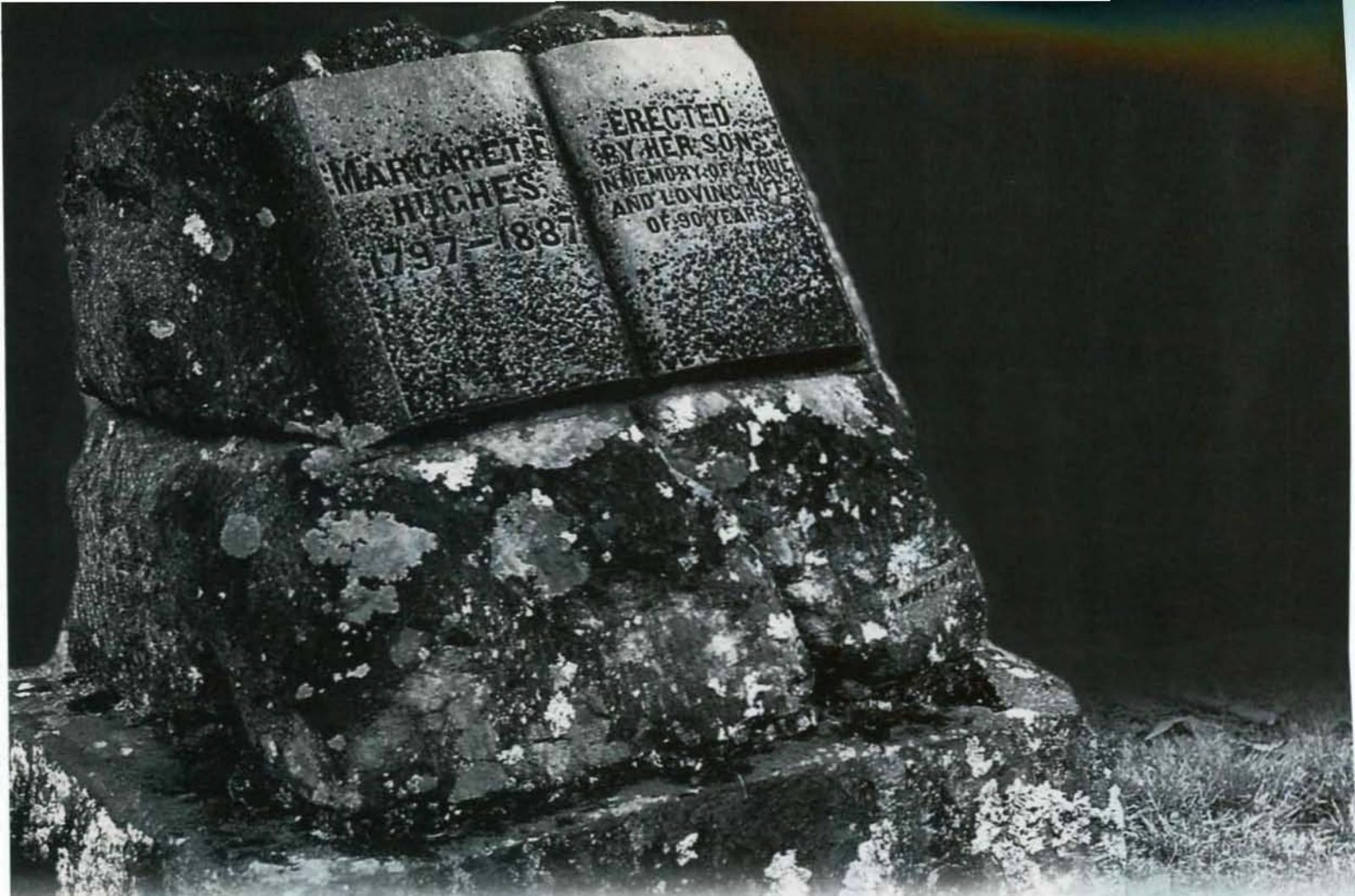


Spirits *of the* Lost Colony

Ghosts don't
haunt sunny
spaces.

