

Copyright © 2003 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Richardson, Judith.

Possessions : the history and uses of haunting in the Hudson Valley / Judith
Richardson.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-674-01161-9 (alk. paper)

1. Ghosts--Hudson River Valley (N.Y. and N.J.) 2. Haunted places--Hudson
River Valley (N.Y. and N.J.) 3. Ghosts in literature. 4. Hudson River Valley (N.Y.
and N.J.)--Social life and customs. I. Title.

BF1472.U6R54 2003

133.1'09747'7--dc21 2003049950

The legend of "Spooky Hollow" is too well known to repeat here beyond the fact that "a Mr. Salisbury" caused the death of a Negro woman slave. . . . On stormy nights she is supposed to appear there and scream. However, Miss Frances Mann . . . told me that her father had a friend . . . [who] said that the woman who was killed was not a Negro slave but a German girl, an indentured. She was a Hessian.

—Letter to the *Catskill Daily Mail*, August 7, 1942

"The Sutherlands" . . . is a romance founded on this story. . . . In filling out her tale [the author] varies from the commonly received statements of facts in the case, by making the murdered girl a colored slave, half Indian and half mulatto, instead of white.

—Rev. Charles Rockwell, *The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around* (1867)

Any way, it was a girl, and she ran away.

—C. G. Hine, *The West Bank of the Hudson River* (1906)

THE COLORFUL CAREER

OF A GHOST FROM LEEDS

Dead women roam the roads, streams, and woods of eastern Greene County. A woman in white has been reported wandering along the aptly named Murderer's Creek in the town of Athens. A woman in black, whose identity in life is not known, has been seen stalking the Green Lake Road in Leeds, according to the *Catskill Examiner* of December 1906. Another woman, this time in gray, meanders in the woods along the Leeds-Catskill Road near Cairo, "singing a mel-

ancholy song." "Who she is," wrote Charles Wilde in 1937, "no one knows."¹

Each of these ghosts has a story, and occasionally hints about the history and meanings underlying these stories come to the surface. The woman in white, for instance, has been identified as Sally Hamilton, whose brutal unsolved murder in 1813 shocked the town of Athens. The same ghost has also been identified as Mary Johnson, killed in 1841.² Mostly, however, this ghost in white, like her counterparts in gray and black, goes unidentified. These ghosts seem to want to say something about the history and character of the place they haunt, but their stories have all but dissolved. Lacking traceable history, they exist only as suggestive, elusive shades of obscurity.

There is, however, another ghost who haunts the vicinity: the ghost of a female being dragged behind a ghostly horse, reported variously near Spook Rock and Spooky Hollow on the outskirts of what is now the village of Leeds.³ This ghost is one of the most enduring and well-known ghosts of the region, as well as one of the most shifty—she may appear as white or black, Indian or Scottish, Spanish or German. Her story, which has its origins in an obscure eighteenth-century murder case involving the richest man in town and his servant, wends through generations of variations from the early nineteenth century to the present.⁴ Although the case is full of holes, the story of this ghost is unusually traceable, presenting a remarkable opportunity to witness the evolution of a local haunting—to look closely at what haunts the towns of Greene County, at why this ghost story emerges in the first place, and also at how the ghost's identity changes according to the contexts of time and individual motive.

This chapter tracks the checkered career of the ghostly servant girl through four episodes. The first takes us back to the village (then called Catskill) in the eighteenth century, to reconstruct the original incident and legal case on whose facts—and gaps—the sub-

sequent ghost stories are founded. From there we move to the 1820s to investigate the first print version of the ghost story, probing the conditions and motives that brought the story to the surface and that colored the details of this crucial telling. Next we confront a pair of later nineteenth-century writings based on the tale in order to consider the ghost's mutations of shade and meaning, its susceptibility to being drawn into various social, cultural, and political agendas. Finally, we return to Leeds to contemplate materials collected or written in the town in the mid-twentieth century, to show how the ghost links into contests over local history and identity, and how her variations operate with regard to both local issues and outside interpretations. Ultimately, the story of Leeds, intriguing in its own right, opens the way into a larger investigation of ghost types in the Hudson Valley, not only because it links into a series of prevailing motifs, but also because it reveals an underlying, productive ambivalence within ghostliness itself that undergirds the meanings and uses of regional hauntings more broadly.

THE MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPT

In the far from spooky library of the Greene County Historical Society, in Coxsackie, New York, there is a mysterious manuscript. This document, a bill of indictment from 1762, is mysterious not only because it eluded for many years those digging for hard facts about a ghost story they had heard, but also because, even as found, it confounds as much as it illuminates.⁵ A single sheet with writing on two sides, it reads:

The Jurors for our Lord the King, for the body of the County of Albany, upon their Oath do Present: That William Salisbury of Katskill in the County of Albany, Yeoman, on the twenty Sixth day of May in the twenty-Eighth year of the Reign of our late Sovereign Lord King George the Second, with force and Arms, &c, in and Upon Anna Dorothea

Swarts, then Serving the said William Salisbury and in his Service at the Catskill aforesaid retained, did make an Assault, and the Body of her the said Anna Dorothea Swarts then and there with a Certain Cord did bind about, and the Said Anna Dorothea Swarts so being bound, to the tail of a Certain Horse of him the said William Salisbury of the Value of three pounds, then and there with the same Cord did Bind and tye, and the said Horse then and there with force and Arms did beat and force and Compell the said horse So Swiftly to Run that the Horse aforesaid the aforesaid Anna Dorothea Swarts upon her Body did Strike, of Which the said Anna Dorothea Swarts then and there Instantly died. And so the Jurors aforesaid upon their oath aforesaid do say that the Said William Salisbury the said Anna Dorothea Swarts then and there in Manner and form aforesaid, feloniously, Wilfully and of his Malice aforethought did Kill and Murder against the peace of our Said Late Lord the King his Crown and Dignity.

[reverse side]

Ignoramus

Abraham Douw foreman

1762

Albany 1762

[King?] vs Salisbury—Ignored.⁶

The William Salisbury named in the bill of indictment belonged to a prominent local family, one of the founding families of Catskill. The town in which he was born and lived out his life stood on a 35,500-acre tract that his grandfather, Silvester Salisbury, commander of the British fort at Albany, had purchased from local Indians in 1678, for which he was granted a patent in 1680.⁷ The so-called Catskill Patent was the largest and most valuable patent granted for lands entirely within what would become Greene

County.⁸ Silvester having died in 1680, his son, Francis, established his family on the patent, building a stone house on his division of the property in 1705, which, according to *The History of Greene County* (1884), "was once the largest and most costly house between Newburgh and Albany."⁹ Born in this house, of this family, in 1714, William Salisbury had an auspicious start in the world; from these "yeoman" foundations, he went on to be a very prosperous man. According to tax records, by 1766 he was not only the richest man in Catskill, but also among the top one percent of those taxed in the enormous area then covered by Albany County, a territory whose inhabitants included Van Rensselaers, Livingstons, and Schuylers.¹⁰

Despite his ancestry, wealth, and position in the town, it seems that William Salisbury, who was later ambiguously described as "a man honorable alike in his descent and in his descendants," would have gone generally unremarked but for one event.¹¹ Sometime before 1755, William Salisbury acquired a servant named Anna Dorothea Swarts, and in that year, according to the bill of indictment, he dragged her to death by tying her to his horse. It is here that the mysteries begin.

First, who was Anna Dorothea Swarts? If William Salisbury remains elusive as a historical figure, Anna Dorothea Swarts occupies a historical void. Beyond the bill of indictment, there is nothing to indicate that she existed at all. Her name and the fact that she was a servant are all that are recorded, and these specifics turn out to be ambiguous identifiers.¹² She was probably indentured, yet since the term *servant* was a slippery one, used to denote a variety of labor arrangements from slavery to hired help, the conditions of her servitude are open to conjecture.¹³ Like most of the early Catskill landholders, William Salisbury held slaves—twelve are mentioned in his will, not counting the children who were willed along with their mothers¹⁴—and the surname Swarts is clearly related to the Dutch and German words for "black." If she was indentured, how did she

come to be so? Was she an orphan, an immigrant, the daughter of a poor local Dutch or possibly German family?¹⁵ Not even her age at the time of her death is mentioned in the indictment, although the value of William Salisbury's horse is.

Beyond the questions raised in these omissions and empty spaces, the indictment presents more positive mysteries in the strange details of the case it delineates. Why, in the first place, would William Salisbury have tied his servant to his horse? Had she run away? Had she been mistreated, as one strain of later speculation asserted? Had untoward advances been made? Or, as another argument would counter, had she behaved badly? Had she, as some said later, been frequenting the house of a "low family" of which Salisbury disapproved? Had Salisbury tied her to his horse to retrieve her or to punish her?¹⁶ More curious, why did it take seven years for the matter of her death to come to court?¹⁷ Albany County, a large frontier territory with a diffuse population, had a woefully poor record in law enforcement; a much lower percentage of cases made it to a court decision there in the mid-eighteenth century than elsewhere in the colony.¹⁸ But William Salisbury clearly did not disappear to escape prosecution, and the gap between event and bill of indictment is extraordinary beyond what can be explained by any slowness of county courts.¹⁹ And why, if the case was important enough to dredge up after all that time, was it subsequently "ignored"?

