

Tour the spooky side of York

The 75-minute walking tour will cover more than 15 blocks.

By TERESA McMINN
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Scott Butcher, a local historian and author, will host a tour with ghost stories about buildings including the home of the former Fisher's restaurant, the Strand-Capitol and Lafayette Club.

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Sep 25, 2006 — There have been some strange reports in the past couple years of unexplained happenings in downtown businesses. Some workers said doors mysteriously locked behind them; others said they were alone and heard their name being whispered. Some said they saw moving shadows and heard a phonograph record being played.

"Probably the most common is . . . hearing things . . . a moan or a groan or a whisper," said Scott Butcher, a local historian and author who interviewed many people downtown. "I heard some very interesting modern day stories."

York is rich with dark history, including the Hex murder trials at the York County Court House in the 1920s, said Butcher, who will lead a tour of reportedly haunted buildings and sites of historical horrors. Butcher is also the chairman of the promotions and marketing committee for Downtown Inc.

The tour will include ghost stories about buildings including the home of the former Fisher's restaurant, the Strand-Capitol and Lafayette

Club.

Butcher, who has led Victorian and Civil War-related ghost tours for the York County Heritage Trust, said people often ask him if he believes in ghosts.

"I don't have any direct explanation," he said of the spooky events that people told him about.

In the past, he asked participants in his tour group if they had ever had something happen they couldn't explain. About 30 percent said yes, Butcher said.

"More than anything it's fun," he said. Butcher said that because he has such a great love of history, he finds the ghost stories very interesting.

"That sort of thing is very enjoyable to me," he said.

The tour will also feature a creepy story Butcher found in local newspaper archive. It's one of his favorites, about a cannibal tribe from Fiji that came to York with the circus. At that time, one local paper reported the man-eater died in a local hotel. The next day, a competing paper published a story saying the dead cannibal was eaten by his fellow tribe members.

"It was really funny to read," said Butcher. The types of outrageous sensationalized stories found today in grocery store tabloids were printed on the front pages of daily papers back then, he said. "Sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction."

The ghost tours have been an annual event for about 16 years. Tour sizes have varied depending on weather conditions but the average is between about 50 and 100 folks.

"It's a long-standing event for us," said Katie Bell, executive director, Downtown Inc. "It's pretty much an all-volunteer event."

The 75-minute walking tour covers more than 15 blocks and Bell recommends wearing comfortable shoes.

Bell said those on the tours are usually surprised by York's rich history and impressed with the "architectural gems."

"We get a lot of comments," Bell said. "Overall, about how spooky the tour is."

IF YOU GO

The Downtown Haunted Historic Walking Tour, led by local historian and author Scott Butcher, will be held next month on Friday the 13th.

The 75-minute walking tours begin at 7 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Space is limited and tickets must be reserved in advance. Ticket prices are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children.

For more information and to reserve tickets, call Downtown Inc.'s office at 849-2331.

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CIVIL WAR GHOST STORIES

The York County Heritage Trust, beginning 6:30 p.m. Oct. 7, will present Civil War and Victorian ghost stories at the Bonham House, 152 E. Market St.

Call 848-1587 for more information and reservations.

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