



2019 Ghost Walk

Frances Squire Potter – played by Casey Winston with Ivy Robinson as Mary Peck

FP: Hello. My name is Frances Potter, but growing up in Elmira, I was Fanny Squire. In 1883, I attended Elmira College and it was there I met my truest and dearest friend, Mary Peck.

[FP reaches back towards the shadows. MP steps from them to take FP's hand. They look at each other with naked adoration. Perhaps there is a quick cuddle.]

MP: Meeting Fanny was like finding a kindred soul. We were practically inseparable, but, unfortunately, all things must end, including college. I went off for post-graduate studies at the University of Minnesota while Fanny—

FP: I stayed here and got married to Winfield Potter. It was—[sigh] Well, I could never regret the four beautiful children we had together, but I could have done without every other part of our eight years of marriage. He left me with nothing but a broken heart and four mouths to feed. Thank god for Mary. I don't know what I would have done without her.

MP: I'd been working as an associate professor of English at the University of Minnesota for several years by then and managed to get Fanny a position there as well in 1900. Those were heady days. Our youngest, sorry, *Fanny's* youngest was just two, and my previously empty house was filled love, joy, and excitement.

FP: In 1905, we went on sabbatical to England together, along with the children. It was also the year I published my novel, *The Ballingtons*. It was a fictionalized account of my own troubled marriage. Writing it was extremely cathartic and helped to crystalize my thoughts on the problem with marriage in our society.

[FP steps forward and speaks impassionedly, as though delivering a political stump speech.]

FP: Women are all too frequently denied access to high-paying jobs. Many working class women are paid less than the men for similar work or have their pay confiscated by their husbands. Women are financially dependent on men, husbands, father, brothers, for financial support. A woman with no way to provide for herself, must find a husband who can, or starve. Thus, men can afford to pick a wife, while women must settle for being picked. Only with true financial equality can women marry those who would suit them best!

[MP steps forward and links arms with FP]

MP: Isn't she a brilliant speaker? In 1909, we both left the university to tour fulltime across the country on behalf of suffragists causes.

FP: I gave lecture tours on behalf of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Women's Trade Union League, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. I even joined the



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Socialist Party. For the next five years, we were constantly on the move as I gave lecture after lecture in city after city. It was exhausting work, but worth it for the cause.

MP: We were in Chicago with Fanny fell ill and she never got better. My dearest friend, Frances Squire Potter died on March 25, 1914. Four years later, I gifted Elmira College a memorial window honoring Fanny for the entrance to Alumnae Hall. Despite all her hard work, fighting for women's equality and suffrage, she never got to vote. I did. Hopefully you will see a day with equal pay for equal work.

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Charles Owens, a.k.a. Chief Ross – story told by David Wiggs

The fire that destroyed the Lyceum Theater in downtown Elmira in 1904 started around midnight in Bernstein's cigar store. There was a massive explosion that blew the front right off the building. The raging inferno reached the theater's stage just three minutes after it started. If there had been a show on at the time, no one would have gotten out alive. The fire was so massive that nearly 75 firefighters from Elmira, Horseheads, and Elmira Heights spent eleven hours beating back the blaze. For a time, that didn't seem like it was going to be enough. We were getting overwhelmed by heat and exhaustion.

A lot of men and boys had come out to watch the progress of the fire including my friend Chief Ross. Now, the Chief wasn't really a chief and he wasn't a firefighter. He was a simple, trusting soul with an underdeveloped intellect but a faithful desire to please others.

The night of the Lyceum fire, Chief Ross was there, just like he had been at nearly every fire in the city for years. Being the guileless sort of man that he was, he was taking a lot of teasing from the hot-shots watching us firemen work. Some men just seem to like to beat down those who they see as weak or damaged, but the Chief didn't pay any attention to them. And when I came around asking for help with a hose, he jumped right in to help when the other men slunk back, afraid to get their neatly-creased trousers dirty. That was the kind of man Chief Ross was. He was always ready to do everything in his power to help out his best friends, the firemen.

The Chief's real name was Charles Owens. No one really knows how he got his nickname but it was probably because he was always hanging around with us at Station No. 2 down on Water Street, bossing us around and telling us how he thought things should be done. We started calling him Chief Ross and it stuck.

He could be a nuisance at times, but I couldn't fault him for wanting to be at the station. He didn't have much of a life outside his love for firefighting. He made a meager living taking care of a man's horses for years and lived in the stable with the animals. I have never seen a man so good with horses. He could calm them down even if they got into a full panic at a fire.

Chief Ross was never an official member of the fire department, but he was like our mascot. He would go to firefighting conventions with us wearing a vest covered with nearly 18 pounds of medals he had collected. He had one huge badge that we made from a steamer's boiler plate especially for him.

I was on duty at the station when Chief Ross came in the other day saying he wasn't feeling too well. We tucked him into a bed in the bunkroom but he just kept getting worse and worse. The poor man was coughing and shaking with chills. He had such a high fever, he was sweating right through the blankets. Finally, we took him to the hospital and found out he had a severe case of pneumonia. If only we had gotten him to the hospital sooner...

On June 25, 1926 Charles Owens, Chief Ross, was laid to rest right here by the Elmira Exempt Fire Association monument. He was just 55 years old. We went all out for our friend. Fire Chief Espey and Deputy Chief McCarthy raised a fund large enough to give him a fitting burial. An entire platoon of firefighters in full uniform turned out for the funeral. We buried him with all the honors and rites fitting a professional firefighter. He was one of us. He was our brother.

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Frank Bundy – played by Joe Edkin

It's been 84 years since my death, and I still have a bad reputation in this city. It's not fair! My name is Frank Bundy and at the tail end of the 19th century, I was a rising star. My father was a grocer, but I had ambition. I was going places. I was a businessman, entrepreneur, politician, and popular man-about-town. The 1890s were *my* decade. Then it all came crashing down around me and it's just not fair!