We can, of course, speculate on what happened, with recourse to historical and legal contexts. The most salient starting point is the fact that Anna Dorothea Swarts was a servant at a time when ideas of social order—especially concerns over perceived threats from the subordinate populations—were reflected in laws curbing servant liberties, particularly after the so-called Negro Plot of 1741.²⁰ Catskill inhabitants would not have been immune to concerns over servants and slaves. Blacks, mostly enslaved, made up 15 percent of the population of Albany County and 20 percent of that of bordering

Ulster County in the mid-eighteenth century. Even as late as 1790, slaves constituted 15 percent of Catskill's population.²¹ Although there were laws in place to protect servants from unduly harsh treatment, and although servants often successfully appealed to the courts, officers of the law were, as one historian put it, "emphatically instructed" to help chase down runaways, and law and custom allowed masters not just of slaves but of apprentices and indentured servants to inflict corporal punishment.²²

Beyond the specifics of servant status, something of what occurred—and perhaps here something of the apparent waverings of justice—may be explained by the particular turbulence of the 1750s and 1760s in upriver New York, where real and perceived threats to social order were coming from both external and internal sources. The years between the incident and indictment coincide almost exactly with the years of fighting in the French and Indian War, and despite the pretensions of large stone houses and a population of 136 taxpayers by the 1760s, the town of Catskill lay near a still-vulnerable frontier. Indeed, well into the nineteenth century, maps record an "Indian Foot Path" running along what would have been Salisbury property, and one nineteenth-century source claimed that "Indians used to come every summer [and] encamp for a few weeks in a chestnut grove on William Salisbury's farm," asserting that the land had belonged to their ancestors.²³

Uneasiness over external threats would have been matched in these years by deep concern on the part of local elites over internal order. Anna Dorothea Swarts had been killed, and the indictment had been brought and dismissed, during a decade when the antagonisms produced by New York's peculiar manorial land system were coming to a head. Tenant-farmer, antilandlord activism had begun to gather steam in the early 1750s, erupting on Livingston and Van Rensselaer manors, just across the river from Catskill, in 1753 and 1754 respectively, and reaching a series of violent climaxes from Albany to Westchester in 1766.²⁴

It is possible that the intensified social antagonisms of these years churned what seemed a forgotten incident to the surface as part of an attack on privilege. It is also possible that a desire by the regional elite to maintain control caused the resulting indictment to be summarily quashed. Both the heightened anti-elite activity and the general leanings of the courts at the time are suggested by the fact that prosecutions for "violations of public order"—riots and breaches of the peace, generally considered crimes of the "lower orders"—were extraordinarily high in colonial New York at that time, especially in rural areas, where "violations of public order" were the most likely of all crimes to result in a guilty verdict.²⁵

Although court records for Albany County are missing for 1762, something about the specific sympathies of the grand jury in the Salisbury case may be suggested by the fact that Abraham Douw—the foreman—had a tax assessment in 1766 of thirty pounds, an indication that he was a man of comfortable means.²⁶ More suggestive is the fact that in 1763 (when the county court records resume), Douw frequently appears on the panel of presiding justices, along with one Rensselaer Nichols—William Salisbury's brother-in-law, a man whose name speaks volumes.²⁷ Perhaps an even more precise hint of a privileged intervention in Salisbury's case lies in a peculiar claim, contained in *The History of Greene County*, that James Barker—the patroon of what is now the town of Cairo, a prominent lawyer, and a friend of Salisbury's—assisted in the defense, and that it was probably through his efforts that "Salisbury was saved from the gallows."²⁸ Taken together, such disparate facts and statements seem at least to indicate the possibility that strings were pulled in Salisbury's case.

So perhaps Anna Dorothea Swarts's death was an accident, or the threat of war delayed court attention. Perhaps the rise of anti-elite sentiment resurrected a poor girl's "murder" after seven years, or a desire for order colored the grand jury's view of William Salisbury's alleged actions. Perhaps it seemed, in a community in which

slavery was legal, in which laws curtailed the potentially subversive activity of servants and apprentices, in which public whippings were common sentences, and in which theft could be punished by death, that William Salisbury was well within his rights and responsibilities in tying his servant to his horse, particularly at a moment when any signs of insubordination were keenly felt.

Ultimately, attempts to explain the strange events and turns of the case dissolve into speculation, as nothing else about the case seems to have survived from the period. We are left with the single mysterious sheet, which raises its grim details only to turn its back on them with its final judgment, or lack of judgment, contained in the word "Ignoramus," whose literal meaning ("we do not know") and legal meaning ("we take no notice of") waver between two equally unsatisfying options: a void of information or a deliberate act of denial.²⁹ If the case brought any particular notoriety or infamy to William Salisbury at the time, no evidence of it has survived. No newspaper would be printed in Catskill for thirty years to come; no written comment or disapproval seems to exist. A keen and romantic eye might detect a hint of remorse in William Salisbury's naming of a daughter baptized in 1756, "Annatje" (eerily, the only one of his eleven children who died young).³⁰ But there is nothing explicit to indicate that these incidents adversely affected William Salisbury, or any sign that Anna Dorothea Swarts was mourned. With the dismissal of the indictment in 1762, the matter appeared to be over. Even the bill of indictment vanished, and Anna Dorothea Swarts passed from public record and memory. Or so it seemed.

**"A SKELETON HALF ENVELOPED
IN A WINDING SHEET"**

Years passed without a word about this incident appearing in the public record. But then in 1824, more than sixty years after the indictment had been dismissed, and more than twenty years after

William Salisbury's death, evidence arose suggesting that the incident had not entirely vanished from local memory, that the matter had not entirely been laid to rest. That year, Colonel William Leete Stone, editor of the influential New York City newspaper the *Commercial Advertiser*, had been invited to visit the newly opened Catskill Mountain House.³¹ While in the vicinity, Stone heard a ghost story that he subsequently committed to print.³²

Along the road from Leeds to Cairo, Stone's attention was directed to "an ancient and spacious stone house" standing amid an "extensive farm of about 1,000 acres . . . hardly anywhere to be equalled for the rich, picturesque, and beautiful."³³ More than the scenery, though, what caused Stone to "linger longer at this spot than our wonted manner" was "an interesting tale connected with it, which is no fiction": "During a part of the 17th and nearly the whole of the 18th century, [this land] belonged to a single owner! When young he was a man of violent passions. A servant girl having once run away, he pursued and overtook her, and, in his exasperation, tied her to his horse's tail to lead her home. By a fright, or some other cause, the horse ran off, and the unfortunate girl was dashed to pieces against some rocks and stones." In the story Stone tells, the matter is not dismissed outright by the court: "The unhappy master was arrested, tried, and convicted of murder!" However, as "he was rich, of a powerful family for the times," and "it being on all hands allowed to be a hard case," he is sentenced to be executed only if he should live to be ninety-nine years old; in the meantime, at least according to "Tradition," he is required, in Hawthornesque fashion, to wear a noose around his neck. Neither of these already more symbolic than severe sentences is particularly effective. Although the man lives to be one hundred, the deferred execution is never effected; "the revolution had intervened,—a new government bore rule." And although "a few years ago, there were those living, who pretended that they had seen a neat silken string

worn in compliance to the sentence," they said it was worn "to appearance as ornament."

Still, the court's ineffectual judgment is to some degree overridden by another verdict, at once more ethereal and more enduring. The incident, writes Stone, had "almost become a forgotten tradition," but "the keen eyes of superstition had seen, and her tremulous tongue related, many tales of startling terror concerning the appearances at the fatal spot, pointed out to this day, where the poor girl had lost her life." Indeed, the "unhappy master" and anyone else who might pass by the fatal spot at night could find themselves confronted by a small mob of ghosts:

Sometimes sighs and lamentations were heard in the air, like the plaintiveness of the soft whistling wind. At others, a white cow, which was said to have been a favorite when the deceased was alive, would stand lowing among the rocks, while again at others, a shagged white dog would stand pointing and howling toward the mansion. . . . A white horse of gigantic size, with fiery eyeballs and distended nostrils, was often seen to run past the fatal spot, with the fleetness of wind, dragging a female behind, with tattered garment and streaming hair, screaming for help. At other times the horse would appear to drag a hideous skeleton, clattering after him, half enveloped in a winding sheet, with cries and dismal howlings; while again a female figure would at times appear sitting up a huge fragment of rock with a lighted candle upon each finger, singing wildly, or uttering a piercing cry, or an hysterical laugh.

The first printed evidence that the case of William Salisbury's servant had been remarked upon and echoed in local memory, and the earliest printed version of what would be a long-running Hudson Valley ghost story, Stone's narration represents a crucial mo-

ment in the haunting of Leeds. To understand the import of the story, we must pay close attention to the historical contexts and conditions accompanying its transmission and giving shape to its details.

