could shed better light on the history of fabric - both current styles of the time, and re-used styles that were common for many years after an old style went out of favor.

jonnylongball

1 year ago

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best to leave it a mystery ... let the legend grow or fade on its own
more fun that way

greydevil

1 year ago

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Here's a few thoughts to ponder:

- 1) June 11, 1863 was at the height of the Civil War, and cotton would have been in short supply in the North (perhaps a short term return to linen fabric?)
- 2) Either the birth name or name at time of death was recorded wrong. it still happens today, so 150 years ago is quite possible. Trying searching for variations of the name.
- 3) If the birth place is known, and the approximate DOB is known, cross check all children born around that time with later marriage certificates, death certificates, school records, etc.
- 4) Again, because of the Civil War, the father could have been serving in the military (likely drafted). Perhaps the mother worked at the inn at the time? That would be one of the few logical reasons the dress end up at the inn?

5) She was supposedly buried in Milford, however: April 3, 1886 - Senate passes bill separating Hopedale from Milford. Perhaps she's buried in Hopedale?
Being Irish, odds are likely she's interred in a Catholic church cemetery?

IndependentParanormalResearcher

1 year ago

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I also scoured the Milford cemeteries in search of this little girl's grave for an in depth project I have been working on for a project about the legends at the Public House for the last three years now. Thanks for the heads up on the Hopedale/Milford split - will be a fun day trip to go in search of this elusive little girl again.

I worked in conjunction with the Ghost Lab show, made the cutting room floor, but also signed a gag order so I can't say too much about that experience. I can say, however, that even though there is no way to verify that Mary Smith may haunt the place or not, we have recorded much more substantial evidence that supports the claims of a young girl. Would be more than happy to share what we've recorded. <http://independentparanormalresearchmassachusetts.weebly.com/cases.html>

IndependentParanormalResearcher

1 year ago

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sorry it was so redundant - typed on this fabulous monstrosity called a blackberry.

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