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Tally finds its spooky side

Ghost Tour of Historic Downtown Tallahassee is one option for Halloween

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It may come as a surprise to some Florida State University students that the hill on which the Westcott building and fountain currently stand was, in the 1830s, known as Gallows Hill, a site where executions were once held, and that's just one place Tallahassee residents can learn about during ghost tours of Historic Downtown Tallahassee taking place Sunday, Oct. 29 through Tuesday, Oct. 31.

"We're going to focusing on the spookier side of Tallahassee history," said Jackson Maynard, one of the partners involved in the planning the event.

The ghost tour is a product of a partnership between Beth J. LaCivita, owner of Historic Florida Consulting, LLC, and Maynard, a local attorney and FSU alumni formerly of Historic Tallahassee Tours, Inc.

"We've got some very interesting stories that we pulled from local folklore," said Maynard.

According to LaCivita, the tour guides include Richard Bivins, who is currently the director of membership services with the Tallahassee Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. Bivins was once a professional actor and played in movies including *Glory*, *Dances with Wolves* and *Tombstone*.

The 40-minute tours will depart from the Starbucks Cafe in the lobby of the Doubletree Hotel at 101 South Adams Street. They will leave every 20 minutes from 6 p.m. to 10:40 p.m. on the evenings the tours are being held. The tours cost \$10 for adults and are free for children 12 and under. It is also recommended that groups reserves their spots early. According to Maynard, Gallows Hill is one example of a stop that will be on the tour.

"There have been numerous reports of various strange sightings, apart from what you might think late at night at (Westcott) fountain, (like) people hearing strange things and seeing strange things," said Maynard. "I, at one point, talked to someone with (the FSU Police Department), who said they get the most reports of unusual sightings in that location more than any other part of campus."

Maynard said one spirit that may be haunting the area is a slave woman executed in the 1830s, who allegedly killed her infant.

"There is some discussion that her ghost may still haunt that location," said Maynard.

Another stop on the tour that Maynard mentioned is the Exchange Bank building at the Southeast Corner of Monroe Street and College Avenue. According to Maynard, the bank was built in 1929, the year the Great Depression began. The bank's owner C.L. Mizell reportedly shot himself in the basement and is said to still haunt the bank to keep an eye on its owners and how they treat their customers' accounts.

"(Mizell) had an insurance policy, which would reimburse the local account holders in the event of his death for any reason," explained Maynard. "Because of that, a lot of families here locally were kept from going under right at the very start of the Great

Depression.”

Reportedly, Mizell also left a one-page, typed note reading, “For God sake, please let my wife keep the house.”

Another Tallahassee ghost story to be discussed on the tour relates the Old City Cemetery and the grave of a woman named Elizabeth Budd Graham, who died in the 1880s.

“If you look at the other graves in the cemetery, they all face to the east,” said Maynard.

“The east symbolized resurrection and life. The west symbolized death and destruction.

Because her grave faces to the west, it was rumored for many years that she was actually a witch.”

According to Maynard, though her grave speaks of her as a good wife and mother, a strange poem is also inscribed on it, which speaks of “the doubly dead.”

Another aspect of the tour is that patrons have the chance to witness the ghosts of Graham and others, as played by actors.

“The way it’s set up is that we have costumed guides as ghosts that will lead the tours, and then occasionally ghosts will actually jump out and talk about why they’re haunting particular buildings,” explained Maynard.

Maynard, however, did reiterate an “anything can happen” feeling to the tours.

“They’ll be some pretty decently scary moments,” said Maynard. “It’s not really necessarily going to focus on what I call the gore side of Halloween. At the same time, just walking around those streets at night and hearing about some of the events that have gone on there creates a nice atmosphere, and you just don’t know what to expect. You never know what ghost you may encounter, either our planned ones or otherwise.”

For more information or to make reservations for one of the ghost tours taking place Oct. 29, Oct. 30 and Oct. 31, call (850) 561-0317.

Part of the proceeds from the event will be donated to Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Big Bend. T-shirts displaying the ghost tour event graphics will also be on sale.

Proceeds from t-shirt sales will also go to Big Brothers Big Sisters.