

SLAVERY – A slave ghost



by
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Carlton is an early 19th century plantation house built on a hill above the town of Falmouth. When I was a little girl the unmarried “O’Bannon girls,” Miss Nannie and Miss Ellen lived there along with the O’Bannon ghost. All three, Miss Nannie, Miss Ellen, and the ghost had been there since before the Civil War and all three were sighted from time to time.

Miss Ellen had been three and Miss Nannie six years old at the beginning of the war. Miss Nannie told my father that she remembered that when the war was over, her father remained angry about the fact that Yankee officers had occupied *Carlton* from 1862 until 1865. She said her father had thrown all of their bedding out of an upstairs window and burned it on the front lawn because Yankees had slept on it.

The ghost was something the two sisters would not talk about. In 1934, the two elderly women still drove a black, two-seated buggy, pulled by a white horse when they came down off their hill to pick up groceries at Berry’s Store or even drive to Fredericksburg to Bond’s Drug Store. When asked, they insisted the ghost story was nonsense, and it probably was. A few local people, including my aunt, Nellie Brown, made regular visits to *Carlton*, but never about sundown or after because that’s when the ghost appeared.

The older townspeople said that the ghost was a slave named Lucas who had been whipped to death by Jack O’Bannon, Miss Nannie and Miss Ellen’s father. After his death, Lucas had been secretly buried in the dirt floor of the O’Bannon stable. Whether or not any real incident had given birth to this story, all Falmouth believed the killing to be truth – regardless of how they felt about the existence of a ghost. Jack O’Bannon was well known for the ill treatment of his slaves. My own grandfather told my father that as a young boy, living in Falmouth, he heard the screams of both men and women as they were beaten with a bull whip. He told of being threatened with that same whip when he attempted to come calling on Miss Ellen when he was about 19. The father never allowed gentlemen callers and so neither was ever married.

My grandfather said that after the initial beatings, further screams followed as the slaves backs were doused with buckets of salt brine. As cruel as this may have seemed, it was in a way beneficial because the brine actually guarded against infection of the cuts and bruises and helped them heal quicker. According to the legend, Lucas had attempted to run away after one of these beatings. He had been caught and beaten unmercifully the second time and died as a result. Another slave told of digging the grave in the stable floor late at night. The story was reinforced well into the 20th century by reports of screams and crying in the night seeming to come from the old plantation house.

Several young men reported seeing a strange – barefoot – young black man wearing knee britches running through the O'Bannon meadow beside Fall Run, usually about sundown. There were whippoorwills calling from that meadow in early evening and people who believed in the ghost said they only called when Lucas was in the meadow. I remember my mother saying, "Ssssh – Lucas is out there tonight."

Miss Ellen, the last of the O'Bannons, died in the late 1930s and the house sat vacant for years. Dr. G. Boyd Graves bought *Carlton* and restored the house in the 1950s. I was invited up to dinner one night and we talked about the ghost story. He felt that Lucas must have left with the last of the O'Bannons. I still wonder if anyone ever dug up the stable floor.