Julia Jones Beecher

Portrayed by Cathy Wiggs

Welcome to the Ghost Walk and our lovely cemetery!

My husband Tom once described our marriage as akin to being hitched to a steam engine. Maybe not the most flattering comparison, but he wasn’t entirely wrong. My name is Julia Jones Beecher and I have lived my life in perpetual motion. Hitched to a steam engine indeed! I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1826. As a young girl, I was more the sort to climb trees than to play with dolls, but my true passion lay in creation. I loved art of every kind: painting, drawing, wood-working even. I have kept on creating. Once one finds a love like that, it’s near impossible to let it go.

My second great love was my husband, the Reverend Thomas K. Beecher. We met in the early 1850s when he was courting my dearest friend Livy Day. At first, we were united in our love of her. Then, when she died a year after their marriage, we were united in our grief and, through that, we came to love each other. In 1857, Thomas took a position as pastor of the Park Church and, through that, we came to love Elmira.

It was quite a life, being the wife of a pastor. There was always something to do, which was just the way I liked it. There were always events to plan, prayer meetings to lead, parishioners to assist, a husband to manage. I loved Tom dearly, both because and despite of the fact he’s the sort to literally give the coat off his back. And he has, you know, with no thought to how much it cost to replace. Someone needed to remind him that we must eat ourselves on occasion and that someone was me. To my great sadness, I never managed to give him children. In our later years, we adopted two motherless girls and raising them was one of the greatest joys of our lives.

My great skill for the church was in fundraising. I made and sold special rag dolls, known as Beecher Dolls, for the church missionary society. Over the years, the sales of the dolls netted $1,111.89, which was nothing to sneeze at back then. Why that would be worth almost $33,000 today! One of my favorite projects was the canvas elephant Columbus. I originally fashioned it for a small roll in a church fete. Tom manned the front half while I, with my hands on his waist, manned the back. It was quite a hit and, over the years, we reprised the role many a time.
I also made and sold wooden whimsies made of tree roots and the like. Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was quite fond of them. He called them jabberwocks and had a small army of them decorating his Hartford home. Sam Clemens and I had an interesting sort of relationship, me being a staunch believer in God and heaven and him being a staunch believer in being contrary. Once, after hours of debate on the existence of the soul, we drew up a contract in stone that, should we meet in heaven, I would have eternal bragging rights.

I died over a hundred years ago in 1905 and here we are. You can’t keep a good steam engine down. We just keep going.

**Thomas Flood**

*Portrayed by David Wiggs*

Family expectations can be a weighty thing. Sometimes to be our best and truest selves, we must find our way out from under them. My name is Thomas Flood and I would know.

I was born in Lodi, New York in 1844, but moved to Elmira as a young boy. My father was Dr. Patrick Flood, a well-respected physician. It was his dream that my brothers and I follow in his footsteps. The three of us apprenticed with him, learning about anatomy, illness, and medicines. My brothers John and Henry both became doctors. After some heavy soul searching, I did not.

I became a pharmacist, at least at first. It was near enough to the life my father had wanted, but involved far fewer bodily fluids. I did well enough, establishing a successful business. Still, I found myself wanting more.

In 1870, I married Francis Miller of Southport. Her uncle, John Dubois, owned nearly 30,000 acres of undeveloped land in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, and was looking for an enterprising soul to tame its untapped wilderness. I leapt at the chance. For the next five years, Frances and I lived a pioneer sort of existence, creating a town from the wilds. I built lumber mills to process the felled trees. I built a rail line so we could ship the
lumber to market. I called the town I built Dubois and served is its postmaster and rail agent.

It was a fine little town, if I do say so myself, but it wasn’t the ideal place to raise and educate ones’ children. Francis and I returned to Elmira where we set about raising our son, Freddie, and daughter, Mabel. I went back to my pharmacy, but that wasn’t all I did.

