### 'THEY AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOSTS': DARK TOURISM AT HISTORIC SITES

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# Title

'They Ain't Afraid of No Ghosts': Dark Tourism at Historic Sites		
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#### **ABSTRACT**

Dark tourism, a subsection of heritage tourism, is growing in popularity and center around historic sites and museums. Those sites are put in the position to take advantage of the surging popularity of dark tourism by offering programming that complements it. Ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and haunted houses have all been utilized by museums and historic sites to boost revenue and attendance numbers. The implementation of dark programming raises difficult discussions on the role of museums in society and the ethics of profiting off of ghosts, spirits, and the paranormal. The decision to produce dark programming as a complement to dark tourism is best decided on a case to case basis, as no two museums or historic sites are the same. But every site that is considering dark programming needs to weigh their mission, ethics, their stakeholders, and the memory and space of their site before coming to a decision.

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### **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

When I studied abroad in Norway in the summer of 2014, I took the opportunity to travel to Scotland for the weekend. While there, I went on a tour of Mary King's Close, a narrow, enclosed medieval alleyway. In the seventeenth-century, city officials built new Georgian style buildings atop it, even though people lived there until well into the twentieth century. As I waited in the queue for my tour, I noticed a flyer for a ghost tour of Edinburgh. I signed up and that night at 11 p.m. I went on a two-hour excursion through the darker aspects of the city's history—execution sites, plague places, and even the old town cemeteries. There was no mention of actual ghosts on the tour. Instead, I enjoyed a guided tour of the city's history told from a unique perspective. It was the first tour of its kind I participated in, and it sparked an interest in sites that have dark tourism offerings. Four years later, as a graduate student at North Dakota State University, I received an assistantship at Cass County Historical Society-Bonanzaville. The staff were preparing for their second year of ghost tours. The further I got in my studies and the more involved I got at Bonanzaville, the more interested I became in dark programming and the ethical issues involved. This became the basis for my thesis work.

Dark tourism is a niche of heritage tourisminvolves travel to places and sites of human tragedy, suffering, or natural disasters and is a niche of heritage tourism.<sup>1</sup> Since the early twentieth century, the amount of time Americans spend at work has decreased by several hours while the time available for leisure activities has increased.<sup>2</sup> This, coupled with the growth of air

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/features/is-dark-tourism-ok-chernobyl-pripy atdisaster-sites/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Robert Reid, "Is 'Dark Tourism' Ok?," *National Geographic*, National Geographic Society, 26 April 2016, accessed 6 June 2019, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/features/is\_dark\_tourism\_ok\_chernobyl\_pripyat

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Valerie A. Ramey and Neville Francis, "A Century of Work and Leisure," *American Economic Journal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 199, 210-211.

transportation, the rise in automobile travel, and new road and highway construction in the twentieth century has led to an increase in tourism.<sup>3</sup> A large part of this growing tourism industry is heritage tourism. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, traveling to experience places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and peoples of the past constitutes heritage tourism.<sup>4</sup> A 2009 study found that 78 percent of U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural and heritage activities when they travel. Those travelers identified visiting historic sites and re-enactments as heritage activities and 65 percent of them stated that they like their destinations that have retained their historic character.<sup>5</sup> People have a yearning to see the places of the past, whether that past is personal or communal. Some people visit sites they already have a personal connection to. Others visit sites where the relationship is one of communal memory.

Museums and historic and heritage sites are a large part of the heritage tourism industry.<sup>6</sup> Littered along U.S. roads and highways are roadside historical markers, denoting some sort of history happened there. The Institute of Museum and Library Services announced in 2014 that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dan Bogart, "Modern Transportation since 1700: A Momentous Achievement," University of California-Irvine, 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Jamesha Gibson, "Preservation Glossary," *Saving Places*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 17 June 2015, accessed 10 July 2019, https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-glossary-todays-word-heritage-tourism#.XZzlJ0ZKg2w.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "2009 Study Revealed Popularity of U.S. Cultural and Heritage Travel," Cultural Heritage Tourism, 3 May 2011, accessed 11 April 2020, https://culturalheritagetourism.org/2009-study-revealed-popularity-of-u-s-cultural-and-heritage-travel/.

travel/.

6 Historic sites and heritage sites have two definitions. Historic sites have continuous, systematic narratives of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc. Heritage relates to something that comes or belongs to one by reason of birth, an inherited lot or portion (https://aaslh.org/history-vs-heritage-what-stories-are-museums-sharing/). For this thesis, the term historic will refer to both, unless the author of a sited work uses the word heritage.

there are more than 35,000 active museums in the United States.<sup>7</sup> These museums and sites host and house the objects and stories of the past. For centuries, people have sought to connect to the past. Just as heritage tourism is not a modern invention, neither are museums. But both have transformed under modern influences.

Museums are no longer places just for collections and scholarly research. While those remain an essential function of their operation, today they also serve as town squares, classrooms, forums, sanctuaries, community centers, and temples.<sup>8</sup> The transformation from a sacred place of learning to a community gathering site gained momentum during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when two types of museums emerged: public galleries and dime museums.<sup>9</sup>

Public galleries continued the tradition of museums by displaying collections of the wealthy, but this time the collections were accessible to the public. During this period, the goal of these organizations was to help create a more educated population, and they focused on newly arrived immigrant populations with the hope that it would help build a stronger America. Dime museums served to entertain people rather than educate them. The influence of P.T. Barnum on the dime museum cannot be overlooked, especially when considering his views on entertaining and astonishing the public. <sup>10</sup> Dime museums and the Barnum circus are early forms of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Giuliana Bullard, "Government Doubles Official Estimate: There Are 35,000 Active Museums in the U.S.," News Release from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, May 2014, accessed 28 December 2019, https://www.imls.gov/news/government-doubles-official-estimate-there-are-35000-active-museums-us.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (American Association of Museums, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Bonnie Pitman, "Muses, Museums, and Memories." *Daedalus*, Vol. 128, No. 3, (Summer 1999): 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Pitman, 5.

edutainment, though they focused more on entertainment than education. <sup>11</sup> However, these venues were popular because they engaged their audiences and made them active viewers, rather than just producing mind-numbing displays of extensive private collections. <sup>12</sup>

In the twentieth century, the evolution of museums was cyclical. Museums alternated between being centers for current events, usually with patriotic displays during war years, and allying themselves to progressive social movements, such as during the 1930s and the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, traditionalists and multiculturalists battled over the type of interpretation in museums. Traditionalists, aware that their messages and interpretations were one-sided, were reluctant to throw away sixty years' worth of perfected dioramas and period rooms. Multiculturalists, those that supported the presence of several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society, as well as anthropologists and Native American groups called attention to stereotypes and gaps in narratives, which included women, minorities, and different social classes. In

In the twenty-first century, the fastest-growing museums are science and technology museums and children's museums because they provide active engagement to their visitors, and an easily recognizable contribution to society. These museums are better able to compete with theme parks, the internet, and other types of attractions. Museums today are redefining themselves as learning and experience environments and changing the way the public perceives

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The term edutainment is used throughout this thesis. Edutainment is a word made up of two others: education and entertainment. Edutainment combines elements of both education and entertainment to engage individuals and keep their attention while providing educational material in a way that also entertains. Museums, television programming, educational computer games, and school lessons all use edutainment.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Schwarzer, Riches, Rivals, and Radicals, 134.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Schwarzer, 134.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Schwarzer, 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Pitman, "Muses, Museums, and Memories," 8.

what they have to offer. This change comes at a time when communities in America are changing from homogenous to multicultural, with diverse populations living within them who look to get different things out of museum experiences.<sup>16</sup>

Having evolved to serve as multipurpose spaces, museums have employed new strategies to bring in visitors and keep them engaged. One strategy is edutainment, an approach to museum programming and exhibits that combines education and entertainment with the goal of engagement. The more a visitor is engaged, if their minds, emotions, or even physical selves are involved in the program or exhibit, the more successful it is. When a museum runs successful programs, it is better able to compete within the tourism industry.

Dark tourism is a niche of heritage tourism. Heritage tourism destinations run the gamut from museums to historical markers on roadsides to battlefields and other historic sites. Within these sites, there is a subgroup of dark tourism sites, sites of human suffering, tragedy, or death. Sometimes visitors will find programs within traditional museums that fit the dark programming designation, including ghost tours, paranormal investigations, or haunted houses. For example, Gettysburg National Military Park is a popular dark tourist destination. While there, visitors may choose from a multitude of tours and programming, including ghost tours. The ghost tour in Scotland I participated in and Gettysburg are just two of the many results when the search terms "ghost tours" and "museums" are combined in an internet search. A glance through Google's search results yields results for museums and historic sites that offer dark programming activities. Fort Delaware State Park offers a Paranormal Adventure. The Jackson County Historical Society in Independence, Missouri, offers ghost tours of their 1859 jail. The Farmers'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Pitman, 15.

Museum in Cooperstown, New York, offers an eerie lantern tour of the museum. Such offerings are becoming more and more pervasive and continue to rise in popularity.

With this rise, many people have raised questions about the appropriateness of dark tourism at museums and historic sites. In some cases, there is an issue with returning too early. How much time must pass before it is acceptable for people to visit a site where a tragedy occurred? For some stakeholders, there is never enough time, while for others, returning is part of the healing process and a way to move forward. There are also concerns about the behavior and voyeurism of tourists at these sites. Examples include selfies at sites like the Cambodian killing fields or Auschwitz, or appropriate dress at sites of religious significance. There is also something taboo in benefitting from suffering and tragedy, charging an admission price to see the places of human sorrow. On the other hand, visitors to modern dark tourism sites have often aided in the recovery with their financial support. After the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, tourist dollars helped rebuild areas devastated by the tragedy.<sup>17</sup>

Because of the prevalence of dark tourism, museums and historic sites can successfully implement dark programming into their programs line-up, but there are multiple factors to be considered. The benefits that come with dark programming are a boost in attendance and a growth in profits from the events. The programs also allow the exploration of the darker aspects of history often ignored in museums. However, there are numerous risks for museums if they decide to pursue dark programming. There is the chance that museum visitors and stakeholders are alienated by the programming, which could have disastrous results in the operation of the site. Another risk is that the memory and mission that the site strives to preserve may be forever

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Peter Hohenhaus, "Ethics," Dark Tourism, accessed 16 Feb 2020, http://www.darktourism.com/index.php/18-main-menus/mainmenussubpages/602-ethical-issues.

altered by presenting programs that are not source-based, but sensationalized instead. With dark programming, the research shows that there is no one size fits all solution for organizations. Each organization needs to evaluate based on their mission, ethics, place and memory, and transparency with stakeholders and to decide whether the risk is worth the reward.

