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The Dark Mysteries of the Myrtles Plantation

Louisiana's Most Haunted House: Chloe's Ghost, the Cursed Mirror, and 12 Murdered Souls

Aiden Nightfall

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The Dark Mysteries

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

The Myrtles Plantation sits on a rise of land in St. Francisville, Louisiana, about thirty miles north of Baton Rouge. It is a white-columned antebellum home, surrounded by live oaks draped in Spanish moss, and it looks exactly the way a haunted house in the Deep South is supposed to look. Since the 1970s, it has been marketed as "One of America's Most Haunted Homes," and tens of thousands of visitors have passed through its doors, staying overnight in its guest rooms, eating breakfast in its dining room, and waiting — sometimes for hours, sometimes for the entire night — for something to happen.

Something often does. Guests report footsteps on the second floor when no one is upstairs. They report cold spots in the children's bedroom. They report the smell of perfume in empty rooms. They report seeing a young girl in antebellum clothing who vanishes when approached. And they report, more than any other phenomenon, the mirror — a large mirror in the foyer that, no matter how many times it is cleaned, develops cloudy patches that look like faces. The staff say these are the faces of the dead, trapped when the mirror replaced a window through which the murdered were said to have fallen.

The story behind the mirror is the story of Chloe.

Chloe, according to the legend, was an enslaved woman who served the household of Judge Clarke Woodruff and his wife Sara in the early 1800s. She was, the story goes, caught listening at a keyhole and had her ear cut off as punishment. She wore a green turban to hide the wound. In revenge, she poisoned a birthday cake with oleander extract, intending to sicken the family enough that she could nurse them back to health and regain their trust. The poison was too strong. Sara Woodruff and two of her three daughters died. The other slaves, terrified that the plantation owner would punish all of them for the murders, hanged Chloe from a tree on the property and threw her body into the river.

It is a terrible story, and it has all the elements of a great ghost legend: injustice, cruelty, murder, and a vengeful spirit. It draws tourists from across the country. It has been featured on television shows, in magazines, and in books. The Myrtles Plantation is a thriving business because of it.

But here is the problem: nearly every verifiable detail of the Chloe story is wrong.

Sara Woodruff did not die of poisoning. She died of yellow fever in 1823, and her death is recorded in the church records of Grace Episcopal Church in St. Francisville. Her daughters did not die in a poisoning incident — at least one of

them survived to adulthood and married. There is no contemporary record of a slave named Chloe at the Myrtles Plantation. The legend of the poisoned birthday cake appears nowhere in any document from the 1800s. The story was first told in the 1970s, roughly 150 years after the events it describes, and it was told by the owner of the property at the time — a woman who had a commercial interest in attracting visitors.

This book is about what happened at the Myrtles Plantation, what did not happen, and what remains unexplained. It is about the difference between a story that is told and a story that can be proven. And it is about why, even after the legend of Chloe has been thoroughly dismantled by historians, people still report seeing something in that house that they cannot explain.

The Myrtles Plantation is not a hoax. It is something more complicated than that. It is a place where a real history of violence and slavery has been overlaid with a fictional story that is more dramatic and more marketable than the truth, and where that fictional story has, over decades, generated genuine experiences in people who visit. Whether those experiences are paranormal or psychological is the question this book will try to answer.

This book will also examine a question that is often overlooked in discussions of haunted places: who benefits from the haunting? The Myrtles Plantation is a business, and the haunting is its primary product. The story of Chloe sells rooms, sells tours, sells merchandise, and sells television appearances. The incentive to maintain and promote the haunting is powerful, and it is worth considering how that incentive shapes both the stories that are told and the experiences that are reported.

Finally, this book will address the ethical dimension of the Myrtles legend. The story of Chloe is a story about slavery — about an enslaved woman who was mutilated, who retaliated, and who was killed. It is a story that turns the real violence of slavery into entertainment. The people who were enslaved at the Myrtles were real people with real lives, and their history has been replaced by a fiction that serves the commercial interests of the property's owners. This is not a minor concern. It is a fundamental question about how we remember the past and who gets to tell the story.

