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## Haunting on the Mountain

A mother's grief has no end in 'Legend of Lucy Keyes'

By Richard Duckett TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

*"Lu-cy! Lu-cy!"*

After the actor and director John Stimpson moved to Princeton, it did not take him long to become familiar with the story of Lucy Keyes. After all, it was, so to speak, right in his own backyard. Fascinated by the tale, he has made a movie, "The Legend of Lucy Keyes," some of which was literally shot ... in his backyard.

*"Lu-cy!" "Lu-cy!"*

It is both a true story and a local legend. But it could definitely be the stuff of a movie, too. In 1755, 4-year-old Lucy Keyes disappeared in the Princeton woods. People from miles around took part in the search, but she was never found. Rumors abounded. Was she abducted by American Indians? Killed by a neighbor? For Lucy's mother, Martha Keyes, the anguish and the grief was indescribable. Long after the search had been abandoned, she would go out into the woods at nightfall forlornly calling "Lu-cy! Lu-cy!" According to some, the mother's spirit still haunts the hillsides of Wachusett Mountain as she searches for her lost child. On windy nights, it has been claimed over the years, you can sometimes hear the mother's frantic cries.

Part of the land that Stimpson lives on was once owned by the tragic Keyes family. Stimpson makes regular forays into the woods.

Anything to report?

"I hike up there all the time. I can't say I've actually heard her voice," he said during a recent interview. "But the dogs have sometimes started acting funny, and the hair on the back of my neck stands up. My wife and I have certainly had experiences where we've both been creeped out."

Stimpson has lived in Princeton for about 18 years since marrying Carolyn (Crowley) Stimpson, who is vice president of the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area.

"It's kind of the most famous thing that ever happened to Princeton. Reading about it, I got intrigued. It really took off in my mind," he said.

"The Legend of Lucy Keyes," which Stimpson wrote and directed, is set in the present with flashbacks to the happenings of 1755. In giving a modern fictitious ghost-story twist to the tale, Stimpson focuses on a family who moves to Princeton and has, unbeknownst to them, an unsettling similarity to the Keyes family that lived there 250 years earlier — including a young daughter named Lucy.

Sure enough, the modern-day Lucy starts to have strange dreams. Something eerie is definitely in the air. Or in the woods.

"The Legend of Lucy Keyes" hit the film festival circuit early this year and is now available on DVD. It will be shown on the Lifetime Movie Network in certain cable and satellite markets beginning Oct. 7. Lifetime is positioning the film for the Halloween season.

The movie was produced by Moody Street Pictures of Waltham and Intellectual Properties Worldwide of Los Angeles. Moody Street is a collaborative of filmmakers and producers in New England who are committed to making films locally. Previously, Stimpson directed "Beacon Hill," a political drama about a newly elected member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives confronting the Boston political machine.

"The Legend of Lucy Keyes" definitely has local flavor, including some breathtaking shots from Princeton looking out to Boston. Stimpson said 98 percent of the movie was shot in Princeton. "It's the real deal." Some sequences were filmed on his own property. Well-known town buildings and locations are also prominent, and 60 extras from the locality were used in the shooting of the movie. "The townspeople were fantastic," Stimpson said.

But the film has some nationally known faces as well. The couple who move to Princeton with their children, Jeanne and Guy Cooley, are played by Julie Delpy ("Before Sunset") and Justin Theroux ("Six Feet Under"). Brooke Adams ("Days of Heaven," "Invasion of the Bodysnatchers") plays an affluent town official who has lured Guy Cooley to town to set up and engineer a wind farm project (perhaps not the best way for Cooley to get off to a good start with his neighbors).

Mark Donadio of Moody Street was a producer of the 2004 movie "Made-Up," starring Adams and directed by her husband, Tony Shalhoub. Donadio, who is also a producer of "The Legend of Lucy Keyes," started talking to Adams about possibly getting involved with the Princeton project.

"She was kind enough to lend her name, so we could say we've got Brooke Adams attached to the project. That meant a lot," Stimpson said.

The main shooting with the featured cast took place in 2004, and follow-up filming, along with editing, was taking place up to last winter.

Asked how much the movie cost to make, Stimpson said, "It's hard to put a figure. ... There's \$2 million on the screen for considerably less."

"The Legend of Lucy Keyes" debuted at the Santa Barbara Film Festival in February. At the Independent Film Festival of Boston, it won the audience favorite award. Reviewers, however, were not always so kind. Robert Koehler, writing in Variety, said the tale "could easily be dubbed 'Amityville Jr.'"

"You take reviews with a grain of salt," Stimpson said. "We made the film we wanted to make — a little New England ghost story."

There was some pressure to make a full-scale graphic horror movie, Stimpson said, but he resisted. "I didn't want it ballooning out of scope."

The film did not get national distribution in theaters, but it does have the Lifetime deal, which calls for 40 television screenings.

"A lot more people will see the film than would have in platform (theater) release." Stimpson acknowledged that a national theater release would be "the dream, but you have to be ready for the realistic."

Will "The Legend of Lucy Keyes" make money?

"Absolutely," he said. With its DVD release and TV deal, "We're miles ahead of most movies on this."