#### **Research Questions**

Traditionally, the public has viewed museums as places that educate first and foremost. Ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and haunted houses flout that traditional view and raise serious questions about their usefulness and position in museums. What is the role of edutainment, entertainment, and education in museums and the visitor experience? Are ghost tours considered edutainment or are they pure entertainment? What are the ethical considerations for edutainment, particularly with dark programming? And is it ethical for museums to capitalize on the public's fascination with the paranormal when it is something that cannot be proven as historical fact, especially considering museums' legacy as trustworthy and reliable sources of information?

#### Methodology

#### Process

The research for this paper pulls from several scholarly fields. While this is a history master's thesis that uses traditional research and historical methodologies, it also draws from the interdisciplinary museum studies field. Pulling from history, anthropology, sociology, education, and even psychology, the research compiled here is qualitative and utilizes case studies.

Literature cited in this study explores the evolution and uses of edutainment in museums, the precedent for dark programming in the origins of museums, and the implications and sustainability of such programming. Finally, I included literature on ghost tours in museums to

give background information on the current state of dark programming in museums and the questions surrounding it.

After conducting the literature review, I researched and found case studies. Museums and historic sites that offered various types of dark tourism were the main focus of the search. There were two major requirements for the case studies: 1.) The programming needed to contribute significantly to either increased visitorship or museum funding, and 2.) The dark programming occurred within the last five years. I also considered the site's media attention and social media surrounding the event. The case studies chosen include three in North Dakota and two that were nationwide, and well-publicized. I was employed by two of the case study sites, the Comstock House and Cass County Historical Society-Bonanzaville, and was actively involved in the programming and operation of them. I wrote tour scripts for both sites and was a decision-maker. Much of the research on those sites comes from my personal knowledge.

Following the selection of the case studies, the museums or historic sites were contacted directly, either by phone, email, or both. For those that answered, I sent a questionnaire (Appendix I). For those that did not respond, their web presence, including webpages and social media, proved useful for gaining information. I used the following questions as a guide:

- 1. How did the site define their event, paranormal investigation, ghost tour, or haunted house?
- 2. How did the event get started/what led to it?
- 3. How does it contribute to their budgets and visitorship?
- 4. Has the event evolved since it began?
- 5. Has there been any negative feedback from the community or press?
- 6. How is the event advertised?

After answering those questions, I looked for commonalities among the sites and assessed what worked and what areas the sites could improve upon to meet their needs and stay true to their mission. The five sites chosen are a small sampling of numerous historic sites that provide some type of dark tourism. The five historic sites and museums chosen each offer at

least one of three types of dark programming: ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and haunted houses.

#### **Definitions**

Dark tourism includes sites that were locations of death, disaster, tragedy, or the macabre. The Taj Mahal, a mausoleum in India, is a dark tourism site, as is the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Even visiting the house where President Lincoln died after Booth shot him at Ford's Theatre is considered dark tourism. With a few exceptions, most dark tourism sites do not claim a dark reputation. Rather, word of the sites spreads through word of mouth and online forums or is already a well-known site of tragedy. Just because sites are considered dark tourism sites does not mean they offer any type of dark programming. Many are memorials or even graveyards, where dark programming is considered inappropriate.

Dark programming follows a similar vein. Any programming at a museum or historic site that revolves around themes of death, disasters, tragedy, or the macabre is considered dark programming. This type of programming does not need to have an association with a dark tourism site, although many do. Sometimes they are taking advantage of the Halloween season or other event anniversaries. These types of programs include, but are not limited to, ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and haunted houses. Once a museum or historic site has implemented this type of programming, it is a dark tourism site. Not all dark tourism sites involve dark programming, but all dark programming is part of dark tourism.

Ghost tours in museums and at historic sites refers to tours based around primary sources that fit within a museum's mission. These tours utilize stories hidden or buried in the past that are revived, such as a ghost, for those in the modern-day to learn from and enjoy. The memory of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Reid, "Is 'Dark Tourism' Ok?"

the events being described is the ghost. These tours can be supplemented by actors reenacting scenes from history. More often than not, the narratives being told on these tours are tragic. Ghost tours in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, focus on Civil War battles. In Chicago, the sites of the H.H. Holmes murder hotel and the St. Valentine's Day Massacre are popular stops on the city's ghost tours. Ghost tours allow guides to teach history in a way that is engaging and accessible to an audience.

Paranormal investigations involve individuals using different types of equipment to search for evidence of the paranormal. The paranormal has been fascinating people for centuries, with paranormal investigations quickly gaining popularity during the Victorian era. In the United Kingdom, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882.<sup>19</sup> Victorians commonly held seances in an attempt to contact and communicate with the dead. They often used Ouija boards, which were patented in Maryland in 1890.<sup>20</sup> Confessions of a Ghost-Hunter, a novel by psychic researcher Harry Price was published in the 1930s. In modern pop culture, feature films point to a growing interest in the afterlife. Heaven Can Wait (1978), Beetlejuice (1988), Ghost (1990), and What Dreams May Come (1998) are just a few movies that handle death. Even Disney is cashing in on the afterlife. Their Pixar brand's recent outing with Coco (2017) gained great success and Pixar will be releasing another afterlife movie, Soul, in 2020. The 2000s, saw a rise in television programming centered on ghost hunting and houses and locations that were allegedly haunted. Ghost Hunters, Ghost Adventures, Paranormal Files, and The Haunting are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> "Our History," Society for Psychical Research, accessed on 6 October 2019, https://www.spr.ac.uk/about/our-history.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, "The Strange and Mysterious History of the Ouija Board," *Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution, 27 October 2013, accessed 10 July 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-strange-and-mysterious-history-of-the-ouija-board-5860627/.

just a few of the offerings available for viewers to get their ghost fix. Many amateur and professional paranormal hunting groups credit these shows with a rise in their numbers.<sup>21</sup>

Amateur and professional groups use equipment, some of it homemade and some of it purchased from the ghost hunting equipment market, to search for evidence of the paranormal. Capturing the voice of a spirit or ghost is one of the most coveted forms of evidence. These electronic voice phenomena (EVPs) can be recorded on simple voice recorders or through spirit boxes. By scanning radio frequencies at a rapid pace, spirit boxes theoretically allow a spirit to use the device to speak in short words or phrases, often in response to questions. Another piece of equipment used is an electromagnetic field (EMF) detector. These devices measure spikes in the magnetic field, usually taken as a sign that a spirit is manifesting itself. Temperature gauges and standard cameras are also used to try and catch something outside of the norm and prove the existence of the paranormal. Some museums or historic sites allow professional or amateur groups onto their sites if rumors exist that there may be something of a paranormal nature at that location.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, there are haunted houses. They involve actors dressed up in costumes as zombies, clowns, and ax murderers, setting out to scare as many people as possible. There is no attempt to prove the existence of ghosts or to revive historical narratives. The objective is to have fun and to scare, pure and simple. Some museums and sites have opened their doors and spaces to haunted houses, enjoying the boosts in attendance. <sup>23</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Skip Peterson, "Ghost Hunting Groups Enjoy Surge in Popularity," USA Today, Gannett Co. Inc., 31 May 2008, 28 December 2019,

https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-05-31-ghost-hunting\_N.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> "Ghost Hunting Equipment 101," Ghost Stop, accessed 6 March 2020, https://www.ghoststop.com/Ghost-Hunting-101-a/144.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> "Haunted Fast Facts," Haunted House Association, 2009, accessed 16 Feb 2020, http://www.hauntedhouseassociation.org/haunted\_attraction\_information.htm.

#### CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been several scholarly studies into dark programming in museums. But to gain a fuller understanding of the topic, it is essential to explore the scholarly relationship between the public, memory, and museums. The ways in which museums employ edutainment in their programming and how they utilize dark tourism is also explored.

### The Public, Memory, and Museums

Understanding how the public uses sites of history and how those sites play into memory and perception of the past is crucial to the debate revolving around dark tourism and programming in museums. In a groundbreaking study, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen discovered that Americans regularly participate in a wide range of past-related activities, including visiting museums, and that the past is omnipresent to them, while traditional history is not.<sup>24</sup> They published their findings in the *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, where they explored the results and ramifications for professionals and the public.

To understand how the public uses history and bridge the gap between professional historians and the public, Rosenzweig and Thelen spearheaded the survey in the mid-1990s. They found that the general public actively pursues the past and seeks to make it part of their everyday lives. They find it central to the effort of living in the present. For museums, the survey's numbers are promising. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed said they visited a museum or historic site in the last year. Museums are also rated the most trustworthy, with an 8.4 average on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most trustworthy. This level of trust is higher

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Columbia University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, 8, 18.

than that of family members, college professors, and high school teachers.<sup>26</sup> The survey results also showed that, for the most part, participation in past events is not tied to specific social groups. Education and income were factors, but the numbers were so small that they were not significant.<sup>27</sup>

The survey showed that people view their personal and family histories as the most important and sought to put themselves into national and collective pasts, such as discussing how the assassination of President John F. Kennedy shaped them personally. Artifacts on display in museums, survey respondents noted, brought them closer to experiences from the past. They could form their own questions and reexperience for themselves the stories behind the artifacts. Museums gave visitors a sense of immediacy and personal participation, leading survey responders to rate them highly.<sup>28</sup>

Rosenzweig and Thelen published *Presence of the Past* over twenty years ago. With the rise of digital media, it would be interesting to see how the results of the survey would change today. Would museums still rank high in trustworthiness now that information is so readily available to the public? Museums rely on artifacts and the desire of visitors to be close to the past. Visitors also learn best by engaging and placing themselves in the past. Edutainment provides a tool for this to happen in a modern museum. However, as Rosenzweig and Thelen point out, people bristled when museums seemed not to respect the original experiences they were presenting, such as an American Civil War museum that discusses civil wars in France or museums that commodify so much that the history is lost.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, 19-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen 27-28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Rosenzweig and Thelen, 22, 105, 107-108.

