

## NEW ENGLAND GHOSTS – the Hibbard House of Bath NH

This much we know: Harry Hibbard was born in Vermont in 1816, and he died of an unknown “brain disease” in 1872. After graduating from Dartmouth in 1835, he set up a law practice in Bath, New Hampshire, and held many posts in state government. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1849 to 1855. In 1848, he married a well-educated, lively, and socially active woman, Sarah Hale, who many believe strengthened his resolve to vote against The Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. It must, therefore, have saddened him to slowly lose his mental faculties in the last years of that decade.

Sarah, active in Bath’s social and political circles, was a notable collector of politicians’ autographs, historical books, and documents. Her only child, Alice, died young, so Sarah threw herself into community matters for the remainder of her life. The Hibbard’s large house on Rum Hill Road was a popular meeting place. She, also, must have been surprised to find herself suddenly dead on an October morning in 1879. For both of the Hibbards, there was still so much to do when death came.



The old Hibbard mansion is a structure of six large bedrooms, five baths, a breakfast room and formal dining room, a parlor and library, and throughout the house, one can find seven fine fireplaces that seem ready to light and restore domestic tranquility. It’s not that it isn’t a peaceful house, but that there are times of downright mystery, which makes the occupants a bit uneasy.

The Hibbard House, which had several turnovers of owners and residents after Sarah’s death, was purchased by Susan Harvey in 1998. “Almost from the start, I would return home to the smell of a freshly opened beer, though at other times I could smell fresh cigar smoke.” On other occasions, the smell of freshly baked bread wafted from the kitchen, though nobody known to Susan had prepared it.

In April of 2002, she collaborated with two local chefs to create a small restaurant specializing in gourmet Italian foods. Four of the upstairs bedrooms were rented to guests who, on occasion, came to breakfast with tales of ghostly cats rubbing up against their legs, or an adult male walking through the upstairs hall. Others sensed a woman and perhaps a servant girl moving throughout the house. Nothing really scary, mind you, but it is difficult for many folks to relate to the unseen guests.

The proprietors sometimes heard the clicking of a dog's toenails crossing the hardwood floors. They were also uncomfortable to find cooking pots rearranged on the stovetop when they briefly turned away. On occasion, both staff and guests witnessed doorknobs turning themselves, though nobody ever came through the portals. Eventually, the restaurant closed and Susan remained to operate the Bed & Breakfast.

I was fortunate to visit the old house in early August of 2009 and had free run of the building. This is always the best condition in which to study a reputed haunted house. On this occasion I had no "real psychic" accompanying me, so I had to dig deep within my senses and just absorb what I could. This technique seems to be what the spirits require from me in recent years – learning how to commune by myself. In any case, it wasn't long before the first greeters arrived.

Seated in the "blue room," which was the old breakfast room, I experienced two women rushing happily up to the left side of my chair. A nicely coiffed, brown-haired woman in a wide skirt came right up to me, smiling, and psychically gushed that "my portrait is in this room." Nice, I thought, and waited for something else. Behind her, I briefly sensed another woman, wearing a light blue dress, but I was unable to look at her. Deciding that this was all that the particular room held for me, I slowly walked about the room.

The Hibbard House has artwork from three centuries, so I looked for someone from the mid-1800's, the period in which wide skirts were worn. I could not find a woman who fit the appearance of my spirit hostess. In retrospect, once I had returned home and investigated the lives of the Hibbards, I decided that the woman may well have been Sarah (Gee there are a lot of Sarahs in the ghost world!). Her manner and bearing were those of a properly educated, but not at all pretentious New Hampshire woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Upstairs, I felt a strong male presence in the south front bedroom. I hoped for a greeting, even a gruff one, but all was silent. It is a nice upstairs for a B&B and would have been a charming place for little Alice to play, though she never got the chance. Wending my way through the upstairs, I came to the furthest back bedroom, which I judged to be above the kitchen. Instantly, on entering the chambers, I felt illness, perhaps even a terminal one. The air was heavy and the sense of sickness so strong that I had to double-check the bed. I was sure someone was lying there, but alas nobody that I could see manifested.

Certainly the energies and personalities of yesteryear still permeate the Hibbard House. I would think that dedicated spirit investigators might make satisfactory arrangements with Ms. Harvey for a prolonged stay in the house. There didn't seem to be any icy spots, so I suspect that the stay-over people are friendly, likely still going about their earthly tasks, if only on occasion. It is a house that needs to be lived in, so I felt that a certain vitality was missing on the day I visited.

If you would like to visit with the Congressman and his wife, and perhaps a menagerie of pets (and you can bring yours), drop a note to the e-mail address [hibbard@oms.net](mailto:hibbard@oms.net).

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