

DID

IKE

SEE A GHOST?



President Eisenhower frankly feels the presence of Lincoln in the White House, especially when he paints in the small upstairs room he's converted into a studio.

This room was used as the bedroom for Lincoln's son Willie.

By VANCE H. TRIMBLE

PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN opened his eyes and sat up in bed, wondering what had awakened him. Then he heard a rapping at the door of his bedroom.

"One moment, please," he cried. He threw back the covers, put his feet on the floor and with a sense of urgency switched on the bedside lamp. America was in the tense final days of World War II. The President had been halfway anticipating a trans-Atlantic call from Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He glanced at his bedroom clock; it was 3 a.m., already daylight in London.

While Truman fished around for his slippers, the rapping again sounded at the door—seemingly louder.

"Hold your horses," the President called, impatiently. "I'll be right there."

Quickly he slipped on his robe and hurried to the door. He turned the key, threw open the door—and got a shock he'll never forget. The hall was empty! Only a dim light glowed halfway down the long corridor. Not a living soul was in sight.

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The President frowned in deep puzzlement and muttered under his breath. He stood for a long moment, staring out into the vacant hall. Then he shrugged, closed the door and locked it.

"I'll be damned," he said, turning back to bed. "Must have been that ghost again!"

This mysterious event occurred in our residence of presidents, the majestic White House in Washington, D. C. The one-hundred-and-thirty-two-room mansion is a beautiful and normally serene place, imposing enough to be called one of the world's show places. It is also the most haunted house in America. Ghosts, wraiths, apparitions—whatever you want to call them—have been bobbing up there for one hundred years. Specters of many shapes, sizes and character, almost too many to count.

In this respect the White House has never left the gas-lit Victorian era of horse carriages, cobblestone streets, and superstitious old wives' tales. Even as we move into the dawn of the Age of Space, the legend of the ghosts in the White House is as much alive as it was in the early 1800's.

Hardly any president who occupied the White House has failed to report some eerie experience within its walls. Herbert Hoover, as well as President Truman, heard fantastic sounds. In the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration aides and guests saw things. The present tenant, Dwight D. Eisenhower, *feels* the presence of a ghost—the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. White House Press Secretary James Hagerty says that Ike, by no means a superstitious man, frankly acknowledges that this feeling is unexplained. Yet it is there, nonetheless.

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER is too much the sophisticate to think that some stormy midnight he will encounter the figure of a lank, bearded man in stovepipe hat and black bow tie striding through the White House halls—or walls. Hollywood could create White House ghost atmosphere with flickering lights, shadows dancing from the wineglass elms on the lawn, the crackle of lightning or the hammering of rain against night-blackened windows. In actuality none of these props are needed to cause the unseen Lincoln to come alive to President Eisenhower.

The strange presence may be felt when Ike, holding a paint brush and an oily wiping rag, stands before his easel in the small upstairs room he uses as a studio because of its good north light. This bed-chamber is rich in Lincolnian atmosphere, for it was in this very room not quite ten decades ago that Lincoln used to kiss his son Willie good night.

Or the feeling may come when golfer Eisenhower steps out on the sunny lawn to practice putting, taking his stance on ground that Lincoln trod in anguish one black night in February, 1862 after Willie, a lad of eleven, had died of typhoid fever.

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Perhaps Honest Abe's spirit materializes to the President as he shows a foreign dignitary the famous Lincoln bedroom, one of the most historic spots in the Executive Mansion; or when he prepares to speak to the nation via TV from his office; or when Ike and Mamie entertain in the State Dining Room where the renowned Healy portrait of the Great Emancipator looks down from its gilt frame over the fireplace on the massive E-shaped table that seats one hundred guests.

Many White House ghost stories originated with superstitious servants of early-day presidents. Some are products of obviously vivid imaginations. Yet many are related by eminently responsible people as President Truman and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. The latter has a practical person's attitude, even more stern than average, toward supernatural goings-on. Yet she was compelled by a strange something in the atmosphere to look apprehensively over her shoulder during long residence in the White House. She frequently had a feeling, she says, that someone was standing behind her. This sensation was so forceful and frightening that only by turning around for a look could she put her mind at ease. But when she did, Mrs. Roosevelt invariably discovered no one behind her.

Sheer horror — unexplained to this day—marred the visit of one royal overnight guest, believed to have been Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands. This occurred when state guests slept in the White House instead of across Pennsylvania Avenue in Blair House, where most dignitaries are now quartered. She was put in the beautiful Rose Room which is on the second floor and directly across from the storied Lincoln bedroom.