I'm not really sure when the trouble started. The courts would probably say it was in 1892 when I became Assistant City Chamberlain and started embezzling tax dollars, but I'd say it was before that. As a young man, my father wanted me to join him in the family business, but I wanted something of my own. Who wants to spend their life working for their father? Throughout the 1880s and 90s, I dabbled in several business ventures: manufacturing, real estate, insurance, publishing, even groceries. The problem is, in order to start your own business, you need some start up capitol. To get that, you need rich friends.

Boy, did I have rich friends. I joined every important club in the city: Masons, Pine Cliff Club, Camera Club, Kanaweola Bicycle Club. You name it, I joined it, and I rubbed elbows with some of the richest and most powerful men in the city. And I threw parties. Parties with the best food, the most expensive wines, the most exotic of entertainments. People would kill to be invited to my parties. But that sort of thing costs money. A lot of money. Money I didn't have.

I was 31 when I was appointed Assistant City Chamberlain. I swear I never set out to embezzle. I couldn't help it. It was just too easy.

Here's how I did it. People would pay their property taxes and I would mark all the payments down in my personal ledger noting which payments I'd taken for myself. Generally the ones who had paid in cash. In another ledger, the official office ledger, I would put only some of them down as being paid and write off my take as unpaid taxes. Sometimes to make up the difference, I'd issue as second tax bill to the city's biggest companies and they'd just pay it as a matter of course. Every year, the city's wealthiest set would put up bonds to help cover any tax shortfalls, so no one ever really felt the impact. I did it for years, first as Assistant Chamberlain in 1892 and 1893, and then as Chamberlain from 1894 until 1900.

And then it all went wrong. Fred Fox, treasurer from the Lackawanna Railroad, noticed that his company was being double billed for taxes. He brought it to the City Council and the jig was up. They appointed a special committee to look into tax irregularities and, that very afternoon, I confessed to my friend and lawyer, former mayor Fred Collin. He didn't seem too worried at first. "Was it more than \$5,000," he asked me.

"Yes," I said.

"More than 10? 20? 30?" he asked, getting more and more worried with each amount. That's when I knew I was in real trouble. I'd embezzled \$84,495 in city funds. That's about \$2.5 million today. There was no way the city bondsmen could ever begin to cover it and no way I could ever pay it back.



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I ended up getting sentenced to six-and-a-half years at Auburn Penitentiary. I only served four, but, when I came home, my name was mud. The wealthy friends who had provided the bond to cover tax shortages ended up paying \$42,961 and none of them would talk to me. The city was still paying off the remaining \$42,534 when I died in 1935.

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Mary E. Stroman – played by Cathleen Wiggs

Well, I could see you coming, your auras are glowing, red, blue, green. I see good health, prosperity and yet, I see future struggles and dark steps, but I am getting ahead of myself. For those of you that don't know me, I am Mrs. Mary E. Stroman, and I died in 1924. I was a clairvoyant business medium from Elmira, and had a sizable following for over thirty years. I was a leader of the Spiritualist society here in Elmira, and am proud to say we clairvoyants proved the existence of life after death.

Now, some people confuse clairvoyants with psychics. *No, no, no!* All of us are psychics my dears. (pause) What you doubt? *Oh yes, yes, yes!* We all perceive. Think of it, have you ever suspected something, and it turns out indeed to be true? Have you ever gotten a hunch about someone, and find your fears heartily confirmed? Or have you FELT you knew what was going to happen, and it happened, just so? That my dears, is tapping into your psychic abilities, your natural intuitive capacity. We have all been blessed as innate perceivers. I, however, was blessed with extraordinary capacities. I was a RECEIVER...I was clairvoyant.

I received my information from spirits beyond, and could see into your future and guide your business success. Perhaps you've come across my advertisements in the Star-Gazette newspaper, *yes? no?* My rates were reasonable, and my work was most reliable.

You don't believe me? Well, I was not be as flashy as that old woman Madam DuBois, who CLAIMED to be clairvoyant (*she scoffs*). She was deeply embroiled in her ex-lovers' affairs. What, you don't recall how she interrupted the marriage ceremony of her old beau, Mr. Harwood Badger? She claimed to be spiritually wedded to the groom, so that he and his blushing bride would not be allowed their entitled happiness? You may recall she was unceremoniously thrown out on her ear-*ha, how she never saw THAT one coming?!? She* cursed the poor couple and they went on to endure many hardships in their marriage.

No, no, no, engaging my scientific services would not bring you shame, curses or misunderstandings. Those I leave to the so-called mediums, like Madam DuBois. My practice was sound and I was of clear mind and constitution. For a modest fee, I received information on your future success which I insist will happen....one day.

Perhaps you've heard of my colleague, the dear Mrs. Wilcox? She worked as a clairvoyant physician, and diagnosed any ailment or malady by a mere glance of the aforementioned afflicted? No talking needed. *Yes?* Well, I came from the tradition of spiritual and business mediums, and received information from beyond to cure costly business mistakes, and guide future financial decisions. IF YOU LISTENED!!!



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My son Charles didn't pay heed, he took a misstep. Literally. He was on a ladder adjusting that newfangled wiring in the building when he receivedelectricity shocking through his body and throwing him to the floor where he broke his ankle.

He recovered, and professed he would listen to my readings more closely. I trust none of you here will make a similar misstep?

Now the spirits are telling me you are at the end of your night's journey. You will thank me and spend a few moments stepping through windswept trees and passing rows of soldiers from times long ago. You will embark on a gleaming chariot and ride back to a place of History.

Also Featuring Gail Lewis and Levi Bradigan as Wandering Ghosts in Woodlawn Cemetery