That William L. Stone came to hear and to tell this ghost story, as well as what he told, is intertwined with the economic, social, and cultural history of the village of Leeds and of the town of Catskill of which it is a part. In 1824 Stone passed close by the place where William Salisbury had died just over two decades earlier, but a historical gulf separated the two men. Although great changes had taken place during the second half of William Salisbury's life—in his last twenty-five years, Salisbury, without having moved from his stone house, found himself in a new town, county, state, and country—his death in the autumn of 1801 corresponded with almost symbolic precision to the arrival of the nineteenth century in Leeds, which brought with it an unprecedented acceleration of development. The Susquehanna Turnpike, incorporated in 1800 to connect Catskill Landing to the developing interior, and probably the road along which William L. Stone would later pass, had completed its first four-and-one-half miles by August 1801, running right by the dying man's house.³⁴ This and other turnpikes constructed within the next few years promised to make Catskill one of the main commercial hubs on the river, at least in the decades before railroads and before the Erie Canal. Although signs of growth could be detected in Catskill before the turn of the century—for instance, a newspaper had started printing at Catskill Landing in 1792—a sense of overnight transformation is apparent in early-nineteenth-century accounts. Writing in 1803, for instance, the Rev. Clark Brown was effusive about current and impending developments: Catskill Landing, which had only five dwellings in 1787, now had twelve warehouses; two hundred buildings, many “of brick mostly two stories high”; thirty-one mercantile stores; a court; a jail; and a printing office. More than \$300,000 of produce

was now being shipped from the Landing to New York annually; the mails came and went twice weekly from Hudson, across the river; and in October 1803 semiweekly stagecoach service to Albany and New York would start. Catskill now had fifteen schools and a library. Most dramatic of all, "land which sold for ten dollars an acre in 1786 now sells for \$400."³⁵ The population of the town had doubled between 1790 and 1810, and by 1813 it was being predicted that Catskill would become "the third if not the second city on the Hudson in wealth, population and commercial importance."³⁶

William Leete Stone, on his arrival in Catskill in 1824, would comment: "Her enterprise is genuine New England—her capital commanding—her industry indefatigable—and her activity unrivalled in that section of the state."³⁷ As Stone recognized, the rapid development of the Catskill area was linked to the movement of a tidal wave of New Englanders into northern, central, and western New York in the years between the Revolution and the 1820s—a movement that caused New York's population to quadruple between 1790 and 1820, propelling the state from fifth to first in population, and giving it top rank in manufacturing, banking, and commercial exports.³⁸ On the southern edge of the territory most affected by this migration, Catskill was drawn into the current, both in its connections to the fast-developing interior of the state and in alterations of local character.

Something of the social and cultural shift from the Catskill of the eighteenth century to that of the early nineteenth century may be read from the reaction to the aforementioned murder of Sally Hamilton in Athens, the town just north of Catskill. This incident has sometimes been paired with the Leeds ghost story in gazettes and histories.³⁹ Although the cases are certainly different, the great ado surrounding the murder of the genteel Hamilton in the more "enlightened" decades of the early nineteenth century both emphasizes the lack of ado over a poor servant girl's death in the mid-eighteenth century and suggests how the developing cultural atmo-

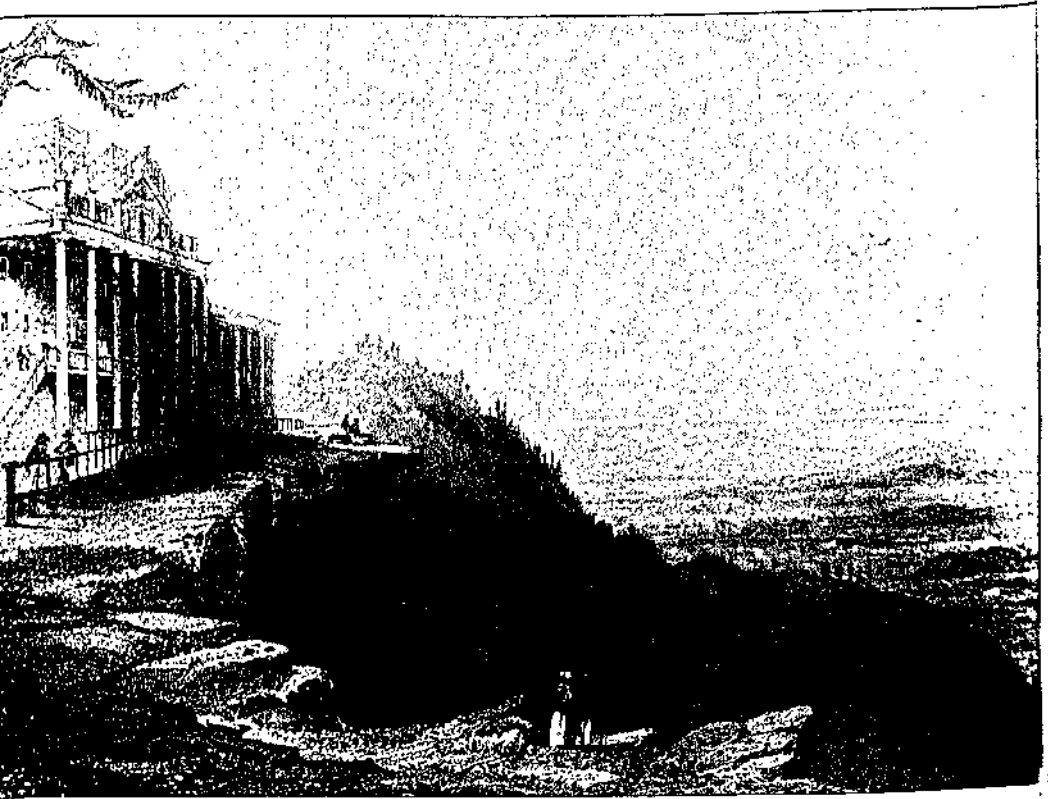
sphere might have nurtured recollection of the servant girl's tragic story.⁴⁰ Hamilton, the daughter of Samuel Hamilton, Esq., was returning home one night in 1813, when, within twenty rods of the house, she was beaten and killed. Her body was found several days later in Murderer's Creek. The murder and its aftermath were widely reported in a manner both sentimental and sensationalistic. A Hudson newspaper, proclaiming the murder a "*most daring atrocity*," detailed the signs of violence on Hamilton's body and reported that she had been "*wilfully murdered by some person or persons unknown*." "No occurrence," the article commented, "has ever taken place in this vicinity, that has ever excited to an equal degree the sensibility of the community." Hamilton, the newspaper averred, "possessed to the full an equal share of the attractions and accomplishments of her sex [and] a most irreproachable character," and her funeral was attended by "a large concourse" from the towns on both sides of the river. Rewards were offered, and a number of trials were conducted and followed by the public over the next several years. Hamilton's parents erected a gravestone "Sacred to the memory of Sally Hamilton" and engraved with a poem.⁴¹ If the unsolved mystery of the murder suggests an underside to local growth—a transient population, which might include murderous strangers (a falsely accused army deserter was among those tried)—the reaction to the murder suggests the rise of new cultural values, as well as the rise of communications, particularly newspaper coverage, which linked what had once been local enclaves into broader sensibilities, and drew outside attention to those enclaves.

William Stone in many ways embodied the changes being brought to bear on eastern Greene County. He was the child of New Englanders who had relocated to New York, and he was a newspaper man. In fact the Hudson newspaper that reported Sally Hamilton's murder was the *Northern Whig*, which Stone would own and operate from 1814 to 1816. More to the point, if Stone's comments, cited above, reflected the general economic and demo-

graphic shifts in the area, his very presence in 1824 was linked to new directions in the area's economy and cultural setting. Whereas turnpikes and tons of produce were portentous news in 1803, in 1824 it was the opening of the Catskill Mountain House, the first of the Catskill resorts, which indicated Greene County's future, especially as visions of commercial prominence were deflated with each mile dug on the Erie Canal. "The vicinity of the Catskill Mountain," Stone writes, "has now become one of the most popular places of fashionable resort in the United States."⁴² The opening of the Mountain House, very visibly set on a mountainside ledge, signaled a developing interconnectedness to new, romantic values and aesthetics that would draw tourists, writers, and artists into the area.⁴³

These developments, as we shall see, animate the ghost story Stone wrote of Leeds; but it is also important to understand that not everything in Catskill had changed. Indeed, this was in large part the basis of its romantic attractiveness. Alongside the signs of modernization in the Catskill area were still to be found holdovers from the eighteenth century. If maps had come to be dotted with New England names, they also indicated that many of the "old families" remained, particularly in more hinterland sections like Leeds. In fact Salisbury descendants were still living in the Salisbury house when Stone passed by. And old hierarchies, practices, and concerns also endured locally and regionally. The land problems that had brought some upriver tenant farmers to arms in the mid-eighteenth century had not dissipated. Slavery also continued to be legal in New York until 1827, and according to the *History of Greene County*, "Most of the old landed proprietors continued to hold slaves up to the time of the final act of manumission."⁴⁴

It is from these overlapping histories that the ghost story of Leeds emerged in the early nineteenth century; and William L. Stone's story about an "unhappy master" and an "unfortunate servant" is clearly related both to what had changed and to what was



"View from the Mountain House, Catskill," by W. H. Bartlett. From *American Scenery; or Land, Lake, and River Illustrations of Transatlantic Nature* (London: G. Virtue, 1840). Courtesy of Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

left in the neighborhood of Leeds. The story contains an intersection of old and new history; it reflects both local and external meanings and modes, and the ghosts who inhabit the tale operate on multiple planes of implication and intent.

