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SEARLES' GHOSTLY CASTLE AT LAST BARES ITS SECRETS TO POST MAN

Is First to Enter and Uncover Mystery of Millionaire's Feudal Domain---Three Knocks the Signal for Entrance---Sees Organ Where Searles Soothed His Feelings---A Moonlight View of Egyptian Treasures Worth $2,000,000

The house of mystery!

This is the first story ever written by a newspaper man who succeeded in getting into the grim feudal castle of the late Edward F. Searles, multi-millionaire recluse of Methuen.

Behind the great walls, topped with barbed wire and patrolled day and night by armed guards, John T. Brady of the Sunday Post staff spent at least two hours.

It was an uncanny experience. There were raps on the outer gate, a password and then exploration. What Mr. Brady saw inside—the secrets which few have seen—he tells Sunday Post readers today.

By John T. Brady

I sat in the railroad station at Lawrence.

It was late in the afternoon and I had purchased a ticket for Boston. My train was due in 15 minutes.

Half an hour previous I had attempted to gain admittance to the Searles castle at Methuen.

But at the very moment when my dream of being the first newspaper man to give to the world a description of the Methuen mansion a guard peeped out and told me there was no good reason to say assistance.

"This strange stranger, under cover of darkness, led me by the hand within those great barriers of masonry to the very rooms in which Edward F. Searles, possessor of millions, lived and died—a human enigma.

Coming to a stop directly in front of me, with a suddenness that instantly arrested my attention, this modern Aladdin glanced furtively about as though afraid that he was being watched, and then dropped a folded newspaper at my feet.

It struck within a few inches of my shoes, and picking it up quickly he said:

"You dropped your paper, sir."

"That's not my paper; you dropped it yourself," I said, wondering what could be the man's reason for such a peculiar act.

"Pardon me, I thought it was yours," he said with a shrug of his shoulders.

Again he glanced about the station and apparently satisfied that no one was watching his movements he slipped into the seat beside me and, turning toward me his searching eyes, cold and gray as steel, fastened upon me, he said quietly:

An Offer to Get Me in

"You want to see the interior of the Searles place.

"Yes," I said, never thinking of the possibility that he might have been eavesdropping one earlier in the day.

He paid no attention to my question, but nodding briefly said:

"If you are willing to do as I direct there is a way to get into the Ladder. I can take you there tonight. We will wait until it is dark, then hop out and roll around and come out when we get ready."

"Think it over," he said, rising, "and until it's dark, then hop out and tell the driver to wait."

He left the station alone. When you come to where the new houses are being built on the left hand side of the road, just before reaching the old way that runs along the big wall of the castle, get out of the cab and I will be waiting back to you about 8.30 o'clock."

Why I Bought a New Cap

He started to move away, then turned sharply and looked me over from head to foot.

"Better wear a cap if you come. The white hat is too conspicuous. There are detectives watching everybody going in and out of the place," he said, and a moment later he disappeared out of one of the side doors of the station.

The spirit of adventure within me had been thoroughly aroused. The element of mystery became significant and in contemplation of the glory of the achievement, I decided to accept the stranger's offer.

Shortly after 8 o'clock, a cab pulled well down over my eyes, I again met the man who had the "open sesame" to the Searles estate. He was awaiting me in the shadow of a big tree and attracted my attention by a low, whistle.

"Good evening," he said, pleasantly. "I'm glad you decided to come tonight. The chance of seeing the place was never better. Just keep close behind me and don't utter a sound. Don't ask any questions after we get inside the place."

Not more than five minutes later we were edging along the great wall surrounded by barbed wire entanglements, that runs completely around the Searles Methuen estate.

Through the Wall Door

Suddenly my guide stopped short and as I came up to him, he whispered:

"This is where we go through the wall. Remain here until you hear three knocks, then come ahead and pick your steps carefully."

A moment or two elapsed and the brief silence was getting on my nerves when I heard two ghostly knocks on the door repeated three times, followed by a whispered conversation. Mr. Brady presented to the guard the password "Fraternity" in a low voice and heard him use the expression "an old friend."

