

REVELING GHOSTS AT LYFORD'S CABIN...

By Susan Cluff

One day in 1898, a group of thirsty picnickers stopped by a lonely cabin at Lyford's Glen near Tiburon and asked the caretaker for a glass of water. While inside, they noticed some doors had been sealed shut. The caretaker explained the owner had some private things stored away and he'd been told never to open them. The curious picnickers lured him away from the cabin and pried open one of the doors, finding three coffins, one adult size and two made for children in the dimly-lit attic. They then hurried away to find a more appealing spot for their picnic.

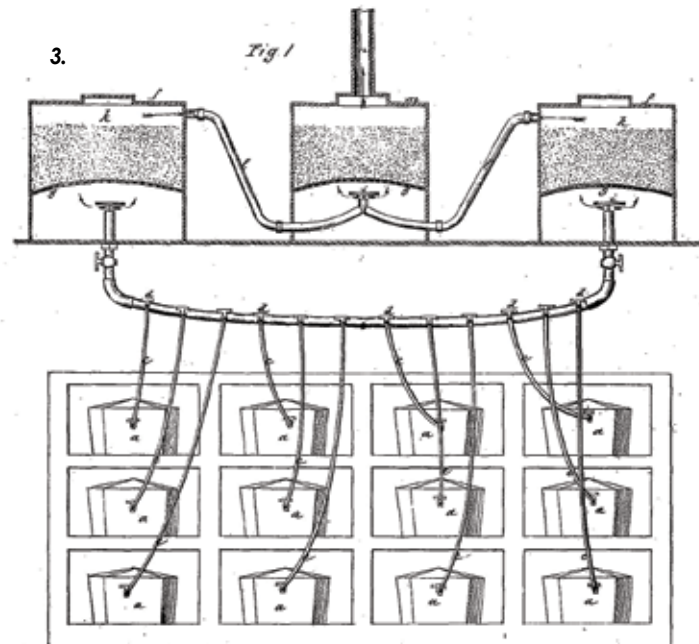
After the incident, the caretaker Volberg discovered the opened door but resisted looking in the locked rooms. A few nights later, he lit a candle and climbed the stairs and opened the attic door. As he stepped into the room, the floor began heaving, the coffins rocked and rolled, and he ran screaming from the cabin.

The next morning, the caretaker was found near California City, half dressed, babbling of ghosts and spirits, refusing to go back to the cabin. People tried to tell him there'd been an earthquake-- buildings collapsed, windows rattled, ships rocked from their moorings, but to no avail. Volberg then took a round-about route back to Tiburon, avoiding the cabin, and caught the next ferry to San Francisco.

The owner of the cabin was Dr. Benjamin Lyford (1841-1906), a Civil War surgeon who'd invented a unique embalming method that allowed a body to be kept in almost perfect condition for many years. Married to land heiress Hilarita Reed, he'd retired to their ranch at Strawberry Point to continue his experiments. Obsessed with health and fresh air, Dr. Lyford planned a utopian community near Point Tiburon called Lyford's Hygiea. He built an impressive stone tower and arch at the entrance and a few cabins for himself at Glen Cove.

And the ghosts? According to the San Francisco Call a month later, Dr. Lyford claimed the coffins were empty, hired another caretaker who nailed the doors shut, and put up a sign. "No picnicking allowed..."

Shortly after this, Dr. Lyford sold the 38 acres with his cabins at Glen Cove to David Keil and his son Hugo, who then built a beautiful Craftsman style home, cottage and barn there. And no more was heard of coffins and ghosts thereafter...



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"The Tradition Starts With You."

1. Lyford's "Old Rose Cabin" at Glen Cove where the coffins were found, 1903
2. Dr. Benjamin F. Lyford (right) seen here at Gettysburg in 1863 with his mentor Dr. Chamberlain demonstrating their embalming techniques.
3. Illustration from Dr. Lyford's patent, 1871. The technique required the body be enclosed in a sealed coffin that was emptied of air by a pump and a secret solution containing a great deal of arsenic.

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