



# Austin Haunts

Austin's old, historical buildings are home to more than just bars and restaurants. Ghosts from the past linger on at some of Austin's favorite haunts.

A ghost has been spotted in the elevator of the Speakeasy in the warehouse district.

Story by Shanna Howard  
Photos by Bruce Dye

**A**ustin is a city rich with more than 150 years of history. The city holds many interesting stories of people, places and events, and (super)naturally, some of the spirits of Austinites linger on.

"I think that if you've got a town that preserves old buildings, that's where the ghosts are," says Lisa Farwell, author of "Haunted Texas Vacations: The Complete Ghostly Guide" and founder of the Capital City Ghost Research Society. Her book lists Austin as the most haunted place in Central Texas. "It has to do with the long history here. If you take a look at the buildings that are haunted, they're old buildings that have been renovated," she says.

While visiting Austin's historical haunts, you might get the unsettling feeling that you have company. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, sometimes there's no denying an inexplicable, creepy feeling, which can be as subtle as a heavy feeling or the pressure changing, or as intense as an object moving or a sighting. Ghostly encounters have happened all around Austin, from the Capitol to local bars.

"It's the feeling that you're not

alone. It's the hair on the back of your neck standing up," says Jeanine Plumer, a historian and founder of *Weird Texas* magazine and Austin Promenade Tours. Plumer hosts a weekly Ghost, Murder and Mayhem Walking Tour of downtown Austin that's likely to teach even native Austinites something they didn't know.

Plumer, sometimes known as the "ghost person of Austin," makes the city's history interesting to locals and visitors alike. With tales of the ghosts of Guytown, the most popular red light district in the Southwest, and serial killings — six axe murders dubbed the "Servant Girl Annihilators" — in downtown in the mid 1880s, she makes history compelling.

"First, I'm a historian, and I was collecting stories of old Austin, and that's how it started. For a long time, I didn't pay that much attention to it. I was putting together an historical Austin tour," she says.

"I make an effort to put together contemporary ghost stories; I can't emphasize that enough."  
**Bitter End Bistro and Brewery**

Plumer's tours end at the B Side Bar of the Bitter End Bistro and Brewery in the old warehouse district, located where Guytown, and its prostitution, drugs and gambling, thrived at the

turn of the 19th century. The B Side bar is the most haunted part of the building, and the occurrences began, fittingly enough, after its renovation.

"It's one of the most haunted places in Austin," says Plumer. "Something unexplainable happens weekly."

Those who have experienced the B Side ghost believe it's a male spirit, and he supposedly died from a shady cause such as murder or a drug overdose. Waiters and the manager have experienced strange happenings, such as things moving around after closing time. Many employees refuse to stay in the building alone. Ashtrays have moved to one end of the bar, stools and bottles have moved about, and the television has suddenly turned on. On a couple of occasions, bottles of maraschino cherries found their way into the rafters. Rob Davis, the manager, even saw a shadowy figure move from the bar to the restroom alcove then disappear.

"He would have the strong feeling that he was not alone ... It was a human form," says Plumer.

Ian Kasnoff, a manager, once found himself immersed in ice-cold air and unable to move while taking a nap on the balcony. He felt a heavy presence retreating into the corner.

"I woke up just freezing cold — absolutely shivering," says Kasnoff.

"That's the only time in my life that that's happened. I was totally awake

and couldn't move a muscle."

Another night he was closing down and found that his keys had moved. He usually kept them on a hook on the door. He had placed them there earlier that day, but they disappeared. After exhaustively searching the entire building for over an hour, he returned to the hook and they were there.

"I was cursing the thing. It was just playing with me," says Kasnoff.

Kasnoff says he thinks the prank-playing spirit is a young man because of "the kind of energy that goes with being an adolescent at that age ... that mischief."

"I think the weirdest thing is the disappearance of something physical," he says.

