Mount St. Mary's College & Seminary Alumni News Fall 2000

MOUNT magazine

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GHOST

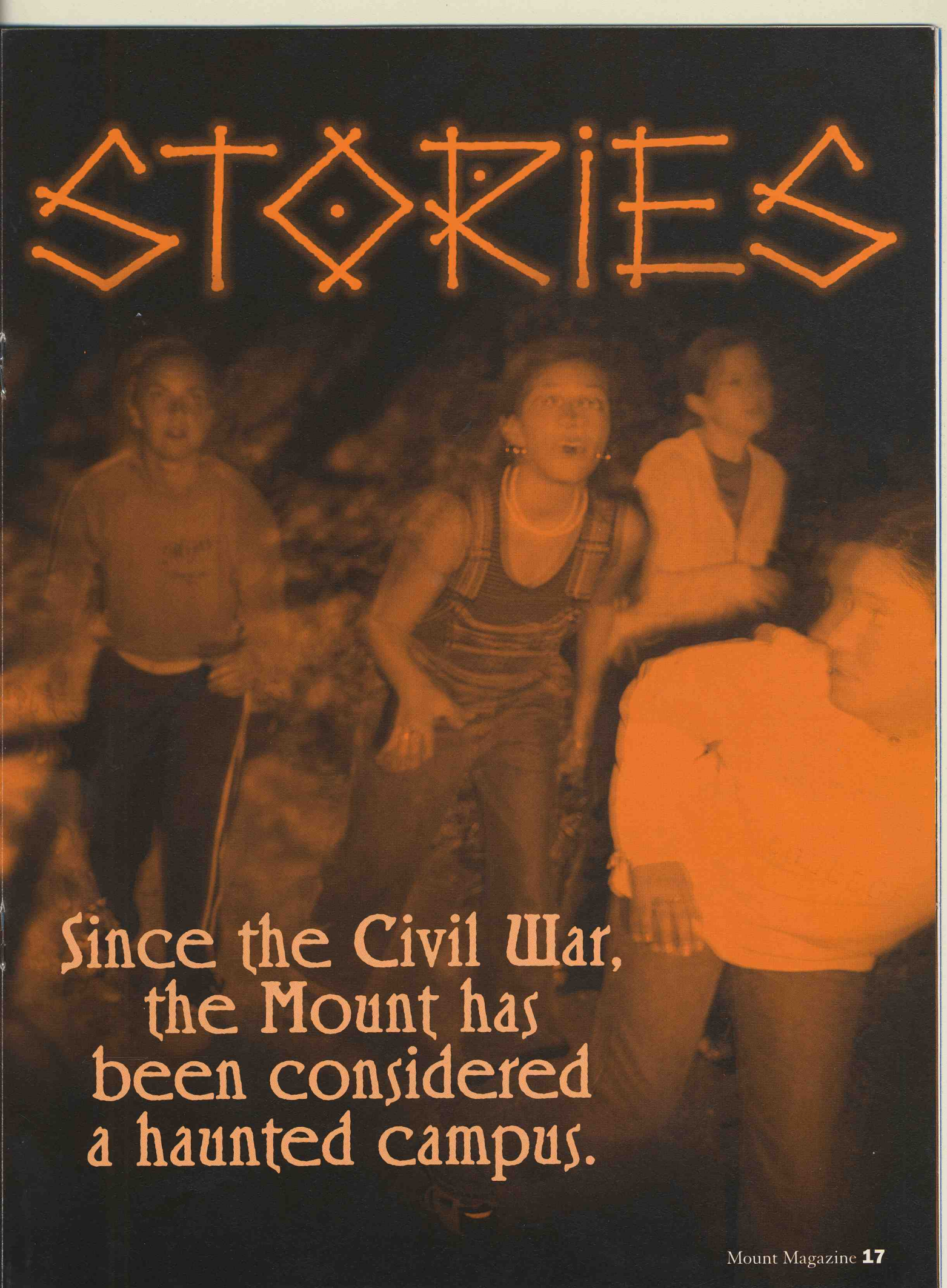
It's the time of the year when the leaves in the Catoctin Mountains near Emmitsburg are turning deep shades of red, orange, and brown. Indian corn adorns doors, pumpkins – short and squatty and tall and lean- line porches, and children who are transformed into princesses, pirates, ghosts and witches go door-to-door in hopes of filling their pillowcases to the brim with candy. It's Halloween. Days are shorter, the temperatures have dropped and conversations regarding ghosts and the paranormal are a normalcy opposed to a rarity. Ghosts stories. Everyone has heard them; probably everyone has told one in their lifetime. Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary is no different.