There is also a structural inversion in the Myrtles case that separates it from nearly every other book in this series, and it deserves naming before the investigation begins. Most hauntings are legends wrapped around thin history — a single documented death, or none, embroidered over centuries. The Myrtles is thick, documented history wrapped in a thin legend. The property has more verifiable human death associated with it than almost any site this series has examined: yellow fever carrying off a wife and son in 1823, a judge

shot dead on his own porch in 1871, a child dying the same year of disease, and beneath all of it the documented lives of enslaved people valued in ledgers as monetary figures.

A place with that much real grief had no need to invent suffering — and it invented a fictional suffering anyway. The Chloe legend is a story of an invented death, told about a house full of documented ones. The analyst should hold that inversion in view throughout: the Myrtles is not a case where history supports a haunting; it is a case where a haunting was built to replace a history that was already more terrible than the story sold in its place.

Key Takeaways - The Myrtles Plantation is marketed as "One of America's Most Haunted Homes" but nearly every verifiable detail of the Chloe legend is historically unsupported. - Sara Woodruff died of yellow fever in 1823, not poisoning; no contemporary record of a slave named Chloe exists. - The legend was first told in the 1970s, roughly 150 years after the events it describes, by a property owner with a commercial interest in attracting visitors. - The real history of the Myrtles involves slavery, violence, and erasure — a history the Chloe legend obscures.

Chapter 1: What Happened Here?

The Myrtles Plantation is located at 7747 U.S. Highway 61 in St. Francisville, Louisiana, in West Feliciana Parish. The original house was built in 1796 by David Bradford, a Whiskey Rebellion leader who fled Pennsylvania to escape federal arrest and established himself on a Spanish land grant in what was then West Florida. The property passed through several owners over the next century, including Bradford's son-in-law Judge Clarke Woodruff, who is the central figure in the Chloe legend.

The house is a two-story, white-painted brick structure with a gallery of columns across the front and a steeply pitched roof with dormer windows. It has been expanded and modified several times since its construction, most notably in the 1850s when the exterior was remodeled in the Greek Revival style. The interior has twelve rooms, several of which are now used as guest accommodations for the bed-and-breakfast operation that has operated at the property since the 1980s.

The grounds include a courtyard, a swimming pool, a gift shop, and several outbuildings. A cemetery on the property contains the graves of several members of the families who lived there, though the markers are weathered and some are no longer legible. The property is surrounded by commercial timberland and is situated on a slight rise above the surrounding flatlands, which are prone to flooding during heavy rains.

The location itself is significant. St. Francisville was the center of a prosperous cotton-growing region in the antebellum period, and the plantations along the Mississippi River in this area were among the wealthiest in the South. The enslaved population of West Feliciana Parish outnumbered the free population by a ratio of roughly four to one in 1860. The violence of slavery was not an abstraction here — it was the economic foundation of every plantation in the region, including the Myrtles.

The landscape itself tells a story that the ghost legends obscure. The rich alluvial soil along the Mississippi River, the warm climate, and the long growing season made this one of the most productive cotton regions in the antebellum South. That productivity was built entirely on enslaved labor. The plantations of West Feliciana Parish were not family farms — they were commercial operations, some with hundreds of enslaved workers, producing cotton for export to textile mills in New England and Europe. The wealth that built houses like the Myrtles came from the bodies of people who had no freedom, no compensation, and no voice in the historical record.

The Myrtles Plantation, like its neighbors, was a place of systematic violence.

Enslaved people were bought, sold, disciplined, and worked under conditions that were, by modern standards, indistinguishable from torture. This is the actual history of the property, and it is a history that the Chloe legend, for all its drama, does not accurately represent.

The four-to-one ratio also deserves to be carried through the rest of this book as a kind of haunting of its own. In 1860, in the parish where the Myrtles stands, enslaved people outnumbered the free population roughly four to one. The house that visitors tour — the porch, the dining room where breakfast is served, the columns in the photographs — was built and maintained by a statistical majority whose members appear in the census as numbers and, in a few surviving records, as names attached to appraised values. The conventional question asked of a haunted site is why the dead do not rest. The Myrtles' records suggest an answer with unusual bluntness: because many of the dead were never recorded as fully alive — entered as inventory, priced, and, in the ordinary course of plantation record-keeping, expected to leave no trace beyond a line in a ledger.

