

Terrell County Memorial October, 2016 Sanderson, Texas **Museum News**

The Ghost in Room 6



Photo: Bill Smith

Several years ago the owner of the Sunset Siesta Motel in Sanderson came to the Terrell County Museum to inquire if I knew anything about the motel being haunted. She wanted to know if there were any events that might have occurred at the motel that could spawn a good ghost story. I had heard nothing about this and I knew the county history book barely mentioned the motel, but I told her I would check around and see if there was anything to the story.

She went on to explain that she could not keep customers in Room 6 at the motel. At that time the town was full of

seismograph crews working the country north of town and the motels were filled to capacity, booked solid for months ahead. A seismograph company had taken a block of rooms for their employees for the foreseeable future, but when crew members stayed in that room, they only lasted one night, then demanded another room. Some didn't even last the whole night, and eventually the whole crew refused to stay in the dreaded Room 6.

When the owner and her husband cleaned the room they did not notice anything out of the ordinary, but she

could not get anyone to stay in Room 6 for more than one night. It sounded like the beginnings of a great story so I couldn't wait to check into it.

The previous owners of the motel happened to live in my neighborhood and one day I saw the lady out watering her yard. I walked over and asked her about Room 6. She got kind of tickled and thought I was pulling her leg, and said as much. But, she was astonished when I told her the back story and the concerns of the present owner. She said she never had a problem with any room at the motel and could not imagine what would be going on. She said the previous owners had not mentioned strange goings-on at the motel, either. We laughed about it, and that was the last I thought of it.

Several years passed and the owners put the motel on the market and moved away. The motel remained open, but I never heard anything else about it or Room 6.

Then, a few months ago, I heard that the place had been sold and that the new owners changed the name to Sanderson Motel. They had hired a woman to run the place for them until they could retire and move to Sanderson.

Lo and behold, a few days later the new owner and his son and the new manager walked into the Museum for a tour. They were excited about being in Sanderson and wanted the full tour with all the gory details about Sanderson's sordid beginnings and its exciting wild west history, so I gave them both barrels. (Don't ever ask me for the whole story unless, that is, you bring a snack and are prepared to stay awhile...)

After the tour and as they were leaving I remembered the previous owners and their strange story, so I told them to be on the lookout for Room 6 and let me know if anything unusual occurred there. As I told them the story their



Photo: Bill Smith

eyes gleamed and they were absolutely delighted. They felt it might even be good for business, although to tell you the truth, I can't imagine a ghost being a good business partner. (I can tell you from my experience at the museum that you don't want to be there after dark. There is far too much creepy noise going on in that house after dark for my comfort! And, the elementary school, too, for that matter. And, I don't even believe in ghosts!)

The manager asked if I would bring some Museum newsletters so she could offer them to customers in the motel office and, of course, I agreed.

When the end of the month rolled around and it was time to distribute

newsletters to the various venues in town, I went by to leave a stack of newsletters with the new manager. We exchanged pleasantries, but I couldn't wait to ask her if anything strange had occurred in Room 6.

Her eyes twinkled and she got a big grin on her face. "Well..." she began, "Yes!"

She explained that she had asked around and found the person who helped clean the rooms under previous owners. This person told her that the room did have an unusual history. It was the room that transients were given when they were put up for the night by the local churches. Sanderson sees many people pass through on busy Highway 90, and a good many have a hard luck tale and come with their hand out. They usually are directed to the local churches, which maintain an indigent fund for such travelers.

She said that at one time, a man was de-toxing from drugs and spent a couple of days in that room. Apparently strange things had happened in Room 6, but she didn't go into detail.

"But..." the manager continued, when she and her son were cleaning that room a few days before, she cleaned the microwave and turned to continue with the rest of the room. Suddenly, the microwave timer bell went off. It was one of those mechanical timers, not electronic, and she thought she must have nudged the dial while cleaning, making it count down and then "ding."

She checked it, but it appeared to be done, so she went back to her cleaning.

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

When she and her son 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?"

"DING!!!"

As long as we are on the subject, let me tell you about the strange goings-on at the old Lemons Homestead, the Terrell County Memorial Museum.

As I said earlier, I don't like to be in the house alone after dark. The only ghost I believe in is the Holy Ghost, so I find run-of-the-mill, standard 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.



Photo: Bill Smith

Almost always when I venture into the museum after dark I hear thumping noises. Sometimes as light as a foot-step repeated in a walking pattern, or sometimes as pronounced as a nerve-racking 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 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, I'll just sic my wife on 'em, she's not afraid of anything!

References

- "Terrell County, Its Past, Its People," Alice Evans Downie. Sanderson, Texas: Terrell Co. Heritage Commission, 1978.
"Tales of the Big Bend," Elton Miles, College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1976.
Conversation with Melody Tarno, Sanderson Motel, Sanderson, TX, May 30, 2014

All newsletters can be found at <http://terrellmuseum.info/newsletters/>