Plumer says occurrences like these are the most frequent. "One of the things I like to do is to dispel popular American myth," says Plumer. "Actually seeing an apparition is hugely uncommon. The most common haunting is the movement of a small object."

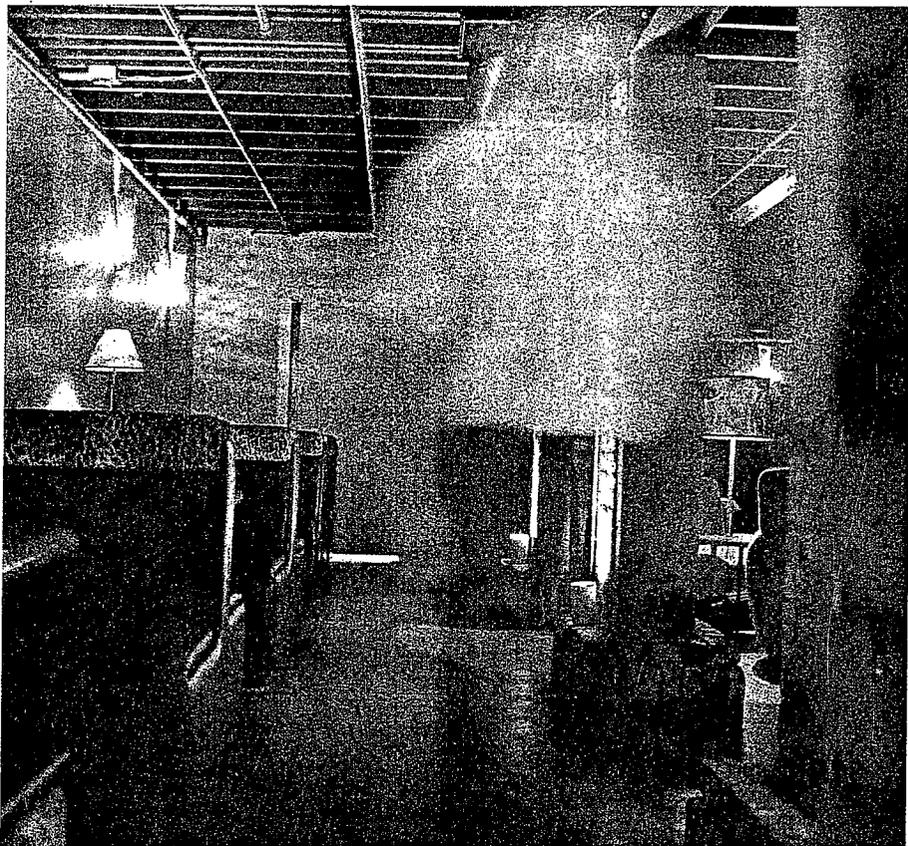
#### Speakeasy

Nearby in the warehouse district at 412 Congress Ave., Speakeasy makes its home in a building built in 1889. Originally, it was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Kreisle, who ran a furniture store as well as an undertaking business. A decade later, the building was sold to Southwestern Telephone and Telegraph Company, whose sign can still be seen on the building.

In 1916, the building underwent a tragic fire. Five Austin firefighters were injured, and fireman James Glass was critically wounded, although he didn't die in the building. Employees wonder if the fire has anything to do with the current happenings.

"We think there's a ghost that lives in the elevator," says Chet Butler, the general manager. He says one of the band members of Dysfunction Junction saw a woman in the elevator while the band was breaking down their equipment at the end of the night. The keyboardist said the woman said hello, but her appearance can't be explained. The cleaning woman has seen her as well. Employees wonder if it could be Mrs. Kreisle.

After closing one night, a bar manager saw a figure of a man standing in the dark main room. The man looked directly at the manager and then disappeared. Other bizarre occurrences, such as front doors slamming, the sound of running footsteps up the stairs, and a woman's piercing



A young male ghost is thought to haunt the Bitter End B Side.

scream coming from the back room, also have plagued Speakeasy.

