

the ghosts of Devils Lake

TRUE STORIES FROM MY HAUNTED HOMETOWN



Corrine Kenner

The Ghosts of Devils Lake

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The Ghost of the *Minnie H*

You don't usually expect to meet a sea captain plying his trade 1,500 miles from the nearest ocean—but one sailor, Captain Edward E. Heerman, was able to claim the inland sea of Devils Lake as his own for decades.

These days, Captain Heerman's steamboat voyages are a thing of the past. No one alive remembers them. But if you look closely, you might be able to spot Captain Heerman himself, still waiting for passengers on the ghost ship Minnie H.

IN LIFE, CAPTAIN Edward Edson Heerman looked as if he could have stepped out of a storybook. He was bearded, like all sea captains should be, and he smoked a pipe. He was perpetually sunburned, and when he walked, he leaned, as though he was always braced for waves or wind.

Like so many settlers, Captain Heerman had traveled a long way to reach Devils Lake. He was born in Vermont in 1834. His parents were farmers who raised sheep, spun wool, and wove it into cloth. His family moved to Iowa when he was still a boy. At the age of sixteen, he left home and headed for the Mississippi, determined to seek his fortune on the water.

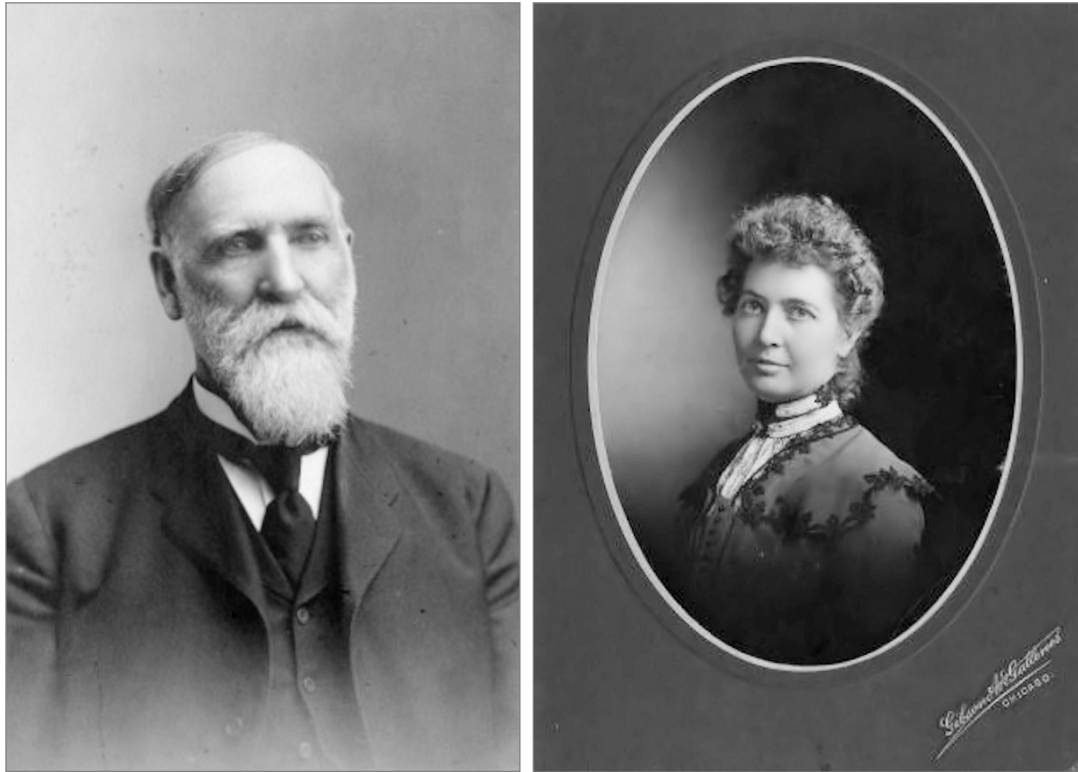
He found it. By nineteen, he commanded his own steamboat, and a few years later he owned a fleet of thirteen riverboats that ran along the Mississippi and Chippewa rivers.

As railroads competed with riverboats for passengers and freight in the central corridor of the country, Captain Heerman started to look for new waters to explore. He headed west toward Dakota Territory.

In 1858, he helped establish a town along the Red River, near Fargo. During the Indian Uprising of 1862, however, the settlement was burned to the ground, and his expansion plans were put on hold.

In 1882, he made a trip to Devils Lake.

“Devils Lake was a beautiful body of water fringed with timber,” he wrote in his memoirs. “The locality was dotted with other beautiful lakes. I examined the soil and believed I had found an empire of undeveloped resources.”



