

More York ghost tours

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Oct 21, 2007 — When I was about 6 years old, I was taken to see Walt Disney's animated version of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." For a Disney film, it was dark and downright scary: A headless horseman with a pumpkin head under his arm?

Auuggghh. I didn't know if I should sleep under the covers, or sleep on top of them with the lights on.

A few years later, while still an impressionable youngster, we visited my aunt and uncle who lived in a large, old house in Kinderhook, N.Y. It was near the location where Ichabod Crane and the other folks from Sleepy Hollow were supposed to have lived.

The first night there, I heard a light ringing noise. The next morning, I asked my aunt what the sound was. "Oh," she said. "That's the woman who lives next door. She rings a bedside bell to keep the sprites away at night."

Auuggghh. Under covers or lights on for the rest of the stay there?

People - for some strange reason - seem to love ghost stories. (We have friends from York who camped near Gettysburg the other weekend so they could go on one of that community's many haunted tours. They were disappointed they didn't see or hear anything/anyone on the tour.)

Last year, Scott Butcher led a ghost tour of downtown York and almost 150 people showed up.

Well, heeeeee's baaaack!

Scott, who is director of business development for NuTec Design, a photographer, amateur historian and sometime Civil War re-enactor will lead another tour to some new locations in downtown York on Friday, Oct. 26 - after dark, of course.

Starting out at the Goodridge House, 123 E. Philadelphia St., the tour groups will hear about - if not actually hear - the stories of the house being used as a stop on the Underground Railroad, before and during the Civil War. Folks who have been in the house - which will not be open because it is a construction site as it is converted into a museum - tell of hearing children laughing or crying; of the sounds of footsteps and rattling chains; of windows opening by themselves.

Walking down Philadelphia Street to George Street, visitors will hear about the strange happenings at the former Pennsylvania House Hotel (now the York County Judicial Center) and the dramatic, haunting sounds and smells of the Strand and Capitol theaters.

Over on Beaver and Market Streets, they'll hear about the visit of that legendary ghost writer - Charles Dickens - when he visited York.

Across the street, Scott will talk about Revolutionary War General Mad Anthony Wayne, who more than earned his nickname by having six prisoners taken from the old jail at George and King Streets, marched over to Penn Park and then each man executed - one at a time - by firing squads made up of 10 men. Pretty gory stuff. There will be some other stories centered about the old jail, too.

In the first block of South Beaver Street, they'll find out about the apparitions and the opening of closed transoms above the bedroom doors in the Smyser House.

The tours will amble up to the Old York County Courthouse (now the Administrative Center) for a re-telling of the "Hex Murder Trial" that took place there and commanded worldwide media coverage. There are a couple of spirits - one a prisoner who killed himself in a holding cell and another of a judge - who are said to still inhabit the building.

The stop at the Yorktowne Hotel will give visitors a water and restroom break before plunging back in to "the other world," which will include tales about the Lafayette Club, whose ghost actually has a name, "Stuart," and then to the Bonham House on East Market Street. Turning on to Queen Street from Market, Scott will talk about "The Ghost Welcoming Committee" in that neighborhood.

Turn another corner and the tour will be back at its starting point at The Goodridge House.

The night promises to be the perfect time to prepare for "Howl-oween." Then you too can decide if you should sleep with your head under the covers.

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