



## 2012 Ghost Walk

Mary Marvin – played by Casey Lewis and Melanie Rahr

Children are one of the greatest joys in a mother's life. I'm Mrs. Mary J. Marvin and my son is the Arctic explorer Ross Gilmore Marvin. Ross was born in 1880, the youngest of my six children. As a boy he did well enough in school but he was more known for his football skills and his devilry than his grades. After graduation I thought maybe he'd become a repairman like one of his friends or a mail carrier like his brother but when he earned that scholarship to Cornell University everything changed. He worked so hard and four years later Ross graduated with honors with a degree in Engineering.

Well, the very day of commencement he was invited to join Admiral Peary on his 1905 arctic expedition. Can you believe it? My baby boy from little old Elmira was going with Admiral Robert E. Peary on his expedition to the North Pole. They didn't reach the pole that time but just three years later Admiral Peary asked Ross to come along again on another attempt. Ross served as first assistant and chief scientist on his second trip. This time the Admiral reached the North Pole, the first man in the world to do so, but my son was lost.

On April 10, 1909 Ross fell through thin ice and drowned. I didn't get the news until September. A family friend got a telegram and told me what happened to Ross before I found out in the press. For a long time I didn't believe that my boy was really dead. They never found his body. It's possible he got lost out on the ice and he just hasn't found his way back yet. It was possible but as the years went by I came to accept his loss.

Then seventeen years after Ross's death we got more news. One of the Eskimos that was with him on the expedition confessed to murdering him. The man's name was Kudlooktoo. He said that Ross went crazy and tried to abandon another Eskimo named Harrington on the ice. Knowing that Harrington would die if he was left behind, Kudlooktoo shot Ross. *Seventeen years later* I'm told that my son, my sweet, kind boy went mad and was murdered. It's almost more than I can bear. I don't believe it. Ross would never have abandoned anyone to die. It just must have been a horrible misunderstanding. The Arctic is a no man's land. No nation controls it and no laws govern it. So, my son's murderer walks free while I'm left to mourn at an empty grave.

Part of me always feared that I would lose Ross to the Arctic. During his first expedition I composed a poem. It was a beautiful morning; cold, but the sun shone bright, and as I contrasted the dark Arctic night with our bright sunny days, these words came to my mind. I call it *A Mother's Meditations*.

Oh, thou glorious sun,  
In the near future day,  
Shine down on my boy,  
And lighten his way.

The dark Arctic winter,  
How drear it must be,  
With no ray of sunshine



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To gladden the day.

But there are hearts full of love  
Where the sun shines each day,  
That pray God, in His mercy,  
To guard your dark way.

And when the warm sun  
Shall return once more,  
And loosen your boat  
From that ice-bound shore.

May you turn your face homeward,  
With joy and delight,  
Thanking God you have lived  
Through the long Arctic night.

Oh, our hearts will be filled  
With thanksgiving and joy,  
To greet you once more,  
My darling, brave boy.



## 2012 Ghost Walk

Simeon Benjamin – played by Jim Wellington

“Simeon Benjamin is the name that began Elmira’s fame.” *I am* Simeon Benjamin and that song is about me. In 1855 I was instrumental in bringing to Elmira the nation’s first college that offered degrees to women that were equal to those awarded to men.

Originally an attempt was made to create a female college in Auburn, NY but those plans fell through. The idea of educating women was a little radical... a bit *too* visionary so it was difficult to come up with the funding to establish the college. Elmira at the time was known for being a very progressive and liberal area so after a change in the college’s charter and some financing on my part Elmira Female College became a reality.

After choosing a site for the college, construction began on its first building— Cowles Hall as it is now called after the College’s first president. When we opened its doors in October of 1855 there was very little furniture, the furnace was not yet in working order and the building itself wasn’t even completed but we still received over 150 students.

It was very important to me that energetic young women, no matter what their family background could attend the college so the cost of attendance was set at \$120 a year which included tuition, room, board, fuel and lights. Unfortunately, it became clear that that sum was too low to meet the actual costs. I advanced and loaned the college money several times to keep it running, especially during the Civil War when funding was particularly difficult to find. My last act of generosity to the college was my bequest of an additional \$25,000 for a perpetual endowment fund. That was one of the largest funds held by a college at the time.

Why, one may ask, did I continue to provide funding for the struggling college? The answer is simple: I was raised with a deep sense of Christian liberality and a belief in using my good fortune to help others. I was a successful business man before I even came to Elmira. Once here, I made it my duty to contribute to my new community. I was an elder and trustee of the First Presbyterian Church, president of the Chemung Railroad Company, and president of two banks. I was even fire warden for a time. The college was another way I could give back to the community and advance the equality of women. I was determined to keep it open. Through my service as chairman and treasurer for the college and by providing financial support, I was able to do just that.

I am very proud that so many women were able to receive high quality educations here in Elmira. One local woman who attended the college comes to my mind as someone you might know. Olivia Langdon was enrolled in the class of 1864. If you don’t know her name I’m sure you recognize her husband’s – Samuel Clemens. He also liked to call himself Mark Twain.

In the first fourteen years of its existence the college graduated 130 women with four year degrees comparable to those of men. Tough times in the 1880s saw as few as three students in a graduating class but the college endured. Today there are over 1,600 students, both male and female, enrolled at Elmira College. I certainly hope it continues to endure for many years to come. (*walks away snapping fingers and singing*) “and as our founder’s dream unfolds, we seek what the future holds.”

