

York's haunted past

Stories of witches, torture and whispering ghouls were told Friday.

By TERESA McMINN
For the Daily Record/Sunday News
York Daily Record/Sunday News

Article Launched: 10/14/2006 02:13:54 AM EDT



At bottom: · [WHAT THEY SAID](#)

Oct 14, 2006 — Human ears were nailed to posts.

Tools were used to dismember body parts into pieces small enough to fit into a large boiling pot.

Torture, hangings, witchcraft and skeletons.

What better way to conjure ghosts than by telling of dark history, dead bodies and active spirits?

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Scott Butcher of Downtown Inc. asked as he led the first of two haunted historic walking tours that made several stops in York.

Each tour drew 75 people, some skeptical and others who said they have had personal experience with ghosts.

Among the stops was the site of the Hex murder trials.

"The trial was held right here in this very courthouse," Butcher said and pointed to the city's former courthouse on East Market Street. The case drew worldwide attention, he said. "After all, we are talking about witchcraft ... Apparently, there are two ghosts that walk the halls of this building."

Ten-year-old Derrick Hollar's jaw dropped, and he sat on the courthouse steps staring up at the old building as Butcher described

reports of unexplainable footsteps and sightings that have happened inside.

Derrick's pal Zach Purdum later said he was sure there was a ghost in the building. Ghosts exist, he said. He saw one last Christmas - it was blue and it was real. It wasn't a shadow from the tree lights, he said. It had a human form, he said.

Zach's mom, Springfield Township resident Helen Purdum, motioned for the boys to look up to the second story of the building.

"Watch the dark spot up there," she told the boys. "Keep watching because you never know who is watching you."

Nearby in the crowd, Greg Poff held a coroner's badge with the inscription "L. U. Zech" on the back. Zech was the coroner who worked on the Hex case, said Poff, a local historian and author.

The York County Judicial Center also was on the tour.

Newspapers in 1872 reported that cannibals, who were in town with the circus, ate one of their peers at the site of the former Pennsylvania House, Butcher said.

Nearby, at the former Fisher's of York restaurant, employees reportedly said they heard their names whispered from empty rooms.

And on the steps of Christ Lutheran Church, Butcher said, a prisoner was tortured for stealing a horse at the former site of the old York Jail.

"Do you think a ghost is walking with us?" the tour guide asked.

WHAT THEY SAID

Questions and comments from the ghost tour:

- "Is Butcher your real name or do you use that just for the ghost tour?" asked Shiloh resident Randy Glatfelter. He and his wife, Robin, attended the ghost tour.
- "I promise you my middle name is not 'The,'" Butcher said as he led the first of two haunted historic walking tours downtown Friday night.
- "I like the history lessons but I don't believe in the ghost thing," said Springettsbury Township resident Arlene Gutierrez. "People believe what they want to believe."
- Deputy Tom Muldrow was working in the York County Judicial Center

and came outside to ask why a crowd had gathered at the building's front steps. When told it was a ghost tour, and asked if he believes in ghosts, Muldrow said people are haunted by unfinished business they had with the dead.

"Things that you didn't do ... undone things, unfinished things," he said. "The ghost - it's your own conscience."

· There's a ghost in the hallways at Lincolnway Elementary School in West York, said Jada Gotwalt, 9, a third-grade student at the school.

"I see a girl at the end of the hallway. She's very pretty with golden hair ... She looks like she died 100 years ago," Jada said. "She's been trying to find a place to stay and came to Lincolnway ... She looks like she's 12 years old ... I look away and then I look back and she's gone."