



House museums often wrestle with the choice to promote haunting over history. Many believe that supernatural interpretations can diminish the importance of the human accomplishments made within their walls, while others simply think the whole thing's just hogwash. Regardless of personal beliefs, it's hard to deny the earned income that comes from irreverent programming like ghost hunts or macabre tours, especially for the small house museums who genuinely depend on it. It's not often local families bring their children for regular daily historical tours, but they will bring the kids for a bit of Halloween fun at a reasonable price.

But at Liberty Hall, the famous Gray Lady is so ingrained that when we opened as a museum in 1937, her legend had already been around for over a hundred years. And now, nearly a hundred years later, the Gray Lady is deeply entrenched within the culture of Frankfort and Franklin County. Children dress as her for Halloween, parents swap stories about their own searches looking into windows and sneaking through the historic garden, and even grandparents may recall when they first saw her ghostly image floating along the staircase. For us, it's never been a question whether to promote "Our Beloved Ghost," which is how the Brown Family referred to their ancestral Auntie. For us, she is more than a fun story to bring out each Liberty Hall-oween. She is a vital connecting thread that ties us to this particular place, this era of time, and to each generation of the past 200 years.

The story of the Gray Lady inspires **Curiosity**, which is at the heart of intellectual achievement. By asking ourselves *how* and *why*, we develop our ability to *learn*. Children as young as 4 can recognize conflicting pieces of evidence, and the discrepancy creates curiosity. It expands empathy and is necessary for overall human survival.

She also builds **Courage**. Not only does our body respond with higher endorphin levels and dopamine, but our brains begin to solve problems and use our natural survival instincts. Building courage teaches emotional resilience and coping mechanisms, and when children first learn about the idea of lingering spirits, that courage allows them to face scary and unknown things safely and on their own terms.

Ghost stories like her are also part of our **Culture**, just as Latin, Indigenous, or Asian cultures remain connected to the spirits of their ancestors. They become oral traditions, passed down from generation to generation with rich tapestries of archetypes, lessons to learn, and mysteries that remain unsolved. We never say "there's no such thing as ghosts" because it discounts these cultures as something that doesn't exist, and so we honor these shared traditions with respect.

And especially for Frankfort, the Gray Lady reinforces the ideals of **Community**. As each generation learns about her life (and afterlife), they discover the roots of this distinctive community and its past. She plays a role in the development, understanding, and appreciation of our own folk heritage, as local folklore helps solidify personal cultural roots and a sense of place.

The Gray Lady began as a woman named Margaretta Varick, but now, she is a LEGEND. She draws us closer to a place with infinite stories to tell, a place with fascinating history that binds us to the beginnings of our nation, our state, and our city. Her legend does not diminish its importance, but rather puts a spotlight on the value of Liberty Hall in our fast-paced, ever-changing lives. She remains here to ensure we never forget where we came from, and no matter your age or location, she will always call us home.

With Love from Liberty Hall