

HIGHROADS

FOR AAA MEMBERS



Haunted Northern Arizona

Two towns with spooky tales

BY TERESA BITLER

In their early days, Jerome and Prescott attracted adventurers looking to make their fortunes in cattle, silver, and business endeavors. Many found tragedy instead, and some are said to never have left.

This fall, relive the history of these early Arizona towns on a guided, or self-guided, haunted tour, and enjoy a few of the most fascinatingly haunting stories in Northern Arizona.

Haunted Prescott

Hassayampa Inn

As you enter Prescott, stop at Hassayampa Inn, one block east of the Courthouse Square on Gurley Street. Built in 1927, it is reportedly haunted by several ghosts, the most famous of which is Faith Summers, who checked in to a balcony suite with her new husband that same year. When he went out for cigarettes and never came back, Summers hung herself from the flagpole on her balcony. The distraught bride makes herself known in Room 426 by turning the lights and television on and off, and she appears throughout the hotel.

Darlene Wilson, of A Haunting Experience Tours in Prescott, says at the Hassayampa Inn she also has encountered: a very young Chinese boy; "the night watchman," who keeps watch over the hotel and its ghosts; and Silas, a miner who died in the 1923 fire that destroyed the Congress Hotel, which occupied the site before the Hassayampa Inn was built there five years later.

The Palace

Many of the buildings that surround Courthouse Square supposedly are haunted — even the courthouse has its ghosts. But no place has had an eerier past than The Palace Restaurant and Saloon with its underground jail, speak-easy, gambling rooms, and opium dens. Although the downstairs area isn't open to the public, the restaurant is haunted enough. The staircase leading up to the rooms where prostitutes plied their trade is an active spot. Watch for one of them, a woman with long dark hair wearing a light-colored dress, to flit through the room.

The restaurant also is said to be haunted by the wife of a former manager, as well as a gambler named Nevins, who lost his business in a high-stakes game.

Hotel Vendome

Just south of the square on Cortez Street, the Hotel Vendome dates back to 1917 and has a storied past. Abby Byr, who lived at the hotel with her husband, sent him out for medicine, and he never came back.

Depressed and sick, Byr locked herself and her cat, Noble, in Room 16, and both starved to death. Guests report hearing a cat meowing at night and feeling him rub against their legs, while Byr moves objects, opens the closet door, and taps guests on the shoulder.

In addition to Byr and Noble, paranormal investigator Maureen Riley suspects there are at least four other ghosts here, including a miner who committed suicide, and a lovesick cowboy.

Haunted Jerome

Connor Hotel

It seems like every hotel in Jerome has its ghosts, but the Connor Hotel has perhaps the most interesting story. When Ann Hopkins learned her husband, the chief mine engineer, was having an affair with a local teacher, she decided to take revenge by throwing diluted carbolic acid on his lover as she ate a meal at the Connor Hotel. The teacher survived, and Hopkins spent several years in prison for the act.

Hopkins now allegedly haunts the scene of her crime along with David Connor, the man who built the hotel in 1898. Jane Goddard, who gives haunted tours through Tours of Jerome, says Connor is watching over his hotel.

Jerome Grand Hotel

The Jerome Grand Hotel, a five-story, Mission-style building that originally served as the United Verde Hospital, is said to be the most haunted building in the state, according to general manager Chris Altherr. The hotel averaged one death per day during its 23 years as a hospital.

On the nightly, two-hour tour, watch for Claude Harvey, a hospital maintenance man who was found with his head crushed under the elevator. It's believed that someone tried to make his murder appear as an accident. Gurthie May Patch's death, however, was no accident. The young woman jumped from her third-floor room and died three days later. She haunts the third floor.

The Park and Jail

Of all the stops on her tour, Goddard says she feels the park between Main and Clark streets is the most haunted, although no specific ghost is associated with it. Don't be surprised to see one of the swings moving on its own. Paranormal investigators often get below-zero thermal readings in the park, which is an indication of an otherworldly presence.

From the park, continue east on Main Street to the Hippie Stairs, cross the parking lot, and take another flight of stairs down to the jailhouse. Goddard says people on her tours consistently report photographing orbs here and by the basketball court nearby, where a convict killed Sheriff Charlie King in 1910.

Cuban Queen Bordello

End your Jerome tour at the Cuban Queen Bordello, located next to the Queens Neighbor Art Gallery. The bordello boasts the sordid tales of a murdered prostitute, the Ku Klux Klan, and a kidnapped boy, but Goddard believes the otherworldly happenings here also are linked to legendary musician Jelly Roll Morton.

Morton, whose godmother was thought to be a voodoo priestess, was married to the bordello's madam, Anita Gonzalez, also known as Bessie Julia Johnson. On her tours, Goddard has smelled "something awful" coming from behind the bordello. "In my opinion, that's where they practiced voodoo," she says.