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Ghosts at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

[Colleen Schmidt - Fall 2002](#) October 28, 2002 1:00 am



When a full moon is out, and a cold wind whips the air, the ghosts of presidents past roam the White House halls, making believers of some, and storytellers of many.

For hundreds of years, tales of past presidents and their wives who haunt 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. have been passed on, and Halloween often is the season when stories abound.

President Gerald Ford's daughter, Susan Ford Bales, remembers her experience in the Lincoln Bedroom, a room she vowed never to sleep in because of its haunted history.

It was late January, and the last night Susan would spend in the White House. She and her friend already had packed her car for their long trip to the University of Kansas the next morning, where Susan was transferring.

Susan said she decided to spend her last night in the Lincoln Bedroom, the room President Lincoln inhabited during his time in the White House, to be daring.

According to legend, Lincoln's ghost had long haunted the room, and mainly was spotted lying on the bed or putting on his boots.

But as the two girls lay awake, waiting to see some spectral sign, all that came was sleep.

"It was one of those, you lie in bed with your eyes open waiting to see stuff, but finally you just get tired of waiting and fall asleep," she said.

Elizabeth Ford, however, not wanting to disappoint her daughter, entered the room early the next morning wearing a sheet, making scary noises and reciting some of the Gettysburg Address.

"We were like, yeah mom, we're a little too old for that, but it was funny," Susan said.

Although the first lady was the only ghost Susan and her friend saw in the Lincoln Bedroom, many of its other visitors have had much more frightening experiences.

William Bushong, historian at the White House Historical Association, said Lincoln's ghost has appeared more than other specters because he is one of America's most respected presidents.

"The presidents or presidents' wives who have the most fame are those who have stories about them," he said.

And many presidents have had encounters with Lincoln, said Carolyn Crouch, the founder of Washington Walks, guided walking tours of the nation's capital.

When Theodore Roosevelt was in office, he said he saw the ghost in different rooms and in the halls, she said.

During World War II, while Franklin D. Roosevelt was in office, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands was a guest at the White House.

One night, while she was staying in the Rose Room, Queen Wilhelmina heard a knock on the door, Crouch said. Thinking it must be an important message, the queen answered the door, only to encounter the figure of Abraham Lincoln.

Another ghostly guest at the White House, believed to be the spirit of Lincoln's son, scared many staff members during the Taft administration, Bushong said.

Lincoln's son, Willie, died of fever at the White House when he was 12.

Many servants said they felt the presence of the ghost, which they called "the Thing," but did not see it, Bushong said.

According to folklore, other ghosts have appeared for a specific purpose, he said.

When Edith Wilson, the second Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, came to the White House, she ordered the gardeners to move the rose garden Dolley Payne Madison had planted.

Dolley's ghost supposedly swooped down upon the gardeners and frightened them away, Bushong said. Edith Wilson decided to leave the garden where it was, and also told her gardeners to plant more roses to appease the unwelcome ghost.

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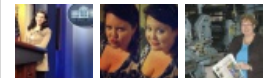
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SHFWireInterns All the interns are hard at work writing today, we should have a great new batch of stories coming out this afternoon!

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One of the other most famous White House ghosts also is the oldest.

Abigail Adams, wife of President John Adams, was the first first lady to inhabit the White House in 1797, Crouch said.

Mrs. Adams used the East Room, the largest room in the house, to hang up and dry the laundry, she said. In past years, many staff members have reportedly sighted her spirit scurrying down the hallway in her bonnet and shawl, or recognized her presence because of the scent of soapsuds.

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