My time in Dubois had shown me the importance of sound governance. A town led by those with purpose and vision will prosper, while one without will not. Luckily for Elmira, I had both. In 1882, I ran for alderman in the city’s fourth ward on the Republican ticket. Despite the ward being staunchly Democratic, my constituents saw the value of my leadership and elected me anyway. I served on the council for a few years before moving on to greener pastures.

In 1886, I was persuaded to run for Congress. The seat had gone to the Democrats for years, but, once again, I was able to rally the voters to my cause. I was easily re-elected in 1888. While my predecessors were inclined to merely serve as a rubber stamp when it came to the passage of legislation, I was not content to sit idly by. I put myself forward to serve as chair for the Committee on Expenditures on Public Buildings. I helped to pass the Hatch Act and Agriculture Experimentation Stations Act of 1887, which created funds for the scientific study of farming.

Agriculture was a passion of mine, or at least horses were. I owned a stock farm in Southport where I bred and trained thoroughbreds. Several of my horses were prized race horses. The most famous of these was Mamie Woods. Why, at just 2 years old, she was the fastest runner on the eastern circuit. I won’t say she was my pride and joy, not with my daughter Mabel buried a few feet from here, but...[laughs]

No, no, Mabel is my pride. She ended up becoming a doctor like her uncles and grandfather before her. Sometimes family expectations are the perfect fit for how to live your life. Other times, it’s best to make your own way.

**Derby Sisters**

*Portrayed by Gail Lewis and Casey Winston*
Eva: Hello Everyone, I’m Cora.

Cora: Oh sister, come now! I’m Cora, she’s Eva and we are two of the Derby sisters, buried here, with our mother, Sarah, and youngest sister, Annie.

Eva: We were such a trio, weren’t we Cora? I was born in 1873, the middle sister, after Cora...

Cora: ...who was born in 1871. Eva, Annie, and I grew up on 75 Walnut St. in Elmira. We had a lot of fun growing up together. Even as adults we were inseparable.

Eva: We’d go to Rorick’s Glen...

Cora: Make homemade candies.

Eva: And bike to Buffalo or Rochester! They were long trips.

Cora: We’d rest whenever we got tired and then pick on up again the next morning and take the train home after reaching our destination. Not all people thought this sort of independence was fitting for young women in the 1890s, but we didn’t mind defying expectations.

Eva: Our father Alden Derby was a Civil War Veteran and carpenter. Our mother Sarah Derby was editor of the Young Women’s Banner magazine. She worked to improve the lives of young women in the city. She encouraged us to be bold and pursue our interests.

Cora: After graduating from Elmira Free Academy, I went to Elmira Business School and Eva studied business too...

Eva: ...At Warner’s Business school. We three loved to learn and read. After finishing our studies, Cora and I worked at Fitch and Billings’ Bookstore on 112 Baldwin Street in Elmira.

Cora: When Hosmer Billings retired, we decided...

Eva: ...to buy the shop! We renamed it The Derby Book Shop and operated it for over thirty years. I did most of the bookkeeping.

Cora: We sold stationary, postcards, books, and writing tools. Eva and I ran the Derby Book Shop from 1914-1946, with our sister Annie as a silent partner.
Eva: We enjoyed our independence and none of us sisters ever married. Though Cora caught Grace Colby’s bouquet at the much-publicized 1905 wedding...

Cora: ...and Eva was certainly favored by Fitch and Billings’ handyman Judd!

Cora: Many people knew of us through the bookstore and the many organizations we were involved in throughout the city.

Eva: I loved the outdoors and was a member of the Audubon Society and Garden Club. I also taught young scholars at Sunday School at The Park Church, to which the family were dedicated parishioners. Sometimes Papa sat in on classes to make sure students didn’t give me trouble –but they rarely did! I was a good teacher!

Cora: I was a member of the Zonta Club, an organization dedicated to advancing the status of women in their local communities. In 1928, I traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota to represent Elmira at the national convention. When the Second World War began, I joined the Red Cross to help the war effort.