Captain Edward Heerman and his daughter, Minnie

He sold everything he owned and moved to North Dakota, where he practically dragged a steamboat, piece by piece, thirty-five miles across open prairie. He shipped fourteen train cars full of boat-building materials—including a sawmill and a boiler—to the end of the rail line in Larimore. He hired teams of men and horses to drag everything the rest of the way, through snow so deep that one of the loads was lost and never recovered. He built the ship in the dead of winter, in temperatures that reached fifty below zero.

Captain Heerman was also a family man, and almost all of his ships were named for his only daughter, Minnietta. The ship he built during that winter of 1882, the *Minnie H*, would be the most successful of them all.

Captain Heerman designed the *Minnie H* to carry freight, mail, and passengers from the train depot to settlements on the lake, including Fort Totten and the town of Minnewaukan. He did a booming business for almost thirty years.

During that time, however, Captain Heerman kept a record of the lake's water level. Each year, the lake grew smaller—until finally, his steamboat business receded, too.



The Minnie H on Devils Lake

In the fall of 1889, the *Minnie H* made her last trip to Devils Lake. The water level had dropped so much that the boats had to land at the narrows of the bay, a mile and a half from Devils Lake, and they were never able to get back to town again.

Captain Heerman turned the *Minnie H* pilothouse into a playhouse for his grandchildren and retired. He died in 1929, at the age of ninety-five.

Despite the fact that he's been dead for decades, everyone in Devils Lake knows where to find his ghost. His place in history is marked by a boulder on a long-lost shoreline.

That boulder, in turn, is in the front yard of the school that was named for his ship: Minnie H Elementary, on the west side of town. That's where Heerman's passengers used to board the paddlewheel for a two-hour ride across the lake.

These days, when the youngest students see him, some think he's a crossing guard, patrolling the crosswalk in front of the school. Others mistake him for a kindly neighbor, enjoying a morning stroll.

Every now and then he stands up and stretches. He walks through the school building, past the classrooms, and out the back door. Then he heads northeast across the playground, and up the hill that leads to the railroad station—just in case there are travelers at the depot, waiting for a ride.

The ancient Greeks and Romans used to believe that the souls of the dead were ferried across the River Styx, the mythological river that separated the land of the living from the land of the dead. They buried their loved ones with a coin or two, so they could pay their fare across the water.

In death, Captain Heerman has stepped into the role of ferryman, conducting souls from one phase in life to another. Given his love of Devils Lake and her people, it's not hard to imagine him, still collecting coins and passengers for transport from one side of the lake to another.

About the Author



Corrine Kenner specializes in bringing metaphysical subjects down to earth. She's an award-winning writer who was raised on a farm near Devils Lake. Since then, she has traveled the world studying the mysteries of life and death.

Corrine is the author of more than a dozen books on the paranormal, as well as the editor of four anthologies. Her books are available worldwide, and they've been translated into a dozen languages. Corrine herself has been a keynote speaker at international conferences and events in England, Canada, and across the United States.

Corrine's father, Wayne Kenner, was a mail carrier, and her mother, Carolyn Kenner, directed the Devils Lake childcare center. As a young adult, Corrine lived in Brazil, where she learned Portuguese, and Los Angeles, where she earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from California State University. She is the mother of four girls, and she and her husband have homes in Devils Lake and Minneapolis.

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Meet the Ghosts of Devils Lake

In this collection of true ghost tales, you'll discover a wide range of bone-chilling stories from the dark and dangerous waters of Devils Lake, North Dakota—where the spirits of Indian and pioneer settlers alike are forever bound to the land they loved.

You'll meet the real men and women who still haunt the dusty trails they walked more than a century ago. You'll see them in the shadows of the wooded shoreline, and follow them across the grassy prairie fields.

In sixty carefully chosen and researched accounts, you will find:

- Legendary stories of bravery and courage in the face of certain disaster
- Lost souls, doomed to relive their tragic deaths
- Vicious outlaws, condemned to relive their crimes for all eternity
- Paranormal places, including a mysterious “Stairway to Hell”
- Supernatural creatures, like the ethereal *Canyo Tina* on the south shore

You'll also come to know a wide range of former area residents, including:

- Lillian Wineman, the eccentric old woman who stayed with all of her belongings—even after her possessions were moved into a museum
- The Ward Brothers, who were murdered on their homestead and forced to seek justice from the next world
- The captain of the *Minnie H* steamboat, who still waits and watches for any travelers who need safe passage
- A lost colony of suffering Jewish settlers and their children
- The Dakota warriors drowned by the spirits of an angry lake

Corrine Kenner is a Devils Lake native and an award-winning author of more than a dozen books on the paranormal. She has traveled the world studying the mysteries of life and death—and in this guide, she offers a glimpse of the Great Beyond from spirits close to home.

