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The haunted Valentino Suite (Rooms 1202-03). The door seen in this picture slammed shut on its own during our shoot, startling all of us.
The Hauntings

The Alexandria Hotel has long been rumored to be haunted, and its ghost stories are based on legends of suicides, accidents, murders, heartbreak, and wild parties. It is true that the hotel, despite its bright and glorious history, had a surprisingly high mortality rate from 1913 to 1922. Still, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when the ghost stories first began, although there are indications that the ghost stories go back many decades. [See end of chapter for more details.]

When the hotel faced closure in 1934, the Los Angeles Times published an article titled “Ghosts of Hostelrie’s Past Grace Farewell Gathering of Staff.” In the article, the Times used the supernatural to romanticize the hotel’s history by writing, “The ghosts of Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, Enrico Caruso, Sarah Bernhardt and scores of others who have been toasted by the world stalked through the corridors of the Alexandria last night, corridors in which a weight of memories flitted behind a mantle of regret.” It further stated that “Shades of departed Presidents and royalty haunted the famous Imperial suite on the seventh floor [sic].”

When the Alexandria reopened in the late 1930s, there was no talk of ghosts, at least, not publicly. There were no reported deaths, either, until December 13, 1961, when 34-year-old Irving Moses, a former mental patient, leaped to his death from a fire escape at the hotel and landed on two pedestrians who survived, though one of them sustained a broken back.

However, by this time, ghost stories at the Alexandria definitely existed. These claims centered around a female apparition that was thought to be connected to the sealed off wing. In fact, one of the first public mentions of a haunting occurred in 1969, when Times reporter Turnley Walker wrote, “Thirty rooms were sealed off by an heiress of great fortune who lived on and on there, ghost-fashion.”

Nancy Malone had also heard that the Alexandria was haunted when she started working there in the early 1970s. She didn’t think much about it until she
encountered a ghost while she was hanging pictures in an upstairs hallway. She claimed that around two o’clock on a September morning, she saw a semi-solid woman in her thirties or forties wearing a black, high-necked, early 20th-century dress with something resembling a bustle and a wide, veiled, black hat. The ghostly woman walked about eight feet down the hallway before disappearing.\(^84\)

In 1997, the International Society for Paranormal Research (ISPR), headed by Larry Montz (who claimed that he had a Ph.D. at the time\(^85\)) and Daena Smoller (a medium and publicist), arrived in Hollywood from New Orleans to establish Ghost Expeditions, a Los Angeles-based commercial ghost-hunting tour. The Alexandria
became one of ISPR’s haunted destinations as customers paid $45 each for the opportunity to investigate the so-called Valentino and Chaplin Suites, the Palm Court, and part of the basement. During one of their 1997 investigations, ISPR’s Maria Saganis and Chris Kelley told their customers “of mirrors falling off the wall, lights turning themselves off and unexplained music in the deserted ball room.” The team also claimed that the Chaplin Suite (Rooms 1102-03) had a closet whose door would slam shut and whose light would turn off. At one point during the investigation, Saganis, who claimed to be clairvoyant, told San Bernardino Sun columnist Janet Zimmerman that she could see “a handsome ’30s socialite named Tom, who had curly blond hair, a double-breasted suit and chiseled features” who had “died from a gunshot to the head.”86 A year later, Smoller told the Times that Rudolph Valentino haunted the twelfth floor suite named after him and that “Every single time we have done an investigation there, someone in the group ends up having a channeling experience. And it’s always in the bedroom.” The ISPR team also claimed that the hotel’s cleaning staff had seen an apparition of a well-dressed man in the bedroom and that people, especially women, experienced the sensation of being touched by invisible hands.87

Smoller then claimed that the ghost of an angry teenage male haunted the Charlie Chaplin Suite, that the Palm Court had unexplained cold spots, and that the Alexandria’s basement, described as a “maze of three tunnels,” was haunted by the ghosts of “Larry and Gus, both Mafioso and very communicative.” As Smoller told the Times, “We get the impression that Gus was a hit man from the old Ciro’s nightclub days on Sunset, which is now the Comedy Store, also one of Gus’ favorite haunts.”88 Of course, the Comedy Store also happened to be one of ISPR’s other haunts.

In 2001, after Montz and Smoller failed to sell their paranormal television show concept to a cable television network, they moved ISPR back to New Orleans, declaring that their successful field “research” had reached a satisfying conclusion. However, ISPR’s field research was far from scientific, and they left behind a number of false ghost stories about many allegedly haunted locations, including the Alexandria. When Montz was questioned about the integrity of ISPR’s paranormal conclusions, he replied, “But we’ve had so much validation already [from psychics], it’s a moot point to have a researcher go back through newspapers or whatever.”89

Even after ISPR left, new ghost stories emerged at the Alexandria as tenants continued to report unusual banging sounds, bursts of air blowing through their rooms, doors opening and closing on their own, and other alleged paranormal phenomena.
The building continued to have a number of deaths. In 2009, a faulty fire escape railing on the ninth floor broke, sending an 87-year-old man to his death. Another death occurred in 2013, when a 24-year-old man plummeted from the fourth floor.\textsuperscript{99}