As the earliest print version to appear, the tale captured by Stone is more likely than later versions to have been founded solely in lo-

cal telling; and on one level the ghosts in the tale reveal roots in local culture, memory, and social dynamics. Stone never explicitly reveals his source for this story, but there are reasons to believe that it came from what might conventionally be called the local folk: small or tenant farmers, working townspeople, or perhaps slaves or their descendants. The folkloric underpinnings of the tale are suggested both by the indications of oral transmission that Stone incorporates into the story and by the types of ghosts that appear. In particular, the ghost cow, dog, and horse that appear in the Leeds ghost story have analogues in the folklore of northern Europe and Britain, as does the figure with candles for fingertips.⁴⁵ Ghostly animals recur in other area folklore as well, and ghost dogs in particular often appear as surrogate or companion ghosts who either defend or reveal something otherwise hidden.⁴⁶

The story proves that the case of William Salisbury and Anna Dorothea Swarts did not pass without public comment in the neighborhood. Although the courts and official history turned a blind eye, as Stone puts it, "the keen eyes of superstition had seen, and her tremulous tongue related, many tales of startling terror." The story also acts as a medium for rendering an alternative local judgment, serving to affix blame and guilt where courts and official records had failed. This is apparent in the transformation made of the legal outcome of the case. Instead of the case's having been "ignored" at the grand jury stage, the legend holds that Salisbury was "tried, and convicted of murder!"—a shift that emphasizes a sense that status and wealth, not innocence, were the keys to Salisbury's escape from real punishment.

Within the story, the ghosts themselves serve to communicate the alternate judgment regarding the case of William Salisbury, to maintain recollection of the incident in the public mind, to indicate guilt, and to frighten and admonish the community that has allowed the injustice. The ghost cow, as it stands "lowing among the rocks," mourns; the dog, which stands "pointing and howling

towards the mansion," accuses; the female figure, with candles for fingertips, as she screams wildly and laughs hysterically, seems to embody a tragic irrationality in the circumstances and outcome of the case. Perhaps the most suggestive and literally revealing of the ghosts in Stone's narration are the spectral forms assumed by the dead girl herself. In one instance, the female figure appears in tattered garments with streaming hair, a macabre sexualized image, especially as she is being dragged by "a white horse of gigantic size, with fiery eyeballs and distended nostrils." In the next instance, she is even more completely exposed, a skeleton "half enveloped in a winding sheet." She is a woman very visibly undone, and, beyond implications of actual sexual improprieties, the image conveys a sense of force and violation.

While clearly revealing an enduring sense of historical injustice, the retention of this obscure servant girl's case in local consciousness implies more than just memory of a past event. The distinct class line embedded in the story—in the types of ghosts, in the transformation of the verdict to emphasize wealth, and also in the exaggeration of Salisbury's hold over the land in the opening to the tale—suggests that the incident resonated with more contemporary local issues and tensions. The story hints at simmering resentments over local power disparities, which had erupted in the mid-eighteenth century and would erupt again in the 1830s and 1840s.

But this is not all there is to the story. Indeed, there is a certain duplicity detectable in the tale. While the tale and its ghosts may encode local culture, opinions, and tensions, they are at the same time colored by Stone's reading of the situation, his editing of and editorializing on the story as received. Although he was born in the Hudson Valley in 1792 and had done stints at newspapers in Hudson and Albany, Stone was hardly a "local."⁴⁷ And as a man of strong Federalist and then Whig affiliations, and a Mason to boot, he was, as he said, "no democrat." Speaking of universal suffrage, he said: "I hate the mob!"; elsewhere he called the farmers who par-

anticipated in Shays' Rebellion "the deluded multitude."⁴⁸ Thus he would not, it seems, have been sympathetic to the democratic undertones of the ghost story from Leeds. At the same time, Stone was thoroughly devoted to the development of upstate New York, had sincere historical interests, and was a man of literary aspirations. Alongside his newspaper work, he had started literary journals, and he wrote numerous tales and sketches about New York and New England.⁴⁹ Something of Stone's political and cultural leanings at the time of his trip to Catskill may be gauged from the pages of the *Commercial Advertiser* from the late summer of 1824. Alongside coverage of the French general LaFayette's return tour, of Greeks fighting for independence, of the work of the American Colonization Society (Stone was antislavery), and of general political wranglings in Albany, the *Commercial Advertiser* contained long articles about Lord Byron; extracts from Walter Scott's latest, *Redgauntlet*; and a lengthy review of Irving's *Tales of a Traveller*, this last appearing in the same edition of the newspaper in which Stone described Catskill Landing as part of his series "Ten Days in the Country."⁵⁰ The review is suggestive of a qualified romanticism that is also evident in Stone's ghost story. Denouncing "that craving and unhealthy appetite which prevails so much now-a-days, after every thing new, marvellous, or ghostly," the review nonetheless praises Irving's latest ghost tales on the grounds that, as they tend to question their own substance, they simultaneously entertain and instruct.

In this light, the ghosts in Stone's story begin to reveal other aspects in their character, aspects not entirely compatible with the local meanings and motivations that the tale suggests on another level. The ghost types in the tale may have deep roots in vernacular religion and culture, representing images that had long been part of an "iconography of death."⁵¹ Yet they are also, at the moment in which Stone is writing in the 1820s, very much contemporary and literary. Indeed, in certain characteristics—particularly their explicit whiteness (white cow, white dog, white horse) and the appearance

of the ghost as a skeleton—Stone's ghosts of Leeds show a decided family resemblance to the types of ghostly creatures who inhabited gothic tales of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with which both Stone and his readership would have been familiar. So common were such images in gothic literature that as early as 1798 an American magazine printed a tongue-in-cheek "Recipe for Modern Romance" calling for tales of "ghosts dressed in white" perambulating about, perhaps a "skeleton with a live face or a live body with a head of a skeleton," or again "a ghost all in white."⁵² A more immediate and direct influence may be detected in the appearance of a "woman in white" in *Tales of a Traveller*.⁵³

Hints that Stone manipulated the ghosts of Leeds to suit romantic tastes arise in another tale, set in neighboring Ulster County, that appears in his 1834 collection, *Tales and Sketches, Such as They Are*. In this story of the ghost of a murdered peddler, Stone first describes the ghost looking as he did in life except that he was "deadly pale." Later a more significant distinction surfaces concerning how the ghost is seen. While "for the most part, in these oft-repeated nightly visitations, the [peddler] appeared as when a regular and substantial inhabitant of this world"—that is, while most people described the ghost as recognizably life-like—Stone writes: "Sometimes, indeed, in the eyes of more excitable and poetical temperaments, the spectre was invested with more picturesque, if not more terrific characteristics. The eyes of the steed had been seen to glare like fire-balls, while flames and smoke were breathed from his distended nostrils, and instead of the [peddler], a skeleton sat upright upon the box—'Whose loose teeth in their sockets shook, and grinned terrific, a sardonic look—'"⁵⁴ In the correspondence of characteristics and types, this later tale suggests that the characters of Stone's tale from Leeds are to some extent drawn from stock, or brought into line with what, for Stone's readership, might be expected of a ghost. An admission of sorts may also be seen in the attribution of the skeleton to "poetical" origins, while its literary

lineages are immediately apparent in its attachment to quoted material.

It becomes clear that the ghosts from Leeds have been genericized to suit the tastes of readers and would-be tourists—an act that employs the ghosts in a political as well as aesthetic duplicity, a counteraction that is being effected in the tale. Stone to some degree abstracts the ghosts from their politicized local meanings and contexts. Indeed, although protesting voices are heard through the narrative, Stone consistently distances himself from the townsfolk's judgment. His version of the tale defuses the popular indictments suggested in the story, calling Salisbury the "unhappy master" and wavering in its assignation of blame. ("By a fright, or some other cause," the narrator explains, "the horse ran off.") The popular voice is characterized as a "superstition," itself personified as a shrewish gossip, and the veracity of those who claimed to witness the ghostly appearances is questioned. "It would be difficult," Stone writes teasingly, "to prove that the spectators approached very near." Later he writes, with what seems intentional ambivalence, that "there were those living, who pretended that they had seen a neat silken string" around the man's neck. Sympathy for the master is also evident in the closing strains of the passage: "For 75 years he had led a quiet and inoffensive life, and who would rudely break in upon his repose? . . . Peace be to his ashes!"

Stone's version of the tale simultaneously suggests and obscures origins, meanings, and transmission. The figures are vague, half-revealed characters, seen or heard at unpredictable intervals, existing mainly at the level of speculation and rumor. And their modes of manifesting themselves, while linking them to existing lore and types, also serve to efface implications and identities. In an anecdote accompanying the ghost story from Leeds, Stone can be seen blanking out names, presenting the local tavern owner, the dupe of the tale, as M____g S_____n (for Martin G. Shuneman).⁵⁵ In the case of Anna Dorothea Swarts, part of her blankness and loss

of identity probably results from Stone's, and perhaps his informant's, ignorance of her name and background. Nonetheless, in presenting his version of the story he has heard, and in aligning it with recognizable, desirable stereotypes, Stone further blanks the ghosts that on another frequency suggest guilt or protest. The ghosts in their emphasized whiteness, shroudedness, and skeletal overexposure are both positive types and symptoms of distances and effacements, something that also renders them negatives.