The opinions of the public are critical to museum success. Everyone who has an interest in the museum, from staff to donors to museum visitors, is considered a stakeholder. As museums have evolved, the importance of listening to stakeholders has become clear. Part of listening to stakeholders involves sharing authority over the museum. It is a collaboration between the museum staff and their audience, on everything from museum programs to exhibit interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

In the book *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, editors Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski compiled the works of twenty-six experts in the museum field to investigate what shared authority means at a time when the expertise of museums is put the test by the world of Web 2.0.<sup>30</sup> In his article for *History News* under the same name, one of the editors, Benjamin Filene, the Director of Public History at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, lays out the overall findings of the book. According to Filene, the evolution of the internet allows people to be their own archivists and curators, historians and designers. The pieces show that the impulse to let visitors interpret the past, to share authority with museum professionals, dates back further than the advent of the internet, to the grassroots movements of the 1960s and that "letting go" actually requires more involvement from museum professionals than less.<sup>31</sup>

Sharing authority with stakeholders is an advantage to museums. By using the internet, oral histories, community-based programming, and contemporary art, the public's interest in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Bill Adair (ed), Benjamin Filene (ed), Laura Koloski (ed), *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Routledge, 2011), 127-128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Adair, et al., 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Benjamin Filene, "Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World," *History News* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 7-8.

museum is more vested, ensuring the museum's success.<sup>32</sup> For dark programming, the results of sharing authority can mean that those programs are retired. Two of the case studies used in this research show just how easy it is to lose the support of the public. One of those sites listened to the feedback of their stakeholders and revised their programming accordingly, while the other is still moving ahead with their contentious programming. We know from the research done by Rosenzweig and Thelen that when museums and historic sites shift away from respecting their original content, they can alienate stakeholders. In many cases, dark programming shifts away from those original experiences. That is why it is essential to listen to stakeholders when considering dark programming, because museums and historic sites play a large part in a person's identity and personal memory and tampering with that should not be taken lightly.

Memory and history are inextricably linked. According to David Thelen in his article for the *Journal of American History*, "Memory and American History," the challenge of both history and memory is to recover the past and introduce it to the present.<sup>33</sup> The ties between history and memory go back to the earliest chronicles, according to Thelen. Narration and construction of memory comes from oral traditions of storytelling. Those traditions gave birth to first the chronical and then to history.<sup>34</sup> Thelen also describes two starting points for the historical study of memory. The first is that memory, private and collective is not reproduced, but constructed. The second is that the construction is made in the context of community and society, through conversation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Filene, 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, no. 4 (March 1989), 1117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Thelen, 1118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Thelen, 1119.

Thelen recognizes that a person's memory does not only provide identity, but security, authority and legitimacy as well.<sup>36</sup> But this sense of self is not created in isolation. In deciding what becomes committed to memory and what is forgotten, people depend on others.<sup>37</sup> Visiting a site of shared history can influence those individual decisions, as can conversation with others. Memory is constructed depending on how identity is shaped and reshaped by the individual and the group.<sup>38</sup> Memory is as much part of the identity of the individual as it is a part of the identity of a community. Experiences bring people together, but sharing and conversing builds not only an individual memory, but a community memory as well.

When something in the now inspires an association with the past, that is the beginning of memory.<sup>39</sup> History repeats itself is a phrase common in the present, because experiences trigger memories of the past. The past does not need to be experienced by an individual for them to have a memory of it. By existing in a collective, community memory, the experience can become a personal memory.

Memory is important to a person's identity and is a significant part of the desire to witness places of the past and heritage tourism. In "Memories of War: Visiting Battlegrounds and Bonefields in the Early American Republic," Thomas A. Chambers discusses how nostalgia, memory, and the past meet and form not personal memory and early American heritage tourism. Chambers, a historian and dean at Canisius College, differentiates between official memory, which he defines as memory in long speeches, and personal and emotional memory, which is tied to place. People want to encounter the past rather than have someone tell them about it. They

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Thelen, 1126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Thelen, 1122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Thelen, 1118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Thelen, 1120.

go to a place so that they can have a more personal memory of it, which helps them to understand.<sup>40</sup>

Chambers notes that in the 1820s, hotels and resorts appeared near the battlefields of the American Revolutionary War and road and travelling conditions improved in those areas as more and more people took up heritage tourism. The tourists visiting these sites were looking for details that could not be found by reading about it in a newspaper or listening to a commemorative speech. They wanted to form their own memories, and, according to Chambers, these memories became based on shared cultural assumptions. At that time, the cultural assumption was overrun with Romanticism. Romantic ideals included picturesque landscapes, melancholia, and nostalgia. Where better to experience these ideals than at a sweeping field once the sight of a battle or a ruined fort being reclaimed by nature. It's the same reason castles are visited today or why many historical markers sit beside now empty fields.

Americans seek meaning in historic places because it helps them to make sense of the world around them and of themselves. Memory is not infallible, however. By connecting with others and their memories, an individual's own memory can change. But memory is also powerful. Chambers notes that politicians and cultural arbiters try and shape the memory of places and spaces, to control the narrative. <sup>42</sup> This controls the community memory attached to it and oftentimes can distort it. Chambers gives the example of Fort Ticonderoga, generally thought to be limited in its usefulness at the time of the Revolutionary War. But because of its memory and legendary status from the French and Indian War, both the Americans and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Thomas A. Chambers, *Memories of War: Visiting Battlegrounds and Bonefields in the Early American Republic*" (Cornell University Press, 2012), 13-14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Chambers, 6-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Chambers, 9.

British wanted control of it. If it fell, it would be demoralizing to the Americans. If it stood, it would retain its legend and boost the Americans.<sup>43</sup>

People are aware of the power of memory and the past. They look for ways to understand it and to use it. Heritage tourism allows them to do this. Battlefields are among the earliest sites for heritage tourism, meaning dark tourism has existed since the earliest Grand Tours in America. People still have that sense of Romanticism, the melancholia and nostalgia. Its why dark tourism and dark programming are popular. And it all ties back to the memory of a place.

In some ways, melancholia and nostalgia can cause memory to take on ghost-like qualities. In his article, "The Ghosts of Place," found in *Theory and Society*, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, a sociologist and social theorist, argues that the presence of those who are not physically in a space—ghosts—are a phenomenology of place. That is to say, they are constructs of experience and consciousness, of memory. The author makes it clear that he believes that ghosts do not exist and are fabrications of imagination, but he acknowledges the use of ghosts and the unique places in society they occupy. <sup>44</sup> Place, according to Bell, is personal. Places can inspire memories of youth, of times gone by, and of even people and events that an individual may not have personally experienced. At historic sites, places where individuals simultaneously belong and do not belong, ghosts are a way to connect the present to the past, for people to engage in the place they are. <sup>45</sup> Bell equates ghosts with presence, and the feeling of something that may have once been but no longer is. Far from being pigeonholed as frightening, ghosts can provide a certain level of comfort. <sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Chambers, 31-32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Michael Mayerfeld Bell, "The Ghosts of Place," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 26, No 6 (December 1997), 831.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Bell, 813.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Bell, 816.

Bell also describes objects and individuals that are haunted by social memory. Many objects, heirlooms, mementos, and gifts are holders of presence, holders of ghosts. <sup>47</sup> We attach our spirits to a place, and that place becomes attached to us. We have formed a connection with a place where previously there might have been none, or what Bell calls a ghost of belonging. By doing this, we place ourselves in relation to others and their own ghost of belonging, forging community memory, connectedness, and social constructs. <sup>48</sup>

A ghostly presence in a place can lead to individuals treating the place as a shrine. Bell argues that we consider these places as shrines because we treat them as we treat ourselves. Shrines are made sacred by our sense that some form of consciousness remains and inhabits a place. <sup>49</sup> People often view places like battlefields, massacre sites, cemeteries, and memorials this way, and many of these sites are believed to be haunted.

Bell discusses ghosts as a selling point for places and spaces. He defines ghosts as positional goods, which are supplied through social processes and limited in number, giving them value to those that control them. Bell describes certain tourist sites that lack the presence of a ghost where visitors have noted that they feel something is missing. When places become housing developments, modern shopping malls or all about the location, location mentality, they lose what made them special, what made them places for people to connect to. Bell even cites the rising heritage tourist industry as proof that people miss ghosts, miss the old things, miss the emotional and social connection, things that make up our sense of self. <sup>50</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Bell, 819.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Bell, 824.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Bell, 820.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Bell, 830.

Like Bell's ghosts of belonging, old places speak to the need for belonging and give individuals a chance to feel a connection to the broad community of human experience. Place is important to who people are as individuals and their sense of belonging. Old places in particular, such as historic sites or even private homes, are valuable in that they give people the ability to define who they are through memory, continuity, and identity. In *Why Old Places Matter: How Historic Places Affect Our Identity and Well-Being*, Thompson M. Mayes, vice president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, explores why old places matter to people and the role they play in their lives. They connect the struggles of earlier generations and those yet to come. It also helps individuals understand that what they do matters, that it has an impact on the future. This is often closely related to memory, especially community memory.

Also similar to Bell, Mayes discusses places as sacred places. According to Mayes, these sacred places give individuals a sense of serenity and peace, continuity, memory, identity, and beauty. But they are revered because of the difficult pasts they represent.<sup>53</sup> He also recognizes the difficulty historians and preservationists have with the idea of a sacred site that contains a presence, whether that presence is a memory or a ghost. Historians, according to Mayes, have little difficulty acknowledging that specific communities believe in the sacredness of a site or place, yet they are not willing to do so.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, historians are often reluctant to deal with ghosts and hauntings. Preservationists, on the other hand, may be all too willing to accept the sacredness of a site, so much so that they have an instinct to prevent any use of the site even to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Thompson M. Mayes, Why Old Places Matter: How Historic Places Affect Our Identity and Well Being (Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), xxiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Mayes, xvii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Mayes, 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Mayes, 59.

ensure its survival. But Mayes believes that a place's ongoing use causes people to continuously see value in a site, thus giving it power.<sup>55</sup>

Bell and Mayes both recognize the power of a place and its position in memory, something they both agree gives individuals a sense of self. They also agree that often places and memory together can possess an otherworldly nature, a feeling of the uncanny. This feeling often happens at sacred sites like cemeteries or shrines. Enter Dylan Trigg and *The Memory of Place:*A Phenomenology of the Uncanny. Trigg, an Irish Research Council fellow at the University College Dublin, considers how place and memory interact with three different types of memory: everyday memory, transitional memory, and traumatic memory. Fig. His definition of uncanny is "of something missing or something disrupted." According to Trigg, memory is often not sparked by what is there, but by what should be there. When certain things strike us in our memories, they can exist apart from the place in which the memory occurred. But when dealing with the place of memory, a division of memory is created in which place becomes the fabric and texture of the memory's specific content, and not just the context in which they exist. Fig. 10.