Since the Civil War the Mount has been considered a haunted campus. Spirits and poltergeists of past priests, students and faculty roam the campus showing themselves to believers and skeptics alike. Mysterious, unpredictable, mischievous and often playful, these ghosts return to the Mount for various reasons. Some are alleged to be searching for something they lost, others find solace in returning to the place where they passed over, and still others return simply to be a part of the community as it appears today.

Fr. Dan Nusbaum, Mount College historian, has been retelling the Mount's ghost stories for as long as he can recall. He initially became interested in the often international stories while studying in France. Upon returning to the Untied States he found that some ghost stories had a universal theme and were altered to those retelling them. He also discovered stories indicative of specific regions or locations. The latter is typically the case when regarding the spirits and celestial beings of the Mount.

According to Fr. Dan the majority of Mount ghost stories have historical roots that can be proven through documentation. These "urban legends" are small windows into our past. Some alum may recall the haunting revivals of these stories told by Fr. Dan in Flynn Hall or on a walking tour through the cemetery. Are these stories true? Do ghosts really exist on the Mount grounds? When asked if he believes in ghosts, Fr. Dan simply replied, "I believe in ghost stories. I will say that." ▲

STORIES



Since the Civil War, the Mount has been considered a haunted campus.

Turn Me Over

Retold by Rev. Dan Nusbaum

Near the end of the Civil War a young man from South Carolina decided to volunteer for the Confederate Army, much to the chagrin of his steady girlfriend. She pleaded that he not go off to volunteer to fight for the South. But he felt obligated to serve, and devised a plan to make their time apart more bearable. Together, they looked into the heavens and chose a star. Each night, at exactly the same time, they would look at the star and know that somehow or another they would again one day be looking at their star together.

As the 17-year-old went off to war he found himself in Gettysburg for the Great Battle, which eventually claimed his life. Following the battle the government contracted local farmers to give temporary burial to the bodies of soldiers unclaimed by family, which was the case for most of them. An Emmitsburg farmer took the young man from South Carolina to a farm located in what's now called Nancy's Bottom on the Mount campus, and most recently the location of the apartment-style dormitories. It was here that, instead of giving the soldier the burial prescribed by law, he simply threw the soldier's body, along with two others, into an abandoned well that had been dry for years and covered it. Records indicate that he was later brought to trial for violating the contract he had signed by improperly disposing of the soldiers' bodies and collecting the government money.

This ghost has been haunting the Mount since the Civil War days.

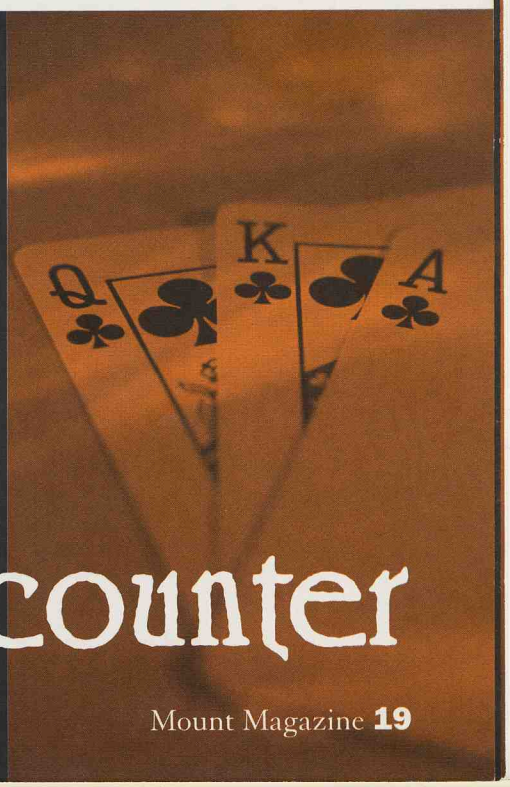
Unfortunately for the boy from South Carolina he landed face down underneath the other soldiers with his body covered up. Ever since then the young boy has wandered the campus of Mount St. Mary's, distraught that he is face down and can't see the star that he and his beloved chose as their common bond. He has approached many students with a simple tap on the shoulder and says, "Turn me over" and then disappears. The young man, all of 17 years old, looks tired and is barefoot (which is typical of a Confederate Army soldier due to the lack of shoes, which was one of the reason they came North to Gettysburg where shoes were alleged to be plentiful). This ghost has been haunting the Mount since the Civil Wars days in the 1860s and maintained his strong presence on the campus of Mount St. Mary's. If you feel a tap and hear the hush of "Turn me over," look up—Chances are, you will see a brightly shining star searching for its beloved. ▲