"Up on the second floor, they've heard some sounds that have freaked out some people," says Butler.

#### Clay Pit

Another eatery with its share of unexplainable occurrences is the Clay Pit Indian restaurant on Guadalupe Street. Located in an 1853 historic landmark building, it was used as a trading post where cowboys and Comanche Indians spent hours in the saloon in the back.

Later, it became Bertram's General Store and then hosted several restaurants. Before it was the Clay Pit, it was home to Bertram's restaurant. The building is thought by some to be haunted by the Bertrams' five-year-old boy who died in the upstairs room from typhoid fever in the late 1800s.

An Bertram's employee opening the restaurant one morning heard the sounds of a party — singing, laughing and the clinking of glasses — coming from the upstairs banquet room. When she went inside, she found the room empty, according to Farwell in "Haunted Texas Vacations."

A cook was taking a nap in the same room when he felt like he was being strangled. Needless to say, he quit taking naps there.

"Sometimes you walk around and

you feel like someone is watching you, but it's probably because of the history here," says manager Regina Pradhan.

One radio station even held a Halloween event where listeners stayed in the building overnight, but that night turned out to be pretty quiet.

#### The Tavern

The Tavern on West 12th Street is a bar that has had its share of supernatural happenings, according to employees. While this building was completed in 1921, styled after English pubs, prohibition kept it from opening its doors until years later.

According to bartender Reuben Guerra, a woman was killed in the building. Perhaps that explains "Emily," as employees have dubbed the spirit that is thought to linger about the bar. Footsteps can be heard upstairs when no one is there. Pool balls break when no one is around, and glasses have flown off shelves and the televisions change channels.

According to Plumer, many hauntings seem to center around electricity or plumbing. Recently, an employee of the Tavern turned off a neon sign, and it turned back on.

But the most interesting story about the Tavern has to be one experienced by a worker at Conoco across the street. He spied a woman peering out from an upstairs window of the Tav-

ern. When he inquired later, he found that no one had been in the building at that hour.

#### Old Pecan Street Café

The Old Pecan Street Café is another rumored paranormal hot spot. The restaurant on 6th Street is housed in a building more than 100 years old, which used to be a leather-working hardware store. Bob Woody, a businessman who's owned the building for the last 17 years, and who is also the president of the East 6th Street Association, said a weird occurrence took place in his restaurant.

"I'm not one to make up stuff, and this made my hair stand up," he said.

Woody also owns a cigar factory, and his employees were temporarily using the café for their work. One employee was working, rolling cigars, facing the stairs. When Woody walked in, he says the man looked very excited. He spoke Spanish, and said, literally, "there's a monster." Woody says the worker saw a woman wearing a period-style dress on the stairs.

"I was skeptical of that kind of stuff, but this guy was not going to make it up. Why would he make up a story like that? I really believe this guy," says Woody. "It gave me the creeps to the point where I didn't want to go in there alone."

#### The Ritz

Woody also owns the Ritz, a popular laid-back bar with pool tables, air hockey and a jukebox. When Woody bought the building, the interior was painted black. It was later repainted a creme color and used as a banquet facility. Before its opening as the Ritz, Woody and a manager were inside discussing painting flames on the walls. When looking up at one of the columns, the paint began to disappear, and old Art Deco designs began to show up at the tops of the columns, still visible today.

"These colors started to bleed through. She [the manager] got tears in her eyes," he says. "It was pretty scary. She says, 'Do you think we need to not do this?' That's part of the building wanting to be itself."

Woody doesn't want to be in the Ritz alone either.

Of course, these are only a sampling of the haunted hot spots in the Capital City. The Driskill hotel is one of the most haunted places in the city according to ghost hunters as several specters from two suicide brides to a senator's child, make their otherworldly presence known. It even

prompted the band Concrete Blonde to pen the song, "Ghost of a Texas Ladies' Man." Also, some of Austin's most historical buildings are rumored to be haunted, including the Capitol and the Governor's Mansion.

