

2020 Ghost Walk

Isaac Rood Taylor (1851-1921) – played by David Wiggs

There's nothing like a fine silk top hat to make a man feel confident and debonair. But after a while, it can start to sag or crumple. And then what does that do to a man's self-esteem? Some of you may have experienced that before, yes?

Well, have no fear, I, Isaac Rood Taylor, am here to help. Just bring your old worn out top hat down to my shop on West Water Street, and I'll fix it up for you in under a week. All it'll cost is one dollar, which you have to admit is a great deal. New top hats can cost as much as six, even eight dollars. Refurbishing the old topper is clearly the best choice. I can even reshape it a bit to bring it up to the newest fashion.

I spent years repairing and remodeling top hats in Elmira. Being born in 1851, I was at the perfect age to appreciate the elegant piece of men's headwear when it became hugely popular in the 1870s. I made quite the living off my particular skills as a hatter until tastes changed and men only wore top hats on the most formal occasions.

By that time I had a wife and three children to take care of, so I had to find other work. I've always had a mechanical mind, so I ended up taking jobs as a contractor, an excavator, and a dredger. I earned quite a fine reputation for my hard work done at a fair price. Most of the jobs weren't very exciting though. The dredging work at least got me out into the river, and that got me thinking. It's so beautiful out on the water, with the cool breeze, the lush green river banks, and nature all around. It's even better when you're not hauling mud and rock. I was sure that other people would be willing to pay to be out there leisurely enjoying the scenery while someone else did the work. And why couldn't that someone be me?

So, around 1890, I bought myself a small steam powered sternwheeler and named her the *Bertha Taylor* after my little daughter. It wasn't a very big craft – it was 20 feet long and could only hold about a dozen people – but the Chemung isn't deep enough for anything much bigger.

I was myself the captain, purser, engineer, mate, and pilot of the craft. I had a dock near the foot of Columbia Street and I would ferry sightseers and picnickers up the river to Rorick's Glen, Hoffman Island, and Conway Riffs. And what a great deal those people got. All that fresh air and nature for just 25 cents a person round trip. Who could beat that?

Sure, we did have some troubles now and then when the river was running low. The steamer sometimes ran aground, but that wasn't a problem at all. If I was carrying just a group of young men, why they could take off their shoes, roll up their trouser legs, and wade to shore. And if there were any ladies aboard, the gentlemen could kindly get out and haul *Bertha* into deeper water. See. No problem.

As with top hats, though, cruising the river also seemed to go out of fashion. Fewer and fewer people purchased tickets on my little steamship, so I had to finally give her up and go back to my contracting work. I did manage to find a man who I'd held a grudge against for years and convinced him it was a good idea to own his very own steamboat. He got a great deal on it too. I practically gave it away.



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Louise Terry (1863-1934) – Played by Cathy Wiggs

Hello gentle visitors, my name is Mrs. William E. Terry of Elmira, New York. I come before you to represent the Federation Farm where I worked for over ten years with my dearly departed husband William. He was the Farm's superintendent and I was the head matron for all those little children.

We were a farm but we didn't grow crops, we grew strong and healthy children.

But let me back up a little. You see, Tuberculosis, often called consumption, was a deadly public health concern. (Feign cough) It had been around for centuries and was quite contagious. It infects the lungs and causes great consuming weight loss. A terrible, terrible thing. At one time, it had been thought of as a vampire disease. Imagine! People thought if one member of a family was infected and died from it, they would return to infect the others. (cough)

Science proved that falsehood. They told us it was a highly contagious disease that easily spread among those with inadequate hygiene, and poor living conditions. You know the type. Dreadful.

Infected people share their disease through air droplets. Health experts began a rousing campaign to alert the public.

We were told to shield our faces!
Cover our coughs!
Stop public spitting!
And wash our hands!

Washing hands certainly never goes out of style. (Wrings hands). Doctors found that people could be silent carriers of the disease. But if suspected, those with infections could be isolated, given good care, and they had a chance to be nursed back to health.

In Elmira, The Federation Social Service opened the Farm in spring of 1917. It operated as the first preventorium of its kind in New York State. Money raised from selling Red Cross Christmas Seals along with a healthy donation by that generous Mrs. Fassett purchased the Farm property. Here was a place we could care for young children in poor health from parents who had tuberculosis. We whisked them away from these families who simply didn't know any better. My dear William and I were hired to attend to their needs. We had a dozen pale, undernourished children were brought in and nursed back to good health.

We provided good food, schooling, and healthy exercise. We instituted regular routines, like lying on the lawn in the sunshine and confining misbehaving children to chairs. (pause)

We saved over 298 children.

We knew what was best for these children, better than their parents did. And sometimes things were a bit, (cough) harsh, but it was for their greater good.



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It wasn't easy, but we had great support from the Red Cross. We sold the greatest number of Red Cross seals one Christmas and won the pennant. And dear Mrs. Fassett supported our efforts best she could, but it wasn't enough. Still we struggled financially.

(eyes cast down)

Just as things got very bleak, my William died leaving my son Raymond and me on our own. Later that same month the Exchange Club swooped in to rescue the Farm and transferred operations to the county.

My time at the Farm ended and I lived out the rest of my days with my son in nearby Watkins Glen.

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Alice Shaw (1853-1918) – Played by Casey Winston

Have you ever heard the idiom “whistling past the graveyard?” When someone is “whistling past the graveyard” they are trying to remain cheerful in difficult circumstances. Well, for me, whistling didn’t just cheer me up during the most difficult time of my life, it made me into an international superstar. I am Alice Shaw, the Whistling Prima Donna! You may applaud now. (pause) Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!

