



Guests report ‘friendly’ ghost encounters at The DeSoto House, Illinois’ oldest hotel

GALENA, ILLINOIS -- They must have enjoyed their stay at the venerable DeSoto House Hotel in downtown Galena, Ill., because they keep coming back. “They” are the ethereal spirits of by-gone guests, occasionally seen by today’s guests.

“None of our staff has seen ghosts,” said Scott Wolfe, hotel historian and front desk clerk. “But every now and then, guests report seeing translucent forms dressed in old-fashioned clothes, drifting across the rooms and passing through walls. When we check the rooms, invariably we discover the walls in question once had doorways.”

This isn’t the stuff of scary movies. Nobody’s scared. In fact, some say the spirits smile and nod. Plus, today’s DeSoto House continues to encounter repeat guests of the real kind.

“This is the oldest operating hotel in Illinois,” explained Wolfe. “It first opened in 1855 with 150 rooms, and was touted as the largest hotel west of New York City. In 1986, after an \$8 million restoration, it re-opened with 55 rooms. Today’s rooms are larger. In many cases, walls and doorways were removed or relocated. That may explain why the ghosts pass through walls.”

The DeSoto House has had its share of famous guests. **Abraham Lincoln** spoke from the balcony in 1856, as did **Stephen A. Douglas** in 1857 and 1858. Galena’s favorite son, **Ulysses S. Grant**, used the hotel as his presidential campaign headquarters in 1868, and received guests there with his wife, **Julia Dent Grant**, on several occasions between 1865 and 1883. **Tom Thumb** and his diminutive wife slept there twice, in 1869 and 1877. **William Jennings Bryan**, perhaps best known for his role as the prosecutor in the 1925 Scopes “Monkey” Trial, stayed at the hotel in 1905 and 1909. Cast and crew enjoyed the hotel’s hospitality during the filming of “**Gaily, Gaily**” in 1968 and “**Field of Dreams**” in 1988. Hundreds of brides and grooms have had their pictures snapped on the lobby’s grand staircase. The hotel is full of happy memories.

So it’s no surprise that the ghosts who haunt The DeSoto House are friendly.

---more---

There are, however, a few tangible surprises:

- The 55 guest rooms are named after people with Galena connections. Each door has a polished brass plaque with a person's name; each room has a framed portrait of the person, along with a descriptive paragraph. "It was a fun project," said Wolfe, who researched the people and found the photos. "One of the most popular rooms is the **Ulysses S. Grant**. Of course, the **Jefferson Davis** and **Robert E. Lee** rooms are on a separate floor. Ironically, the room named after **Bishop John H. Vincent**, a non-drinking Methodist, is convenient to the tavern." Four rooms are named for women: **Julia Dent Grant**, plus suffragettes **Susan B. Anthony**, **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Frances Willard**. One room is named for **Black Hawk**, a Sauk warrior, and another for **Booker T. Washington**, a former slave and the founder of Tuskegee Institute.

- Parking, a valuable commodity in Galena, is free for the hotel's overnight guests.

- You don't have to be a paying guest to enjoy a free self-guided walking tour of the historic DeSoto House. Just stop at the front desk and ask for the walking tour brochure.

- The hotel has three restaurants and two cocktail lounges. Together, they serve breakfast, lunch, dinner and an elegant Sunday brunch. (But you don't have to wear a tie!)

- The DeSoto House "History Package" celebrates the 150th anniversary of its grand opening. It includes a room for two, a \$50 gift certificate for The Generals' Restaurant, two passes to the Galena History Museum, parking and a gift bag (postcards, hotel history booklet, self-guided walking tour brochure, commemorative chocolate bar). Rates begin at \$159 per night + tax. (Reservations required.)

Located on Main Street in the heart of Galena's historic district, The DeSoto House Hotel is within easy walking distance of more than 100 specialty shops, galleries, restaurants and historic sites. For more info about The DeSoto House Hotel, phone 800-343-6562 or visit www.desotohouse.com.

Galena is a picturesque village tucked away in the northwest corner of Illinois, where it meets Wisconsin and Iowa on the Mississippi River. For visitor information about Galena phone 877-444-5850 or visit www.galena.org.

#

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Jim & Kathleen Webster
Webster's Unabridged, Inc.
PO Box 311
Galena IL 61036-0311
P: 815-777-2422
F: 815-777-2436
E: websters@galenalink.com

*We can supply: digital copy and hi-res photos, plus traditional, comprehensive press kits.
We can arrange: interviews, guided tours and complimentary overnight stays and meals.*