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## Haunted travels

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### Orange Hall — St. Mary's, Ga.

When the Acadians arrived in Georgia, after *le grand derangement*, the great expulsion from their native lands of Nova Scotia, the Georgia government did not welcome the Catholics to its predominantly Protestant state.

A group moved on to Saint Domingue, but when the country now known as Haiti erupted in a slave revolt, many Acadians sought refuge back in the southeastern United States, including Georgia.

Some of these Acadians arrived in St. Marys, Ga., but landed suffering from yellow fever, according to Diana Burgess, the owner and tour guide of the town's Green Elephant Ghost Tours. Jane Pratt, the young daughter of the town's Presbyterian minister Horace Pratt, visited these Acadian refugees along the waterfront and caught the fever.

Although Pratt actually died in Alabama, her ghost haunts the Pratt home of Orange Hall in St. Marys, Burgess said. She's one of the many apparitions floating throughout the seaport town Burgess claims is the second oldest city in America.

"I have seen her and a lot of people have seen her," Burgess explained.

Atlanta journalist Bobby Hickman spotted Pratt on a trip to town last May.

"Just before the ghost tour, our guide and several others saw a little girl in period clothes looking out of the window of nearby Orange Hall," he said.

The town is so renowned for its ghosts that Georgia Scene Investigators registered several audio and visual evidence at Orange Hall, among other sites, and published them on their Web site, [www.gsigeorgia.com](http://www.gsigeorgia.com). One of the audio recordings contains language thought to be French.

"We have a nice little ghost tour up here," Burgess said with a laugh.

The Acadians who perished in the fever epidemic are buried, with descendants, in the town's Oak Grove Cemetery. Margurite Comeau is buried there, the only settler



Submitted photo  
**Orange Hall**

born in Acadia, with her husband Joseph Desclaux, whom she met in Saint Domingue. Their descendant, James T. Vocell, wrote the first history of Camden County, where St. Marys is located, and the book, *Acadians and Reminiscences of Old St. Marys*.

Because of the fever epidemic, a now common expression was born. Fever victims sometimes descended into a coma, Burgess explained, and were wrongfully buried alive. Strings were installed inside the coffins with bells on the outside so that live victims could alert the living before being stashed underground. Thus the expression, "Saved by the bell."

Burgess explains this little-known fact, along with ghost stories and local folklore on her 90-minute walking tour of St. Marys. Stories are family-oriented and "not gory," she added.

### **Rose Hill Road — Port Tobacco, Maryland**

Another landing spot for the displaced Acadians was Port Tobacco, Md., more welcoming than Georgia because of its Catholic heritage. The spot served as a popular trading port for years before sliding into obscurity. References to the Acadians living in the town are scarce; historical markers exhibit no information on the French settlers who lived in poverty before moving on to reassemble in Louisiana.

One piece of history that does live on, however, is the legend of the "Blue Dog." No connection to local artist George Rodrigue and his famous canine paintings, this Blue Dog haunts an area known as Rose Hill Road just outside of Port Tobacco. Story has it that revolutionary soldier Charles Thomas Sims and his dog were returning along the road after visiting a tavern in town and were killed by Henry Hanos, who stole Sims' gold and deed to his home. Hanos buried both under a holly tree near a large stone, but when he returned to reclaim the stash, the ghost of the dog scared him away.

According to Olivia Floyd, once owner of nearby Rose Hill mansion and a spy for the Confederacy, the ghost of the "Blue Dog" haunts the spot every Feb. 8, the date of the murder in 1776. She reported seeing the apparition in an 1897 story in the Port Tobacco Times.

The stone has since been moved but remains on the original property. The dog still protects his master's money, according to locals, and the stash was never re-earthed from its resting spot along the road.

In nearby Port Tobacco, along Route 6, the Blue Dog Saloon serves up dog bite shooters and the "Dirty Dog." On the wall are vintage French beer posters.

### **If you go**

Green Elephant Ghost Tours  
(912) 269-9194  
[www.stmaryswelcome.com](http://www.stmaryswelcome.com)

Blue Dog Saloon

7940 Port Tobacco Road  
(301) 932-1740  
[www.thebluedogsaloon.com](http://www.thebluedogsaloon.com)

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