



It's the Eve of All Hallows' Eve. Are you ready for some spooky tales?

The Ghosts of Southwestern

Mischief-making manifestations haunt the historic halls of the university.

By Meilee D. Bridges
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Whether you are a believer in the supernatural or are just entertained by stories of the mysterious and unexplained, the hallowed halls of colleges and universities are the ideal haunt for spooks and specters. After all, with their creaky floors and old pipes, the historic buildings often found on college campuses practically invite spectral habitations—or at least urban legends of such uncanny encounters. So with the cornerstones of Southwestern University's Roy and Lillie Cullen Building dating back to 1898, it's not surprising that spine-tingling tales are embedded in SU's rich traditions or that ghostly coeds have been embraced by our tight-knit community. Here are just a few examples of SU's most notorious school spirits.

Bestial bogeys

If you ever find yourself passing by the Lois Perkins Chapel in the late evening hours, you might hear the quiet cries of a child escalating to distressed screams. Listen again, and you'll recognize that the sounds are not quite that of a human being but rather are the plaintive bleats of a goat. That's because the chapel tower is inhabited by a goat man. You can catch a glimpse of him if you look for him on Halloween night. But if you are so daring, you might consider concealing yourself behind one of our sturdy oaks on the Academic Mall because if Le Goatman sees you, he'll likely throw a pumpkin at you, killing you on the spot because he has impeccable aim for a human-bovid hybrid. You've been warned.



The author's impression of Southwestern's squash-chucking goat man.

Alumni also say that one Halloween in the 1940s, an SU fraternity, which shall remain nameless to protect the less than innocent, thought it would be amusing to place a goat in the Cullen Tower. At the time, the only way to access the Tower was by climbing a rickety ladder up two stories. I have no idea whether the clever gentlemen succeeded in their scheme, so there's no real plot or climax to this tale. But given the goat theme so far, I'm beginning to think someone misheard me when I asked for *ghost* stories.

In yet another Cullen canard, Claud Howard, a professor of English in the 1940s and later chair of the Division of Humanities, would frequently allow his cow to roam on the football field. The football players tired of playing in bovine feces, so as retribution, they stole his cow one evening and placed it in Howard's classroom on the second floor of Cullen. To this day, you can hear cow hooves clopping up and down the steps of the building. OK, I made that last part up; we all know that cows prefer elevators to stairs.*

Dormitory denizens

Unseen but otherwise sensed, Southwestern's phantasms presumably take human form as well. From 1926 to 1996, the East Campus Courtyard was occupied by a residence hall named for Laura Kuykendall, who served as dean of women at Southwestern in the 1910s-1930s. Her eponymous wraith occupied room 313, but fortunately for the residents living below, Kuykendall was a benign visitant who simply enjoyed practical jokes. Primarily nocturnal, this restless shade was frequently heard moving above and was known for turning on water faucets and moving objects around students' suites. "During finals, you could hear her more, and sometimes she banged on the pipes," recalls one alumna. "Besides the noise, she was fairly harmless—although I do remember the women on third floor said their stuff would go missing." We're going to assume those missing items were merely lovingly placed elsewhere because petty theft was not a value shared by Kuykendall, who once helped save 200 women from a fire that destroyed the Ladies' Annex in 1925.

Students also tell of strange noises and happenings in Kurth Residence Hall, from wind gusting in the hallways to beds shaking and doors shutting erratically. Sharon Smith '03 remembers encounters with a potential phantom while living on the third floor of Kurth before the first-year students arrived. "We would randomly hear the water come on in a room and have to unlock the door and go turn the faucet off," she recalls. Even within the past 10 years, students such as Charlotte Griesel '14 have reported hearing the sound of marbles dropping and rolling across the ceiling of the third floor. In a twist ending worthy of the good films of M. Night Shyamalan, Kurth has no fourth floor—nor is there sufficient space for marbles to roll between the third-floor ceiling and the roof. Dun dun DUN!

In a Facebook post from 2010, Brandine Powell '89 recalls, "When I was at SU, many moons ago, there was a building that looked like an old house that was near the new dorm . . . It appeared the house was being used for storage, and there were no occupants." One night, Powell and approximately 20 to 30 other students heard resounding moans coming from the house. "It was very creepy," she says, "very, very creepy!!"

** For some reason, students really like parking animals and objects on the upper floors of Cullen. For instance, in 1957, a Volkswagen Bug was pulled up the stairs as part of a Senior Day prank. I don't think it was a ghost car, but if we start finding Large Hadron Colliders or alpaca herds on Cullen 2nd or 3rd, we will not be amused. OK, I secretly will be, but you didn't hear that from me.*

Performative poltergeists

You cannot have a proper theater until it's inhabited by a dastardly daimon. And if you ask most any student on campus, they will tell you that the Alma Thomas Fine Arts Center is most certainly haunted. Anecdotes abound of lights turning on and off unpredictably, things moving around, and a piano playing when no one is in the practice rooms. One alum, Kristi King '08, remembers a particularly frightening episode in the building: "One night in particular in 2008, while studying in the green room, [my friend] and I heard supremely creepy harp music playing." Forsaking their notes and books, the pair decided to seek out the source of the sound. They saw only one practice-room light on, tiptoed over to the music hallway, saw the door open, and heard the music coming from within, so they returned to studying, feeling relieved that they'd discovered where the music was coming from. However, sometime later, the harp music began to grow louder. And louder. Admittedly procrastinating on their studying, the two friends decided to investigate further. This time, the same practice-room light was on, but the door was shut, and when they tried the handle, they realized it was now locked. "We walked around to get a peek across the courtyard," King recalls, "and looking into the lit practice room, we saw that it was completely empty. It was horrifying. We ran to the dorms, studying abandoned!"

