

HAUNTED PLACES

IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments xi

Preface xiii

Introduction xv

ALABAMA

Linn Henley Building 5

Marengo 9

McCandless Hall 15

The Sloss Furnaces 19

Sturtivant Hall 25

ARKANSAS

The Allen House 33

Crescent Hotel 36

Gurdon Lights 40

Pea Ridge National Military Park 44

FLORIDA

Fort Zachary Taylor 51

The Jameson Inn of Crestview 54

Kingsley Plantation 59

Lilian Place 63

Old Leon County Jail 66

GEORGIA

Davenport House 71

The Juliette Gordon Low Girl Scout Center 73

The Pirate's House 77

Telfair Museum of Art 80

KENTUCKY

Bobby Mackey's Music World 85

Headless Woman Rock 91

Liberty Hall 94

Van Meter Auditorium 98

LOUISIANA

The *Delta Queen* 105

Griffon House 109

The Myrtles 113

Oak Alley 119

MISSISSIPPI

The Ell Davis Woods 125

King's Tavern 129

Magnolia Hall 134

The *Meridian Star* Building 140

Peavey Melody Music 143

The Pigford Building 146

Waverley 150

NORTH CAROLINA

Fort Fisher 163

Gimghoul Castle 166

New Hanover County Public Library 170

The Vander Lights 173

SOUTH CAROLINA

Hagley Landing 179

The Ladd House 184

St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church Graveyard 188

Wedgefield Plantation 191

TENNESSEE

Brinkley Female College 197

Carter House	203
The Orpheum Theater	207
St. Mary's Catholic Church	209
The Woodruff-Fontaine House	213

TEXAS

The Alamo	219
Driskill Hotel	226
The Houston Public Library	230
The Texas Governor's Mansion	232
The Villa Main Railroad Crossing	236

VIRGINIA

Eppington	241
Lee's Boyhood Home	245
Physic Hill	248
Ramsay House	252

Bibliography	255
Index	265

King's Tavern

NATCHEZ

King's Tavern Restaurant stands on the outskirts of Natchez, Mississippi. Constructed sometime in the 1760s, it is one of the oldest buildings in a city renowned for its antebellum homes. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the structure was a mail run and a tavern where weary travelers on the Natchez Trace sought refuge from the elements. The inn derives its name from Richard King, who acquired the building in 1789 and converted it into a tavern. His guests ranged from the famous to the infamous. Politicians such as Aaron Burr and Andrew Jackson boarded there, but so did a host of outlaws, such as Big Harpe. Like many frontier outposts in that period of history, it was frequently the scene of fierce altercations between drunken guests who settled their arguments with guns and knives. Some residents of Natchez believe that the walls of the old tavern still resonate with elements from its violent past.

Generations of owners, servers, and patrons have had paranormal experiences in the restaurant. Susan Adams, director of a historic home in Natchez called Magnolia, believes that there are at least two ghosts at King's Tavern, both of whom are mischievous. The most playful of the tavern's ghost is the spirit of Richard King's mistress, a woman known only as Madeline. Employees of the tavern claim that she seems to enjoy water.

Water has dripped from the ceiling at spots where there are

no pipes. One of the owners of the tavern, Yvonne Scott, said that when the inn first opened under her management, there was no hot water upstairs. While she was discussing the plumbing with a friend, hot water started running out of a dead pipe. Madeline has been credited with other phenomena in the tavern as well. The heavy door of the waitress station has stopped in mid-swing. Alarms in the restaurant have gone off at 5:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M. for no apparent reason. After this happens, an inside door on the second floor is always standing open. Lights that have been turned off go back on after the employees have left the building. Waitresses walking into the pantry storage rooms have seen balls of light bouncing off the walls.

Madeline even “gets up close and personal” with the staff once in a while. Beverly Franzen, a Tavern employee in the 1970s, said that one day when she was upstairs alone, she heard a voice say “hello”: “I looked around and there was no one there. When she said ‘hello’ again, I left.” Yvonne Scott said that she once felt someone touch her shoulder. When she turned around to see who it was, there was no one there. The attic seems to be Madeline’s private domain. In the 1980s, a woman in a restroom was looking in the mirror while putting on her lipstick when her image was replaced by that of a young woman with red hair. She exited the restroom very quickly in an agitated state. Employees have gotten the impression that Madeline is very protective of her privacy in this part of the house. Yvonne Scott said that Madeline expresses her displeasure by blowing the light bulbs. One night, she blew every light in the second floor after a group of people walked into the attic.