It scared the bejabbers out of him.

Father Dan once lived in a dorm room where a priest had died 30 years prior. From the very beginning things just didn't seem right. Objects on the mantel would mysteriously move. His bed would move in the middle of the night. Fr. Dan stated that once he was playing cards in the dorm room with a student and won every hand because he knew exactly what cards his young opponent was holding. When he told the student the dead priest was helping him, the student scoffed. So, Fr. Dan told the student in 30 seconds a cat that was sleeping on the desk would sit up, look intently at the corner and then jump from the desk and run down the hall. And that's exactly what happened.

"It scared the bejabbers out of him," Fr. Dan said. ▲

Fr. Dan's Encounter



Retold by Rev. Dan Nusbaum

Flute on the Mountain

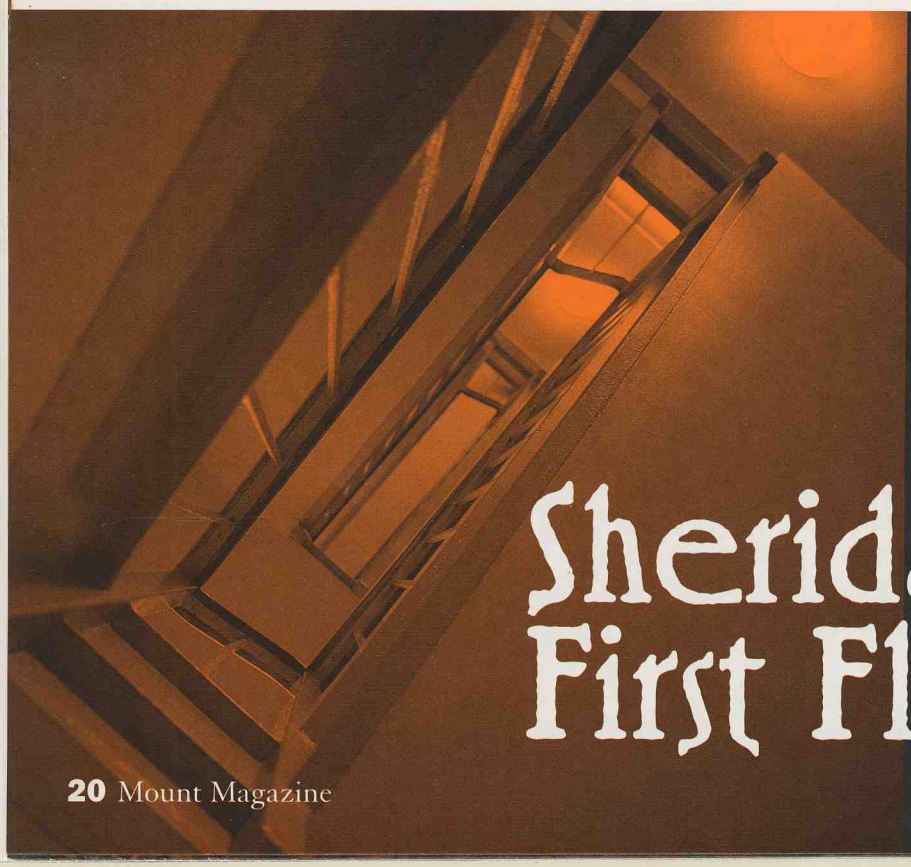
...the townspeople and parishioners swore they heard the music of a flute just before midnight Mass coming down the mountain from the college cemetery.

Just before the turn of the 19th century, Henry Dealman was the professor of music and art at Mount St. Mary's. Each year he would give a concert on Christmas Eve in the wonderful old St. Mary's-on-the-Hill Church. He would play Christmas music on the organ for hours to large audiences who traveled great distances just to hear the well-known musician and composer play.