## 2012 Ghost Walk

Sarah Jones – played by Kayla Nash

Hello, my dears. Perhaps one of you can tell me who started calling me the Florence Nightingale of the Chemung Valley. I'm extremely honored to be compared to that noble lady, whom I greatly admire, but like many women during the Civil War I was simply doing my part to support our boys in blue. Just because women couldn't enlist didn't mean we couldn't rally round President Lincoln and .... Oh dear! I can tell that I've gotten ahead of myself.

My name is Mrs. Sarah Jones. Perhaps you've done business with my husband Richmond Jones. He's one of the largest lumber and real estate dealers in Elmira. Anyway, as you may know Elmira was a military and draft rendezvous point during the war. The military thought of everything for our boys – food, clothing, shelter. They, however, did forget one very important detail - a hospital. Believe me one was needed not just for the boys in training. As the war progressed more and more sick and wounded boys were coming through Elmira on their way home. My heart went out to those poor dears. So I assembled a group of women to form the Elmira Ladies Relief Association. We quickly established a hospital on Third Street near the Erie Railroad Station.

Now I know what you are thinking. Ladies have no business in a hospital dealing with bodily functions and being in close contact with men who are not relatives. All I can say to that is someone *had* to do it. Of course, we ladies of the Relief Association did more than tend the sick and clean wounds. We washed and dressed patients, served rations, distributed medicine, read aloud, wrote their letters home, did laundry, mopped floors, changed bed linens, emptied chamber pots, cooked and simply provided a kind word or gentle touch. We cared for so many boys that we could barely keep up at times, but I always wondered what happened to them once they left our care.

We also received assistance from the community. The Ladies Hospital Aid Association collected lint, bandages and delicacies which they donated to the hospital. The sweet girls at Elmira Female College presented us with a parlor organ. The organ gave the hospital a homey feel and provided many evenings entertainment.

Through my patients I saw that the war didn't not end on the battlefield. Many boys needed assistance not only taking care of themselves but their families as well. And what about the widows and children left behind? Who was going to take care of them? Once again I assembled my ladies together. We began assisting disabled soldiers and their families by providing food baskets, temporary housing and tending the sick. We also found work for widows so they could support their families. Of course a much larger issue arose – orphaned children. Perhaps orphans and abandoned children were a problem before the war but became more prevalent during the war. Being a mother myself, I find it very hard to believe that anyone could simply abandon one's children. Yet until you are faced with adversity you don't know what you're capable of doing. Of course, I got an idea and I gathered my ladies together. By this time everyone said "My dear, Mrs. Jones whatever you want to do we are with you," so we formed the Southern Tier Orphans Home and began finding homes for the children.

My organizational skills did not go unnoticed by members of the community and I, Sarah Jones, was asked to help organize the Elmira Sanitary Commission. But I'm afraid I've already taken too much of your time and that will just have to be a story for another day. Good-bye, my dears.



## 2012 Ghost Walk

Joseph UpdeGraff – played by Rob Lavernway

I wasn't supposed to be here, at least, not like this. I'm no fool. I was a fireman and a soldier, I knew I could die. I just always thought it would be in a blaze of glory and not because of something so...so...stupid.

My name is Joseph UpdeGraff and I'm a local boy from right here in Elmira. Now, after Pa ran off, I took a job in a grocery to support my Ma, four brothers and baby sister. I worked my way up from stock clerk to salesman and I like to think I was good at it. I earned a whole \$5.00 a week, just enough to support the family with a little bit for fun left over.

When I wasn't working, I volunteered as a firefighter with the Torrent Company No. 1. Now *that* was fun. When we weren't fighting fires, we were having our monthly meetings and drills. I was even the Secretary there for a couple of years. As fundraisers, we'd have balls and socials and every girl there was eager to dance with me, a firefighter and an officer to boot. Our biggest event was the annual firemen's parade and tournament. We'd dress up real fine, decorate the pump in flowers and just let the cheers wash over as we marched down Water Street. Down by the canal, we'd play dueling pumps with rival companies blasting away at each other until one engine flooded out or someone cried uncle.

Of course, it wasn't a game when the fire bells rang. You've never worked as hard a day in your life as you did manning a fire pump. Why, I'd be sore for days after, but at the time, right in the thick of it, it was like I was the one on fire. Truth be told, I never felt more alive than when I was breathing in that smoke and dodging debris, knowing that any second it could all be over. I suppose that's why I joined the army. At the war rally here on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1861 a whole bunch of us just rushed to sign right up as soon as the speeches were over. Just a few weeks later I mustered in with Company K of the 23<sup>rd</sup> New York Volunteers and was headed south on a train in my new uniform.

Problem was, most of the time army life was dead boring. We were sent down to guard Washington from the Rebs, but that mostly meant drill, sitting around camp, drill and some more drill. Battle, on the other hand, battle was like being back in a fire. I'd be out there, bullets whizzing all around, people yelling and my heart pounding like a fire pump. Lord, what a rush! Less than a year in service, I'd been through 4 battles, but that wasn't what killed me. My friend, Joe Packard, and I were out foraging for wild hogs and such when we ran across a patrol from another company. Now, sometimes in camp we used to play these silly games, arresting fellows from other companies and holding mock trials to pass the time. Why, just the week before one of our boys had been tried for the crime of malicious lingering and been forced to tell dirty jokes for an hour as punishment.

So, when that patrol stopped us, well, I just thought they were joking. The one man called out, "Stop or I'll shoot," and I said "Fire away then." And you know what? He did!