A waiter at the restaurant claimed that on one occasion, Madeline actually made his job easier. A customer had entered the restaurant late in the evening and had ordered a bottle of wine with his meal. The waiter explained that the wine was

kept upstairs in a locked storeroom and the person who had the key had already gone home. All at once, the upstairs dumbwaiter moved down the shaft and stopped on the ground floor. When the waiter opened the door, he was amazed to find the bottle of wine that his guest had ordered.

According to Beverly Franzen, Madeline usually waits a couple of weeks before revealing her approval or disapproval of a new employee. However, when Grover Moberly became manager in 1977, he found evidence of Madeline's presence on his first day of work. While making an inspection of the restaurant on a Monday morning, he walked up to the third-floor bathroom and was shocked to find small footprints all over the floor. Moberly said, "The prints must have been made sometime Sunday night or early Monday morning because the floor was mopped and waxed Sunday. The strange thing is that no living person was up there, especially with feet that small. The footprints measured only seven inches with six toes showing on one foot. From the placement of the footprints, it appeared that someone had just climbed out of the bathtub onto the wooden floor with wet, bare feet. The tracks led from the tub to the lavatory and then proceeded into the clothes closet. The footprints stopped abruptly at the bathroom door. Chills ran up Moberly's spine when he examined the bathtub and found a spider web stretched across it, indicating that no water had been turned on in the tub. At noon the next day, additional footprints were found in the bedroom. No tracks were visible on the floor between the two rooms. Moberly was particularly puzzled by the appearance of this set of footprints because they were not there when he was in the room earlier in the day. Down through the years, employees have heard the sound of footsteps coming from parts of the restaurant where no one was present.

A waitress working in the fall of 2000 said that she can usu-

ally sense when Madeline is around. Some mornings, she has walked into the tavern and felt Madeline's presence. Instead of entering the dining area through the swinging doors of the waitress station on these days, she remains on the other side, getting the salads, napkins, and silverware ready. One morning when she felt uneasy, she waited until the feeling subsided and walked through the swinging doors. Glancing at the fireplace area, she was surprised to find little footprints all around it. The waitress shuddered because the footprints were on a part of the floor under which three skeletons were discovered in 1930 when sewage lines were being installed. Later when a chimney partially collapsed near where the skeletons had been found, a jewel encrusted Spanish dagger was found. The discovery of the skeletons and the dagger gave rise the theory that Madeline had been stabbed with the dagger and buried under the tavern.

A psychic who visited the tavern in August 1977 identified two of the spirits in the tavern as being that of a young girl and an Indian chief. The Indian chief's ghost has been sighted primarily in the part of the building that used to be the post office. One day, a little girl asked her mother to identify the reflection of a man in the mirror of the bar. Her mother replied that there was no man in the mirror. Because the child said that the man was wearing a red hat, employees have speculated that the ghost may be the spirit of an Indian who ran the mail up and down the Natchez Trace.

Probably the most disturbing phenomenon that occurs at King's Tavern on a regular basis is the sound of a crying baby. An employee named Sonia Frost heard the baby crying while she was putting crackers on the tables. She combed the inside and the outside of the building but found no sign of a baby's having been there. The crying sound seemed to come from the wall in the post office or from the dumbwaiter on the other

side of the wall. The source of the crying has been traced back to a tragic incident that occurred in the tavern in the early 1800s. An outlaw named Big Harpe was in a room in the tavern one night when he heard the sound of crying coming from the adjoining mail room. He entered the room to find a mother sitting on a bed, cradling an infant. Big Harpe took the infant from the woman's arms and slammed it against a wall, killing it instantly.

Danny Scott, the daughter of the owner of King's Tavern has had several unnerving experiences in the old tavern: "I'll be in the building and know I'm totally alone. Then I'll hear somebody call my name. Other times, I'll go upstairs and feel somebody touch my shoulder. When I turn around, there's no one there. Sometimes, the chains hanging in the dining room that used to be the mail room will swing by themselves. They also say that at midnight during a full moon, you can see the ghost of one of the Indian runners standing by the fireplace in the mail room. He likes to run his fingers through the hair of blond women. The attic really bothers me, though. I hate it. The story goes that years ago, a mother left her baby alone up there, and it suffocated. Sometimes when I'm up there, I have trouble catching my breath, like I'm being suffocated. Then after I've been up there, I'll hear the baby crying for days afterwards, like it's reaching out for help."

Even though King's Tavern has been a terrifying place to work at times, most of the employees do not mind sharing the tavern with ghosts. The spirits may be bothersome at times, but they have never done anything malicious. It could be that they simply want to make their presence known.

King's Tavern is located at 619 Jefferson Street, Natchez, Mississippi; phone: 601-446-8845.