

# Museum News: Room 6 Revisited; A New Terror Arises

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Ah, Halloween is upon us. There's a chill in the air, and though the frost isn't yet on the pumpkin we definitely are in the middle of autumn and the first of two favorite holidays is hurling headlong at us. It is time for ghost stories, hot chocolate around a fireplace, and s'mores, dripping all over the hearth and scalding your tongue.

Several years ago I wrote an article about the Sanderson Motel and its haunted Room 6. I told of a couple who ran the motel when it was still the Sunset Siesta and their problem keeping Room 6 rented. Clients would not stay more than one night in the room, and sometimes would come to the office in the middle of the night and demand to be moved to another room.



Photo: Bill Smith

A seismograph crew working in the area stayed at the motel, but no one would take Room 6. The couple wanted to know if there was a history of supernatural happenings at the motel. I researched the subject, including interviewing past owners and employees, and could find nothing about ghost sightings in any of the rooms at the Sunset Siesta.

As I reported, the years passed and the motel acquired a new owner and a new name. When the new owner and his manager came to visit the museum I informed them of the unusual reputation of Room 6 and they were delighted. They thought it might be a good way to draw customers who were interested in that sort of thing. I visited with the manager a few months later and she told me of the haunted microwave in Room 6, that kept "dinging" even though no one had touched it. Picking up where she is describing what happened in Room 6:

***"In a short while, the timer "dinged" again. Nobody had touched it and she was sure the timer had run down completely. Now she was getting kind of edgy about it.***

***"When she and her son had finished cleaning and everything was perfect, she turned as she went out the door and took one last look. In a half-joking manner, she called out to the "ghost" in Room 6 and asked, "Is that clean enough for you?" and the microwave went, "DING!!!"***

But, I have a new story for you, about the strange goings-on at the old Lemons Homestead, the Terrell County Memorial Museum.

I don't mind telling you I don't like to be in that house alone after dark. Since the only ghost I believe in is the Holy Ghost, I find run-of-the-mill spook stories entertaining, but nothing more than that.

HOWEVER (and that's a big however)...I am loathe to have to go into the Museum late at night. A feeling of foreboding comes over me, totally uncharacteristic of the "normal" me. As my grandfather used to say, I get the "willies" when I think about having to go down to that place at night, and for good reason.

On numerous occasions I have come into the Museum in the morning to find one or more lights turned on. I have gotten calls from folks wanting to be helpful to remind me that a light is still burning down there. So, ever mindful of the county budget, I make myself go down to make sure the lights are off.

In the beginning I thought I was just suffering from the effects of early senility. I vowed to do a better job of conserving the county coin and made it a point every day to go through the building checking for glowing orbs...er...uh...light bulbs still burning.

But still, I would come in the morning or drive by late at night and see the unfriendly glow of a lit bulb. I have no idea what is going on, because there are only a few keys to the building and I am the only one, besides visitors, who goes there on a regular basis.

And then there is the noise problem.

When I venture into the museum after dark I almost always hear thumping noises. Sometimes as light as a footstep repeated in a walking pattern, or sometimes as pronounced as a nerve-wracking BANG!

Ever the scientist, I tell myself that it is just the house cooling off, metal and wood and plaster shrinking or expanding, but it occurs in the wintertime as well as the rest of the year.

And then, there are the creaking noises, as though someone is standing in one spot, rocking back and forth over a noisy floor board, like my kids did when they were little and we lived in old creaky houses.

I have no definite explanation for either sound, but I guarantee that I definitely will come unhinged if I start hearing a rattling chain!

It is so easy to let your imagination run away with you. A book I often refer to is Dr. Elton Miles' "Tales of the Big Bend," (Texas A&M University Press, 1976) in which he covers all sorts of ghostly happenings and weird tales that have entered into the rich folklore of the Trans Pecos. We recognize some as sophomoric yarns to scare the kids as we sit around the campfire telling ghost stories. But other tales are seemingly plausible, genuine enigmas...and very creepy!

In his book, Dr. Miles explores multiple variations on a theme and shows how some tales begat others, with slight differences in the characters and the places. Folk tales lend themselves to embellishment with each retelling, as I have found with local historical "facts."

That is all well and good, but what about my situation...I have to work in that place!

Oh, well, in the same vein as "Let Mikey do it," I'll just sic my wife on 'em, she's not afraid of anything!