





The
SEELBACH HILTON



*A Centennial Salute
to Louisville's Grand Hotel*

Larry Johnson

BUTLER BOOKS
LOUISVILLE

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■ *The Seelbach Hotel,
Fourth Street, 1927*

LOUIS SEELBACH
PRESIDENT

OTTO SEELBACH
V. P., SEC'Y & TREAS.

W. O. SEELBACH
MANAGER

CARL RINDT
ASS'T MANAGER

OTTO E. SEELBACH
ASS'T MANAGER

The Seelbach

— EUROPEAN PLAN —

CORNER FOURTH AND WALNUT STREETS

THE SEELBACH HOTEL CO., INCORPORATED. PROPRIETORS AND MANAGERS



The Seelbach

Being the **LEADING HOTEL** in the **CITY**,
located in the heart of the shopping center and in
the midst of all Theatres it is **THE PLACE** where
EVERYBODY MEETS EVERYBODY.

The Rathskeller in the basement is the handsomest
and most unique place of its kind in the country.



■ *The Oakroom*



1981 Metropolitan Life Insurance obtains 50% of the Seelbach in return for a \$15.5 million loan.

1982 The Seelbach reopens in April, restored to its former grandeur. The reopening ceremonies include Louisville Mayor Harvey Sloane and Governor John Y. Brown, Jr.

1982–1990 The hotel is managed by National Hotels Corporation, a subsidiary of Radisson Hotels and Doubletree Hotels.

1983 The Seelbach is selected by the Preferred Hotels Association, one of only 40 hotels worldwide.

1990 The Seelbach is sold to Medallion Hotels of New York.

1995 The addition of the 8,678-square-foot Medallion Ballroom makes the hotel a top conference hotel in Louisville.

1996 The Oakroom undergoes renovations and reopens, aiming for a five-star level of quality.

1998 Meristar Hotels and Resorts purchases the Seelbach and begins a \$10 million renovation of all guest rooms.

1999 The Oakroom receives AAA's Five Diamond designation.

2001 The Oakroom is entered into the Fine Dining Hall of Fame by *Nation's Restaurant News*.

2007 Investcorp International, Inc. purchases the hotel.

2009 Investcorp completely renovates the hotel—\$14 million.

Today After a series of ownership changes, the Seelbach now proudly flies the Hilton flag and enjoys four-star, four-diamond status.

CHAPTER SIX

Ghosts, Gangsters, and Gorbachev



The Lady in Blue, 1936

This is a brief look into the story of Patricia Wilson, the “Lady in Blue.”

During Sunday brunch one hot July day in 1987, two separate hotel associates saw a woman in a blue dress walk into the elevator—with the doors closed. The first sighting occurred on the hotel’s Mezzanine level and the other on the eighth floor.

James Scott was cooking waffles for Sunday brunch on the Mezzanine. He looked out toward the small elevators and saw a dark-haired lady in a blue dress walk into the elevator through closed doors. Shaken, he called a security guard who checked the elevator and could find nothing.

A short time later a housekeeper on the eighth floor saw a lady go into the same elevator in the same manner. The security guard, called again, talked with both associates and found that their descriptions of the lady were identical.

The apparition remained a mystery until 1992, when Alex Hunt discovered an article in the 1936 newspaper about the death of a woman in a Seelbach elevator.

It seems that a young couple had just moved to Louisville from

Oklahoma. The Wilsons had been married for four years but had separated. Mrs. Patricia Wilson was 24 years old and lived at 847 South First Street.

Their landlady had said, “The Wilsons were trying to work things out and they planned a meeting at the Seelbach. Mr. Wilson was killed in a car wreck on his way to the hotel. A few nights later, Patricia fell to her death in a dark service elevator in the back of the Seelbach. She had a blue dress on.”


So add The Lady in Blue to the list of ghosts who frequent the hotel from time to time.

The story became fairly well known nationally. On Halloween night, 2003, the Lady in Blue was a clue on “Jeopardy.”