The pale ghosts in the story told by William Leete Stone are thus thoroughly double-sided. On one hand drawn from folk culture, on the other from literary stock, these ghosts half reveal and half obscure local content and discontent. They seem to carry a critique of a locally infamous injustice and of a local power imbalance, yet in the plastic insubstantiality of ghostliness, they are susceptible to being tied to other agendas. Still, Stone cannot be blamed too much for his rendering. What he has essentially done is to draw out a latent vagueness and tenuousness within ghostliness itself. Moreover, the half-obfuscation that the ghosts themselves embody, their blankness, as it emphasizes their malleability, would paradoxically aid in their perpetuation. Stone's capture in print of this tale at what might be considered a critical moment of Hudson Valley haunted landscape formation, as well as his particular blank-slate rendering of it, helped fix the story in place while providing invitation for later adaptation. This was especially true as Stone's potentially ephemeral little tale gained a degree of permanence, appearing in Barber and Howe's *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (1842) and in Charles Rockwell's *The Catskill Mountains* (1867). Stone's tale, it turns out, was not simply duplicitous; it was also crucial to the extended haunting of Leeds.

"A COLOR OF THE SUPERNATURAL"

"Some characters," writes Charles M. Skinner in *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896), "prosaic enough, perhaps, in daily life, have

impinged so lightly on society before and after perpetrating their one or two great deeds, that they have already become shadowy and their achievements have acquired a color of the supernatural."⁵⁶ Although it would be difficult to label Anna Dorothea Swarts's death a great deed, she had nonetheless acquired a "color of the supernatural" by the mid-1820s. At that time the color was undeniably white. But William L. Stone's version of the tale was by no means definitive or proscriptive; quite the opposite, it seems. As the century progressed, this ghost underwent a series of chameleonlike mutations as a string of writers and tellers developed shadings and highlights on the ghostly negative provided by Stone. The way in which the ghost's identity and, more specifically, her color shifted to suit changing contexts and needs can be traced in two later nineteenth-century stories—one a novel titled *The Sutherlands* (1862), the other Charles Skinner's version of the tale in *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*.

The Sutherlands, written in the early 1860s by Miriam Coles Harris, wends its way through almost five hundred pages of romantic plots and subplots, ranging from England to Catskill. But it takes as its foundation the ghost story from Leeds. The geographical and chronological setting, the dragging death, the unusual court sentences, and stories of ghostly repercussions all reappear in Harris's book. "The country people would walk miles around to avoid passing within earshot of [Sutherland's house]," the narrator declares. "Ghosts, they believed, were its habitual tenants: [the] poor murdered [girl], chained to her ghastly horse, dashed nightly past the old man's window—the clatter of . . . hoofs upon the rocks echoed there the whole night long."⁵⁷

But here the girl who will curry the disfavor of her master, meet her death tied to a horse, and finally reappear as a ghost is not white but a slave of mixed African and Native American ancestry, with the Cooperesque name Nattee. Nattee is a favorite in the eighteenth-century household of Ralph Sutherland—a favorite

with everyone but Sutherland, a mean-tempered, boorish slaveholder who, through will and violence, has carved a domain out of the wilderness along Catskill Creek. Having fallen under the influence of an antislavery Methodist preacher, and having been whipped by Sutherland for eavesdropping on a family conversation, Nattee runs away. For days she is relentlessly pursued by Sutherland and his neighbors, as well as by his slaves, who are too afraid of him not to comply. "A more diligent and thorough [search]," writes Harris, "had never scoured the Five-Mile Woods."⁵⁸ But it is Sutherland who ultimately finds her, and thus the story turns toward its recognizable conclusion.

In a note appended to the 1871 edition of *The Sutherlands*, Harris states: "The extraordinary sentence passed upon the murderer, his strangely extended life, and the manner of the victim's death are traditions fully credited and widely diffused in the locality described."⁵⁹ Although the statement seems to echo Stone's assertions, it is quite possible that Harris herself had been in Catskill prior to writing the novel and had acquired knowledge of the legend independently. In *The Catskill Mountains*, Rockwell states that Harris had "spent some time in the neighborhood where these events are said to have occurred [and] made herself familiar with the traditions related."⁶⁰ A cosmopolitan New Yorker, Harris probably stayed at some point at the Catskill Mountain House or one of the other Catskill hotels that sprang up after it, where she could have been exposed both to Stone's version of the story and to stories from more local sources. Details in the novel suggest at least some knowledge or investigation of local places (Kiskatom, Five-Mile Woods), history (local quarrying, religious history, slavery), and family names. The name Harris gives her fictionalized Salisburys—Sutherland—which seems on one hand simply meant to suggest South Land, was also the name of a family that lived on Salisbury lands in the mid-nineteenth century, and thus perhaps reflects local research by Harris into the event.⁶¹ Most telling may

be the name of the slave, which, although it seems intended to resonate with Cooper's noble near-savage, Natty Bumppo, may also be a phonetic spelling of the Dutch name Annatje (related to Anna), as the *je* in Dutch would be pronounced like *ie* in English.⁶² This correspondence would imply that Harris literally *heard* the story from someone who knew something of the dead girl's name. It is therefore possible that Harris's romanticized, fictionalized account reveals aspects of the story unseen in Stone's whited-out edition.

Nonetheless, it is also apparent that Harris has seen in the ghost story of Leeds both literary and political opportunity, and that she colors the story to fit contemporary agendas and sensibilities. Her opening, in fact, boasts of the potential for historical reimagination made possible by the passage of time. Setting her tale one hundred years earlier (almost precisely coincident with the year of the original indictment), she writes, "There can . . . be no one to contradict the assertion that [the weather] was soft and sunny; it cannot possibly be proved that there was a cloud in the May sky . . . or that the tall poplars by the roadside did not throw their long shadows over greener fields than 1860 has seen, or is likely, with its drought and heat, to see."⁶³

Written on the verge of the Civil War, the novel employs the ghosts of Leeds in an antislavery agenda, one that seems directed against Northern complicity. When Nattee runs away, pursuing a "dangerous experiment of liberty," Harris writes, at once excusingly and accusingly, that "such was the sympathy among those early advocates of the peculiar institution, settled by the mother country upon the colonies before they were old enough to choose for themselves, that one and all, for miles around, lent readily their influence against the fugitive."⁶⁴ Although the novel is outwardly historical, these comments on local sympathy with the "peculiar institution" would have had contemporary regional and local implications. Not only was slavery legal until quite late in New York, but southerners were frequent guests at Catskill-area hotels, and the

men of Greene County had voted for Stephen Douglas over Abraham Lincoln in 1860 (they would also vote overwhelmingly against black suffrage in 1869).⁶⁵ Whether or not she has so specifically gauged the local political and social sensibilities, Harris's frequent use of the word "fugitive," her long and peril-filled account of Nattee's attempted escape, and the collusion of the Sutherland's neighbors in her recapture are surely meant to evoke the notorious Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (which legally enmeshed the North in upholding slavery) in order to make northerners question and renounce their own complicity in such tragedies and in the system that produced them. Although the characterization of Ralph Sutherland as having a "native perversity" dilutes the message somewhat, Harris points to a systemic corruption underlying the awful results of the story. This is suggested, for instance, in the foreshadowing observations of Sutherland's English nephew: "It seemed . . . as if the household were all wrong—a good and prosperous edifice founded on shifting sands. . . . What was it but the reward of iniquity?"⁶⁶ The statement, especially when aligned with Harris's identification of the ghost, casts a wide net of blame and guilt, pointing to slavery and also to questionable acquisitions of Native American territory.⁶⁷

Harris had clearly been influenced by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); what she hit on in the ghost story of a servant girl from Leeds was an opportunity to create a northern "Uncle Tom"—a tragic figure who, more than the theoretical arguments echoing in Sutherland's nephew's silent musings, might operate as an emotional catalyst for antislavery sympathy. Renée Bergland, in her book on Indian ghosts in American literature, writes that America in the mid-nineteenth century was haunted by "African American slaves and Indians as well as disfranchised women and struggling workers."⁶⁸ Miriam Coles Harris's version of the servant girl's ghost is all of these. Given a ghost of ambiguous identity, who nonetheless points to a tragedy resulting from the inequalities of

class and caste, and who echoes the problematic powerlessness of women which underscored nineteenth-century sentimentalism, Harris adds a specific weight and meaning: she taps into a contemporary romanticization of African Americans, evident in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, together with an evocative profusion of Native American ghosts in that era, to produce a sentimental if uneven social critique of slavery and dispossession.⁶⁹

It seems that, writing a generation later, this identification was precisely what Charles Skinner, a newspaper columnist and writer, wanted to avoid when he composed a version of the Leeds ghost story for his collection *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896). Skinner was almost certainly aware of both the Stone and Harris versions of the tale. His description of the various manifestations (including the secondary ghosts that had gone missing from *The Sutherlands*) undoubtedly owes something to Stone:

After dark [the master's] house was avoided, for gossips said that a shrieking woman passed it nightly, tied at the tail of a giant horse with fiery eyes and smoking nostrils; that a skeleton in a winding sheet had been found there; that a curious thing, somewhat like a woman, had been known to sit on his garden wall, with lights shining from her finger-tips, uttering unearthly laughter; and that domestic animals reproached the man by groaning and howling beneath his windows.⁷⁰

Skinner's debt to *The Sutherlands*, which went through eleven printings in nine years, is also evident as he begins, "Ralph Sutherland, who, early in the last century, occupied a stone house a mile from Leeds, in the Catskills, was a man of morose and violent disposition." Yet the ghost in Skinner's tale is not the anonymous servant of Stone's version, nor is she Indian or mulatto, nor even a slave. She is "a Scotch girl . . . virtually a slave . . . bound to work for [Sutherland] without pay until she had refunded to him her passage-money to this country."⁷¹

As in Harris's case, Skinner's identification may derive from local sources—particularly a Reverend Searle who was also cited in Rockwell's *The Catskill Mountains* (1867). Nonetheless, if Skinner did read Rockwell, he would have had several options available to him, including versions of the tale by Stone, by Harris, and by William Salisbury's own grandson, who thought that the girl was German.⁷² Moreover, Skinner was not averse to taking liberties in his retellings (something most evident in his recreations of tales by more prominent authors).⁷³ What, then, accounts for Skinner's apparently deliberate choice to make the ghost a Scottish servant?