They weave like gauze through shadowed hallways or rise from deep-woods fog. You look for them—or try not to—in secluded spots with bittersweet histories, leftover tears and longing. Places like Rugby, Tennessee.





Nearly hidden in the high, tangled woods of the Cumberland Plateau, Rugby is the remarkably preserved dream of 19th-century British novelist and social reformer Thomas Hughes. Hughes founded the town in 1880 in search of a utopian existence. He longed for an ideal cooperative settlement where hard work and a cultured leisure would make its citizens better servants of God.

But Hughes and his dedicated colonists could not have foreseen the circumstances that would thwart this plan. Now, 122 years later, 20 original buildings still stand as a testament to Hughes's vision and struggle.

Creeping through the rooms of Rugby's long-ago splendor, winding down halls now silent, you may feel very near to the souls who lived in them. In the bedroom of Thomas Hughes at his restored cottage, Kingstone Lisle, his gloves and collars lie upon a marble dresser as if only momentarily left behind. You can see where Hughes's right arm rested against his writing desk and wore away the green felt surface. It is not a museum room, you'd swear; Hughes must simply have got up from composing a letter a few moments ago and walked into the hereafter.

In an autumn twilight in this lonely and beautiful



village, the warmth of the sun gone west, it would be easy to imagine, as you strolled from the old library to the Episcopal church through fallen leaves, that someone else's invisible feet were following behind.

A lofty ideal

On Highway 52 in Morgan County, 70 miles northwest of Knoxville, Rugby is a bit off the beaten path even in 2002. In 1880, it was its own world, within shouting distance of nothing. There were no paths then; they had to be forged through the thick woods and often brutal weather. The final seven miles to Rugby traveling from the nearest train station became notorious for their muddy difficulty.

To found a town deep in the Cumberland Plateau in 1880 took some serious determination, and Thomas Hughes was a determined man.

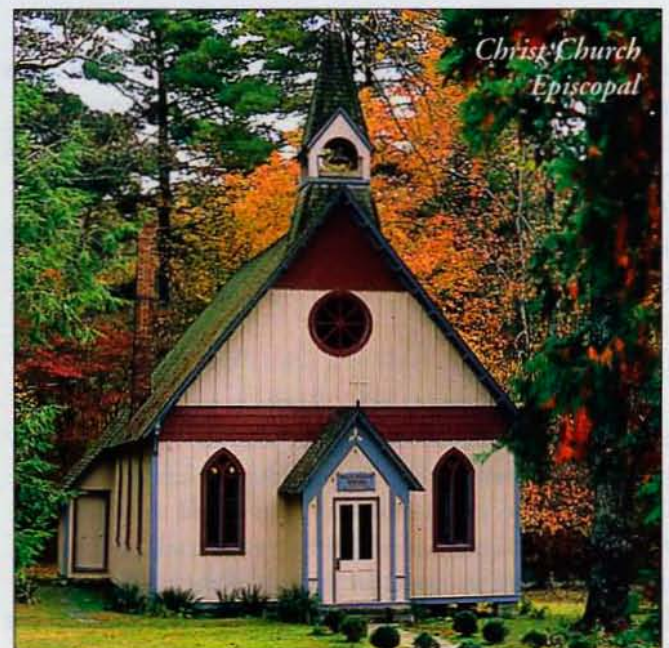
What brought Hughes and his British settlers to Tennessee? Hughes, born in Berkshire, England, in 1822, was famous at the time as the author of *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), a largely autobiographical novel about his beloved years at England's Rugby School. He became a lawyer after his education at Oxford University and was eventually elected to Parliament.

But Hughes was also fascinated with social reform and longed to build a cooperative colony based on agriculture. His target group was Britain's "second sons," or the second-born sons of the English gentry. These men would not inherit their fathers' fortunes, but neither were they expected to work, since that would bring shame upon their families. Hughes' objective was to establish a colony open to both British and American residents that would offer these second sons a place to work respectably in the New World and earn a decent living.

Hughes also intended that while residents would work hard at farming during the day, they would be rewarded with cultural pursuits, sports, music, and other fun at night.