Trigg also agrees with the assessments of Bell and Mayes that memories of place give individuals an identity. In fact, according to Trigg, without memory of places, memory itself would no longer play a role in our conscious lives. Memories we acquire of places we inhabit assume a value that defines and structures our sense of self.<sup>58</sup> As these three authors have shown, interacting with places and old spaces helps people develop a sense of self, form community memory, and connect individuals. Is it any wonder that these old spaces, spaces often reserved

<sup>55</sup> Mayes, 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), xxiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Trigg, 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Trigg, 1.

for museums and historic sites, become sacred and in these sacred places, people experience what they believe to be paranormal phenomena? After all, what are ghosts but memories of times gone by and of people who once existed? Trigg believes that history appears to render the individual aspect of memory external by making the past an ordered unit, divided up into events, when really memory is the raw material of history and what draws people in and connects them.<sup>59</sup>

However, part of the reason ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and even other less controversial forms of edutainment can leave a bad taste in people's mouths is because of the way individuals venerate places that hold the past and hold memories, i.e. the sacredness of a site. Diane Barthel, in *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity*, believes these tangible forms of history should not be wasted or treated casually. <sup>60</sup> Barthel specifically mentions Disneyland as a place of historical representation in casual terms and uses it as an example of the importance of place to meaning. Disneyland is constructed on an arbitrary site with new structures built to emulate historical accuracy, banking on historic images and nostalgia to give visitors a version of history. <sup>61</sup> While this version of history does offer a nostalgic and fun version of history, authentic memory does not exist because the site is arbitrary. Scholars have long used Disneyland and its particular brand of history as a caution against edutainment, mainly because it presents a rose-tinted version of history. Some, like the authors of "From Museum to Amusement Park: The Opportunities and Risks of Edutainment," who are writing as cultural marketing authorities, understand that when actual places of history

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Trigg, 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Barthel, 8.

try to compete with Disney, they will lose every time, but it is possible to borrow elements from what makes Disney work in moderation to help museums and historic site succeed.<sup>62</sup> But, as Barthel points out, these markets succeed because they are fun.<sup>63</sup> Visitors engage when they are having fun in museums as well, proving that edutainment can lead to museum success.

#### **Edutainment**

The visitors that Rosenzweig and Thelen studied differ from the visitors of museums 100 years ago. They also differ from modern museum visitors, who receive much of their historical information almost instantaneously through the internet. They do not need to wait for information to be viewed on the nightly news or printed in a book or newspaper. From Mayes, Bell, Trigg, and Barthel, we see that today's public audiences seem to ascribe a sacredness to historic sites. This creates a new challenge for museum professionals. How do museums engage the visitor who wants quick information while still creating a respectful tone at their sites?

Author Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness*, dives into the concept of radio and television and how they have given people an insatiable appetite for distraction, something that spills over into the museum world. His thoughts are relevant when thinking about what a visitor at a museum today wants versus what would have worked in a museum 100 years ago. <sup>64</sup> Certainly, a museum visitor at the turn of the twentieth century would not expect to have technological, interactive elements in their museum visit, but because of the advent of radio, television, the computer, and the internet, guests at large museums today expect a level of technology in new exhibits.

62 Balloffet, et al., "From Museum to Amusement Park," 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Barthel, *Historic Preservation*, 133.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness (Penguin Books, 2005), xx.

Postman has written seventeen books on the relationship between technology and humans and is considered an expert in media theory and culture. While Postman does not write about museums explicitly, he does raise several points in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that strike very close to the museum home. He argues that the decline of typography and print and the rise of television in the second half of the twentieth century means that the content of politics, religion, public business, and education must be recast in terms that are suitable to television. <sup>65</sup> This is not, in Postman's opinion, necessarily a good thing. Television is changing culture into one vast arena for show business. The problem is that television speaks with one persistent voice—entertainment. <sup>66</sup> Entertainment is an event, performance, or activity that provides amusement and enjoyment to its participant or viewer. <sup>67</sup> Traditionally, people found entertainment by going to the theater, concerts, or parties, expensive ventures that excluded the non-wealthy. The invention of television and radio changed that. While still expensive, the burgeoning middle class could afford to make the splurge.

Television itself is not necessarily entertaining, but it has made entertainment the natural format for the representation of all experience, which is a problem according to Postman. All matter is presented as entertaining.<sup>68</sup> The implication for museums is that to be effective something must be entertaining as well as educational. It cannot just educate. Postman goes on to say that "priests, presidents, surgeons, lawyers, newscasters, and, yes, even educators, worry more about the demands of good showmanship and not about the demands of their discipline."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Postman, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Postman, 80.

<sup>67 &</sup>quot;Entertainment," *Dictionary.com*, accessed 8 September 2018,

https://www.dictionary.com/browse/entertainment?s=t.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Postman, 98.

Postman argues that television's main contribution to the field of education is the idea that teaching and entertainment are inseparable. Rosenzweig and Thelen highlight education as one of the expected functions of museums, and Postman suggests that their educational function should also include elements of entertainment.<sup>70</sup>

Another author who looks at the relationship between teaching, play, and entertainment is Kim H. Veltman, a science historian. In Veltman's article "Edutainment, Technotainment, and Culture," he said that, "In the last twenty years, concepts such as edutainment and technotainment have transformed the relationship between learning and play." Veltman looks at three major markets, Japan, the United States, and Europe, to explore how this link between education and play evolved. In Japan, edutainment is linked with academic learning, whereas edutainment in the United States is linked with theme parks that offer generic impressions of the past. Veltman argues that this creates a disconnect in America between the educational goals of museums and the potentials of new technologies, which serve to undermine and compete with the authenticity of history. New technologies can also be used as crass commercial exploitation, which limits their use in educational arenas.

Three kinds of edutainment have emerged in the last few decades, according to Veltman. Serious edutainment is linked to new forms of learning, like computer technology, while commercial edutainment, such as educational games, seek to make money. Finally, there is edutainment in memory institutions and museums, which develops separately, but parallel, with the other two.<sup>74</sup> Because there are numerous types of edutainment in the public sphere, it is hard

<sup>70</sup> Postman, 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Veltman, *Edutainment, Technotainment, and Culture*, 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Veltman, 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Veltman, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Veltman, 5.

to determine its value in museums, particularly in America. Veltman argues that it is a ubiquitous American quest to make money, even in education.<sup>75</sup> This leads to edutainment being eduminimal and -tainment dominant, even in museums.

Veltman makes another point about the use of the past and edutainment in theme parks. These places are not interested in providing accurate depictions of the past, but rather the rhetoric to create a particular atmospheric past. He mentions Walt Disney and the various Disneylands that give a history-lite atmosphere of the past. However, because they do simulate history, sites like Disneyworld or Busch Gardens serve as direct competition to the actual historical sites and museums they mimic.<sup>76</sup> But in these cases, the -tainment levels outshine the edu-levels, at least in the United States.

Between theme parks and museums/historic sites are edutainment heritage tourist attractions, or EHTAs. These sites attempt to keep the entertainment and education on equal levels. In their article, "Edutainment Heritage Tourist Attractions: A Portrait of Visitors' Experiences at Storyeum," anthropologists Emily Hertzman, David Anderson, and Susan Rowley describe these sites as a "hybrid attraction that create a synergy between educational value and entertainment value using multimedia technologies." They focus on the cultural implications of edutainment. Edutainment Heritage Tourist Attractions (EHTA) are not full historical museums, but neither are they a Disneyfication of history. The lines between are blurred and obscured by sites like Storyeum, an EHTA site in Canada that offers live interactive, educational re-creations of British Columbia history and is the focus of the authors' study on visitor experiences at these sites. Their study finds that as the process of hybridization continues

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Veltman, 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Veltman, 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Hertzman, et al., "Edutainment Heritage Tourist Attractions," 155.

to occur, tourist venues differentiate less. Museums and other tourist attractions increasingly share features and content, presentation techniques, and edutainment, blurring the definitional lines between museums and private-sector tourist attractions.<sup>78</sup>

Heritage tourism is part of a growing heritage industry, where the past is transformed into consumable items for the present. Hertzman, Anderson, and Rowley believe that there is a broad cultural fascination with collecting and consuming the past and EHTAs provide a way for the public to do that. The issue with these sites is that they tend to romanticize the past, like the way Disney presents a nostalgic view of the past. In an increasingly competitive tourist economy, public museums strive to promote their edutainment value, so where does that leave the educational component? The authors believe that many assume EHTAs are inherently educational, and they only need the attraction of heritage themes to bring the history to life. This blending of entertainment and education is challenging long-established definitions of an educational experience, definitions that many museums still hold dear.

The Storyeum study outcomes showed a generally positive outlook on budding EHTAs. Eighty-seven percent of study participants gave the entertainment value of Storyeum a high rating. Sixty percent gave a high rating for informative value, and 55 percent gave a high rating for educational value.<sup>81</sup> A further 72 percent gave Storyeum a high value when it came to thought-provoking material. The comments from visitors also revealed that EHTAs are received as different, but on par with educational and informational experiences provided by museums. Several comments revealed that the entertaining format of presenting information made the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Hertzman, et al., 169.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Hertzman, et al., 157.

<sup>80</sup> Hertzman, et al., 156.

