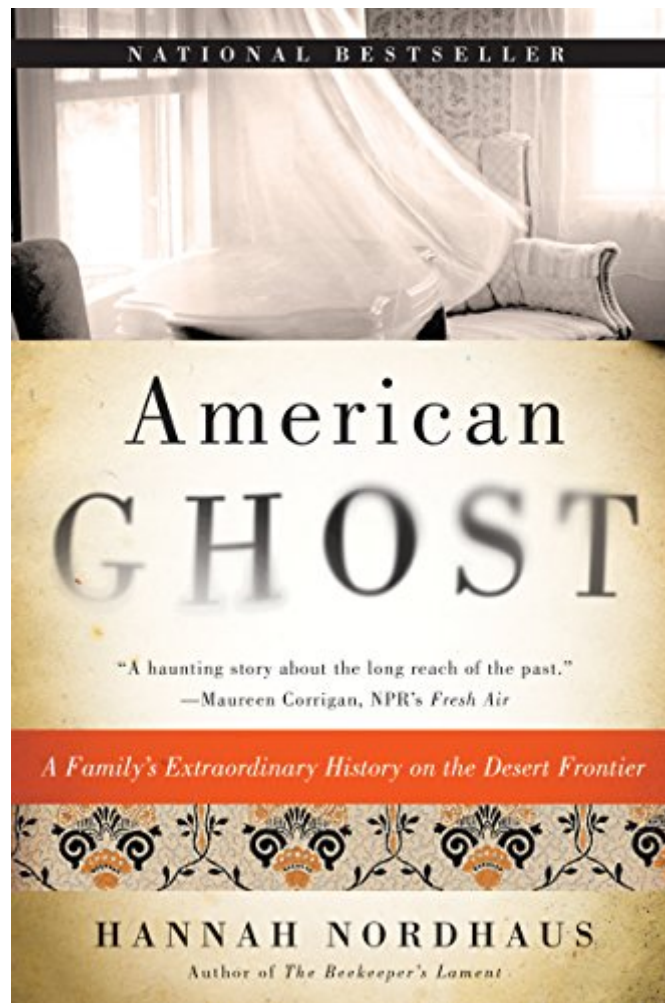




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American Ghost: A Family's Extraordinary History On The Desert Frontier



Synopsis

A haunting story about the long reach of the past. "Maureen Corrigan, NPR's Fresh Air In this intriguing book, [Nordhaus] shares her journey to discover who her immigrant ancestor really was and what strange alchemy made the idea of her linger long after she was gone. "People's Place" was once a grand Santa Fe mansion. It belonged to Abraham and Julia Staab, who emigrated from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. After they died, the house became a hotel. And in the 1970s, the hotel acquired a resident ghost—a sad, dark-eyed woman in a long gown. Strange things began to happen there: vases moved, glasses flew, blankets were ripped from beds. Julia Staab died in 1896—but her ghost, they say, lives on. In *American Ghost*, Julia's great-great-granddaughter, Hannah Nordhaus, traces her ancestor's transfiguration from nineteenth-century Jewish bride to modern phantom. Family diaries, photographs, and newspaper clippings take her on a riveting journey through three hundred years of German history and the American immigrant experience. With the help of historians, genealogists, family members, and ghost hunters, she weaves a masterful, moving story of fin-de-siècle Europe and pioneer life, villains and visionaries, medicine and spiritualism, imagination and truth, exploring how lives become legends, and what those legends tell us about who we are.

