

IN THE SOURLANDS

Special Character of the Sourlands

By Caroline Katmann

Every Sourland Mountain resident and visitor has experienced its *special character*. It would be interesting to gather views on exactly which attributes comprise the character of the Sourland Mountain region. For sure, the many “legendary tales” about the Mountain’s past contribute to its character.

According to a New Jersey newspaper article from 1945, “Old Residents Recall Tales of Ghosts and Mysterious Figures Who Once Roamed Hills”, Sourland Mountain is the “centre of many weird, legendary tales.” (Times-Advertiser, Trenton, NJ, September 30, 1945)

Here are a few of them, as written in the old Times-Advertiser article:

Charlie Sutphen, whose father was the Sourland Mountain fiddler, is the source of many a weird legend concerning the wild life that abounded in the hills north of Hopewell. Take it from him, Sourland Mountain was the devil’s stamping ground. He is responsible for the yarn that the devil started to build a great stone wall, separating the East from the West and while carrying a huge number of boulders he received a call for dinner. He dropped the stones, which today are known as Roaring Rocks located near Belle Mead.

Another of Sutphen’s fantastic stories concerns the ghosts of nine murdered men and women. They may be seen any night one desires to roam the woods of Sourland Mountains. Headless men and women, burning eyes that pierce the blackest night, wagons that disappear into the side of the mountain, weird cries at night, like those of someone in distress; strange birds that carry off children to their hidden lairs, huge and vicious dogs that follow people through the trails, strange quaking of the ground, jack-o-lanterns that if followed will lead into quicksand.

Still another yarn is that concerning Knitting Betty, who seated on a flat blue jingler rock, now a part of the Lindbergh backyard would remain from morning till night knitting, knitting, knitting. At one’s approach she would disappear.

Pero, the hermit, known as the ‘old man of the mountain’ lived in a cave near the Three Brothers Rocks, while Silvia DuBois, an old fortune teller, resided in the mountain and lived to be 120 years old.

Possibly one of the best known legends is that told by the Rev. George A. Easton and accepted as an actual fact. He was returning home after visiting a dying man and was met by a man on a white horse. He as the ghost of the man who had died. ‘Meet me tonight in the dark woods,’ the man is quoted as saying. ‘I cannot,’ the clergyman replied. ‘Then hold out your hand,’ said the man’s wraith. As the minister stretched out his hand, the spirit touched it and from that time on the Rev. Mr. Easton’s arm was paralyzed.

Thanks to Eleanora Kolbert, an octogenarian and lifelong area resident, the Sourland Conservancy is in possession of some wonderful old newspaper articles about Sourland history, legend and lore, as well as a 1940s photo of a Sourland Mountain fiddler and his wife on the porch of their residence near Hillbilly Hall. You can find these articles on the Conservancy’s website and the photo appears in the spring 2015

issue of *Sourland Journal* (Sourland Conservancy's membership newsletter), as does an interview with Mrs. Kolbert.

To hear more Sourland legends and to experience the magic and rich history of the Sourlands, sign up for the Conservancy's Bus Tour of the Eastern Sourland Mountain Region (Saturday, May 2nd) at www.sourland.org or call 609-466-0701. This tour includes a visit inside and around the Lindbergh Estate.

Since 1986, the Sourland Conservancy has worked to protect the ecological integrity, historic resources and special character of the Sourland Mountain region through education and advocacy.