<sup>81</sup> Hertzman, et al., 162.

information easier and more enjoyable to receive. Additionally, visitors commented that entertaining and educational formats framed in the right combination can enhance education values of productions at EHTAs like Storyeum.<sup>82</sup>

While EHTAs promote themselves as education spaces that borrow entertainment elements, such as performance, to engage and enhance visitor experiences, there is a growing movement among pure entertainment spaces, such as theme parks to borrow elements from museums to increase their appeal. In their article "From Museum to Amusement Park: The Opportunities and Risks of Edutainment," Pierre Balloffet, Francois H. Courvoisier, and Joelle Lagier find that cross-fertilization between the museum sector and the entertainment sector could prove useful, but with a cautionary approach. They believe the best way for this cross-fertilization to occur is through partnerships, conferences, and educational programming.<sup>83</sup>

The authors begin by briefly outlining the idea of edutainment and the trap that museums can fall into of Disneylandization to increase attendance. They also detail scholarly concerns and opportunities that have appeared in the literature on edutainment. Edutainment can combat the perception that museums are unwelcoming. Visitors want a museum experience that is shared, user-friendly, and interactive. And on the other hand, museum professionals fear that to cater to experience-centered expectations would negatively impact their museums' programming and mission. According to the authors, though, the lines between cultural and recreational/entertaining are already blurred. Shopping centers have opened their doors to cultural institutions to attract new customers. Walt Disney's objective for Disneyland in 1955

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<sup>82</sup> Hertzman, et al., 162-163.

<sup>83</sup> Balloffet, et al., "From Museum to Amusement Park," 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Balloffet, et al., 5.

<sup>85</sup> Balloffet, et al. 5.

was to create a place for people to find happiness and knowledge, a goal not far removed from the mission statements of many museums. <sup>86</sup> This blurring of the lines has put museums at the center of a new environment that is based not on contemplation and acquisition, but also creative and memorable experiences.

Using the responses from a survey of several museum professionals in Europe, the authors made several conclusions about the future and place of edutainment in museums. Museum professionals need to limit their use of edutainment as a strategy. New strategies are frequently being applied in museums and just as often fail. Staying true to the mission is more important. Another conclusion from the professionals surveyed is that while most were in favor of edutainment strategies, they were not in favor of excessive spectacularization. Professionals were also not concerned with the convergence of the museum world and amusement parks, viewing their organizations as places that still have offerings that are unique to museums.<sup>87</sup>

Within the scholarship that addresses edutainment, the words Disneyfication, Disneyana, and Disneylandization often appear, usually in the context of sanitizing or watering down history. The Walt Disney Corporation can influence huge audiences all over the world through media and theme parks. Within those mediums and places, representations of the past are presented for consumption. In *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, Mike Wallace wrote two chapters on the effect of Walt Disney on interpretations of history. The first, "Mickey Mouse History," details the two histories the Disney parks present to the public for consumption: a 1950s nostalgic and sanitized view of history and the 1970s corporate-controlled history. Both versions of history present consequences to museum curators and staff.

<sup>86</sup> Balloffet, et al., 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Balloffet, et al., 10-13.

According to Wallace, most visitors to museums are alumnae of Disney versions of history and that has shaped their expectations.<sup>88</sup>

Walt Disney had a 1950s nostalgic view of history, all part of his vision for the original Disneyland and he sought to capitalize on the growing trend of heritage tourism sweeping the nation. He followed the examples of Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village as Americans took to the highway in search of their roots. <sup>89</sup> Disney did not seek to reproduce history, but rather to improve it. Disneyland's Main Street bore little resemblance to actual main streets of the early 1900s, with none of the dirt and grime or xenophobia of early shop owners during the height of American immigration. Disney did not see it as an abuse of history, only as something meant to entertain. <sup>90</sup> Disney's history brushed up against some realities of the past, such as in Frontierland and Adventureland or the Hall of Presidents, but ultimately shies away from controversy.

Corporate Disney history presents top-down, man over nature narratives that are selective in the facts they offer. Epcot, although advertised as a world for the future, spends a lot of time in the past, but it mentions nothing about war or slavery. This version of history combines the desire to fix the past with Disney's ability to spruce it up into a pleasant, nostalgic memory tailored to the white, middle-class demographic of Disney. This in turn diminishes the public's capacity to make sense of our world and a way of not seeing and not acting, according to Wallace. When history is analyzed well, it informs people about the constraints and

<sup>88</sup> Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Temple University Press, April 1996), 154.

<sup>89</sup> Wallace, 135-136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Wallace, 136-137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Wallace, 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Wallace, 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Wallace, 149.

possibilities they have inherited from the past, which in turn enhances their ability for effective social action.<sup>94</sup>

Wallace's next chapter, "Disney's America," shows the Disney corporation's attempt to follow more completely in Colonial Williamsburg's footsteps and present an amusement park that would evoke the history of the United States. It would favor simulation over authenticity but promised to give historical information. <sup>95</sup> Elements of the park would include an Indian Village, Lewis and Clark ride, Civil War fort, Ellis Island, a factory town, and a family farm. On the surface, Disney seemed ready and willing to tackle sensitive subjects. <sup>96</sup> Historians were immediately concerned. They saw an irreconcilable tension between the subjects Disney wanted to present and how it planned to treat them. They worried that children's entertainment would destroy real history. Disney fought back, stating that historians were threatened that they would step in where academics had failed and educate through entertainment. <sup>97</sup> The backlash to this proposed park outside Washington D.C. proved to be too much, and the planned park never materialized.

Wallace argues that he has no problem with the techniques of Disney and difficult historical topics. He points out that museums borrow Disneyesque techniques in tackling difficult subjects, and even museums have seen their share of criticism for sanitizing history, such as slavery topics in Colonial Williamsburg. He objects to strip-mining the past and the conflict between closed narratives and happy endings in Disney and the open-ended question raising nature of the historical enterprise. 98

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Wallace, 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Wallace, 163.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Wallace, 164-165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Wallace, 167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Wallace, 171.

Why would historical museums take the risk of borrowing elements from theme parks when that path has the potential to invite criticism and controversy? The answer is the drive to increase visitorship, relevance, and funding. The reality of running a museum, especially a small museum, is that it costs money, and generous donors are hard to come by in the modern age.

James M. Bradburne, architect and museum specialist, writes about the pitfalls of museums catering to programming that is not based on its mission but rather on its potential to bring in money. He argues that mission and money are inextricably intertwined in a relationship, where money should support the mission instead of being the driving force behind it. He believes in creating projects to suit budgeting needs rather than using mission-focused projects to attract funding.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to its role as a collector and preserver of material culture, Bradburne states that museums have two other major functions: educating and providing leisure. Contemporary museums combine these two functions to create edutainment. But, he argues, museums that have followed the trend and incorporated more edutainment programming are now also in danger, as these endeavors are often expensive. His solution is to stay focused on the museum's core educational mission to ensure its survival value. Bradburne's final warning is to stay away from blockbuster programming and focus on flexible projects that center on a museum's unique collection and keep the identity of the museum. Still, the lure for small

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> James M. Bradburne, "Wagging the Dog: Managing Museum Priorities in a Difficult Economy," *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 35, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Bradburne, 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Bradburne, 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Bradburne, 150.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Bradburn, 152.

museums to implement programming that has great potential for increased revenue and visitorship is strong because it is often their only means of survival.

With the competition from other cultural institutions and theme and amusement parks, museums have embraced the role of edutainment to engage visitors, gain repeat visitation, and raise money. Ghost tours are one of many ways museums and historic and cultural sites pull in visitors. There are several questions raised about the place this type of edutainment has in museums, specifically regarding ethics and the definition of museums as places of historic truth. But why are ghosts so popular?

### **Dark Tourism**

The commodification of ghosts goes back hundreds of years. They are a selling feature, a way to draw in consumers. Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*, in which spirits visit the main character, to great success. The upper classes of society hired mediums and psychics to enter their homes to connect with the dead. In her chapter, "The Commodification of Belief," in the collected volume of *Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, Diane E. Goldstein discusses ghosts as a commodity. She shows that ghosts are sold through ghost tours, haunted hotel experiences, or even haunted real estate listings. She does not explore theme-park-style haunted houses, but rather spaces that are real and never meant to be marketed as haunted.<sup>104</sup>

According to Goldstein, in the United States and the United Kingdom, virtually every major tourist city advertises a ghost tour. <sup>105</sup> The whole town of Salem, Massachusetts, briefly advertised themselves as the Witch City, capitalizing on their reputation but ignoring the history

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Diane E. Goldstein, "The Commodification of Belief," in Haunting Experiences: *Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, (University Press of Chicago and Utah State University Press, 2007): 174.

<sup>105</sup> Goldstein, 186.

at the same time, according to critics.<sup>106</sup> One of the first ghost tours in the United States was in 1970s Chicago, but the real ghost tour boom occurred in the 1990s. These tours typically lasted two hours and included local history and tales of the supernatural. Costs varied from \$5 to \$40.<sup>107</sup> The ghost tours, then and now, all use the paranormal as a selling feature. They turn the stories and the ghosts into consumable commodities such as a tour, a t-shirt, or a bumper sticker.

The best ghost tours are the ones that meet four central criteria: presentation, location, ghost potential, and history. The last two are weighted equally. Goldstein quotes a ghost tour evaluator, who reviews and grades ghost tours for a popular ghost tours website, who states that visitors expect authentic, primary source-based research for ghost tours. The struggle that most historians and folklorists have with ghost tours is their seeming inauthenticity. Many who partake in ghost tours see them as theatrical performances, while others take the historical information provided as truth, blurring the lines between the two.

While Goldstein does not directly reference museums and historic sites, her story of the commodification of ghosts has real connections to them. Ghosts have become something that can be sold or used to entice, and a way to connect the past to the present. As custodians of the past, museums have turned to different commodities, even ghosts, to drive up visitor numbers. We know from Rosenzweig and Thelen that those consuming the past in museums treat them as among the most trustworthy. We also know that visitors dislike when museums stray from their original content by trying to commercialize and make money. Ghost tours in museums would seemingly go against all that the visitor holds most dear in a museum or historic site.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Goldstein, 173.

<sup>107</sup> Goldstein, 187.

<sup>108</sup> Goldstein, 190.