Local ghost enthusiasts can help with finding Austin's haunts.

"I wrote my book so that people

who had an interest in it could take a vacation to an historic place — and also one that was haunted — and go into that with an open mind and open heart and see what happens," says Farwell.

"It's a part of life, just a different realm that some of us are lucky enough to experience [from] time to time."

## Ghostly Resources

**"A Texas Guide to Haunted Restaurants, Taverns and Inns"**

By Robert Wlokarski and Anne Powell Wlokarski

**"Haunted Texas Vacations: The Complete Ghostly Guide"**

By Lisa Farwell [www.ghostlyguide.com](http://www.ghostlyguide.com)

**Austin Promenade Tours**

Jeanine Plumer 498-GOTO [www.austinghostours.com](http://www.austinghostours.com)

## Austin Halloween Happenings

#### Nightmare Factory

2101 W. Ben White • 445-FEAR • [www.nightmarefactory.com](http://www.nightmarefactory.com) • Sept. 28 — Nov. 3

Back for the 14th year, a tradition here in Austin is the Nightmare Factory. Starting Sept. 28 through Nov. 3, you can be scared out of your wits in more than 6,000 square feet of haunted house fun. Nightmare Factory employs the latest technology to bring fright into your life with 3D-art (complete with 3D glasses they'll let you borrow), animatronics and surround sound. The price is \$10 for everyone and half price on Family Night (every Sunday until 10/21). Coupons can be found at Thundercloud Subs and on Oak Farms milk cartons.

#### Halloween on 6th Street

6th Street • after dusk on Halloween  
Austin's well-known party street, is even more alive (or living dead?) on Halloween night. An estimated 80,000 Austinites come decked out in their best costumes each year. With that many people on one street at the same time, crowd control can get pretty crazy, so be sure to follow the police guidelines. Every club and bar on the street is filled with ghoulish 20-somethings and the streets are packed with people of all ages coming to enjoy the fun and costumes. Even if you don't plan on venturing into one of the many clubs, 6th Street is still a ghastly good time.

#### Pioneer Farms Haunted Hay Ride

11418 Sprinkle Cut-off Rd. • October 19 — 31 • 837-1215

Jourdan-Bachman Pioneer Farms is fun for the whole family. From exploring a haunted barn to taking a hayride, there is plenty for the family to enjoy. This year, the Halloween festivities will have

six dates, October 19, 20, 26, 27 and Halloween night. Each day, Pioneer Farms will open at dark and stay open until 9:30 p.m. The farm will have a Tiny Tots day on Oct. 28 with arts and crafts and other activities for the little ghouls. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$4 for children. The hayride is \$2 per person, or pay the same to have your fortune told.

#### Horton Hears a Boo Part II

2219 Klattenhoff Drive, Wells Branch • donation: can of non-perishable food items • Halloween night • Marcus Horton at 471-9265

Come enjoy a homemade haunted house, sponsored by the Hortons. The Hortons have been haunting Klattenhoff Drive for 20 years. They offer a "flexible" haunt, so feel free to bring kids of any age. Horton Hears a Boo will be open on Halloween night starting at dusk and will run until the crowds are gone. There is no admission fee, but they do offer an extra treat to everyone who brings along a can of non-perishable food items to be donated to a food bank.

#### Wild Basin Haunted Trails 2K1

Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve • 805 N. Capital of Texas Highway • \$35-40, all proceeds benefit the Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve • October 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27 and Halloween night • 327-7622 • [www.haunted-trails.com](http://www.haunted-trails.com)

The Haunted Trails is an interactive Halloween trail. Venture (guided) for an hour through the wilderness and try to survive the Haunted Trails. The trail interacts and responds to you. You must be 16 years old to attend the Haunted Trails. You must make reservations for time slots from 7:30 to midnight.

Compiled by Heather Ramón