■ *The Lady in Blue was seen walking into this elevator in 1987. She had died in 1936, having fallen down this elevator shaft in the hotel.*

FALL VICTIM



MRS. PATRICIA WILSON.

**GIRL LOSES LIFE
IN HOTEL SHAFT**

Coroner Delays Verdict As
Body Found Atop Seel-
bach Elevator.

DEAD SEVERAL HOURS

Mrs. Patricia Wilson, 24, of 847 S. First, was found dead shortly before 8 a.m. Wednesday, lying atop a service elevator at the bottom of a shaft at the Seelbach Hotel.

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Patricia or Lucy

This story was sent to me on April 16, 2006 from Margaret Bateman, the Kentucky Department of Tourism, Communication Branch.

Mrs. Bateman gave her father the first edition of this book. When she later visited him in Ohio, he said he thought he knew the Lady in Blue.

The following are Mr. Bateman's memories.

My dad (now 93 years old) was a member of the 107th mounted troop in Cleveland before the war started. In 1935, the troop was at Fort Knox for its two-week active duty training and he and his three friends went to Louisville for some "fun." (He told me he probably should not be telling this story, but he was single at the time.) They asked where the excitement was and were directed to Fifth Street. They went to a "house" and the madam brought them four girls. One of them was a knock-out and they called her "Lucy." The next year, they were back at Fort Knox and went back to the same house. They asked about Lucy and were told she had died in an elevator accident at the Seelbach. So now, we know how the "Lady in Blue" was making her living during the time she and her husband were separated. Her death may not have been an accident. Anyway, this sounds like a story for the TV show, "Cold Case."

This story was shared in memory of Margaret Bateman's father, who died April 22, 2006.



All Wet, October 11, 1995

Russian Premier Mikhail Gorbachev came to town in 1995 to receive a Grawemeyer Award from the University of Louisville. As he arrived, Mr. Gorbachev's pants got soaked when he was caught in a sudden rainstorm at the airport.

Not having a change of clothes, the former Soviet leader gave his pants to one of the officers from the Louisville Police Dignitary Protection Unit. The police officer rushed the pants to a bellman at the Seelbach, who took them to be cleaned and pressed at a nearby cleaner.

While thousands of people waited at the Louisville Gardens for Gorbachev's speech, he was waiting for his pants.

The pants were returned to Mr. Gorbachev by the bellman a short time later.

Mr. Gorbachev arrived at The Gardens only 45 minutes late.



Gangsters, 1982 and 1996

John Young, the bellman at the hotel from 1982 to 1987, and Max Allen, a third generation barman, son of Max "Scopie" Allen, the bartender in the Rathskeller from 1918 to 1922, told this story to the author.

Al Capone, Dutch Schultz and Lucky Luciano visited the Seelbach during the Roaring '20s, perhaps prompted by hotel owner Abraham Liebling from Chicago, to do a little friendly gambling,



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■ (Above) Bartending legend Max Allen at the Seelbach Bar. (Right) Al Capone, a frequent Seelbach guest.



which was, of course, illegal. The door to the Poker Room where they hung out was spring-loaded, and if the police happened to come into the lobby someone would push a button and the doors would close and the players knew to get their money off the table.

Stories have been told about Al Capone playing cards one night in the late 1920s when the door suddenly closed. He got up and went through a small hidden door to a staircase that went down to the basement kitchen, and from there he went down another staircase to the sub-basement and took the drainage tunnel under the city for several blocks.

The stairway leading from the poker room was put in as a way to get food to the billiard room from the kitchen.



■ (Above) Troy Westrick seated in the old Poker Room with Al Capone's secret door behind him. (Below) The tunnel under the hotel.





Seelbach Cocktail

Folklore or truth, the Seelbach Cocktail was made by accident in 1917 in the Seelbach Bar. The bartender opened a bottle of champagne which began to foam over, so he held it over two Manhattans that were sitting on the counter and the house drink was born.

How to make a great Seelbach Cocktail:

5 ounces champagne

1 ounce good Kentucky bourbon

Orange liqueur and bitters

Add a dash of sophistication

Serve it in a champagne flute with a twist of orange peel