In her article "The Ethics of a Haunted Museum," Julia Nashwinter seeks to answer the question of how a museum can balance documented and undocumented histories, such as ghost tours and events, even as they struggle with funding. She highlights the "Terror Behind the Walls" event at Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. The staff there carefully plan the event, making sure never to portray actual people who may have worked at the site. They are upfront about the fact that this event is pure profit for them, bringing in enough to cover 63 percent of their yearly operating costs. <sup>109</sup> The event does not claim to be a historic portrayal of events. Nashwinter points out that by hosting the TBTW event, they are calling into question the ethics of using the haunted past of the museum. Are they staying true to the museums' mission? Or is this a fundraising effort, which in turn supports the museum as a whole. <sup>110</sup> Museums like Eastern State have to walk the fine line cautiously, carefully weighing the pros and cons.

Nashwinter goes on to highlight two other museums and historic sites that have turned to some type of ghost tour or paranormal investigation to help with funding needs. The two, Eastern State Penitentiary and Waverly Hills Sanitarium, have ethically murky approaches to how they advertise these tours and have drawn ire for their portrayals of the mentally ill. In both cases the revenue allows both sites to be preserved. However, rather than being edutainment, the tours and events are pure entertainment with no educational components. In some cases, museums will separate themselves as much as possible from the event, serving as a host site rather than purporting to provide historical information. In the other, ghosts and more unsavory bits of history are used as a selling point.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Julia Nashwinter, "Ethics of a Haunted Museum," *Collections and Curators*, October 17, 2017, 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Nashwinter, 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Nashwinter, Ethics of a Haunted Museum, 3.

Nashwinter does not provide solutions in her article, but instead acknowledges that these types of events are occurring in museums and are gaining popularity. She is one of the few museum professionals who does not outright condemn ghost tours and similar programming, opting to open a dialogue that might lead to real solutions for museums to use as they navigate haunted tourism. Museums who participate are going to face tough decisions in terms of their image, mission statement, funding, and ethics.

Eastern State Penitentiary historic site is often a topic of scholarly scorn due to the popularity of its dark programming. In Margaret W. Hughes' article, "Bridging the Divide: Mission and Revenue in Museum Programming," it serves as one of her case studies. Hughes writes that the site struggles due to the tremendous success of its programming that conflicts, but its historical narrative supports its mission and mission-based programming. She argues that as museums are increasingly put in positions of having to defend their public value while also covering costs, many turn to non-mission focused programming to meet needs. 113

Eastern State, according to Hughes, is different from the other case studies in that "Terror Behind the Walls" (TBTW) is a purely commercial and entertainment endeavor and it is critical to support the mission-based programming the site provides. 114 Evening Halloween tours started as a way to help raise preservation funds after it became a historic site in 1994. Even after the site was saved, the immense popularity of the event made it difficult to abandon. It also faced the problem of sensationalizing the site's past to scare tour participants. In 1996, the director of programs transformed the event from a sensationalized version of a painful history into a purely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Margaret W. Hughes, "Bridging the Divide: Mission and Revenue in Museum Programming," *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Fall 2010): 279.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Hughes, 279.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Hughes, 281-282.

commercial endeavor, a full-fledged haunted house with no historical basis. <sup>115</sup> Eastern State acknowledges that TBTW works against its mission. But to them the ends justify the means. TBTW brings in upwards of one million dollars yearly, which supports mission-based programming throughout the year. While the event encourages the public view of Eastern State Penitentiary as a haunted site, staff use it as a gateway to bring in repeat visitors. New audience members often come back for daytime tours of the site, where they are introduced to mission-related interpretation and information. As audience members wait to enter, the site plays promotional videos for their educational programming offerings on monitors in the queue area. <sup>116</sup>

The site and staff are pragmatic about TBTW. Without its funding, the site and museum would never have opened and would not be functioning today. 117 According to Hughes, Eastern State stands out as an example of making non-mission focused programming, such as haunted houses, work for a historic site. The key to this is transparency. The museum is upfront with visitors and audience members that this is a profit-making endeavor, one that enables the site to continue to run. 118 Confirmed by Goldstein's work on the commodification of ghosts, and from the success of places like Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site and other ghost tours, there is a market for this type of programming in historic sites and at museums. 119 But why is there such a draw for the paranormal?

Robert C. Thompson, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Maryland's theater and performance studies program, gives one explanation for the draw of the paranormal in "Am I

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Hughes, 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Hughes, 283.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Hughes, 283.

<sup>118</sup> Hughes, 284.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Goldstein, "The Commodification of Belief," 205.

Going to See a Ghost Tonight?": "Gettysburg Ghost Tours and the Performance of Belief."

Thompson argues that ghost tours provide a window into the unknown in a scientifically rationalized and technologically sophisticated world. He further states that Americans have mostly grown past their Victorian fascination with demons, angels, monsters, and poltergeists, some part of the culture clings to the possibility of worlds and truths that exceed material existence. Using his experiences observing ghost tourism at Gettysburg, Thompson came to this conclusion: successful ghost tours asked their groups to activate their paranormal beliefs. This is different than suspending disbelief. Suspending disbelief implies that there is a fictional element to the content the viewer is receiving. By activating paranormal belief, audiences are to believe that the stories are true. This remained true if there were actors portraying events or if they were simply viewing sites.

Michele Hanks, a lecturer in the anthropology department at Case Western Reserve University, breaks ghost tours into three subcategories: ghost walks, non-profit ghost hunts and paranormal investigations, and commercial ghost hunts. 123 The hunts focus on public ghosts, ghosts that are of local, regional, or national history rather than family histories. Hanks believes that ghosts constitute a type of disembodied heritage that serves to disrupt known narratives and destabilize the authority of historical experts. 124

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Robert C. Thompson, "Am I Going to See a Ghost Tonight?": Gettysburg Ghost Tours and the Performance of Belief," *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2010): 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Thompson, 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Thompson, 80-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Michele Hanks, *Haunted Heritage: The Cultural Politics of Ghost Tourism*, *Populism*, *and the Past* (Walnut Creek California: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2015), 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Hanks, 15.

Hanks acknowledges that as a way to engage visitors in the past, ghost tours are successful. 125 Museums and heritage sites have adopted ghosts as a way of broadening their audiences and making the past accessible. To avoid claiming things for which they have no proof, many sites use phrases such as "according to" and "it is said." 126 Hanks found that by heavily emphasizing ghosts in their historic and folkloric capacity, heritage officials sidestep issues of belief. By not asking their visitors to question their beliefs but rather to learn about the past through the ghost stories, sites that have been successful with ghost tours can save their credibility. 127

Hanks also brings to light interesting questions on the role of memory in ghost tours. Ghost tours can change how a museum is viewed, like with Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site and its reputation as haunted because of its association with "Terror Behind the Walls." Hanks uses the example of a cast-iron footbridge located in the National Railway Museum in York, United Kingdom. During the day, it is a testament to the 1890s architecture, its narrative one of the changes occurring because of the expanding railway system. However, the museum has opened its doors to ghost tours and another narrative has emerged, that of the bridge being the host to the rape of a young girl. Suddenly, the architectural feature has a new name, the rape bridge. Never mind that the museum has no proof that this event happened, it is just the word of a medium present on a ghost tour. <sup>129</sup> Narratives do change over time as new information is discovered. They also change as different trends in interpretation emerge. But those changes are based on fact and research. Ghost tours have the power to change how a site is seen by the public

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Hanks, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Hanks, 50-51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Hanks, 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Hughes, "Bridging the Divide," 283.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Hanks, *Haunted Heritage*, 123-126.

and its memory. Regardless if a rape never occurred at the bridge, those on the tour will forever remember the bridge as the rape bridge. Ghost narratives are sensational and grab attention. The fear that historical narratives will be overrun and the memory of a space will be changed is just one of the notes of caution in Hanks' work.

Historical narratives are often overwhelmed by the sensational, pushing what once might have been edutainment into the realm of just entertainment. In the case of Fort Abraham Lincoln in Mandan, North Dakota, what started as a way to grab visitor attention with history-based ghost tours has turned into a commercialized success, pure entertainment. Matt Schanandore, the Interpretive Director at the Fort, writes in an article for *Seasonal Entertainment Source Magazine* about how the decision to shift away from history revitalized the fort. According to Schanandore, when the history-based ghost tours began, they were a huge success, but by the third year, people got bored. The stories that the site could tell, such as soldiers freezing to death, could only go so far. Staff found difficulty in expanding the ghost stories beyond the boundaries of the fort. The team at the fort slowly began to incorporate more of a haunted house into the tour, with ghosts, demons, and killer clowns. The tour boomed and is now in its seventeenth season. <sup>130</sup> The tours are so successful without their historic base that the site sees more foot traffic in October than they do during the height of their open season and the revenue brought in is double or triple the revenue from May to September. <sup>131</sup>

The rise in revenue is their justification for the programming. The tours will enter their nineteenth season in 2020, contradicting Bradburne's theory that programming based on raising

<sup>130</sup> Matt Schanandore, "A Journey to the Dark Side: The Evolution of the 'Haunted Fort' Event at Historic Fort Abraham Lincoln," *Seasonal Entertainment Source Magazine*, "Issue 22 (Dec 2018): 17-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Schanandore, 19.

money is not sustainable.<sup>132</sup> For Schanandore, the funding from their haunted house eases the taxpayers' burden and makes the site itself more fiscally responsible. Not only that, but teenagers who may have been dragged to the site by their parents during the summer come back on their own after visiting the haunted house.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, Schanandore believes that the tours have helped regular interpreters learn to better gain and sustain visitor attention and have carried that to the day-time tours.<sup>134</sup> The staying power of the program is in direct contrast with Bradburne and Balloffet, Courvoisier, and Lagier who worry about the sustainability of edutainment and entertainment programming.<sup>135</sup>

In the case of Historic Fort Abraham Lincoln and their haunted house, what started as a fun, engaging educational experience slowly turned towards the commercial. Like the cases stated by authors like Bradburne, Nashwinter, and Hanks, sometimes the commercial appeal and profitability of ghost tours are too difficult to turn away from and are easily justified, especially by smaller museums. But would these smaller museums be participating in ghost tours and paranormal investigations if there was not a market for it?