In 1885, I was living with my father here in Elmira. Thirteen years earlier, when I was just 20 years old, I married William Shaw. He was a successful businessman from Detroit; a widower with four little boys. We had four daughters together, who were the great joys of my life. Just five years into our marriage, however, his business utterly failed. I tried to support us all by working as a seamstress, but I just couldn’t manage with eight young mouths to feed. All the children and I moved in with my saint of a father and my deadbeat husband went out on his own to find a new career. Funny how he never showed up again, even when the divorce papers were finalized.

So, there I was, a single mother of eight with no prospects and little hope. What was I to do? Well, I screwed up my courage, took a deep breath, and whistled my way to fame and fortune. I had always been a naturally skilled whistler, even as a child. My first big performance was in December 1886. I was a featured soloist at the holiday reception of the Teachers’ Association in Steinway Hall in New York City. That one performance got such rave reviews that I was soon working as a professional whistler at high class concerts, private musicales, and society entertainments in the city. *The New York Sun* wrote that I was a wonderful performer, a rather majestic presence, and decidedly handsome.

The next thirteen years were just a whirlwind. After New York, I went to London and performed for the Prince of Wales – who later became King Edward. I also whistled in Russia for Czar Nicholas. I breezed through India, Germany, and South Africa then came back to the United States. For much of my touring, I was able to bring my daughters with me. Sometimes my little twins Elsie and Ethel even whistled with me on stage.

I did have one unsavory run-in with my ex-husband in that time. He came to one of my concerts at Lafayette Hall in Pittsburg. Fortunately, I didn’t have the displeasure of meeting him in person, but he was not shy in telling the local newspaper what he thought of me. It was just a year after our divorce in 1888 but I hadn’t seen him in over two years. He told the reporter that I had grown fleshier. Can you believe it? How disgraceful! But I had the last laugh. This “fleshiness” as he so called it, only brought me more wealth and fame. I made a very pretty paycheck endorsing Dr. Edison’s Obesity Pills and Salts, thank you very much.

I made my permanent home in New York City, but I came back to Elmira as often as I could. I would do little concerts to help out local charities. Yes, even as a major international star, I made time to help others. I returned to Elmira one last time on April 24, 1918, when I was laid to rest here.

Despite all my struggles, I really did live a blessed life. My strength, perseverance, ingenuity, and beauty are likely an inspiration to you all, so I will leave you with a very valuable piece of advice. If you find yourself in tough times, try whistling. It just might help.



2020 Ghost Walk

Governor Lucius Robinson (1810-1891) – Played by Joe Edkin

My name is Governor Lucius Robinson and across my career I was elected to multiple political offices under three different political parties. There are some that say I am fickle and lacking in party loyalty, but that's not the way I see it. A man should be loyal to principals first and party a distant second.

I was born in Greene County, New York, in 1810. My people were good American stock. My ancestors came across on the Mayflower and I was raised to respect their traditional Christian values. Moral uprightness. Respect for the law. Fiscal responsibility. Hard work. *Maintenance* of the proper social order. All the things a man should hold true.

I trained as a lawyer and began my career as a Democrat, serving as district attorney in Greene County. After three years of that, I headed to New York City in 1839 where I worked as a lawyer and wrote editorials for the *New York Evening Post* as well as the *New York Sun*. My political writings won me an appointment as Master in Chancery, a judiciary post. It was around that time that I purchased some land in Southport along Maple Avenue for the construction of a summer home. In 1855, my health began to suffer from the hustle and bustle of the city, so I brought my family here to live year round and became involved in various business ventures.

I cast my first vote as a Democrat for President Andrew Jackson, but as time went on I found myself differing from the party on one key issue: slavery. I was staunchly opposed to it. The national party was not and so, in 1854, I joined the Republican Party which was specifically created to oppose slavery. It was as a Republican that I ran for and won Chemung County's seat in the New York State Assembly in 1859. Just two years later, the People's Party, a bipartisan coalition, nominated me for State Comptroller. I won and served as the guardian of New York's finances throughout the Civil War.

Although I was a staunch Unionist, I quickly grew frustrated with Lincoln and, indeed, the whole Republican Party. Lincoln and his federal government amassed too much power, far too quickly and trampled over states' rights to get it. And then there's the greenbacks. Paper money unbacked by gold or indeed, any solid currency? Madness, sheer, irresponsible madness. It was a continuous struggle to keep the state solvent in spite of the federal government's spendthrift ways. After the war, I left the Republican Party and took an extended break from politics for a while.

In 1876, I got back into politics, running for governor of New York, this time as a Democrat. During my time in office, I was a fierce protector of the people's money, vetoing all sorts of wasteful spending. I vetoed bills to expand universal education and the state college system. While education is a fine thing in a rich man, it leaves a poor man discontented with his proper station. I blocked a bill which extended the rights of married women for similar reasons.



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I ran again once my term was up, but sadly, a second term was not to be. I had refused to issue a pardon for Boss Tweed, the corrupt leader of Tammany Hall, and his subsequent death in prison split the party. Even my fellow Democrats here in Elmira didn't support me. It seemed they were still sore over me calling out the State Militia to put down striking workers along the Erie Railway. Ah, well. A man must be gracious in defeat. I returned home to live out the remainder of my days with my children and grandchildren on Maple Avenue.

Some say I might have won if I had just put party loyalty over my principals and to them I say, fah! A man who sacrifices his principals for political gain is no man at all.

Also Featuring Gail Lewis, Ivy Robinson, Bob Guzman, and Daniel Zuckerman as Wandering Ghosts in Woodlawn Cemetery