On one side, the identity and condition of the servant girl in Skinner's tale seem related to a concern with contemporary labor conditions, a prominent topic in Skinner's column for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.⁷⁴ In particular, Skinner's version of the story suggests sympathy with the working and living conditions of European immigrants, a new kind of industrial slavery that was a central concern of this period, exposed in contemporary works such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). On the other hand, the assignment of Scottish ethnicity, as opposed to African, for instance, seems to reflect both the desires and fears of Americans looking to forget the perceived fiascos of Reconstruction, while facing increasing immigration from southern and eastern Europe. As the titles of his books attest—notably *Myths and Legends of Our New Possessions* (1899) and *American Myths and Legends* (1903)—Skinner wrote with the nation in mind, both in the sense that he was writing for a national audience and in the sense that he saw himself contributing to an imaginative act of nation-building. Skinner's claim in his preface that his tales “have been gathered from sources the most diverse . . . in every case reconstructed,” takes on particular valences in the context of the late nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Skinner's *Myths and Legends* collections and his ethnic reconstruction of the ghost from Leeds parallel other nationalistic endeavors from the period, such as historian Frederick Jackson Turner's influential 1893 essay, “The

Significance of the Frontier in American History," and the "White City" at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, whose expansive yet unified visions of American national achievement derived, in part, from the effacement or marginalization of potentially discordant ethnic or racial elements.⁷⁶ These efforts coincided with the dramatic rise in the South of Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, which were effecting wide-scale marginalization of African Americans through political disfranchisement and segregation. Indeed, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* was published in the same year that the Supreme Court delivered its famous, long-standing "separate but equal" ruling to uphold segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.⁷⁷

In this light, Skinner's decision not to cast the servant girl as a black slave seems part of a more endemic whitewashing that is evident within the wider scope of his collection. One has to look hard in *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* to find an African-American character; of the few black characters in the New York stories, one is an "ill-disposed, ill-favored blackamoor," another a "dark-featured" man, perhaps "Egyptian."⁷⁸ The preface is more deliberate in its categorical eviscerations: "as to folk-lore, that of the Indian tribes and of the Southern negro is too copious to be recounted in this work."⁷⁹ And at least one of the stories in the southern section of the book explicitly reveals Skinner's awareness of fears of racial disorder during and after Reconstruction: every time the Republicans were about to win an election, the story goes, a spectral barge with "gigantic Negroes who danced on deck, showing horrible faces" would appear on a Virginia river.⁸⁰ In making his ghostly girl Scottish, Skinner is able to maintain a plausible yet evocative otherness in the story, which allows for sympathy and drama even as it satisfies a national wishful thinking for a whiter American past and present that was evident both in Jim Crow laws and in the rise of movements seeking to limit immigration from "darker" nations.⁸¹ Even though Skinner's ghost is an immigrant, she is of the white, English-speaking variety.

SPOOKY HOLLOW

The accounts we have examined thus far demonstrate how the ghost from Leeds has been swayed by the broadest aesthetic, social, and political movements. Stone's white ghosts are painted with reference to a transatlantic romanticism and the rise of cosmopolitan tourism, Harris's ghost girl is colored to support an antislavery agenda, and Skinner's ghost is rewhitened in a nationalistic sweep. The vicissitudes of color and ethnicity in these accounts suggest the wide potential contained in this ghost's underlying indefiniteness—its susceptibility to abstraction and interpretation according to taste and need. Yet it is also true that these accounts were written by "outsiders." As each of these versions claims a local base while enlisting the ghost to serve larger purposes and audiences, the question inevitably arises whether these stories have any special reference or relevance to the town of Leeds. In other words, we are left wondering: What is the ghost's *local* color?

Charles Rockwell in 1867 characterized the Leeds ghost story as "so often repeated, and so religiously believed in all the country round." Visiting in 1906, C. G. Hine claimed, "Many are the ghost stories based on this legend."⁸² But although these references bespeak a continued local proliferation of the story, the local sensibilities regarding the tale in the nineteenth century are largely irretrievable. Local lore tends to be ephemeral, often lost or inaccessible, and to a large extent the story from Leeds is no exception.

Yet for various reasons, among them the development of folklore courses at the New York State College at Albany under Louis Jones in the 1940s—an outgrowth of the tremendous interest in folk cultures that emerged during the Depression—a significant record remains of what was available and current in the Leeds area in the mid-twentieth century.⁸³ Materials collected by Jones's students, along with contemporary letters and articles, provide an opportunity to examine the legend as it existed locally: to see how the vari-

ous versions and details were situated with regard to local sources and society, and to consider how and why the ghost of Anna Dorothea Swarts continued to exist and evolve in Leeds.

Perhaps the most compelling of the contributions to be entered on this story in the Jones Archives is a letter that appeared in the *Catskill Daily Mail* in August 1942, written by one Ella Rush Murray:

The legend of "Spooky Hollow" is too well known to repeat here beyond the fact that "a Mr. Salisbury" caused the death of a Negro woman slave, who ran away, by catching her at the "Giant's Bowling Alley" on the Old King's Road and tying her with a rope to his horse. . . . On stormy nights she is supposed to appear there and scream. However, Miss Frances Mann, whose father, John T. Mann, was the owner of what is now Day & Holt Co., told me that her father had a friend, a Mr. Van Deusen, a lawyer, who lived in the old part of the house now the property of Mrs. Ely Parker Spalding on Spring Street. Mr. Van Deusen said that the woman who was killed was not a Negro slave but a German girl, an indentured. She was a Hessian, and when, during the Revolution, the Hessians were in camp at Saugerties with the English troops, she asked Mr. Salisbury for permission to go to see her fellow country-men. He quite naturally refused.

The rest of the story is the same.⁸⁴

The letter is telling in both its consistency with and its difference from treatments of the ghost story examined so far, and it deserves close attention for what it reveals about the place and implications of the ghost in Leeds.

To some extent, the details of Murray's letter might suggest the influence of outside narratives; for instance, the starting assumption that the ghost is a "Negro woman slave" may seem to derive from *The Sutherlands*. That such sources were available locally and

might infuse local lore is evidenced by other entries in the Jones Archives, which refer to Stone, Harris, and others.⁸⁵ But what sets Murray's letter apart is its explicit localism. The letter reveals that the proliferation of ghost types in Leeds cannot simply be dismissed as a sort of contamination. In her references to local landscape and belief, and in her apparent spontaneity of purpose (unlike Jones's students, she is not deliberately collecting folklore), Murray proves that the ghost had a real presence in the local scene. This is evident, in part, in her offhand reference to Spooky Hollow, which, along with a Spook Rock, was related to the story of the ghostly servant girl. Murray simply takes it for granted as a known landmark; she begins her letter not by locating it but by using it to identify a "ridge on the Leeds road just back of 'Spooky Hollow,'" before getting to her main discussion.⁸⁶ Murray's letter shows that people in the town talked about the ghost (for instance, Miss Frances Mann). And she reveals that the legend—specifically the belief that the ghost was a black slave—had local currency; it was "too well known to be repeated." Her statement finds support in a *Catskill Daily Examiner* article from 1935 which called it "common knowledge" that Spooky Hollow was haunted by William Salisbury's "slave girl."⁸⁷

What is ultimately most interesting in Murray's account, however, is that even as it shows the haunting to be a well-established part of local landscape and life, it also uncovers the existence of a meaningful contention over the ghost within the local community. Indeed, Murray's purpose in writing is not to reemphasize the common interpretation, but rather to bring up a counterclaim she has heard, specifically that the ghost is that of a German indentured servant, a Hessian killed during the Revolution, rather than a black slave. Although it is often much more difficult to apprehend local motives, as opposed to those of "outside" writers like Harris or Skinner, the fact that Murray situates the contesting claims over the ghost's identity with regard to local sources provides something of

a key for unlocking the local implications of the contending racial assignments. Specifically, dimensions of the local battle over the ghost emerge when we know something about "Mr. Van Deusen."