The Alma Thomas Theater is another sanctuary of disembodied musicians. For example, Mindy Griffin Klein '07 recalls working in the theater late at night and hearing a piano when all the practice rooms were empty. Another alum attests that the late Alma Thomas herself, a longtime trustee of the University, can be heard roaming the theater at night, sometimes singing and sometimes turning the lights on and off.



"I personally heard her one night my junior year as I was preparing for a production," the alum reminisces. "I was in the stage-manager booth, and she was up in the catwalks. At the time, the booth was backstage and up one level. I went to investigate, and no one was there. And there was only one way up and down the stairs."

In a tale that probably sends shivers down the spines of our intrepid Facilities Management team, last year after SING! practice, a light exploded after everyone walked off stage. In addition, students heard the sounds of someone walking across the catwalk over the stage, but nobody could be seen above.

Just outside the theater hangs a photograph of Thomas. Students say that "if you look at the photo while walking past it, Thomas's eyes follow you on your journey." Let's hope that means the late Austinite's gaze and not her actual eyes because the latter interpretation would be even more unnerving.

Academic apparitions

If you know Southwestern, you know that one of our core values is promoting lifelong learning. But what you might not know is that we also nurture *after*lifelong learning.

Margaret Mood McKennon has been a librarian at Southwestern since 1903. In fact, she was the first full-time librarian of the Georgetown campus. Before that, she was a student: the daughter of SU founder and first regent Francis Asbury Mood, McKennon was the first woman to receive a bachelor's degree from Southwestern. In an article from the *Robstown Record* dated December 12, 1935, the author comments, "although she attended classes with boys, she graduated with honors," which seems like a slight to either McKennon or her male classmates, but we are talking 1935 here, so we'll just let that one go for now.



Margaret Mood McKennon, first alumna, librarian, and "ministering angel" of Southwestern.

Anyway, the *Robstown Record* reporter goes on to catalog the first alumna's exemplary service to the campus. For example, she composed "The Legend of the Bell" as well as a poem titled "The Rainbow" for an SU tradition ominously known as the Dinner of the Golden Bowl. At this occultish event, which was inaugurated by fellow haunter Laura Kuykendall, all women attending Southwestern would pledge *everlasting* loyalty to the school's ideals and to the friends they'd made on campus. To her student library assistants and other undergraduates, McKennon offered "excellent advice and sympathy" as well as gifts from her "personal funds": "She has given freely of her time and means to Southwestern University. Several summers she worked without salary." So given that McKennon was "a woman of rare ability, courageous spirit, and self-sacrificing nature," we'll forgive this genius of the library for moving books around and turning on faucets and leaving them running today because, as the *Georgetown Sun* once extolled her, McKennon was the "noble type of good heroic womanhood / A ministering angel." And the next time you're in the library, you might even consider leaving an offering. Here's a suggestion: in the October 21, 1930, issue of the *Megaphone*, a reporter praises "the windows full of gayly colored flowers which Mrs. McKennon says 'are her white lilies to feed her soul.'"

Feed her spirit, my friends. We can safely assume she'd appreciate cut flowers, blooming plants, and ferns considering those were her acknowledged favorites. (And if current Director of the Library Carol Fonken asks you what you're doing, I deny all responsibility.)

Finally, let's end where Southwestern began. McKennon's father, F. A. Mood, died on November 12, 1884. At the time of his passing, Southwestern was located just a few blocks away from its current location, at what is now Williams Elementary. Several years later, Mood's wife, Sue, passed away and was buried at the cemetery behind Southwestern. His friends felt the two should be buried together, so in the dark of night, they dug up the founder's coffin, carried it to the cemetery, and reinterred him next to his wife. Mood's monument, now located outside Mood-Bridwell Hall, was originally the tombstone for his grave.

Now, whether the ghost haunting Mood-Bridwell is F. A. himself remains to be seen, but then so does his ghost. Nevertheless, it's common to hear strange noises and doors closing or just to get an eerie feeling at night in this 110-year-old edifice. Kevin Ngo '13, recalls, "I remember one time, I went to the Writing Center during the evening, and I took the stairs to the third floor. The door was already open, and as I entered the floor and made my way into the Writing Center, that door all of a sudden slams behind me loudly."

So there you have it, my lovelies. If you find yourself traipsing alone across campus on a barely moonlit night—perhaps during the waning gibbous of All Hallows' Eve—you might suddenly tense as the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end, or you might just feel your arm enclosed by frigid ephemeral fingers. If so, you'll know you've encountered one of the many ghosts of Southwestern. Sleep tight, my ghouls and sprites. But the rest of you might want to leave your lights on.