Mr. Dealman had a son, Larry, who has taken up the flute at a very young age and was quite good. He began joining his father in these Christmas Eve concerts. For several years they played alongside each other until one year when Larry refused to play. Sometime during the year the father and son had a falling out and ceased speaking to one another. For years Larry stayed at his house, which was a building that stood just across from St. Anthony's Church just off the Mount campus, sulking and refusing to play with his father. In 1882, several years after they had last performed together, Larry's father passed away. Ridden with guilty feelings for his behavior over the years and saddened by his missed opportunities to perform with his father he began playing the flute at the Christmas Eve concerts once again, this time alongside his father's successor, who was now the professor of music for the Mount.

After the concert concluded, Larry always went into the college cemetery and, standing over his fathers grave in an act of atonement, he would play the Christmas songs to honor his father. He continued this tradition each year until his own death.

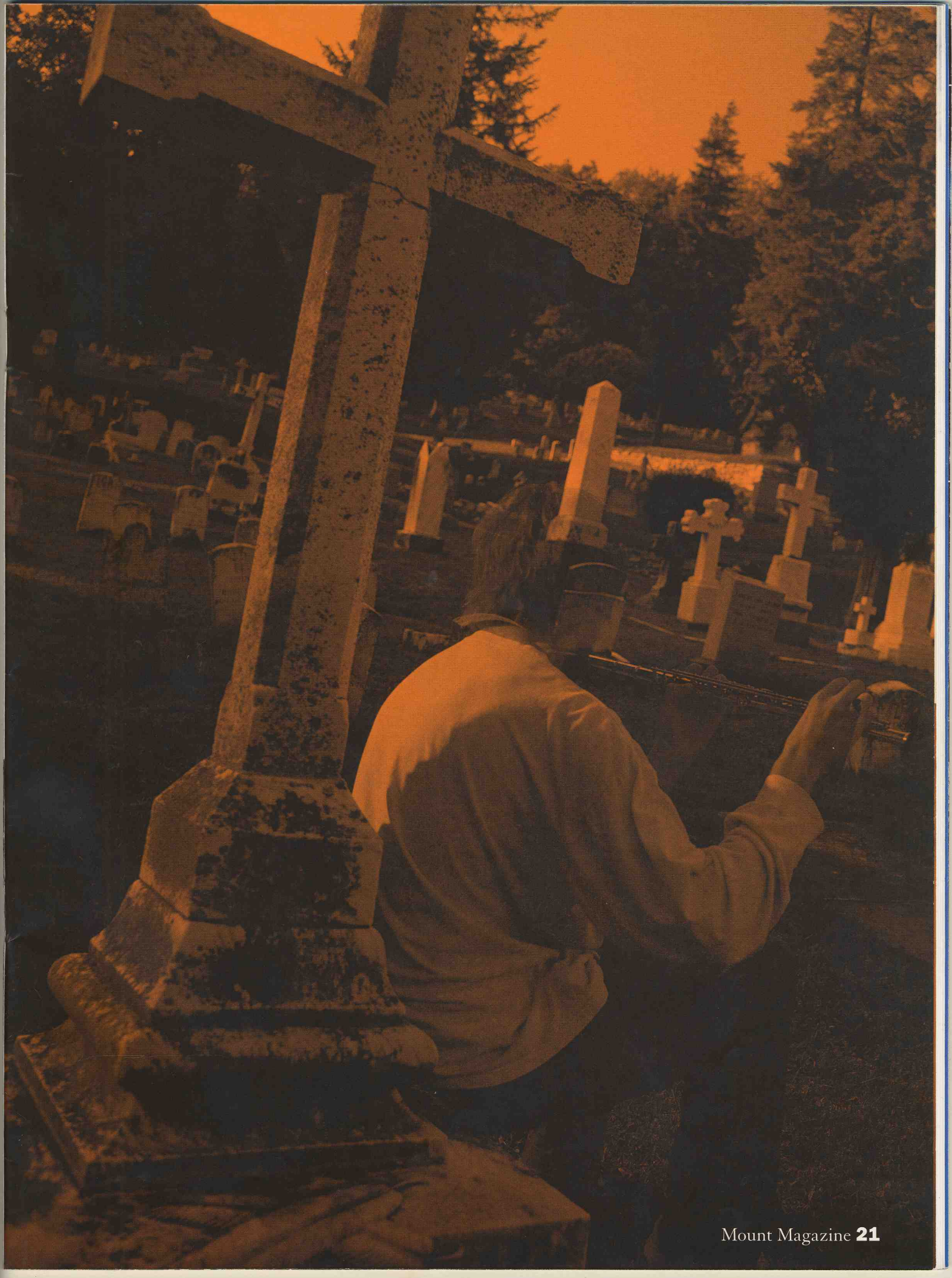
The Christmas following Larry's death, the townspeople and parishioners swore they heard the music of a flute just before midnight Mass coming down the mountain from the college cemetery. When the looked for the source they found neither the flute nor the flute player. The legend of the Music on the Mountain spread across the state and for years individuals would travel from as far away as Baltimore just to hear the echo of a son's tribute to his fallen father. ▲