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Customer Reviews

A fascinating account of a family's history; of pioneers, desperadoes, and a woman completely out of her element who's forced to live in a harsh and uncomfortable environment. The question is; does her spirit still inhabit the house that her husband built for her almost a century and a half ago. Hanna Nordhaus explores this question from every angle, traveling to the southwestern United States, Europe, and many places in between, retracing the footsteps of her great-great-great-grandmother Julia - the woman said to haunt the old family Santa Fe mansion. The story was interesting as a history, and I was especially engaged when the author told of her encounters with mediums, spiritualists, and ghost hunters - some of who seemed fairly on target and others who were clearly way off base. Sometimes the story dragged on a little in its exploration and seemed to deviate off track, but when exploring something nebulous like a legendary haunting, I guess the author was justified in wandering a little. I recommend this book for people who like reading about interesting family histories - of a resilient, driven, prosperous (and possibly tyrannical) man, and a wife who, after being taken out of her element succumbs to the stress, the strain of loss and loneliness, and pioneer life to which she was ill suited.

This is a quirky and imperfect book, but I enjoyed it a lot. Ms. Nordhaus writes about her great-great-grandmother, a rather sheltered and frail German Jewish woman who moved (or, perhaps more aptly, was moved) from Germany to Santa Fe, New Mexico when it was still just a territory with her new husband and who apparently haunts a hotel there that was formerly her home. The (true) story takes us through generations of a very successful and wealthy German Jewish family, both on the frontier and in their travels around the United States and Europe, but always returning to the saga of Julia Staab (the great-great-grandmother and/or ghost in question) and her husband and children. The story is fascinating and is "interrupted" (delightfully, in my view) by Ms. Nordhaus's visits with various and sundry mediums, some of whom seem, well, less than authentic in their efforts to communicate with Julia. Ms. Nordhaus perseveres and actually learns a great deal about the family, even though some major mysteries are left unsolved. The very fact that the family's tale isn't wrapped up in a box with a pretty bow, and the fact that the story is a mix of

sadness and humor, makes it more realistic. I can't give it five stars for two reasons -- first, there's a rather lengthy digression about a sister of Julia who died in a concentration camp. It's not a frivolous digression, but it's a digression nonetheless. Second, there's a sort of touchy-feely "soliloquy" towards the end of the book that I could have lived without. That said, I very much enjoyed the book.

As a person who loves genealogy - that's why I bought this book - because it sounded so fascinating. Researching ones ancestors is a great deal of fun. You learn about history and so many things. I did enjoy reading about Julia and learning all about her family and life. I knew nothing about that part of America where Julia and her husband settled, which was quite interesting to learn about. Full of details and captivating scenes - this book is not boring at all. This is a true story and one that is pretty amazing as well. It takes you from Europe to the South-West and back again. The author did a great job of investigating all matters of these people's lives. She truly did all the leg work by going to each location. This keeps the book's flow going and it moves right along in a seamless manner. The only thing I didn't agree with - was her 'conclusions' about certain events. She put her own focus of reality onto these people. First at the beginning she was sure of this or that fact only to find out she was wrong. Later on she uses psychics and other methods of trying to learn about Julia and her family. I don't mind psychics at all. However, I don't think you can 'assume' they are always correct. However, since this is her very own relative and it's her book - she, as the author, has every right to put forth her own ideas and assumptions whether they are right or wrong. As a genealogist - you must rely strictly to facts that have proof on documents. As a person who is just trying to learn about her family - you don't have to rely only on documents or proof. There is room for speculation and/or conjecture in just story telling. Basically - if you like true stories about real people from the past - I don't see why you wouldn't like this book. It does take you on a journey and ends up with results that were unknown & unexpected. I think Julia would be proud of her descendant for caring enough to do all the research and asking the hard questions. Hopefully this is one ghost who can now be at peace and who can move on to where-ever ghosts go to.

While it is an interesting recap of reasearching both family history and the paranormal, it tends to be unfocused. There isn't enough unbiased factual historical information to support any of the interpretations of Julie Staab and her marriage and life, so the real woman is replaced by a distorted image based on other's life experiences, so there are no answers in the end. There is also not a lot of paranormal investigation into the haunting itself, the paranormal focus being on various psychics and maybe one ghost hunter Investigating a different ghost. It was well written, but may be

unsatisfying to readers looking for a haunting.

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