At that time, a Boston-based company called the Board of Aid to Landownership had purchased land on the Cumberland Plateau for the purpose of settlement. The land was sparsely populated, fairly fertile, and loaded with timber and other natural resources. Hughes acquired more than 100,000 acres of land from this group.

Some of this land came without clear title, which was a first false step in Hughes's ill-fated dream for his colony. And although Hughes rightly believed that a few years of hard work would be necessary before the land yielded a



ANDREW B.
BURROUGHS
BORN IN
NEW JERSEY
DEC. 6, 1850,
DROWNED IN
CLEAR FORK
MAR. 27, 1886.



Big South Fork River gorge

great bounty, the newspapers touted the beauty of the area and the abundance of crops. Some colonists, expecting instant utopia, were a bit shocked by the reality of settling in the wilderness. Naysayers began to chatter, making Hughes's task all the more difficult. Still, he plowed ahead, naming his new township after his alma mater, the Rugby School.

the rise and fall of rugby

After its founding in 1880, Rugby grew and began to carve its own niche on the rugged plateau. New houses sprang up, as well as the Thomas Hughes Library, Kingstone Lisle, and a fabulous hotel called the Tabard Inn. Parks, common areas, bridle paths, trails, and swimming holes were set aside for the use of the colonists. Residents whiled away the evenings by participating in the Rugby Lawn Tennis Club, the Rugby Cornet Band, the

Rugby Music & Dramatic Society, or a variety of other pastimes. By 1884, 450 British and American residents called Rugby home.

But Rugby would face several crises that crippled its efforts. Some of these problems were related to bad administration. The colony's first business manager had to be fired for jacking up land prices and skimming the inflated profits for himself. Hughes, while dedicated to the colony's success, could not stay in Rugby full time because his wife and children refused to accompany him and because his work in England financed the colony. In a time before telephones and e-mail, this remote management system caused chaos and confusion.

Other crises were beyond the control of Hughes and his followers. Although the Cincinnati & Southern Railroad had promised to build a spur between Rugby and the nearest rail town, Sedgemoor, the track never materialized, leaving a perilously difficult seven miles between Rugby and civilization. An outbreak of typhoid, meanwhile, left seven Rugby residents dead and many more ill or panicked. Even as the colonists recovered from these setbacks, and more tourists began to take note of the area's beauty



Kingstone Lisle

and charm, the Tabard Inn burned to the ground in 1884. This proved to be the colony's final turning point toward ruin.

By the close of the 19th century, most of the colonists had fled for greener pastures, although some remained permanently. The Rugby cooperative enterprises were finally sold off to American capitalist interests in 1909. The area, however, never became a ghost town (at least not in the traditional sense of the phrase, as we shall see).

historic rugby saves the past

Children and grandchildren of the original colonists, like Rugby residents Will and Sarah Walton in the first half of the 20th century, helped keep as much of Rugby's history and architecture intact as they could. Residents who later owned some of the colony's original buildings also worked to preserve their integrity.

In 1964, a local young man named Brian Stagg took an enormous interest in caring for the historic village and organized a preservation committee. Only sixteen at the time, he began to appeal to the Tennessee Historical Commission for help. His project, begun on nothing more than a bright idea in 1964, has



blossomed into the thriving village Rugby is today. Brian wrote a book about the town called *The Distant Eden* before his death at 28. Today, his sister Barbara Stagg serves as executive director of Historic Rugby and continues Brian's work.

The Thomas Hughes Library today is missing only 12 volumes from its original inventory of 7000, and it is filled with fascinating titles from a different era: *How to Grow More Handsome, What Girls Can Do* (sew, clean, and sweep, if you couldn't guess), and *The War of the Rebellion*, a multi-volume account of the Civil War. Christ Church Episcopal still has a regular congregation—and its original paint on the inside. Painted with a buttermilk-based tint when the church was built, the red *fleur-de-lis* design is as bright as when the color was first brushed on in 1887.

