

City of York's own ghost whisperer

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Oct 1, 2006 — I have this theory: Every minute of every day - on a television station somewhere in the world - the Patrick Swayze-Demi Moore film "Ghost" is playing.

It's a rare day, indeed, when I don't run into it as I surf the channels on my television set - or I don't walk in and find my wife, once again, engrossed in that film.

What is it about ghost stories that fascinate us? Certainly York County's supernatural obsession with Halloween is evident at this time of year.

Well, hear this, all you ghost boosters: Get ready for an updated ghost tour of downtown York.

Scott Butcher, who wears many hats - including director of business development for the Nutec Group and chair of Downtown Inc.'s Promotions and Marketing Committee - will lead two candlelight "haunt jaunts" of mid-town York on (and didn't you just know this was coming) *Friday, Oct. 13.*

From the gathering spot at 14 W. Market St. (Downtown, Inc. offices), the first stop will be the old York County Court House on East Market Street. At one time, jail cells were in the basement of the building. That's also the location of York County's famous "Hex" trial for a murder that took place in Rehmeyer's Hollow. More than that, there are those who believe two ghosts hang out in the building: A former judge who skitters between courtrooms one and two, and a jailed man who took his own life before he went to trial.

Across the street, some folks at The Lafayette Club have reported hearing the footsteps of a dedicated deceased employee who apparently sticks around - even in death - to make sure things are running smoothly.

Around the corner - on East Philadelphia Street - is the Goodridge House, believed to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad as escaped slaves from the South made their way to freedom in the North. Some people say "you can hear haunting moans coming from

the basement," Scott says. Others say they've heard the "rattling of chains" and ghostly footsteps.

The Capitol Theatre might want to consider showing the film "Ghost" to entertain its spectral visitors. At one time, people said they could smell cigar smoke in the projection booth of the theater - that came from a long-ago stagehand known to keep a stogie clamped between his teeth. Others have said they've heard the voice of a woman in the empty auditorium.

Over at the now-closed Fisher's Restaurant, the owners said they had ghostly encounters while they were renovating the place. As Scott says: "Construction seems to bring about (ghost) activity." Staffers reported hearing disembodied voices calling their names in the former Ramona Restaurant portion of the building. You'll also hear about the sing-along humming - that was not coming from an old record player.

For history buffs, outside the York County Judicial Center - which is on the site of the former Penn Hotel, which was built on the site of the former Pennsylvania House hotel - there will be the story of the dwarf cannibal from Fiji who died while touring with a B.T. Barnum show when it stopped in York. The deceased main attraction was buried in York City's Potters Field - later the site of the original York High School (later Hannah Penn Junior High) across from Penn Park. Or was he?

The Penn Park location, which is not included on the tour, was also the location where four Revolutionary War-era soldiers were accused of desertion and executed by firing squad.

There will be many more stories on the walking tour, Scott promises. However, if you need a "warm-up" for the chilling walk, Scott notes the York County Heritage Trust will tell Civil War ghost stories around a campfire behind the Bonham House on Saturday, Oct. 7 at 5:30 p.m.

The tour on Oct. 13 is an update of the popular Ghost Tours led by Georg Sheets a few years ago. Tickets are available at the Downtown, Inc. offices at \$7 for adults and \$5 for children.

It just might be the right Halloween gift for the "ghoul of your dreams." *Gordon Freireich is a former editor of the York Sunday News.*
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