Eva: Our sister Annie was an active supporter of the Elmira Association for the Blind and worked as a milliner on North Main street.

Cora: I had a special bond with my sisters throughout my life and although we were independently minded, we always loved being together. It was heartbreaking to lose our sister Annie in 1947, one year after closing the bookstore. She’d been ill for a long time. Then, I passed away in 1959, leaving Eva behind.

Eva: I was sad to lose my sisters but I remembered them always throughout my years...my many years...I lived until 1973 to be 100! I saw so much change in Elmira in a century of time. People weren’t biking to Buffalo in the 1970s. They were buying cassette tapes more often than books! But I loved Elmira and am happy to be laid to rest here with my sisters.

**Oscar H. Adams**

*Portrayed by Joe Edkin*
Well, you’ve had a pretty smooth journey this evening... my own path in life was a little bumpier.

First let me share my story. My name is Oscar Adams and I was born in in the year 1833 in Carbondale, Pennsylvania.. I fell in love and married my sweetheart Lucy. Soon, we had a daughter whom we named Laura Elizabeth but called Libbie for short.

Life looked good. 
For me at least. 
See at the time the country was in turmoil. Folks disagreed about slavery, an unfair and abhorrent system. The Civil War began and I knew I had to do my part. In May of 1864, I traveled north from Carbondale to Elmira to join the fight. I was 30 years old when I mustered in as an assistant surgeon with the 8th NY Calvary. I planned to serve three years as a field medic helping the boys.

Fate led me on a different pathway. 

We trained in May and I saw my first and last battle in June. It was a disastrous raid on the Weldon railroad in Virginia. I took a bullet in the head. Oh, I didn’t die but was wounded and captured. The headaches and heartaches that bullet inflicted stayed with me my whole life. I was among the 117 reported missing from that battle. I spent time in a rebel hospital and after seven months, was finally released.

It was February of 1865. I made my return to Carbondale and reunited with my family. One year later we moved to Elmira, where I set up a medical practice.

But this isn’t the kind of story a father wants to tell. The one I really want you to know tonight is the story of my daughter Libbie. Hers is a journey of persistence. With a sick pa and worried ma, that girl kept herself busy. Why even before we moved to Elmira, Libbie wrote stories and collected neighborhood news for fun. She published too. She published poems and stories in the Carbondale Daily News calling herself Nettie Sparkle. She wanted her stories to shine a light on the good things in life. As she got a
little older she used those skills to pursue one of the latest newfangled hobbies.

Libbie got a hold of one of those hand printing press and at just sixteen she produced her own amateur journal. She continued printing when we moved to Elmira, and now called it the *Youthful Enterprise*.

She did it *all* herself. She wrote, she edited, she set the type, printed, and distributed her newspaper to all who were interested.

Now mind you, most young printers at the time were boys so Libbie and a few other girls just stood out. They had to persist. They had to be smarter and quicker than those boys.

It was a time when some young people with means were craving new social connections and the young printers started the United Amateur Press Association. The Association held meetings, fairs, and conventions all around the state. Libbie attended what she could. I suppose that’s where she caught the ire of a young lad who protested that she, a mere girl, could not really have done all the work to produce her paper. But my Libbie pushed back. Libbie gathered support for an affidavit to attest to her efforts. It was signed by none other than the likes of Edwin Eldridge, John Arnot Jr., H.W. Rathbone and both editors of Elmira’s newspapers.

My Libbie was a force to behold.

When I died in July 1878, I was 44 years old. I left Libbie and her Momma to fend for themselves, and they did. Libbie continued to print and earn enough money to help her Momma out. She also earned enough to enroll in classes at Elmira College where she met and married Edwin B. Turner. Together those two had six children. Imagine, six young’uns I never got to meet.

If they were anything like their Momma, the path they forged was full of good cheer, a few strong opinions, and maybe a little printer’s ink beneath their nails.