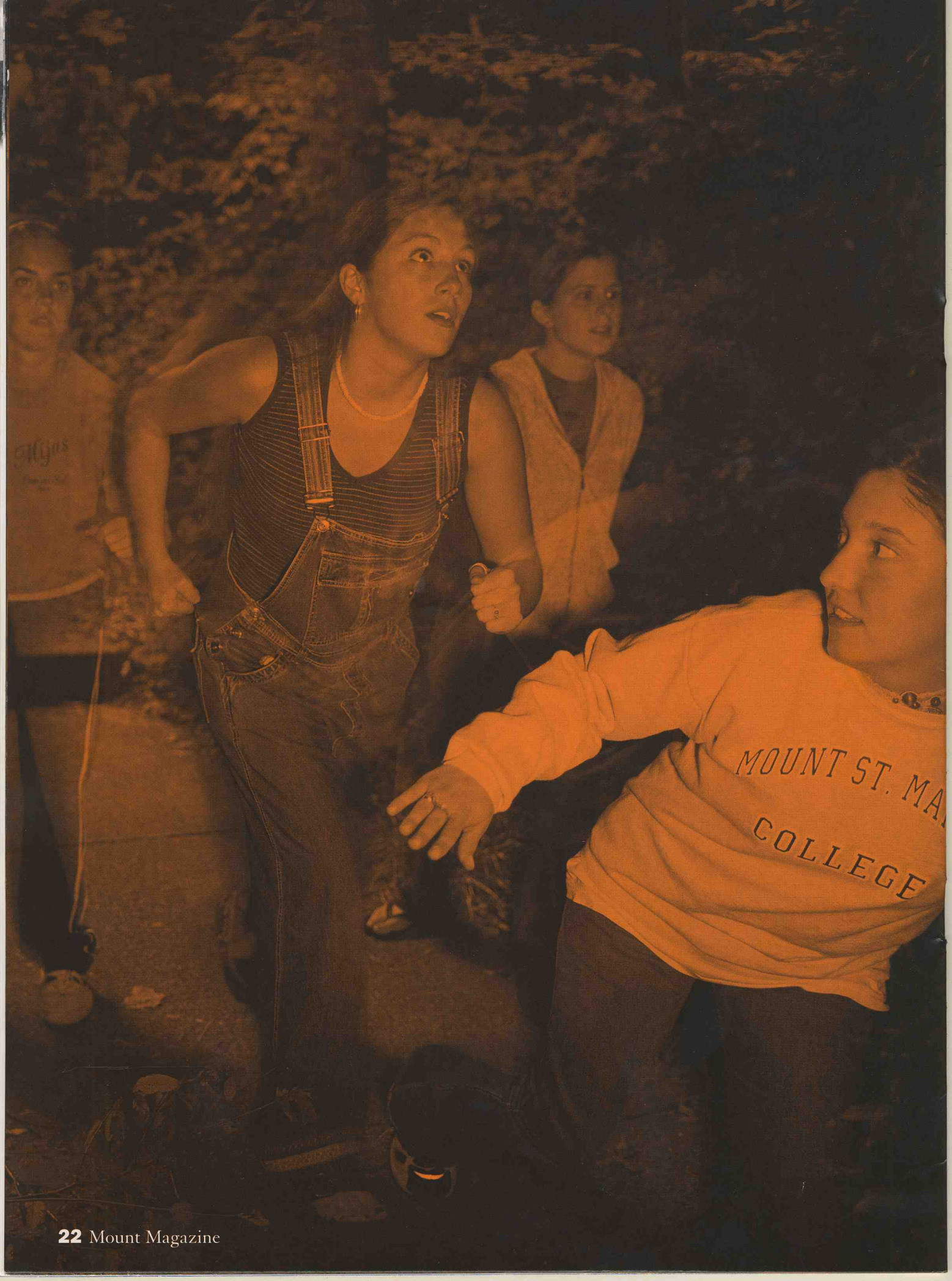


Sheridan First Floor

...strains of music seem to be coming from nowhere.

Mount legend has it that a student died in his dormroom while the sounds of Led Zeppelin blasted from his speakers. While no one knows how—or even if—this student passed on, musical "evidence" lingers through the mysterious strains of music that seem to be coming from nowhere in Sheridan Hall. ▲




MOUNT ST. MA
COLLEGE

The Hand

Retold by Rev. Dan Nusbaum

...people would hear scratches on their window, and the hand would be spotted.

Slavery is a part of our national history, and the Mount has a chapter in it, too. In the 1800s it was a fairly common practice for the Mount to receive slaves as payment-in-kind for outstanding tuition of students from the South. Slaves were "deeded" to the school for a determined duration to cover the impending tuition costs.

Sometime in the 1840s the administration was finding it difficult to hold the slaves. Most were not actually owned by the college, rather indentured or under a contract held by the college. When their contracts expired, the Mount was obligated to return them to their masters. After years of struggling through legal problems, Mount President John McCaffrey was able to free slaves owned by the college and those held by college contracts.

One of the Mount's most memorable slaves was a gentleman by the unique name of Leander. Leander was a notorious thief on the campus. After many warnings and petty thefts, he finally was convicted of a somewhat more egregious theft and sentenced to punishment. In those days standard punishment was to cut off a hand. In Leander's case, his left hand was removed—leaving his right, which was more capable of rendering work. Because Leander was Catholic, as were most slaves at the Mount, and because he was on a Catholic campus, a proper Christian burial of the severed hand was performed. At that time, slaves lived on first floor McCaffrey. In instances such as Leander's, burials took place in front of McCaffery.

Years later, Leander, who had been freed, remained at the college and was revered, died a well-respected man. Upon his death his body was buried in the college cemetery on the mountain. His hand, however, remained buried in front of McCaffrey.

