

Local ghosts star in 'Haunted Onondaga County': CNY books and authors

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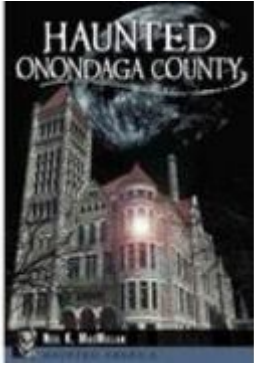
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Central New York's past is at the heart of two locally penned books.

Neil MacMillan, of North Syracuse, explored the historical basis for the area's ghost stories in his book, "Haunted Onondaga County." [Sheila Myers](#), of Skaneateles, took a different approach: She fictionalized the history of the Adirondacks' Durant family for the first book in her trilogy, "Imaginary Brightness: A Durant Family Saga."

Writing science fiction rather than historical fiction is Syracuse's [Corliss Herr](#). Her Florida-set novel, "One in a Blue Moon," is 14 years in the making. And [Khalid Bey](#), who serves on Syracuse's Common Council, has released a new book on love and relationships.

"Haunted Onondaga County"



"Haunted Onondaga County" by Neil MacMillan

Local ghosts step into the spotlight in Neil MacMillan's new book.

Published as a local edition of History Press' ["Haunted America" series](#), "Haunted Onondaga County" breaks down Central New York's ghostly lore chapter by chapter. "I've always been a fan of ghost stories," said MacMillan, who lives in North Syracuse. So in writing the book, he scoured the Internet, newspaper records, historical association archives and more to cast light on the ghost stories he had known since childhood — and a few he hadn't.

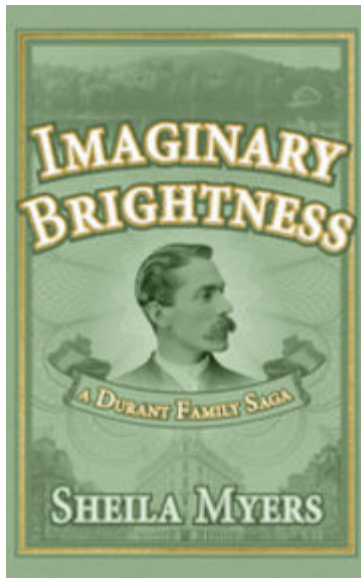
The best known, he said, is probably the story of the bride and groom who haunt the 13 curves of Marcellus' Cedarvale Road, after crashing there years ago on their wedding night. But for MacMillan, this one seems unlikely: He couldn't find any newspaper articles about a crash, he said, let alone the splashy front-page stories he would have expected for such a tragic event.

"Did it happen?" he said. "Honestly, I don't know."

But other ghost stories, he said, have stronger historical connections. Residents of Jordan, New York, for example, told stories through the 1970s about seeing a ghostly version of President Abraham Lincoln's funeral train on the anniversary of his death. The actual funeral train really did stop in Central New York for about a half-hour, MacMillan said.

Published this month, "Haunted Onondaga County" is available [online](#); at some local stores such as Nichols Supermarket in Liverpool; and at the [Onondaga Historical Association](#), where MacMillan is a member.

"Imaginary Brightness: A Durant Family Saga"



"Imaginary Brightness: A Durant Family Saga" by Sheila Myers

While vacationing at the Adirondacks' Camp Kirby one summer, Sheila Myers came across the story of an earlier resident: Minnie Kirby. According to the story, Kirby had once lived there as the mistress of William West Durant, who had developed the nearby Camp Huntington in the late 1800s and left his mark on the area's architecture.

"I thought that'd make a great fictional story," said Myers, who is an associate professor at Cayuga Community College and has previously published [fiction](#).

So she set out to research the Durant family, she said. And when that grew into a visit to England, trips to the Library of Congress and Syracuse University's library and time spent poring over old letters and court documents, she decided to break the family's fictionalized story into a trilogy. The first book, "Imaginary Brightness: A Durant Family Saga" was released in May.

"Imaginary Darkness" begins in 1873, when William West Durant and his sister, Ella, trade their posh life in London for New York's Adirondacks. The 20-something William is recruited to help his father develop the wilderness. The Great Camps — and William's mistress — make an appearance before the end of this first installment, which details their dynamic family relationship in a new home.

"Imaginary Darkness: A Durant Family Saga" is intended for an adult audience, and is available [online](#) in print and e-book formats. Myers, of

Skaneateles, will also have copies at an event at Hoss's Country Store in Long Lake on Aug. 11 between 7 and 9 p.m.

"Once In a Blue Moon"



"One in a Blue Moon" by Alexandra Corliss

Corliss Herr had been tinkering with a novel draft for years; but it wasn't until she retired from her job with the Syracuse City School District that she got serious about seeing it published. "I pulled it back out, blew the dust off it and went to work," she said.

That book today is published as "Once in a Blue Moon," a science fiction novel that draws on thriller and romance elements within a Florida setting. The book follows two main characters — a marine biologist and a vacationing police photographer — as they try to make sense of the mysterious disappearance of all the world's dolphins. Complicating the situation, they discover, are both political intrigue and forces of nature.

"I've always loved dolphins," Herr said of the inspiration behind the book. She also incorporates themes of nature and environmental change, she added — in some cases, plot points that were imagined when she wrote them 14 years ago and are now cropping up in the news.

Herr, whose father live in Florida, uses fictional town names in Florida. But her references to Central New York are specific, she added: Natalie, the police

photographer, flies to Florida from Rochester, seated beside a woman from Syracuse.

"One in a Blue Moon," published in July, is currently available [online](#) as an e-book. Herr, who lives in Syracuse and writes under the pen name Alexandra Corliss, recommends it for late teenage and adult readers. A sequel, as well as a separate children's book series, are also in the works.

"Love Under Will"



"Love Under Will" by Khalid El Bey

Khalid Bey has written nonfiction books in a variety of topics: government, character, community and more. But each book shares one common principle, he said: "Every book I've written, no matter what the subject is, is based on extremes coming to the middle."

In his latest book, "Love Under Will," Bey applies this idea to romantic relationships by suggesting that extreme self-determinism is preventing people from committing fully to a romantic relationship. "People go in 50 percent or less, while simultaneously demanding a greater commitment from the other person," he said.

One factor, he said, is that people have grown confused about the concept of love, using the word recklessly and drawing flawed understandings from soap operas or popular music.

"To love and commit is a choice," he said. "It's not an involuntary impulse."

Bey's intention is get readers to think critically about their relationships, he said. And with chapters addressing "feeling lonely" and "being alone," he added, the book can be relevant for any reader: single, dating or married.

The ideas presented in the book are drawn from his own experiences with relationships and those of people he knows, he said, as well as the philosophy that he has elaborated in previous books: that extremes, in any context, are destructive. "Love Under Will," for example, grew out of his previous book, "The Key to Character."

Bey, who grew up in Syracuse and represents the fourth district on the Syracuse Common Council, published "Love Under Will" in January. It currently is available [online](#).

Have a book to share?

Are you a local author or have you come across a book set in Central New York? Tell us about it. Send a brief description of the book and the author and we'll add it as a candidate for coverage. Write us at features@syracuse.com.