The committee's future plans include rebuilding the once-mighty Tabard Inn on the original site and producing a live history diorama at the restored Uffington House, which was the Rugby home of Thomas Hughes's mother, Margaret.

and the past lives on

The old homes of Rugby have wide-hewn, hand-planed boards and the thick scent of a century's worth of living within their walls. Step inside and you won't quite remember what year it is. Neither, apparently, do the misplaced spirits from Rugby's past who reportedly roam the halls.

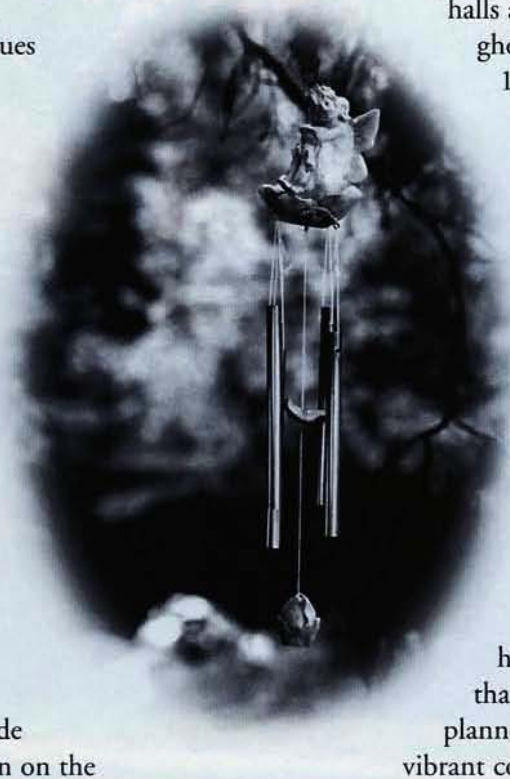
A tragic tale from Rugby's early days would make a classic teen horror flick. In the heyday of the grand Tabard Inn, a married couple, the Davises, managed the place and lived in Room 13 because guests commonly refused to stay in a room with such an unlucky number. But early one morning Mr. Davis arose and cut his wife's throat, drank poison, and shot himself.

When the inn burned a few years later, Room 13 was the last part of the building to go up in flames, and so colonists were able to get much of the furniture out before it was reduced to ashes. The legend is that witnesses of the fire heard ghostly human moans as the fire licked around Room 13 and finished destroying the inn. The furniture, meanwhile, was moved to Newbury House. Since Newbury's restoration as a bed and breakfast by Historic Rugby, guests have reported waking to the sight of a ghostly male figure bending over the bed.

Another famous Rugby ghost is that of Sophie Tyson,

a colonist whose otherworldly form was first spotted by Brian Stagg at his home in the original Rugby cottage Roslyn. Tyson's figure, he said, paced the halls and wept. No one knows why the ghost cries, but living in Rugby in the 1880s, Tyson would have seen fire, disease, failed crops, death, and the eventual scattering of her neighbors to the winds. She probably wept a time or two in her years as a Rugby pioneer.

Whether you believe in ghosts, autumn is a perfect time to visit the town of Rugby and slip quietly into the past for an evening. The colony itself may not have lived up to Hughes' dreams, but its legacy—its beautifully preserved buildings, stories, and well-recorded history—is very much alive in the work of Historic Rugby. Hughes himself might be delighted to discover that while the utopian society he planned didn't materialize, the small but vibrant community he founded has persisted to this day. *TH*



Upcoming Events at Rugby

Halloween Ghostly Gathering - Oct. 25-26

Thanksgiving Marketplace - Nov. 29

Includes crafts demonstrations, shopping, and a Victorian Cream Tea at Newbury House. Advance reservations are required for the tea.

Christmas at Historic Rugby - Dec. 7 & 14

Includes decorated original buildings, carols, hot wassail, Christmas shopping, classical music, and more. Advance reservations are required for Victorian Dinner at the Harrow Road Café.

Call Historic Rugby at (423)628-2441, e-mail rugbytn@highland.net, or visit historicrugby.org for information on reservations, lodging and more. Historic Rugby building tours are offered daily.