The ghost stories ask visitors to look for a phantom in a mirror. The historical record asks something harder: to look at a bookkeeping system and find the human beings inside it. This book cannot recover those lives — the sources do not allow it — but it can refuse to let the one invented enslaved woman, Chloe, stand in for the real ones whose names survive in fragments, and whose absence from the legend is the most accurate haunting on the property.

The first written reports of paranormal activity at the Myrtles Plantation date to the 1950s, when a subsequent owner reported seeing a woman in old-fashioned clothing standing at the foot of a staircase. The report was brief, undocumented, and not investigated. There are no known reports of haunting from the Woodruff family's time in the house, or from any of the families who lived there in the 1800s.

The modern era of haunting reports began in the 1970s, when Marjorie and Arlin Decker purchased the property and began restoring it. Marjorie Decker reported seeing a young girl in the house and hearing footsteps. She also reported the first appearance of the faces in the mirror. The Deckers began telling the story of Chloe to visitors, and the property's reputation as a haunted house grew rapidly after that.

By the 1980s, the Myrtles had been featured in national media as a haunted destination. The current owners, who purchased the property in the 1990s, have continued to operate it as a haunted bed-and-breakfast, and the property has been the subject of investigations by paranormal groups, television shows, and journalists. The volume of reports has increased over the decades, which

is consistent with the pattern seen at other haunted tourist destinations — the more people who visit expecting to experience something, the more experiences are reported.

The scaling of reports with visitation also deserves to be read as a graph, because the shape of that graph is itself evidence. A genuine external phenomenon — geological, meteorological, or paranormal — should produce experiences at some roughly fixed rate per unit of time, regardless of how many people are present to notice. The Myrtles produces the opposite profile: experiences scale with occupancy. The reports begin when the property opens to paying visitors, surge after national television exposure, and rise again with each expansion of marketing and each new camera carried through the door.

The manufacturing metaphor is unavoidable: the Myrtles' experiences behave like output, with visitation as the input. None of this requires anyone to be dishonest — each individual guest genuinely hears the footsteps and genuinely reports them — but the aggregate has the production function of a hotel, not of an anomaly. A house that generated experiences at a constant rate independent of belief, marketing, and headcount would be a different kind of mystery. The Myrtles' graph rises and falls with its own advertising, and the honest investigator has to sit with what that correlation is trying to say.

The story of Chloe spread through several channels. The first was word of mouth, as visitors who heard the story at the Myrtles repeated it. The second was television: the property has been featured on Unsolved Mysteries, Ghost

Hunters, and several other paranormal investigation programs. The third was the internet, where the story has been repeated on hundreds of websites, often with embellishments and inaccuracies.

The story has also been spread through books. Several collections of haunted places include the Myrtles, and the property's own gift shop sells books and merchandise related to the Chloe legend. The commercial dimension of the story is important: the Myrtles is a business, and the haunting is the primary draw for visitors. This does not mean the reports are fabricated, but it does mean that the incentive structure favors dramatic stories over mundane explanations.

Key Takeaways - The Myrtles was built in 1796 by David Bradford, a Whiskey Rebellion fugitive, on a Spanish land grant in what was then West Florida. - The enslaved population of West Feliciana Parish outnumbered the free population roughly four to one in 1860. - The first written haunting reports date to the 1950s; the modern era of haunting stories began with the Decker family in the 1970s. - The Chloe legend turns the real violence of slavery into

entertainment, obscuring the actual history of the people who lived and worked there.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aiden Nightfall writes at the intersection of horror, mystery, and history. His Dark Mysteries series investigates supernatural folklore across cultures -- from the water spirits of Morocco to the haunted fortresses of Eastern Europe -- asking not whether the stories are true, but why they persist.

Each book combines archival research, on-the-ground reporting, and psychological analysis to separate the myth from the mechanism without losing the atmosphere that makes the stories worth telling. His editorial standard is historical accuracy: dates verified, sources cross-referenced, nothing embellished.

He writes in the hours after midnight, when the research feels closer.