

The Ghosts of the Frist House

The years of the Civil War wreaked a terrible toll on the citizens of West Virginia and on the slaves who were held captive in points further south. For many years, there have been stories and rumors of terrible atrocities that were carried out on escaped slaves who were once again recaptured.

There is a house in Moorefield where these stories and rumors proved very real... resulting in a haunting that still echoes there today.

Despite the fact that the state of West Virginia had “seceded” from the Confederacy and had remained a part of the Union, there were still many Confederate sympathizers and outright supporters who lived in the state. One of these bastions of Confederate loyalty was the town of Moorefield in Hardy County. Many of the residents had remained Confederates after the start of the war because of the slave labor used to work the farms there.

The town also served as the headquarters to “McNeill’s Rangers”, a guerilla band of Confederate troops who numbered no more than 100 men but who fought numerous battles in the war and captured tons of Federal supplies and ammunition.

The small army was led by partisan John Hanson McNeill, a former Missouri Confederate who had been imprisoned in St. Louis in 1861. After being paroled, he returned to West Virginia and raised volunteers for a fighting force. The band of men operated successfully against Crook and Sheridan and fought in guerilla operations with Mosby in the Shenandoah Valley. They would also fight at Gettysburg and at the Battle of New Market.

McNeill’s Rangers became notorious for their raids on supply trains, camps and railroads but his tactics were not always appreciated by his superiors. He was criticized for his field performance and in 1864 he was court-martialed for accepting Confederate deserters into his ranks. He was acquitted of the charges but the taint of them followed him for some time. He was later captured and died from wounds in November of 1864.

McNeill and his men were also some of the most brutal of Confederate guerillas. They met opposition

in Moorefield by a prominent farmer named John Frist. He was a man who was loyal to the Union and McNeill hated him. One night, a hot-headed group of Rangers went to Frist’s house and murdered him, his wife and their three children.

After this, the house was turned into a prison where captured runaway slaves were held. The slaves were taken into the basement of the house, chained to the walls and left for dead. These unfortunate souls were not among the slaves who were released at the end of the war. In 1865, a group of townspeople went to the Frist house and cleared out the bones and decaying bodies and gave them as decent a burial as possible, considering the tragic circumstances.

The house is still standing in Moorefield today and since the Civil War, many families have either owned or rented it. None of them have remained in the place for more than a year. It is said that each year, on the anniversary of the Frist family’s murder, blood appears on the walls and the floors of the room in which they were killed. It slowly wears off as time passes but it is impossible to paint over or wipe away. There are also stories of strange sounds, screams and moans that come from the basement. Those who have been brave enough to venture down there in the darkness say that the sounds of rattling chains convince them not to stay for very long.

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Edited by: J. Moore – WVGHhosts.com Editor

Editor’s note: This story was passed to us without any real verification as to its authenticity. We spoke to several residents of Moorefield and they could not say every detail of this story was real, however there is a house standing empty that was the scene of the owners being murdered by Confederate soldiers during the Civil War, and tales of ghosts in the house. We could not corroborate the “Frist” part of the story, but it’s still intriguing and would be fun to do more research. Thanks to everyone in Moorefield for trying to help me with this story. Moorefield is a friendly area nestled in the beautiful mountains of West Virginia—a great place for a Fall visit.