

LAINÉ CROSBY

To be born a Virginian is to be subtly aware of one's uniqueness, even among Southerners. At the heart of these distinctive people is the Lee family, generations of Old Dominion aristocracy, who called Stratford Hall home. When born into a history as rich as Stratford Hall's, you carry in your genes the indisputable occurrence of the generations who had a direct impact on our American Spirit—the understanding of ferocity, strength, limits, and as Margaret Mitchell might say, gumption—passed down from Lawrence Towneley, granddaddy to George Washington, Robert E. Lee (and notably Queen Elizabeth II, by the way), so other memorable ancestry, extended through generations of sagacious Southerners, the spirits of those who once called Stratford Hall home, and now find these acres too alluring to leave.

AS AN INVESTIGATIVE MEDIUM, I WORK WITH AUTHORS, ARCHAEOLOGISTS, HISTORIANS AND DETECTIVES TO FIND OUT WHAT HISTORY HAS NOT REVEALED. I AM OFTEN PRIVY TO THE ESOTERIC DETAILS OF HISTORIC EVENTS, AND AT STRATFORD HALL, HISTORY HAS JUST BEGUN TO REVEAL ITSELF.

On a warm day in June, 2009, I arrived with my family, for the last tour. A knowledgeable historian guided us, taking great revelry in the tawdry details of the alleged affair between Robert E. Lee's older half brother, Henry Lee IV, and his ward, Elizabeth McCarty, his wife's younger sister. As I listened to the guide, I heard a woman over my right shoulder exclaim, "I did not do it!" I turned and sensed a presence and asked in my mind, "What is your name?" I heard, "Elizabeth."

A year later, Stratford Hall's director of events, Jon Bachman, invited me to return with my uncloaked gift. I told Jon my suspicions of Elizabeth's McCarty's honorable morality and the incredulous gleam in his eye told me I had my research cut out for me. I am the first to admit that my interest in history does not qualify me for an educated discussion. As a medium, I am simply a mouthpiece, like a television or radio. I receive information, and with my human prism, I translate it as best as possible, and pass it on.

Historians believe Elizabeth had an affair because she once wrote in her diary that Henry Lee was seduced by her long hair, so she was going to cut it off. I may not know much about history, but I do know about Southern women, and I have never known one to cut off her hair to be less attractive to a man she loved.

Over the past two years, I have had many conversations with Elizabeth and she consistently maintains her innocence. She tells me she stayed at Stratford Hall when she was a flirtatious young teenager and had a crush on one of Henry

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who visits her daughters, and causes a ruckus in her kitchen. She tells me he always comes down the chimney, blows out the candles, and makes a lot of noise. She said the spirit was named Tyrone, after the Greek god of the same name. Which of course, begged the question of the duties of the faux Greek god Tyrone. Ruth Ann replied with sarcasm, "He tells me he is named after the Greek god to women." I finally met Tyrone and asked him why he chooses to come down the chimney instead of through the door. He told me it was an appropriate entrance from the heavens.

UNBEKNOWNST TO ME, MY FRIEND L.B. TAYLOR HAD WRITTEN ABOUT THIS AMUSING SPIRIT AND HIS ENTRANCE INTO THIS OUTBUILDING MANY YEARS BEFORE AND HIS STORY IS INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE. APPARENTLY, THERE IS NEVER A DULL MOMENT ON THESE SEEMINGLY QUIET ACRES.

Lee's brothers. She feigned attraction to another brother so the one she liked would be jealous. Consequently, there was an argument resulting in her unpopularity among all the brothers. Her sister Ann repeatedly told her husband Henry that he needed to pay more attention to Elizabeth, so he eventually made the effort, despite the family fracas she created.

One day Elizabeth caught her sister reading her diary and decided to teach Ann a lesson. She wrote that Henry was seduced by her long hair, and she was going to cut it off. Elizabeth tells me that Ann did not believe it for a second, and that she never cut her hair, which she always wore up, as was the style of the day. When I asked Elizabeth why she would do such a thing, she answered, "I was very young. I regret that. It defames the man who was so kind to me all those years." Elizabeth wishes she had been more kind to Henry, but she said in her lifetime, they made peace with each other. She later became Elizabeth McCarty Storke, bought the plantation from Henry Lee IV, and lived there for fifty years. She transformed Stratford Hall, and her cultured Southern touch can be seen today at the Grist Mill, and in the home and gardens, where she is buried. She leaves a living legacy at Stratford Hall, and I want to be sure she is remembered for the wonderful contributions she made, rather than those she did not.

I enjoy holding events and lectures at Stratford Hall in June, October, and November. I've met a number of ghosts who have received me with the great Southern hospitality you would expect from the Lee family. Ruth Ann, the spirit of the Lee family's cook, welcomed me into her kitchen and shared recipes and stories of her family. She also shared her aversion to a spirit

At my last event, a spirit described himself as a worker named Wesley, and visited with several of us at the tomb area. We all enjoyed hearing about life on the plantation, but it wasn't until the next day that I was spooked. In the Dining Hall, I met the great great granddaughter of one of the plantation's slaves, and she wanted me to introduce her to her ancestor. After explaining how I can't reach spirits on demand, she defeatedly replied, "That's okay, I know where Grandfather Wesley's cabin is and maybe one day I will talk to him." Needless to say, I'm planning another visit soon.

Lainé Crosby is a mom, wife, sister, professor, freelance writer, investigative medium, and proud Southerner. She moved to a haunted plantation in Maryland in 2004, and life has never since been the same. For more information about Investigative Medium Lainé Crosby, her Stratford Hall lectures and events, or to read an excerpt of her upcoming book, *Investigative Medium: The Awakening*, visit www.LaineCrosby.com.