One of the most haunted areas in the Alexandria is the second-floor ballroom (formerly called the Rose Ballroom). Not only has the “lady in black” been seen near its entrance, but there has also been at least one eyewitness account of a spectral 1910s formal dance taking place in the room. In the second floor ladies’ restroom, located nearby, people have seen faucets turning on by themselves. In 2012, security guard Johnny Rayo claimed that while he was monitoring the building’s security cameras, he had noticed the lights in one of the ballrooms flickering, as if someone
were rapidly turning the lights on and off. When he went to investigate, he discovered that all the entrances to the ballroom were locked.91

Another apparition commonly reported near the second floor ballroom is a shy young girl wearing a white dress who is occasionally seen peeking through the doorway before turning and running away. She’s described as being eight to twelve years old, with long, dark hair. Employees have also seen a male apparition wearing an overcoat and fedora walking through walls in the hotel’s parking garage. More recently, a new legend emerged that the “lady in black” ghost is a shape shifter that can take the form of a black cat.

Former tenant Alexis Justman heard about the hotel ghosts when she worked as a hostess for the Gorbals Restaurant next to the main lobby. Apparently, in 2009, Gorbals used the Franco-Italian Dining Room’s former kitchen as a storage room. On several occasions, Grobals’ wait staff saw vintage looking servers “wearing fancy black and white period suits” enter from the empty banquet room to grab invisible supplies before leaving. “They never acknowledged us and minded their own business,” Justman recalled. “But they looked like real people, not apparitions or ghosts.”92

The old elevators are also thought to be haunted because they have the tendency to stop on different floors. The prevailing legend is that a six-year-old girl (possibly the daughter of one of the hotel’s architects) opened one of the elevator cages while the hotel was under construction and fell down the shaft to her death. Historically, however, none of the architects ever lost any family members at the hotel, nor are the current elevators original to the building. That said, there were real accidents connected with an elevator at the Alexandria, but none of them resulted in death. In late January of 1916, for instance, an elevator door unexpectedly closed on the leg of its operator, Joe Brousett. When the elevator took off, his trapped leg was badly mangled and he fainted. An ambulance was called, Brousett was driven home, and another elevator operator took his place. Three hours later, Doc Bassett, superintendent of services, stepped into the elevator and “thought he saw a ghost” when he found Brousett back on the job. “You see,” Brousett explained, “that was a cork leg that got smashed. … The accident brought back so vividly my original accident that I fainted and only came to by the time I reached home. Then I put on my reserve leg and came back to work.”93
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Owens graduated from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas with a B.F.A. in Communications. He moved to Los Angeles in 1994, and continued his work in film and television production. Among his film credits are *The Gilmore Girls*, *The Christmas Box*, and *Wag the Dog*. Owens also worked for the Century City Chamber of Commerce, and the International Cinematographers Guild.

For seven years, Owens has dedicated his talents to research, investigate, and photograph hotels and inns believed to be haunted. His photograph of an apparition at a haunted inn in Temecula led to a featured spot on TV’s *My Ghost Story: Caught on Film*. His paranormal research led to a feature story in the online magazine, *The Verge*. As a skeptic, Owens has established a solid reputation in paranormal research for carefully discerning fact from fiction.

In 2010, Owens created the popular Facebook blog, Bizarre Los Angeles, dedicated to L.A.’s forgotten history, especially Old Hollywood. He also has a following on Instagram. Owens lives with his family in Southern California.

www.bizarrela.com
HAUNTED BY HISTORY

Have you ever stayed at a hotel said to be haunted and wondered if its ghost stories are true? Have you ever left a historic hotel feeling certain that you had encountered a ghost? Haunted by History, Volume I, by Craig Owens uncovers little-known facts about eight prominent historic hotels in Southern California and the origins behind many of their ghost stories. Not only does his well-documented research separate facts from legends, but Owens also keeps the subject matter interesting by interweaving historic photos with his own elaborately staged Old Hollywood-style photos shot in the most haunted rooms, hallways, and lobbies. This unique book blends solid research, fascinating insights, and haunting photography that will appeal to believers and non-believers alike.

Hotels and inns featured in Volume I are the Hotel del Coronado, the Victorian Rose Bed & Breakfast, the Julian Gold Rush Hotel, the Mission Inn Hotel & Spa, the Alexandria Hotel, the Wyndham Garden Pierpont Inn, the Banning House Lodge, and the Glen Tavern Inn.

“Craig Owens' book is the most well-researched and down-to-earth portrayal of California’s haunted hotels in decades. His ability to separate fact, fiction, lore, and myth is what makes this book stand out from other books about haunted places. The stunning photos are addictive visual eye candy that hook you in before you know it.”
— Nicole Schuck
PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR, SAN DIEGO PARANORMAL EYE

“Craig Owens has combined mystery, history and controversy into a well-rounded book that helps the reader bring ghost stories to life.”
— Craig W. Held
HISTORICAL RESEARCHER, SANTA PAULA, CA

CRAIG OWENS is a Los Angeles-based fine arts photographer, historical researcher, and blogger of the popular Facebook page, Bizarre Los Angeles. In recent years, he turned his creative lens and critical eye on historic and haunted hotels in Southern California. Not only has Owens emerged as a leading authority on the paranormal, but his haunted hotel photos have developed a worldwide following.