My courage revived and in response to the signal to advance, I took about a dozen steps forward and found myself in what appeared to be a vaulted passageway. This led to a large room, which I learned later is of the old homestead of the Searles family, where the millionaire recluse lived when a poor boy.

Inside the Palace

The house sets on the side of a hill, and is a wooden structure of large dimensions. The architecture is of the modern colonial style, and a colonnade along three sides of the main building contains a collection of magnificent oriental vases. From this arcade the guests' dining hall can be reached by a short walk from here.

There is a large reception hall on the first floor of the house, containing a wonderful organ, with staircases on both sides of it, leading to the floor above.

This organ was the great solace of the millionaire in his old age. He keys he whiled away hours at a time and his skill as a musician was one of his great achievements.

On this second floor is the private chamber which Mr. Searles occupied when he slept at "Pine Lodge." The room is a large one, and is furnished with a beautiful canopy. There are several other chambers on the same floor and a good sized library.

The wonderful Egyptian room, said to contain more than $2,000,000 worth of art treasures, is on the third floor of the house. It is a long room, with a large music room containing a piano that must have cost thousands. There is an exit from the music room to a terraced lawn and from this point an excellent view of the sunken gardens in front of the house is obtainable.

By far the most striking of the paintings in the main art gallery at "Pine Lodge," is a colossal picture of General Washington, standing beside his horse. This canvas is fully 20 feet high by 20 feet wide, and has an elaborate frame about five feet in width. The painting was evidently framed in the gallery after being brought in on a roll.

In this same gallery are copies of two paintings by Victor A. Searles of Boston, who will contest the will of his father, the estimated value of which he is given but $200,000, while the bulk of the estate, estimated at $20,000,000, goes to Arthur T. Walker, business secretary to Edward F. Searles during the latter years of his life.

A Ticklish Moment

Stretching out from "Pine Lodge" on each side in a sort of horseshoe arrangement are numerous buildings, all triumphs of architectural skill, and all connected by colonnades or cloisters, so that one can walk from one to another under cover.

It was in one of these archways between buildings that I had an experience that I shall never forget. My guide had hold of my arm, and we were walking in the centre of the passage to avoid striking any objects that might be in our path, when I detected the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching from the direction in which we were headed.

"I don't want anyone to see," said my guide. "We can't go back. We must flatten ourselves against this wall and let the person pass." We stood in the shadow of a large vase or vase of some kind.

The footsteps we had heard were those of a man, and he passed within a few feet of where I was hugging the wall of the passage, hardly daring to breathe.

We waited until we could no longer hear the echo of his footsteps and then proceeded on our way.

Where Mr. Searles Died

"Applejole," a smaller mansion than "Pine Lodge," is the home where Mr. Searles died. His chamber was on the second floor. At "Applejole" there is a large reception room, a library, quarters for servants, and a beautiful breakfast room, in which Mr. Searles frequently ate his meals. In the basement there is an entrance to a large harmial hall fully 50 feet square and out of that a cloister, long as from the Post building to the Custom House, extends to the chapel. On the floor of this colonnade are costly oriental rugs, and hanging from the walls are vases, urns, suits of armor, and richly ornamented cabinets filled with choice relics and antiques of every description.

In this gallery, beneath a large dome, stands an immense granite vase fully 20 feet in circumference and 10 feet high, with the light of the moon shining on it, is awe inspiring.

Chapel Seats 1000

The chapel will seat fully 1000 people and at the front are two heroic gladiators in stone about 12 feet tall, and a gilded cabinet, fully 15 feet high with a great ball on top. This contains a collection of rare antiques. Hanging on the wall behind the figures of the gladiators are two ancient and curious tapestries. The roof of the chapel is supported by 12 marble columns with white corinthian caps, but the most striking color effects to be seen in the chapel are produced by the tables along the side walls, having hundreds of books, bound in tooled, tanned leather. Many of the volumes are very ancient. Another striking feature of the chapel is the beautiful organ.