The market demand for dark programming exists nation-, and even world, wide. A Gallup poll from 2005 found that almost 75 percent of American adults believe in some type of paranormal activity. The same poll found that 37 percent of Americans believe that a structure can be haunted. Tom W. Rice explores the different levels of belief in the paranormal, focusing on the United States, in his article "Believe It or Not: Religious and Other Paranormal

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Bradburne, "Wagging the Dog," 150.

<sup>133</sup> Schanandore, "A Journey to the Dark Side," 20-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Schanandore, 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Bradburne, "Wagging the Dog," 171, and Balloffet, et al., "From Museum to Amusement Park," 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> David Moore, "Three in four Americans Believe in Paranormal," *Gallup*, (2009): http://www.gallup.com/poll/16915/three-four-americans-believe-paranormal.aspx.

Beliefs in the United States" in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. His study includes data from a nationwide random population sample and looks to see if correlations exist between the two main types of belief - Christian doctrine paranormal and belief in the supernatural or occult - and gender, social status, education level, and age. 137 Rice begins his article by establishing previous study results. Prevailing theory, according to Rice, holds that those of lower social and economic status believe in traditional paranormal occurrences, such as ghosts and the occult, as a way to cope with the psychological and physical strain of their circumstances. 138 Rural dwellers are more likely to believe than urban dwellers. Women also tend to believe in ghosts, communication with the dead, and astrology more than men, but men tend to believe in UFOs and aliens more than women. Youth are more likely than their elders to believe in déjà vu and to have paranormal experiences but less likely to believe in astrology. Those who believe in religious paranormal phenomena—demons, heaven, and hell—tend to be disproportionately women, African American, and less educated. Southerners and Midwesterners are more likely to hold paranormal beliefs than those dwelling in the east and west. A final result from previous survey results found that there should be a negative correlation between Christian paranormal phenomena and traditional paranormal phenomena. That is, the higher a person's belief in God, the lower their belief in the paranormal should be. 139

Rice reexamined the results of the surveys and reached several different conclusions, the most prevalent of which is that with a few exceptions, there is no rhyme or reason to those that believe. People who are often marginalized, like the poor and less educated, are no more likely to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Tom W. Rice, "Believe It or Not: Religious and Other Paranormal Beliefs in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 42, No 1 (March 2003), 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Rice, 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Rice, 96.

believe than others.<sup>140</sup> Rice finds that believing is the norm, with roughly 90 percent of respondents believing in at least two types of paranormal phenomena. Even though contemporary science is not able to explain the paranormal, the vast majority of the population accepts it.<sup>141</sup> Rice also finds no negative correlation between those that believe in God and those that believe in traditional paranormal occurrences. Many who accept religious paranormal phenomena easily accept the classic paranormal.<sup>142</sup> This study shows that there is a market for the type of dark programming that museums can provide to the public.

History is important to people. Places and objects help them to make sense of the world and their place in it. It is why museums and historic sites matter. They are stewards of collective and personal history. Consequently, there is a responsibility to treat the places that represent the past with respect. But to survive in a competitive and growing tourism industry, museums have to evolve and come up with new ideas to be able to continue their roles as holders of history.

Edutainment is a way in which museums can accomplish this, but should be utilized with caution, weighing mission and monetary needs, public perception, and sustainability.

<sup>140</sup> Rice, 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Rice, 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Rice, 103.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES**

Museums and historic sites have evolved from their early origins to become places of gathering and memory, of community and shared awareness. But they have also become tourist destinations. As part of the tourist industry, they have evolved to compete with other attractions for visitors, necessitating the development of programming that both educates and entertains. Within this realm of edutainment are ghost tours, which are examples of the triumphs and pitfalls of the lengths museums will go to engage the public.

Ghost tourism is a growing trend in American society. Ghost tours are offered by a wide range of venues and groups, and museums and historic sites are now offering a wide variety of dark programming to help them engage visitors. The following case studies have used dark tourism and dark programming, along with edutainment, to supplement their institution's visitorship, funding, or both.

## **Cass County Historical Society-Bonanzaville**

Cass County, North Dakota, Historical Society, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in West Fargo, North Dakota. He are open to the public for tours from May 1 to September 30 and year-round for special events. Its mission is "Bonanzaville, USA, where we are dedicated to the Education, Enlightenment, and Enrichment of the lives of our guests through the use of History; by preserving, sharing and connecting the past with the present" and its vision statement reads as "a place of interactive unique experiences that inspires people of all ages to learn about early pioneers, their descendants and their impact; a place called Bonanzaville, USA." Bonanzaville has a small staff of two full-time employees, the executive director and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Cass County, North Dakota, Historical Society, Inc., is colloquially known as Bonanzaville and all their marketing campaigns and social media accounts operate under that name. For this paper, the shorter Bonanzaville will be used to refer to the site.

events coordinator, as well as several part-time employees that include the curator, maintenance person, and executive support manager. In the summertime, their staff includes front desk personnel.<sup>144</sup> The curators who work at Bonanzaville are employed through a partnership with North Dakota State University. Curators work twenty hours a week as part of their history graduate assistantships and can gain real-world, hands-on experience.

Bonanzaville exists thanks to the women of the Daughters of Dakota Pioneers, organized and first presided over by Alice Minard. The Fargo chapter formed in 1934 and one of its first tasks was to create a local museum. For many years, the museum operated out of the basement of Minard Hall at the North Dakota Agriculture College, now North Dakota State University, but the university needed the space for classrooms. The search began for a new building.

At this time, the women of the Daughters of Dakota Pioneers wanted to expand the museum to include all of Cass County. They formed the Cass County Historical Society as a non-profit organization in 1954. A few years after the formation of the historical society, the Red River Valley Fair moved from its location north of Fargo to West Fargo. Royal Berstler, the executive secretary for the fair, suggested a pioneer village also be created at the site as a year-round attraction. They gifted the historical society land upon which they could build a museum and pioneer village.

Historical society member James Connolly created the name Bonanzaville U.S.A., speaks to the rekindled interest in the history of bonanza farming in North Dakota. Bonanza farms, large farms consisting of anywhere from 3,000 to over 100,000 acres that typically focused on one crop, played a significant role in the growth of the Red River Valley and the financial development of eastern North Dakota. When Bonanzaville opened to the public during the 1968

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> "About," *Bonanzaville*, accessed on 5 May 2019, https://www.bonanzaville.org/about.

Red River Valley Fair, four buildings were on the site: Dobrinz School, St. John's Church, Habberstad Cabin, and the Furnberg Store. 145 Today, Bonanzaville has 30 original and restored buildings and structures from all over the Red River Valley, seven large buildings that house planes, trains, automobiles, and tractors, and a main museum. In addition to the exhibit and display spaces, Bonanzaville has two large event spaces and regularly rents out their facilities for weddings and other private events. Bonanzaville hosts three major festivals every year: the Fourth of July Celebration, Pioneer Days, and Christmas on the Prairie. They also host several smaller-scaled events, such as Murder Mystery at Bonanzaville, Ghost Tours, and Paranormal Investigations.

Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville began in 2016 at the suggestion of the curator. The tours were based on historical sources and told stories from North Dakota history. High school history club and drama students re-enacted the scenes from history as the curator led tour groups through the village. The tours were initially going to run one night in October and tickets were sold for \$15. There were three tours scheduled for the night and each tour could accommodate twelve people. The event description read as follows:

Leave the little ones at home and visit Bonanzaville after dark! Participants will receive a guided tour of haunted structures. This includes both the Brass Rail Hotel and Saloon, and the Houston Mansion. We will also explore additional buildings, with their own nighttime inhabitants. Visit spaces most guests are never allowed to enter. Be prepared to see and hear things daytime visitors never witness. Who knows? By the end of the evening, you may wonder if YOU are the ghost. Due to the small interior spaces we will be entering, tour space is extremely limited. Only twelve spaces are available for each tour. This tour is not for very young children. 146

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Rural Cass County: The Land and the People (Fargo, North Dakota: Cass County Historical Society), 1976. 260.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> "Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville," Facebook, accessed 14 November 2018, https://www.facebook.com/events/1777490465857608/?active\_tab=about.

The tours were announced and advertised on Bonanzaville's Facebook page on October 2, 2016, and garnered immediate response. Eventually, fourteen hundred people indicated interest on Facebook. On October 3, Bonanzaville announced that no spots remained and that they would start a waiting list. That same day they announced that the waitlist was too long, and they would no longer accept names. On October 7, Bonanzaville announced a second date to help meet demand and filled those spaces with the people on the waitlist. <sup>147</sup>

The event raised \$1080. Because of the overwhelming response, the event coordinator and curator decided to make the tour an annual event. The following year, they came up with a new script for the tour. 148 Some of the feedback from visitors noted that the description was misleading. The curator and coordinator worked together to come up with a more accurate description for the 2017 tour:

Leave the little ones at home and visit Bonanzaville after dark! Participants will be led around the village and into structures such as the Brass Rail Hotel and Saloon & the Houston Mansion. Be prepared for frightful feelings as we immerse you in the darker history of North Dakota!

This time the event only reached 196 people interested on Facebook, but the event still sold out every tour. 149 Ticket prices increased to \$25, and Bonanzaville made a profit of \$3,975. 150 For both 2016 and 2017, the tours received positive attention from the public and the media, with local newspapers publishing stories both years.

<sup>148</sup> The author of this paper began in the position of curator in August 2017 and held the position until August 2019.

<sup>147 &</sup>quot;Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> "Ghost Tours," Facebook, accessed 14 November 2018, https://www.facebook.com/events/899750503512476/?active\_tab=about.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Cass County Historical Society, Profit and Loss Statement: Jan-Dec 2017, (Cass County Historical Society, 2018).

The curator also suggested a new October event. During renovations on a new church moved to the property, construction workers reported strange occurrences and phenomena that caught the public's and media attention. Rumors have swirled for years that Bonanzaville is haunted and due to the response to the 2016 Ghost Tours, where the description led visitors to believe they would be encountering real ghosts in a paranormal investigation instead of a historically-based tour with actors, led the curator to believe that people would be interested in doing paranormal investigations on the site. She and the event coordinator gauged how interested the public would be in doing an investigation by posting a poll on Facebook. Just like with the Ghost Tours two years before, interest came immediately.

