

Name _____ Date: _____

Mrs. Winchester's Strange House

In San Jose, California, there is a strange house. It has 160 rooms. There's no other house like it. It took thirty-eight years to build this house and it was never finished. The story of this house began in 1881.

William Winchester, whose father had invented the Winchester rifle, died that year. He left twenty million dollars to his wife, Sarah. Sarah could have spent the money but she was not happy. Her wealth troubled her. It had come from the sale of guns. They had killed a lot of people. Some people say Sarah feared the spirits of the dead. She feared she might die too.

Sarah went to a fortune teller for help. The fortune teller told her to build a house. Once work had begun on the house, it could not stop. She had to keep building. This would keep the spirits happy. Then, Sarah would not die.

Sarah lived in the east. She went west to search for a house. In San Jose she found one. She bought the house. Then, she paid men to work on it. They built more rooms. They tore out some and they changed some. At times, they worked through the night. This strange house has strange things in it. The number thirteen is used in many ways.

The ceilings have thirteen parts. Most rooms have thirteen lights. The stairs have thirteen steps. In most rooms, there are thirteen windows.

It's easy to get lost in the house. Some doors do not lead anywhere. Some stairs go up to the ceiling. Those who worked in the house used maps to find their way around in the house. The house has forty-seven fireplaces. Most windows are made of beautiful art glass. Gold and silver were used on lights, doors and windows. In the house, there is fine work in wood, glass and metal. It was all done by hand.

The house is well built. In 1906, there was an earthquake. After the earthquake, few repairs had to be done on the house. Sarah did not leave her house often. Few people came to visit her. Servants took care of her needs. She kept on building the house and she stayed alive.

Time won out. At the age of eighty-two she died. The house is now famous and it's open to all visitors. Soon the house will be restored. It will look as it did when Sarah lived there. She would have liked that!