

UIL LISTENING CONTEST – GRADES 5-6 INVITATIONAL 2013-2014

Contest Script- “America’s Most Haunted Hotel”

Have you ever thought about staying at a haunted hotel? What if something woke you up in the night? Would you stay, or would you run down the hall screaming? The Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas has the distinction of being known as America’s most haunted hotel. What is the history of the Crescent Hotel? What secrets are hidden there? What causes people to return year after year?

1:00 The Crescent Hotel was built in 1886 as a resort for the rich and famous. Built by Isaac Stockton Taylor, construction began in 1884. Taylor was the foremost architect in Missouri in the late 1800s and was also well known for his work in Texas. The magnesium-limestone blocks used throughout the building came from a quarry of the White River close to Eureka Springs at Beaver. Large cream-colored blocks of the dense stone were transported by train and specially built wagons to the top of the West Mountain where they were precisely cut and fitted into place. The walls of the Crescent are eighteen inches thick and constructed without mortar. Stone cutting specialists Crescent’s grand opening, May 20, 1886, was a social event attended by 400 guests from several states. The next day the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* featured an article on the gala affair listing some of the prestigious guests who danced the night away in the grand ballroom. The Crescent Hotel was touted as America’s most luxurious resort hotel, costing more than \$290,000.00.

2:00 For the first 15 years after its grand opening, The Crescent Hotel was operated by The Eureka Springs Improvement Company as an exclusive year-round resort hotel catering to the rich and well-to-do. The gracious southern hospitality of the Crescent Hotel became well known. However, despite its grand beginnings, the hotel soon became unmanageable and fell into disrepair and was shut down. On September 23, 1908, it reopened as the Crescent College and Conservatory for Young Women to provide extra income needed to keep the hotel running year round. The small college operated from September through June, with the summer months being devoted to hotel operations. Enrollment was restricted to eighty-eight students, who originally came from thirty-nine different states. A. S. Maddox served as the first president. The college was known for its high standards. Nine faculty members taught such subjects as math, science, languages, English, and history. Richard Ryan Thompson moved to Eureka Springs in 1908 to teach at the college and help with its operations. In 1910, he began his tenure as president, serving in this capacity until 1924. His wife, Mary Breckenridge Thompson, taught French and health classes. Another staff member was Cecilia Paul,

who was given the position of dean as well as hostess of the hotel in the summer months. President Thompson worked for fourteen years to raise funds needed to continue operations of the college. In 1924, however, the college's lease with the Crescent Hotel ran out, and without sufficient funding to purchase the property, Crescent College and Conservatory closed its doors. A January issue of the *Flashlight* cited a "lack of interest, lack of funds, and lack of backing by the citizens." In 1930, with renewed interest from the community, the college reopened and was called Crescent Junior College, and A. Q. Burns served as president. The college had a girls' basketball team called the Crescent Comets, as well as a prestigious faculty and staff. Crescent Junior College remained open until the end of the 1934 school year. After the college closed in 1934, the Crescent was leased as a summer hotel.

3:00

In 1937, it got a new owner, Norman G. Baker, who turned the place into a hospital and health resort. Baker, a millionaire inventor and radio personality, styled himself as a doctor, despite having had no medical training. He claimed to have discovered a number of "cures" for various ailments, including cancer, and launched frequent attacks on organized medicine, which he accused of being corrupt and profit-driven. Norman Baker, the tenth and last child of John and Frances Baker of Muscatine, Iowa, was born on November 27, 1882. Ten years of his life were spent touring with a vaudeville magician act that focused on reading the minds of his clients. Baker returned to Muscatine in 1914, where he patented the Air Calliaphone, a portable organ run by air pressure that could be heard for a quarter of a mile. In addition, he ran a correspondence art school and a mail-order business. These businesses made him a claiming that he had a cure for cancer and opened the Baker Institute in Muscatine. His cure was a solution containing glycerin, carbolic acid, and alcohol, which was mixed with tea brewed from watermelon seed, brown corn silk, and clover leaves. Shortly after that, he was forced to leave Iowa for practicing medicine without a license. It was at this point that he bought the Crescent Hotel. He called it a "Castle in the Air" because it sat on a hill 2,000 feet above sea level overlooking the town nestled below. It was here in 1937, that he established the new location of the Baker Hospital. The local chamber of commerce, the Bank of Eureka Springs, and the *Daily Times Echo* all looked to Baker to rejuvenate the town. At the Crescent, Baker painted virtually everything lavender or purple. The polychrome lobby decorated in red, yellow, orange, and black, along with a Calliaphone on the roof, set the institution's tone. As he had done before, he claimed to be able to cure cancer and various other illnesses. Baker moved his cancer patients to Arkansas and advertised his new health resort at the Crescent. His "cure" consisted primarily of drinking the area's natural spring water. Many of his patients died and people in the area began to realize that he was possibly nothing more than a con-man. In 1940, federal charges were filed against Baker for mail fraud based on advertising his cure for cancer and he spent four years in prison. The Crescent Hotel was left ownerless until 1946. In the spring of 1946 the Crescent Hotel was purchased by John

4:00

R Constantine, Herbert E Shutter, Herbert Byfield, and Dwight Nichols. The hotel ran uneventfully until on Wednesday, March 15, 1967, it was nearly burned to the ground.

5:00 Over the next thirty years, the hotel passed through several hands as repairs and more restorations were made, but the hotel was never fully restored to its original grandeur. However, this all changed in 1997 when the historic inn was purchased. In May, 1997, the new owners announced, "In five years, we pledge to have this 'Grand Lady of The Ozarks' back to where she was 100 years ago." Today, the Crescent Hotel is one of the most visited hotels in the South. With its long and extensive history, it is also known to be one of the most haunted places in the Ozarks. Staff and guests alike tell stories of a number of ghosts that are still said to inhabit the old hotel. The most often sighted apparition is that of a red-haired Irish stonemason, who the staff has dubbed "Michael." Allegedly, Michael was one of the original masons who worked on the building of the hotel in 1885. However, while working on the roof he lost his balance and fell to the second floor area and was killed. From the days when the old hotel served as Baker's Cancer Hospital, the lingering spirit of a nurse, dressed all in white, is often seen pushing a gurney on the third floor. Only spotted after 11:00 p.m., the time which they used to move the deceased out the cancer hospital, the ghostly spirit vanishes when she reaches the end of the hallway. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, the stories are always interesting. The hotel even offers ghost tours in the evening for those who want to try their hand at ghost spotting.

6:00 Today, the fully restored hotel creates an ambience that has transcended time, while providing all the amenities that the modern day traveler requires. Surrounded by 15 acres of formal gardens and nature trails, the hotel offers 72 guest rooms, many with their own balcony, and 12 luxury suites throughout the building. It is often the scene of weddings and other celebrations.

Will the Crescent Hotel continue to its grand tradition of beauty in the Ozarks? No one really knows. What we do know, however, is that a huge slice of American history sits just above the town of Eureka Springs. From dream to ruin and back to dream again, the Crescent Hotel is an American legend whose story is as intriguing as the Ozark mountains themselves.