At one end of the chapel there is a large doorway opening onto a balcony, surrounded by exquisitely carved balustrades, and from this elevation, one looks down on the sunken gardens, a magnificent view of the estate with the various turrets silhouetted against a pine forest, greets the eye.

My exit from the Searles estate was accomplished without the slightest difficulty, my guide remaining with me until I had passed the gate of the wall of Lawrence. I had been within the walled enclosure almost two hours. It was a nerve-racking experience.

Rowland Children, Heirs to $3,500,000 of Searles' Fortune, Do Chores for Pocket Money---Plan to Work for Living

They're heirs to $3,500,000 and they do chores around the house for their mother in order to earn pocket money.

They prefer to live in their modest little home at Melrose Park, near Philadelphia, rather than the beautiful and extensive Searles estate, Pine Lodge, in Methuen.

They're going to work for their living when they grow up.

They like to swim, ride bicycles and go on roller coasters.

All in all they're "regular fellows," the three sons of Mrs. Mary Allen Rowland, who, with their mother, inherited $4,500,000 from the estate of Edward Searles of Methuen. A few million dollars, more or less, isn't going to change them in the slightest.

These and other fact's, a Sunday Post staff writer, discovered when she visited the Rowland home the past week and secured this exclusive story.

BY OLIVE BELLE McGUIRE

Picture three lively boys, eight, nine and ten, and named respectively, Benjamin, George and Jack, manly little fellows, tow-headed, blue eyes brimming with fun and mischief, broad expansive smiles on their faces, dressed in khaki knickerbockers, blue percale blouses and tan sneakers.

You have them—just boys.

Unspoiled they always have been. And unspoiled they always will be if their mother has her way in their upbringing. There will be no big automobiles for them, nor any servants. There will be no private schools and tutors. The boys will continue in the public schools and remain in their present home, with its comfortable-looking, red-gabled roof and its pretty shaded lawn—the lawn which George has taken care of this summer that he might earn money to buy a bicycle.

When I arrived at Melrose Park, Mrs. Rowland and Benjamin were away. They had gone to Methuen to visit the Searles estate.

George and Jack were home, and aided and abetted by their frolicking pascal Hills, they gave me a rousing welcome.

"They're acted like Indians all day.—Miss Daisy Vickoor, a cousin of their mother, who was acting housekeeper, excitedly apologized.

"I'm sorry that the two boys tagging to you, and I'm sorry I let them go with you, and I'm sorry I—"

"They're really as good as can be, but they expect their mother and Benjamin home today and they don't know if that I haven't the heart to send them to bed."

The word "bed" had an enlisted record for George and Jack.

"Bed! Why, it's early yet," Jack remonstrated in way of explanation to me. "I'm the guess. You can be a guess, too, if you'd like."

A Boy in Her Lap

I thanked him and took the chair Miss Vickoor waved me to. Whereupon George climbed into my lap, and, pointing a chubby forefinger at his brother, "I can beat him playing fox and geese."

"Can't," Jack came back, quick as a flash.

"Can," George called.

For a moment the air seemed almost to sing as the "cans" and "can'ts" flew back and forth.

And, as always with children, their minds were soon distracted. They had "forgot" about the game.

"Mamma" mentioned the irrepressible Jack, "you're the 10th reporter who's been here today. That's a lot of fun—me and him," indicating his brother with a jerk of his thumb. "We've had 9 when they come. Cousin Daisy wouldn't let them see us. You're the 10th. Guess you want to know about that money Mr. Searles left us?"

Lack of breath cutted this topic

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Colonel Theodore Roosevelt leading the cavalry charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American war. This another glimpse of the Methuen recluse's art gallery, was painted by Victor Searles, who has an intense admiration for T. R. This picture and the Lafayette one are, of course, reproduced exclusively by the Sunday Post.

Searles Castle open 1920

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carl_b_mccarthy
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