Seeking to be reunited with its body, the hand is said to roam McCaffrey Hall. Of course there have been several occurrences...people would hear scratches on their window, and the hand would be spotted. It has been found underneath a pillow when students are trying to find a comfortable area to sleep. It has been found in a dresser drawer. If you feel a cold hand brushing against your face in McCaffrey Hall, don't be alarmed. It is just Leander's hand—prowling, seeking to find the body it was detached from so long ago. ▲

Room 252

Troy Trayor of hauntedmaryland.com

One of the most popular ghost stories involves the ghost of a former college president.

He has since been seen wandering the campus and spotted following groups of students. The ghost of Fr. Simon Bruté is known to occupy the space known to students as 252 Bruté. In 1973 a priest was living in the room and reported hearing strange noises one night. He left a tidy room one night, only to return a few moments later to find the room completely torn apart...the bed unmade, clothes strewn about and books and papers scattered all over the floor. His initial thought was that someone was playing a prank. His opinion changed shortly thereafter when his lights started operating sporadically and his television would turn on and off by itself at different times of the day. He finally moved out of the room. Another priest unknowingly moved in and brought with him a pet cat. He soon realized that there was some sort of frightening energy in the room. It was the cat that noticed it first, sometimes (for no reason the priest could see) becoming very agitated and afraid. It would suddenly start hissing at the air and then go and hide beneath the bed. This happened several times until he too moved. For a long time 252 Bruté remained unoccupied. In 1997 three Mount females once again occupied the room. Although the girls say they were not intimidated by the room's cryptic lore, they did report several unusual occurrences. Once a mirror feel off the wall for no apparent reason and the toilet repeatedly flushed throughout the evening. There are most likely more stories from the students and priests who have occupied the fated dormitory space, but who have not been brave enough to speak about what they have seen. ▲