

# 'Turn' author tied to early Syracuse booster

By Joseph Whelan

Contributing writer

A young governess, newly hired to care for two children on a remote English estate, begins to see apparitions of a man and a woman. She learns the figures she sees once worked as caretakers on the estate. She starts to fear that these spirits intend to harm the innocent children. She knows she must protect them.

Such is the tale of mystery and menace fashioned by the great American novelist Henry James in "The Turn of the Screw." A spine-tingling theatrical version of this psychological thriller, adapted by playwright Jeffrey Hatcher, opens the 39th Syracuse Stage season on Friday with previews starting Wednesday.

In addition to providing a chance to enjoy James' famous ghost story, this production of "The Turn of the Screw" offers an occasion to recall the James family ties to Syracuse. This connection is the subject of a gallery display prepared by Dennis Connors of the Onondaga Historical Association that will be featured in the Storch Lobby during the run of the show.

The history stretches back to



Courtesy of Syracuse Stage

**THIS PHOTO SHOWS** what James Street in Syracuse looked like around 1890. "The Turn of the Screw" was written by Henry James, whose grandfather helped develop much of early Syracuse.

1824 when the novelist's grandfather, William James, a prosperous Albany merchant and banker, bought the 250 acres that constitute much of what is downtown Syracuse today. At the time, the land, known as the Walton Tract, was little more than marshes and swamp, with three and a half buildings and about 250 inhabitants.

William James bought the property for \$30,000, and with partners John and Isaiah Townsend and James McBride formed the Syracuse Company. The Syracuse Company

employed agents in Syracuse, Moses DeWitt Burnet and Gideon Hawley, and set about draining and grading the land. Streets in downtown Syracuse still bear the names of the partners and agents. By 1830, the property had been divided into 320 lots; some were sold, but many became profit-making rentals. At the same time, William James and his partners acquired the Syracuse Salt Company, which also proved quite profitable.

William James, who arrived in America from Ireland with a "very small sum of money," amassed a fortune. Henry Sen-

## The details

**What:** "The Turn of the Screw."

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday; 3 and 8 p.m. Saturday. Runs through Oct. 2.

**Where:** Syracuse Stage's Arthur Storch Theater, 820 E. Genesee St., Syracuse.

**Tickets:** \$28 to \$48.

**Information:** 315-443-3275 or [syracusestage.org](http://syracusestage.org).

ior later inherited all the income-producing property in Syracuse, much of it on James and Salina streets.

"Leisured for life," as he declared himself, Henry Senior led an unconventional life and encouraged his children, notably sons William and Henry, and daughter, Alice, to freely pursue their interests. The inheritance he passed to them supported their intellectual and artistic pursuits.

William became a Harvard professor, physiologist and a world renowned philosopher and psychologist. Alice was an accomplished diarist. And Henry produced some of the most important novels of his day, including "The Turn of the Screw."

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