The Van Deusen who stands at the end of Murray's somewhat tortuous path of names most likely either was, or was related to, Dr. Claudius Van Deusen, described by C. G. Hine in 1906 as "a typical, old-style country doctor, with all the best that the word implies; a finely educated man."⁸⁸ More than this, Van Deusen, who in the late nineteenth century lived in one of the Salisbury houses, was related to the Salisburys. His step-grandfather was William Salisbury's son.⁸⁹ First prompted by a magazine article (probably one appearing in *Harper's*), Van Deusen had begun trying, as Hine writes, "forever to lay the ghost" in an article for the *Catskill Recorder* in 1883.⁹⁰ He was still trying in the early 1890s, contributing an account to R. Lionel DeLisser's *Picturesque Catskills* of 1894, and still working to redeem the historical Salisbury from the legendary one when Hine spoke to him more than a decade later. The substance of Van Deusen's version, as it appeared in DeLisser's and Hine's books, was that the girl was the daughter of "poor whites," that her services had been purchased from her parents (a common arrangement), that Salisbury tied her to his horse "as the only practical way of leading her back to the paths of industry," and that her death was "so evidently the result of an accident that there was no arrest nor trial."⁹¹ Van Deusen even explained the myth of the noose, saying that Salisbury might have worn a cord around his neck, as it was believed to prevent nosebleeds.⁹²

Leaving aside for now that Claudius Van Deusen almost certainly never said that the girl was Hessian (as is suggested in Murray's letter), it is possible to discern in Murray's 1942 letter a local contest over the ghost in which the different assignments of race cleave to a large extent along local class lines, and indeed along family lines. On one side in Murray's letter is common knowledge—an anonymous, diffuse, popularly based authority—which

holds that the ghost is that of a black slave, something that emphasizes a sense of injustice in the town's early history. That is, to say that the girl was a "Negro woman slave" is to make her more dramatically powerless, and to stress the abuse of power on the part of Salisbury specifically, and the slaveholding founding families by implication. On the other side of the contest in Murray's letter is a prominent, named descendant of the early families, who has attempted to counter what is perceived as an indictment of the old local elite by asserting that the girl in question was "German" or "poor white," and thus to a degree complicit in the system of servitude and social order.

The sense of the story as an item of local contest and the specific class- and family-based lines of division suggested in Murray's letter are corroborated in an account of the case by the county historian, Jesse Van Vechten Vedder, probably written close in time to Murray's. Vedder, whose maiden and married names also link her to the earliest settlers of Catskill, wrote on the story several times in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹³ Although in her 1922 book, *Historic Catskill*, Vedder half-indulged a storytelling impulse—giving what she says is the real story, but ending on more mythic notes—she was a good deal sterner in a later response to a newspaper article about the ghost.⁹⁴ Her letter demonstrates how, and with whom, the event and the stories about it still hit a nerve in Leeds. She writes:

In your issue of Sunday Nov. 17th there is an interesting article[,] in substance probably taken from an old magazine of the 1860's which has attracted considerable attention and interest in this vicinity. At the request of citizens and descendants of the Salisbury family to whom it refers, I am sending a true version of the [erroneous] tale (the author of which doubtless was intent only on weaving an interesting story

from one [first] handed down through generations of superstitious slaves).⁹⁵

Where Murray's letter divides between common knowledge and Mr. Van Deusen, Vedder's letter effectively sharpens the divisions, placing on one side what she paints as the embattled Salisbury family and what she tellingly calls the "citizens" of the town, and on the other side "generations of superstitious slaves" (and, by implication, their descendants in the area) along with what she elsewhere calls "superstitious townfolks."⁹⁶ And to counter the accusations of common folk and slaves, Vedder's "true version," like Van Deusen's, operates from a sense of social order that is at once historically relativistic and conservative, laying blame for the tragedy not on a system of servitude that might be understood as unjust or undemocratic, but squarely on the girl who does not know her place: "In William's house was a bound girl, Anna Dorothea Schwartz [*sic*], who in spite of commands and warnings insisted upon visiting a family of more than doubtful reputation. In those days the master of a bound girl was held responsible for her good behavior. William had been sorely tried in this respect."⁹⁷ Vedder also enlists a variety of hard facts. "Indisputable court records" showed that the case never came to trial. And, to staunch the further flow of ghost stories, she says in conclusion that "Spook Rock disappeared when a state road was built," and "even the old gray mare is gone who occasionally [broke] from the pasture . . . sending the belated traveler scurrying back to town with wild tales."

Written from different perspectives, Murray's and Vedder's statements divide along very similar lines. What both accounts reveal is that the different types of ghost, the different assignments of identity, are intimately linked to underlying contests within the local populations over town history in terms of both content and mode. They are, in part, manifestations of a tug-of-war between of-

ficial, documented, written history and the type of oral, popular tradition which William L. Stone stumbled across in the 1820s, and which was still hard at work in the accounts of the mid-twentieth century. It is a contest over *belonging*, in which each side asserts itself through claims of special historical knowledge, and situates itself with reference to a figure who is alternately painted as a social outcast who was tragically wronged by the local elite, and as a social misfit who brought about her own death by her failure to mind her place.

Of course, the two sides—one interested more in the figurative aspects of the case, the other interested more in the facts—are talking past each other. This, too, is evident in Vedder's account, and in what it, like Van Deusen's multiple efforts, fails to accomplish. Indeed, it is worth pausing further over Vedder's letter, as it represents a particularly crucial and paradoxical moment in the epic of Anna Dorothea Swarts's ghost story. If at some level the purpose of the ghost story was to draw attention to the incident and to the case, then Vedder's response, ironically, represents what might be seen as the apotheosis of the ghost; that is, Vedder, while trying to defend William Salisbury against indictments made by ghosts, is compelled to bring to light the original case, the actual bill of indictment, and, for the first time in generations, the dead girl's name. It is a strange moment: denying the ghost stories, Vedder seems to fulfill them; disparaging Anna Dorothea Swarts, she nonetheless resurrects her.

If the ghost stories emanated purely from what had been hidden and neglected, one might imagine for a moment that Vedder's rematerialization of the girl might mean the end of the ghost. Yet Vedder's attempt to contain the ghostly Anna Dorothea Swarts by calling up the historical one fails. First, there are simply not enough facts to fill the ghost-producing historical voids. Moreover, there is too large and varied a contingent of the public who prefer sto-

ries to fact. As Vedder's letter indicates, she, like Claudius Van Deusen, is fighting not one but several forces that, as we saw in William L. Stone's story, operate in an uneasy but productive collusion. Vedder guesses that the current article she is protesting is based on a "magazine article from the 1860's" (probably related to Harris's novel), which, in turn, she believes is based on stories told by local slaves. On one side are various "outsiders" who have seen in the local ghost various aesthetic and political potentials, and have drawn her accordingly. On the other are local vernacular and popular cultures in which the ghost also serves a number of purposes, from protesting class or racial disparities, to challenging the local elite, to perhaps simply enlivening the mundane local landscape and experience. Certainly, the local proliferation of the legend in the 1930s and 1940s may be related to the baneful effects of the Great Depression and World War II on the local economy, signaled by the closure of the Catskill Mountain House in 1942.⁹⁸

The ghost is simultaneously too shifty and too well entrenched, too interesting and too useful. So, Claudius Van Deusen's assertions are undone: as Murray's letter indicates, not only has the idea that the girl was black (whether based in *The Sutherlands* or in the claims of slaves) survived in local culture, but somewhere along the short grapevine between Van Deusen and Ella Rush Murray someone has added yet another identity, claiming that the ghost was a Hessian, a move that allows this local tragedy, and thus the history of Leeds, to resonate with the most dramatic event to touch regional history, the Revolutionary War. Meanwhile, Vedder's account, which itself testifies to Van Deusen's failure to dispel the ghosts, is no more successful in staunching the perpetuation of stories, even though she has more facts to tell. She is mistaken in thinking that the ghost story is only about the original case. Her little dam of facts is easily breached or circumvented by the stories and desires of residents and visitors alike.

Most telling, in fact, among the materials to be found in the Jones Archives is a letter written in 1956 to Louis Jones (then director of the New York State Historical Association) by one of William Salisbury's descendants, who apparently was not one of the local descendants Vedder mentions in her account. This descendant *thanks* Jones—who had included a version of the Leeds ghost story in his recent children's book of Hudson Valley ghost tales—for “calling attention to my murderous ancestor! It has made my genealogical quest quite exciting.”⁹⁹ Moreover, distressed at the neglected condition of William's house, called the “Ghost House” by the owner at the time (who had yet another version of the ghost story to tell), the letter writer wonders whether anything might be done: “As you pointed out, the N.Y. Thruway has an exit a mile to the east of Leeds and this may help revive this little village, including the haunted house.” The note reads almost as a betrayal of Jesse Van Vechten Vedder's attempt to defend Salisbury against the allegations in the ghost stories. Even more, it underlines the problematic nature of ghostliness for Anna Dorothea Swarts; her potentially indicting ghost is once again co-opted—this time providing entertainment to one of Salisbury's descendants, who hoped to enlist her to revive the Salisbury properties, especially as the new highway connections promised to draw in a new generation of travelers.