The guest thought the President's Palace, as she called it, utterly charming. A little after midnight she retired. As she stepped into the dim, rosy glow of her chamber (as it was told next morning) she came face-to-face with the gaunt, melancholy figure of Lincoln. She did a very queen-like faint.

In the William Howard Taft administration peculiar things began happening in the East Room. This is a magnificent reception hall—seventy-nine feet long and almost half that wide—where three huge crystal chandeliers dangle sparkling pendants from the frescoed ceiling. A butler prancing through the white and gold chamber was the first to see it—the dancing figure of a woman flitting up the wall to vanish into the ceiling.

"That probably was just a vagrant beam of light," he was told, "reflected off the chandeliers."

"No, suh," he countered, rolling his eyes. "It was a ghost!"

Word passed quickly among the servants that the room was haunted by Abigail Adams, the first First Lady to live in the mansion. When President and Mrs. Adams moved

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into the White House in November, 1800, the East Room was only half-finished. In fact, she used to hang the family wash there. Why she would now haunt it, no one could explain.

The climax to this particular episode came on a foggy winter morning. A young cleaning woman heard the rattle of the doorknob. She dropped her dust cloth on the hall stair rail and moved back apprehensively. She stared at the door which was, of course, locked. Again the knob turned slowly from side to side. Then it rattled and the door shook vigorously.

Next, as the girl related afterward: "There suddenly was a rush of wind, cold wind. And then I saw her — Abigail Adams! She walked right through that locked door! She was all misty-like, with eyes that were like coals of fire."

The servant girl fled screaming — and never again set foot inside the White House. Legend has it that Abigail's ghost repeated her performance some years later.

Mary Todd Lincoln was another who had many supernatural experiences in the White House. She told friends that often at night she heard the ghosts of Andrew Jackson swearing and Thomas Jefferson playing his violin. Moreover, she also heard old John Tyler making love to his twenty-three-year-old second wife. Similar to President Eisenhower's experience, Theodore Roosevelt, according to historians, "many times fancied that Lincoln's spirit still pervaded the White House."

Why should the plodding figure of Lincoln be the No. 1 ghost in the White House? One psychiatrist finds a clue in the field of extra-sensory perception. Says the doctor: "We find that it is quite possible to feel something, perhaps a presence, as does Mr. Eisenhower, because your subconscious has been dwelling on it, or is suddenly and sharply recalled. Obviously there are many articles in the White House that might be agents for creating such a bond between its living occupants and the departed Lincoln."

AS far as Lincolnian memorabilia is concerned, that's correct; much is in evidence. Many items have been reverently assembled in what is called the Lincoln bedroom. Actually Abe used this chamber as his office. Though he slept in several different bedrooms it was always in the same bed. Being six-four, Lincoln couldn't stretch out in an ordinary bed; so he used a wide one of carved rosewood that was nine feet long. Clustered about this relic are Lincoln's desk, a marble-topped table and some of his cabinet's chairs. This one chamber alone was kept in Victorian motif a few years ago when the interior of the White House was remodeled. The other rooms were done over along Georgian lines.

Possibly the most dramatic of all White House ghost stories was told by the serious-minded Mrs.

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Roosevelt. In an interview with Washington reporters in 1939, someone raised the never-dying question about apparitions in the Executive Mansion. The Washington *Evening Star* quotes Mrs. F.D.R. as saying:

"In 1934, right after we moved in, I was using Lincoln's bedroom as my study. One day I had occasion to send one of my secretaries, Mary Eban, up there on an errand. Miss Eban raced back down the stairs, pale, breathless, in a true state of fright.

"I asked what was the matter. Gasping out the words, she told me that she had seen the ghost of Lincoln sitting on the edge of his bed, pulling on his boots!"

Capital tourists are permitted on certain days behind the high iron fence surrounding the eighteen-acre tract chosen by George Washington and are allowed to tramp through the lower floors of the White House. Yet the pristine edifice seems to stand aloof from the modern day bustle of Washington. Even by day a hushed air of mysticism hangs over the mansion. As dusk settles on the city and the big old-fashioned carriage-type lamps become glowing sentries atop the gates on Pennsylvania Avenue, the residence of Presidents seems to recede further into the bygone era. Rarely is there movement about the portion of the facade bathed in floodlights. Little activity can be seen through the windows.

On the great sloping lawn behind the White House it is very dark; dwarf lamp posts make a few slender avenues through the blackened acres. And when the moon rides high and the wind comes up, the branches of lonely cathedral elms, scarlet oaks and weeping birch dance and sway, creating shadowy grotesqueries. Who can say what mocking figures flit among those shadows?

SIR!

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