

The House of Seven Gables

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The protagonist in The House of Seven Gables is Hepzibah Pyncheon. She is an aging gentlewoman who in the past had lived in luxury, but she has recently run into troubling economic times. She is an ancestor of a patrician Puritan background that goes all the way back to the colonial days of the United States. One of her earliest relatives was Colonel Pyncheon who built a house with seven gables on property which was formerly owned by a man named Matthew Maule who was executed for witchcraft. It is said that Colonel Pyncheon was one of the main figures in having Maule executed.

On the day of his death Maule put a bad spell on the Pyncheons that would last until the day of

Hepzibah. Hepzibah is a dynamic character in The House of Seven Gables.

As the story begins, Hepzibah is having to open a cent shop to help pay her bills.

She is a tall, gaunt woman who always seems to be in a fowl mood. She finds having to

open the shop extremely demeaning considering her patrician background. She lives almost completely in the past and never leaves the house to interact with the rest of the

world. When she opens the cent shop she finally begins to make interactions with other

people; however, she keeps her unpleasant mood even to her customers. The woman lives with the curse that has been handed down through the generations. It is this that

fuels her constant bad mood.

The day after she opens the shop, her cousin Phoebe comes to visit her.

Phoebe is

a young country girl who ends up staying with Hepzibah to manage the household.

Phoebe has youthful energetic demeanor which improves Hepzibah's attitude a little.

The

day after Phoebe's arrival the house of seven gables receives another guest. This guest is

later revealed to the reader to be the Hepzibah's brother Clifford who has been in jail for

thirty years for the murder of his uncle. The key to the character of Hepzibah is her strong

devotion to her brother. Throughout this middle part of the book, Hepzibah is changing

from the old maid that she was into a happier person through her brother and the lively

character of Phoebe; nevertheless, Hepzibah knows in her heart that she will never be

completely happy until the bad curse brought down on her family is removed.

The curse is finally removed as a result of two causes. First, her cousin Judge

Pyncheon who is said to be an exact copy of Colonel Pyncheon dies. With his death Hepzibah finds the curse lifted off the house. With the curse lifted Clifford

begins to come

of his state of sadness and now becomes excited. Further removing the curse, Phoebe

marries the last relative of the Maules. This totally dissolves the curse that had formally

been on Hepzibah and the house of seven gables. Hepzibah with the curse gone changes

into a happy old woman which was impossible before the curse was removed.

As seen from the above examples, Hepzibah undergoes a definite change through the story. At the beginning she is old lady living in the past, but at the end she turns into a prosperous old lady looking towards the future. She makes the complete change only through the death of her uncle and the removal of the curse on her family. With the curse removed she makes a complete change.