Ghost Stories of Sweet Briar

Wednesday, October 30, 2013
Friday, November 1, 2013
5-7 p.m.

The Sweet Briar Museum
Sweet Briar College

The evenings’ readers, tour guides, & hostesses are Sweet Briar College student members of The Chung Mungs and Tau Phi.
The Program

Two Short Ghost Stories by Daisy Williams, age 9
1876

“From a Manson Window at Night”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 6, no. 1, October 1914, p. 30
Helen R. Duke, Academy

“From My Window”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 9, no. 3, February 1918, p. 134
Elizabeth C. Eggleston, Class of 1919

“A Poem”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 10, no. 2, April 1919, p. 119
Elizabeth C. Eggleston, Class of 1919

“Daisy’s Harp”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 6, no. 4, June 1915, p. 163
Helen R. Duke, Academy

“In the Light of the Embers”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 1, no. 2, February 1910, p. 56
Eugenia Griffin Burnett, Class of 1910

“The Shadow Child”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 1, no. 1, November 1909, p. 9
Mary Pinkerton Kerr, Class of 1913

“A Mid Summer Night’s Vision of Daisy’s Garden”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 6, no. 3, March 1915, p. 110
Helen R. Duke, Academy

“The Fire”

“Novel Ghost Flits Far Ahead”
_The Sweet Briar News_, 18 January 1928, p. 2

“Daisy’s Vision”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 8, no. 2, March 1917, p. 144
Maynette Rozelle Stephenson, Class of 1921

“The Guardian Spirit”
_Sweet Briar Magazine_ vol. 1, no. 3, April 1910, p. 111
Henrietta Washburn, Class of 1914
A spooky highlights tour of the Museum will follow the readings—

“Yellow Gallery”
Érard Harp, 1846
This harp was purchased for Indian Fletcher Williams in London when she and her sister Elizabeth and brother Sidney were on their “Grand Tour” in Europe as young adults. Indiana was an accomplished harp player. She taught Daisy to play this harp. Mother and daughter were both quite fond of harp music and their skill would have been an admired accomplishment for well-educated and culturally sophisticated women and girls of the 19th century. This harp features in several of tonight’s stories and poems.

Gold Watch, ca. 1884
This watch was given to Daisy by her parents for her 16th birthday—her last. After her death, Indiana gave it to a friend of Daisy’s from her school days in New York, Helena Mallory Mellersh. Mrs. Mellersh donated the watch to the College in 1938.

“The Chatterbox” storybook, 1876
This tiny book was written and illustrated by Daisy Williams when she was nine years old. It features a story of a ghost hiding in a tree and coming out to eat a girl and a man.

“Whitley Gallery”
Woven wool blanket, ca. 1880s
This blanket is thought to have been used for Daisy’s pony, Bounce. After she died, Daisy’s bereaved mother had servants saddle Bounce and take him up to her grave every day for several months.

“Purple Gallery”
A bound volume of the St. Nicolas Magazine, charred in the 1927 fire at Sweet Briar House
This was a popular children’s magazine in the 19th century and these copies belonged to Daisy. Her mother kept them after her death.

A portrait of Daisy Williams, ca. 1880-1884, charred in the 1927 fire at Sweet Briar House
Indiana kept many mementoes and likenesses of Daisy close to her throughout her life.

A curl of Daisy’s hair, and mementoes of her infancy, kept by her grieving mother.

Eastlake style desk, ca. 1880
This elaborate and stylish desk is thought to have been Daisy’s, who was a well-educated and quite literate child. She shows off her desk to a visitor in one of tonight’s stories.

Outside Terrace
The original marker for Daisy’s grave. This was at Daisy’s gravesite on Monument Hill for close to a century until it was vandalized in the 1970s. The College moved it to the Sweet Briar House grounds and then to its current location in the 1980s or 1990s. This high Victorian style marble marker features a fringed drape on a “pile” of stones, an inscription noting Daisy’s birth and death dates, and at the front center portion a doorway and doorstep—leading to the world beyond—carved in relief. Before being damaged by vandals it was surmounted by a small grieving angel holding a cross.
Dramatis Personae

Maria Georgiana “Daisy” Williams

Daisy Williams, the only child of Indiana Fletcher and James Henry Williams, was born September 10, 1867. She passed away from an inherited disease, thought to have been antitrypsin deficiency, on January 22, 1884 at the family’s home in New York. She is buried with her family on the Sweet Briar College campus, at Monument Hill. Her individual grave marker, missing the small angel and cross broken off by unidentified vandals sometime in the 1970s, can be seen at the rear of the Sweet Briar Museum terrace.

Indiana Fletcher Williams

Indiana Fletcher Williams (1828-1900) directed in her will that, aside from a few legacies to family and friends, her estate be used to establish a school for young women in memory of her beloved daughter, Daisy, who died at age 16. Born and raised in Lynchburg, Indiana (who was named for an uncle who lived in that state) attended the school of Georgetown Visitation Convent in Washington, D.C. She subsequently attended Bishop Doane’s School (now Doane Academy) in Burlington, New Jersey, and later toured Europe with her sister and one of her brothers. An accomplished manager who steered her property safely through the turmoil of the Civil War and a savvy investor during her widowhood, she left an estate worth more $20 million in 2011 dollars and encompassing 8,000 acres. Despite legal challenges from some family members, her bequest launched Sweet Briar College in 1901.

Indiana passed away at Sweet Briar House on October 29, 1900. Her funeral service was held October 31, 1900, led by Rev. Arthur Gray of Ascension Church in Amherst. Gray Dormitory—now used for offices and classrooms—was named for him to recognize his service as an early trustee of the College.

Elijah Fletcher

A schoolteacher educated at the University of Vermont, Elijah Fletcher (1789-1858) traveled to New Glasgow (now Clifford), north of Amherst, Virginia, in the early 1800s in order to take a teaching position. He boarded with the family of one of the school’s trustees, the Crawfords of Tusculum, and courted daughter Maria Antoinette. They wed in 1813 and would spend much of their married life in Lynchburg. There, Fletcher developed a number of business interests, served as mayor for two terms in the early 1830s, served on the common council, and published The Virginian newspaper. He was a founding member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Lynchburg. Fletcher was responsible for remodeling Sweet Briar House in 1851, creating today’s familiar Italianate façade. A firm believer in the lasting value of a good education, Fletcher sent his two daughters as well as his two sons to very good schools and sent three of his children on extensive European travel to “finish” their education.

Elijah expired in the arms of his daughter Indiana at Sweet Briar House. It was Elijah who selected the location of the family cemetery, now called Monument Hill, which overlooks campus. His grave is marked there by an obelisk of Vermont granite.

* Per the resource www.measuringworth.com, based on figures for “historic standard of living”.