



## Investigation Summary Report

### The Myrtles Plantation St. Francisville, LA



### HISTORY

The Myrtles Plantation was built in 1796 by General David Bradford and called Laurel Grove. He lived there alone for several years, until being pardoned for his role in the Whiskey Rebellion in 1799. He then moved his wife Elizabeth and their five children to the plantation from Pennsylvania. One of Bradford's law students, Clark Woodruff (or Woodrooff) eventually married Bradford's daughter, Sara Mathilda, in 1817. After the death of David Bradford in 1808, Clark and Sara Woodruff managed the plantation for Elizabeth Bradford. They had three children: Cornelia Gale, James, and Mary Octavia.

In July of 1823, Sara Woodruff died from yellow fever. Clark Woodruff continued to manage the plantation with his mother-in-law. In July of 1824, James died of yellow fever as well, and his sister Cornelia Gale succumbed to the disease in August of that year.

When Elizabeth Bradford died in 1830, Clark Woodruff and his daughter Mary Octavia moved to Covington, Louisiana, and left a caretaker to manage the plantation. In 1834, Woodruff sold the plantation, the land, and its slaves to Ruffin Gray Stirling. Woodruff eventually died in New Orleans in 1851. It is said that one day the doorbell rang. Clark answered the door. The man at the door shot him. So then he went up seventeen steps and died on the seventeenth step.

His picture hangs on the wall next to the seventeenth step. His footsteps are reportedly heard by some visitors.

Stirling and his wife, Mary Catherine Cobb, undertook an extensive remodeling of the house. When completed, the new house was nearly double the size of the former building, and its name was changed to The Myrtles. The Stirlings had 9 children, but five of them died young. Stirling died in 1854 and left the plantation to his wife.

In 1865, Mary Cobb hired William Drew Winter to help manage the plantation and as her lawyer and agent. Winter was married to Mary Cobb's daughter, Sarah Mulford. Sarah and William Winter lived at the Myrtles and had six children, one of whom died from typhoid at the age of three. Although the Winters were forced to sell the plantation in 1868, they were able to buy it back two years later.

In 1871, William Winter was shot by an unknown man on the porch of the house and died. Sarah remained at the Myrtles with her mother and siblings until 1878, when she died. Mary Cobb died in 1880, and the plantation passed to Stephen, one of her sons. The plantation was heavily in debt, however, and Stephen sold it in 1886 to Oran D. Brooks. Brooks sold it in 1889, and the house changed hands several times until 1891, when it was purchased by Harrison Milton Williams.

Over the next several decades, the land was split up and owned by various Williams heirs. In the 1950s, Marjorie Munson owned the house itself. Munson apparently noticed odd things happening around the house and began to question neighbors about its history. This is possibly the beginning of some of the legends surrounding the Myrtles. The plantation changed hands several more times and was restored in the 1970s by owners Arlin Dease and Mr. & Mrs. Robert Ward. At some point the house changed hands again, being bought by James and Frances Kermeen Myers. The Myerses apparently believed the house was haunted, and it began to be featured in books and magazines about haunted houses. Frances, publishing as Francis Kermeen has written a book about the Myrtles and its supposed haunting. The house is now a bed & breakfast and offers historical and mystery tours, and is owned by John & Teeta Moss. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Touted as "one of America's most haunted homes", the plantation is supposedly home of at least 12 ghosts. It is often reported that 10 murders occurred in the house, but historical records only indicate the murder of William Winter.

Possibly the most well known of the Myrtles supposed ghosts, Chloe (sometimes Cleo) was reportedly a slave owned by Clark and Sara Woodruff. According to one story, Clark Woodruff had pressured or forced Chloe into being his mistress. Chloe and Clark were caught by Sara Woodruff, and Chloe began to listen at keyholes, trying to learn what would happen to her. Other versions of the legend have Chloe listening in at keyholes to learn news of Clark Woodruff's business dealings or for other purposes. After being caught, either by Clark or Sara Woodruff, one of her ears was cut off, and she wore a green turban to hide it.

After having her ear cut off, Chloe supposedly baked a birthday cake containing oleander leaves, which are extremely poisonous. The various legends diverge as to why she did this, with some saying she was getting revenge on the Woodruffs and some saying she was attempting to redeem her position by curing the family of the poisoning. According to the legends, her plan backfired. Only Sara and her two daughters ate the cake, and all died from the poison. Chloe was then supposedly hanged by the other slaves, either as punishment or to escape punishment by Clark Woodruff for harboring her.

The historical record does not support this legend. There is no record of the Woodruffs owning a slave named Chloe or Cleo. The legends usually claim that Sara and her two daughters were poisoned, but Mary Octavia survived well into adulthood. Finally, Sara, James, and Cornelia Woodruff were not killed by poisoning, but instead succumbed to yellow fever. Regardless of the factual accuracy of the Chloe story, she supposedly haunts the plantation.

The mirror. There are a variety of other legends surrounding the Myrtles. The house is reputedly built over an Indian burial ground, and the ghost of a young Indian woman has been reported. During the Civil War, the house was ransacked by Union soldiers, and legend claims that three were killed in the house. Supposedly, there is (or was) a blood stain in a doorway, roughly the size of a human body, that will not (or would not) come clean. Other legends say that cleaners have been unable to push their mop or broom into that space. However, there is no record of any Union soldiers having been shot on the Myrtles property.

A mirror located in the house supposedly holds the spirits of Sara Woodruff and two of her children. According to custom, mirrors are covered after a death, but legend says that after the poisoning of some of the Woodruffs, this particular mirror was overlooked. The uncovered mirror reportedly trapped the spirits of Sara and her children, who are occasionally seen or leave handprints in the mirror. These handprints may have been left by workers replacing the glass or resilvering the mirror.

The plantation is also reportedly haunted by a young girl who died in 1868, despite being treated by a local voodoo practitioner. She supposedly appears in the room in which she died, and has been reported to practice voodoo on people sleeping in the room. There is also a ghost who reportedly walks, staggers, or crawls up the stairs and stops on the 17th step. Some have said that this is William Winter, the victim of the only reported murder in the house. Alternate versions of his murder claim he managed to walk or crawl up the stairs, and collapsed in his wife's arms on the 17th step. However, this version of the story is contested. There have been other reports of odd sounds, but they generally do not have legends attached to them.