And so, stories continued to be told in Leeds, and the ghost continued to change shades. In 1975 an article in the Catskill *Daily Mail* announcing the opening of an antiques store in William Salisbury's old house reported that it was “a young American Indian girl” who was indentured to William Salisbury, who was killed “in the vicinity of what is now the Thruway exit at Leeds,” who “appears yearly at the anniversary of her death being dragged behind the riderless horse,” and who, conveniently, “now haunts the manor house.”¹⁰⁰ Thus it was that the antiques dealer was “offering ‘200 years of tradition’ along with her fabrics, rugs, handmade ponchos

and shawls." Anna Dorothea Swarts, dead two hundred years, was still serving in William Salisbury's house.

In many ways the ghost story of Leeds is unique, and is compelling for precisely that reason. Unlike, for instance, the nationally pervasive story of the ghostly hitchhiker, who exists both everywhere and nowhere, the ghost of Anna Dorothea Swarts belongs to Spooky Hollow and is about the village of Leeds in a way that is nontransferable.¹⁰¹ The origins of the legends, the details of every version retain some link to the particular, peculiar case from the mid-eighteenth century; and the emergence and development of the ghost legend have to do with discrete local events, beliefs, people, and places. Each of the various renderings and debates about the ghost contains specific valences and meanings that resist generalization.

Yet the shifts and transformations in the story of Leeds are also broadly representative. Versions of this story coincide, either directly or tangentially, with ghost types prevalent throughout the Hudson Valley, while the variability of the ghost's identity exposes a more fundamental aspect of ghostliness, a relationship between vagueness and definition that allows us to fathom the social and political functions of hauntings. In essence, the shifting identification of Anna Dorothea Swarts's ghost points to a profound though not entirely antagonistic tension at the core of haunting, a dialectic between ghosts as impositions and as choices; as received, unbidden residues of the past and as adaptable, impressionable entities.

Recent scholars locate the psychosocial roots of hauntings in the Freudian concept of repression. Kathleen Brogan in her study of ghosts and ethnicity observes that "denied history reasserts itself, much like the return of the repressed."¹⁰² The town of Leeds is haunted by the past; the ghost *is* in some way the reassertion of what was "ignored" in the case of William Salisbury and Anna Dorothea Swarts. Swarts's ghost signifies things hidden in a collec-

tive unconscious; she is the martyr and memory of a secret history, recalling, for instance, exploitative and violent systems of servitude that existed in the North, in New York, as well as elsewhere. She represents whole categories of people who have been tucked away from view—the sorts of people about whom Avery Gordon writes: “it is essential to imagine their life worlds because you have no other choice but to make things up.”¹⁰³

Certainly, this story is related to issues of gender. A female servant, completely subject to and overshadowed by her master, Anna Dorothea Swarts embodies in exaggerated form the problematic historical situation of women in general. From laws of coverture in the colonial period to the ideology of domesticity in the nineteenth century, gendered social structures have contributed to ghost stories, in part by making women vulnerable to exertions of masculine will, and thus to wrongs that could arouse haunting feelings of guilt or sympathy, particularly with the rise of a sentimental culture that at once lamented and idealized female suffering.¹⁰⁴ More basically, as they have been denied economic and political selfhood in life, women have been eclipsed historically, rendered obscure in ways that easily translate into ghostliness—hence the multitude of shady women roaming the roads, streams, and woods of Greene County and beyond.¹⁰⁵

In Anna Dorothea Swarts’s case, her haunting invisibility as a female is redoubled by her social status, her almost undoubted poverty; and thus the haunting of Leeds is founded in issues of class as well as gender. It is also—indeed, most obviously—connected to questions of race and ethnicity. With the possible exception of Stone’s story, which assumes and exaggerates whiteness, the stories from Leeds are centrally concerned with assigning the ghost an ethnic identity. Even those that do not outwardly ascribe African, Native American, Scottish, or German ancestry usually make some qualifying reference: Van Deusen says “poor white”; Vedder renders the spelling of the girl’s name (“Schwartz”) to seem more Ger-

man than Dutch.¹⁰⁶ On one level, this emphasis bespeaks an American privileging of race and ethnicity over social class. On another level, the necessity of an ethnic or racial description seems to reflect apprehensions of a more basic otherness that approximates, or can be understood as, race or ethnicity. Charles Skinner's phrase "a color of the supernatural" reads ghostliness itself as a racial designation.

Tied in her variations to social anxieties about underrepresented others lurking in regional as well as national history—women, the poor, Native Americans, slaves, immigrants—the ghostly servant girl's story more broadly relates to what might be called the problem of the past. The past is a foreign country, David Lowenthal asserts in the title of his book on memory.¹⁰⁷ In the case of the United States this is true both in the sense of a history inhabited by people largely from other places, and in the sense of the difference between pre- and post-Revolutionary affiliation. Notably, most versions of the Leeds ghost story in part attribute Salisbury's escape from execution to the discontinuity in government resulting from the American Revolution, which cemented in neglect and amnesia the injustice of the past. Locked in the history of "a foreign country," the case remains permanently unclosed, and the ghost unintegrated. Whereas Kathleen Brogan writes of a movement from possession to exorcism, or from bad to good haunting as ethnic writers are able to integrate their ancestry,¹⁰⁸ what makes the ghost of Leeds so difficult to exorcise, the reason why she continues to haunt in ethnic form, is her essential difference from the ghosts Brogan sees haunting recent ethnic literature: Anna Dorothea Swarts is not an ancestor. She is irretrievably other. Her ghost emanates from the lost history of a local tragedy, from the problematics of ethnic and racial diversity in the early settlement, and from the distance between the eighteenth and later centuries. Neither she nor the incidents surrounding her death can be entirely assimilated into the present landscape and culture. Thus the ascriptions of ethnicity, as

well as blankness, and the inability of the ghosts to communicate fully—they howl, shriek, low, cry, moan, and laugh incomprehensibly—represent at the core of this haunting an inability to comprehend a history that seems alien, but refuses to go away. In part, then, the unresolved past haunts by virtue of its unresolvability, and the diversity of assignations represents attempts to estimate what has been lost or to give understandable form to what seems unexplainable or unassimilable.

But this is not all. First, the past is not entirely a foreign country, and ghosts haunt only insofar as they have not become entirely irrelevant. The main work of haunting is done by the living. As much as it may be haunted by the ghosts of the past, the town of Leeds is even more haunted by stories people tell. C. G. Hine, noting the number of variations of the story available in 1906, marked it as “showing how much can be made of little when the neighbors really take hold and help.”¹⁰⁹ The phrasing is gruesomely appropriate. While the ghost of Anna Dorothea Swarts may represent a fearsome reassertion of things repressed or unresolved, she also embodies the exact opposite of agency: a servant, female, tied and drawn entirely against her will by a motive force that is not her own. While the various ascriptions of ethnicity to the ghost may encode apprehensions about the unknown past, they are also the colorings and interpretations of generations and individuals who have seen, in the vague, passive servant girl’s ghost, an opportunity to draw her in the direction of their own desires.

The story of Anna Dorothea Swarts’s ghost demonstrates how ghosts, who on one side may be undesirable or troubling eruptions of repressed history, also exist as a sort of “usable past” that may be cut and colored to suit a wide variety of frameworks and needs. The ghost waxes and wanes, evolves and multiplies with reference to discernible aesthetic trends and cultural models: folk culture, gothic and romantic literature, sentimentalism, a vogue for Indian ghosts, the heightened interest in folklore in the 1930s. And the

variations of type are simultaneously motivated by political, social, or commercial demands, from the national to the personal. As a skeleton in a winding sheet, the ghost is turned into an inviting stereotype for nineteenth-century tourists looking for domestic romance. As a black slave, she can serve an antislavery agenda or be used to undermine local elite authority. Certainly, there is an ambivalence of fear and desire in hauntings: ghosts may represent those whose disappearance or death leave guilt or an appalling gap, or they may stand for ideal ancestors whose ghostly presence is enlisted to assert priority and ownership. Nonetheless, what the story of Leeds makes clear is that, as much as ghosts may be emanations of repressed pasts, they are also laden with present meaning. Anna Dorothea Swarts's ghost is itself haunted.

None of the stories of Leeds is pure fiction: each version is complex, double-sided. In her variations, the ghost is both vestige and novelty, positive and negative, powerful and powerless, a possessing force that descends upon the town and through history, and something passive that is possessed. It is in its double-sidedness, its ambivalence, its intertwining of imposition and interpretation, that the ghost really functions. What makes this haunting particularly effective is that, even though we can trace vectors of influence in the tale and detect where apparently deliberate switches in identification occur, it is impossible to distill out what is original or true and what are innovations (as in the case of Miriam Coles Harris's "Nattee"). What seem fictional liberties descend as the legendary inheritance of another generation. This confusion is what makes it so difficult to exorcise the ghost, especially as the mechanisms of decision and proliferation are most often hidden from view ("the tremulous tongue of superstition" and "common knowledge"). The double-sidedness of the servant girl's ghostliness—the combination of assertiveness and impressionability—makes the ghost simultaneously sticky and slippery. The ghost may not be provable, but, in the vagueness of history and the diffusion of storytelling,

she is also not disprovable. The point is directly and arrogantly made by A. E. P. Searing, who wins the award for most implausible casting of the ghost, presenting her as Spanish and the lover of Captain Kidd, in *The Land of Rip Van Winkle* (1884). When her narrator is challenged about the accuracy of his story, he simply replies, "I have told my story . . . the burden of disproof lies with you."¹¹⁰