



## Our Past Can Never Die

In a city with a history as rich as New York's, the past can sometimes haunt us. In our quiet moments, ghosts ensure that our ever-modernizing city will never forget the creepier aspects of its heritage. BY LISA LIPKIN

**WHEN A CITY HAS A HISTORY AS RICH AS NEW YORK'S**, it's bound to create a few spirits who simply don't want to leave. When a city is this vibrant, even the dead don't rest.

New York ghosts are a bit like street bullies. If you don't get in their face, they'll leave you alone. But if you defy them, watch out! For proof, look to the story of Captain Kidd.

A British gentleman who lived on Wall Street, Captain Kidd was commissioned by the governor of New York to protect English vessels in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. In short, he was given a license to prey on ships.

And prey he did: pillaging, murdering, and stealing a fortune in gold and jewels. He was arrested in 1699 and sent to London, where he

was tried and hanged in 1701, but not before purportedly burying his booty. Rumors spread as to its location: Sandy Hook, Long Island Sound, and even Halifax, Nova Scotia were suggested. But the appeal of Manhattan as the potential burial ground captured the imagination of some clever Wall Street entrepreneurs, who encouraged speculators to invest in the search for the pirate's missing treasure near his Wall Street home, and hired bands of workers to dig up the stash. This turned out to be a bad idea. Legend has it that Kidd's ghost appeared at a meeting of the investors and blinded all in attendance. To this day, Kidd reportedly wanders the downtown streets in a bluish-green cloud, defending his stash from greedy treasure seekers.

And then there's Sadie the Goat, a ruthless river pirate and head of The Charlton Street Gang whose turf was the Hudson River from Manhattan to Tarrytown in the 1860s. Her crew became famous for kidnapping wealthy men, women, and children, and she earned her nickname by head-bucking her male victims in the stomach before making them walk the plank. She and her gang were eventually driven out of the Hudson Valley by local residents, and she turned to street crime in Manhattan. If you stroll along the esplanade at the World Financial Center, you may just see Sadie behind you clad in the knickers of the day, emitting a raspy cough followed by a shrill cackle that echoes long after the shivers down your spine should have subsided.

For a ghost of a different species, there's Maud S., William Vanderbilt's favorite race horse, who's often heard neighing by diners at 42nd Street's Oyster Bar. Vanderbilt, who inherited nearly \$100 million from his railroad mogul father, retired Maud S. as a race horse in 1881, but kept her in a field across the street from his office at Grand Central Station so he could ride her during his lunch hour. Years after Maud's death, neighing sounds began to emerge from the hallways of the Grand Central Terminal. Cynical commuters blame the equestrian anomaly on the influx of noisy trains during rush hour. But those of us in the know recognize the ghost of a horse who refuses to be put out to pasture.

There's also a ghost that never lived at all. The White Satin Gown, a haunted wedding dress still on the loose somewhere in Manhattan, was initially stolen off a dead woman's body by a 19th century pawn shop owner moments before her casket was closed. The gown seeped embalming fluid into the maiden who unknowingly purchased it, killing her. The dress mysteriously disappeared, and has popped up sporadically throughout the years. In one story from the 1950s, the dress appeared on a clothing rack at Klein's department store. In a 1980s version, the haunted gown snuck onto a sale rack at Marshall Field's, as reported in 2000 on Fox Television's "Beyond Belief." In 2005, the dress was further immortalized when "CSI: NY" aired an episode that featured an embalming-fluid-soaked wedding dress. To this day, the dress has never been found.

Finally, there's perhaps the most legendary ghost of all: the ghost of Mark Twain, which is often seen in the stairwell of 14 West 10th St., the 19th century house where he once lived. The author said about New York, "the city is a great place, if only they would finish it already." Ironically, his ongoing presence, along with the others who continually haunt this city, remind us that in an insecure, impermanent place like New York, there are some things we can always count on.