Bonanzaville announced paranormal investigations for two nights in October on Facebook. The staff decided to charge \$50.00 per person and Bonanzaville provided standard ghost hunting equipment. Groups were limited to six people and a Bonanzaville staff person accompanied each group for safety and security. Three tours of ninety minutes ran each night. The tours were advertised as an opportunity for visitors to investigate and decide for themselves if any truth to the rumors that Bonanzaville was haunted existed.<sup>151</sup>

The response to the announcement was even greater than the Ghost Tours of 2016, with twenty-four hundred people interested on Facebook. Several news outlets did highlights for morning and evening news, and paranormal groups from around the Midwest called to inquire if they could come out and participate. The discussion on the Facebook page was overwhelmingly positive. The only negative comments were complaints about the price. Even with that, the tours sold out and a waitlist made. Two more nights were added with three full tours each night.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> "Paranormal Investigations," Facebook, accessed 14 November 2018, https://www.facebook.com/events/117498618914119/?active tab=about.

Eventually, two "Witching Hour" tours that ran from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. were added to two of the nights. Finally, staff added a single Halloween tour to help meet demand. The tours brought in nearly \$12,000 in profit. 152

For the 2018 Ghost Tours, ticket prices were raised to \$30 per person. Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville focused on stories from the darker, untold side of North Dakota history using historical sources. They ran Saturday nights in October and interest was again high, with eighteen hundred interested on Facebook. Staff refined the description to be more accurate:

North Dakota nice? More like North Dakota malicious. Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville are back with more true tales from the darker side of North Dakota history. The historic pioneer village serves as a backdrop for some of North Dakota's more gruesome historic tales. Guests in groups of 15 will be led throughout the village and watch scenes unfold before their eyes.<sup>153</sup>

Two nights of tours were canceled, once because of rainy weather and once because the production manager who organizes the high school participants had a family emergency. The remaining dates sold out.

Paranormal Investigations in 2018 were a big hit in their second year. The investigation offerings were extended, starting in September and running through October. Tours were also changed to just two time slots a night, rather than three. Other than those changes, the format stayed the same. Interest in the event reached an all-time high of thirty-one hundred people. 154 While not every date of the two months sold out, the events were still hugely successful, with several people who took part in the 2017 investigations returning.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Profit and Loss: Jan-Dec 2017.

<sup>153 &</sup>quot;Ghost Tours," Facebook, accessed 14 November 2018,

https://www.facebook.com/events/986133018232832/?active\_tab=about.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> "Paranormal Investigations," Facebook, accessed 14 November 2018, https://www.facebook.com/events/659202354442218/.

The Ghost Tours at Bonanzaville are a form of edutainment. The tour scripts are heavily researched and strive for historical accuracy.. One visitor on the tours listened to one of the stories, about a murdered teenager at a Fargo hotel in the 1920s and realized that the girl in the scene was one of her ancestors. Because of the tour, she discovered unexpected information about this relative.

Unlike Ghost Tours, Paranormal Investigations are pure entertainment, because no historical sources beyond folklore are utilized to plan them, and guests are more or less allowed to participate on their own. This is the opposite of Ghost Tours, which are heavily structured and based on historical sources. While the staff hopes the guests have fun at the paranormal investigations, they do not expect them to learn something about history, as they do on ghost tours. The staff avoids using language that suggests that the staff at Bonanzaville supports the view that the museum is haunted, since such statements cannot be proven. However, there is a large number of visitors who are interested in and believe in the paranormal. Rumors have swirled for years about paranormal activity at Bonanzaville. The site's staff believe that they are allowing the public to decide for themselves.

The investigations lead to several moral quandaries. Because paranormal activity cannot be proven, do events that celebrate them belong in a museum? Most people who visit

Bonanzaville for the Paranormal Investigations tour would not have visited the museum otherwise. In between buildings, they often ask historically related questions about the site and several have come back during daylight hours. Paranormal Investigations are also extremely lucrative. For a museum-like Bonanzaville, which has numerous buildings and artifacts to maintain on a small, county museum budget, the money that comes in from the investigations helps with preservation.

Bonanzaville's staff does several things well when it comes to their dark programming. For ghost tours, they use primary and secondary sources to research the stories they tell. They are happy to share that information with interested parties after the tours. They success in keeping their stakeholders in mind by responding to public feedback. However, there are things they can improve upon when it comes to their paranormal investigations. Taking a firmer stance on the question "is the museum haunted?" is important. While letting people decide for themselves skirts the issue, many people ask on tours what the guides have experienced. The guides include both volunteers and staff. Museum staff at the start of the tours can include a disclaimer that the views of the guides are their own and not the official word from Bonanzaville.

For the time being, if the events remain lucrative and interest continues, both events will continue. For Bonanzaville, the increased visitorship, lack of negative attention, and incoming flow of funds make Paranormal Investigations worth it, which is an opinion shared by other historic sites. Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site has many parallels to Bonanzaville. Like Bonanzaville, Eastern State offers two types of dark-themed programming, a haunted house, and paranormal investigations, both of which are pure entertainment. And like Bonanzaville, Eastern State has a large site that requires a constant flow of money to maintain, making the lucrative success of their dark programming difficult to turn away from.

## **Eastern State Penitentiary**

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site in Philadelphia, is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Their mission statement, adopted in 2017, states, "Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site interprets the legacy of American criminal justice reform, from the nation's founding to the present day, within the long-abandoned cellblocks of the nation's most historic

prison."<sup>155</sup> They proudly proclaim that they are not a neutral site and take a vocal stance on the rate of incarceration in the United States, which they believe is too high. They also employ several formerly incarcerated guides and staff and sponsor programming and outreach to currently incarcerated individuals.

Eastern State Penitentiary opened in 1829 as the largest prison in the United States. The architect designed its gothic exterior to inspire true penitence and regret in its inmates. It originally held 250 inmates, both male and female, but more and more cellblocks were added over time, creating a sprawling complex. The prison grounds, in addition to several cellblocks, included a hospital, death row (although no executions took place at the prison), baseball field, synagogue, and a large kitchen. One of the most famous residents, gangster Al Capone, was incarcerated there for 8 months in 1929. In 1965, the National Park Service declared Eastern State a National Historic Landmark. The prison officially closed in 1970, although attempts to close it date back to the 1940s. After it closed the city bought the site for \$400,000. Initially there were plans to turn the site into commercial space, but a preservation task force established in 1988. In 1991, stabilization and preservation efforts began, and daily tours were offered starting in 1994. 156

Tourists have been visiting the prison even before it closed. In 1858, over ten thousand people visited the site. Famous visitors included the Marquis de Lafayette and Charles Dickens, who described it as cruel and wrong. The very first official, though limited, tours to the site in 1988 were conducted with hard hats for visitors, as the building was in a state of total disrepair.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> "About Eastern State," Eastern State Penitentiary, accessed 15 April 2018, https://www.easternstate.org/about-eastern-state.

<sup>156 &</sup>quot;Timeline," Eastern State Penitentiary, accessed 20 November 2018, https://www.easternstate.org/research/history-eastern-state/timeline.

Visitors were also required to sign liability waivers before going on tours of the site. This requirement remained in place until 2008. Today, Eastern State is one of the most visited historic sites in the country. 157

One of Eastern State's biggest draws is their private paranormal investigations. For the price of \$100 per ticket, groups of between 5-15 individuals can explore the grounds for four hours. A staff person accompanies them and will answer questions about the history of the site, but they do not provide training on paranormal investigating or equipment. <sup>158</sup> The staff and site do not explicitly state that Eastern State is haunted, though they do have a FAQ page on a about claims that the site is haunted, simply stating:

Many people believe that Eastern State Penitentiary is haunted. As early as the 1940s, officers and prisoners reported mysterious visions and eerie experiences in the ancient prison.<sup>159</sup>

They also describe various television programs they have been featured on due to their reputation as a haunted site:

The penitentiary has been featured on the Travel Channel's Most Haunted Live, Ghost Adventures, and Paranormal Challenge; Fox Television's World's Scariest Places; TLC's America's Ghost Hunters; and MTV's FEAR. Footage captured on the second tier of Cellblock 12 by paranormal investigators during filming of SyFy's Ghost Hunters may be the most controversial ghost sighting in history.

During the filming of Paranormal Challenge, host Zak Bagans called Eastern State Penitentiary "one of the most haunted places in the world." Jack Osbourne, host of the Travel Channel's Portals to Hell, agreed. After filming the series, he noted, "Eastern State Penitentiary really freaked me out... The place is terrifying... Easily one of the most haunted places I've ever been."160

<sup>157 &</sup>quot;Timeline."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> "Paranormal Investigations," Eastern State Penitentiary, accessed 15 April 2018, https://www.easternstate.org/visit/site-rentals/paranormal-investigations.

<sup>159 &</sup>quot;Is it really haunted?" Terror Behind the Walls at Eastern State Penitentiary, accessed 15 April 2018, https://www.easternstate.org/halloween/visit/faqs.

<sup>160 &</sup>quot;Is it really haunted?"

Another draw for Eastern State is their "Terror Behind the Walls" event, touted as "America's largest haunted house." Tickets range from a base price of \$25 on a weekday in October to up to \$115 for a VIP After Dark ticket on a weekend. Guests tour through six attraction areas within the walls of the penitentiary, with themes such as the Infirmary, the Machine Shop, Blood Yard, and Break Out. <sup>161</sup> The tours are pure entertainment and are not based on any historical facts or events. "Terror Behind the Walls" began in 1991 as a fundraising effort to preserve the site and can be credited with raising much of the revenue that saved the physical structure. Today, the tours are a huge operation that make up 60 percent of the revenue generated by Eastern State, accomplished in 32 nights. According to the site:

Every year, it [Terror Behind the Walls] employs over 300 seasonal, part-time staff as actors, makeup artists, costume staff, and security. More than 100,000 people go through the haunted house every year. 162

The tours have evolved since their first inception. Originally, they featured elements that spoke to the history of the museum, dressing up zombie prisoners, although no historical facts were included. However, as the museum's mission and vision fully developed, they toned down the prison elements. Sean Kelley, senior Vice President and Director of Interpretation at the site, says:

Eastern State makes a conscious effort to distinguish its daytime historic programming from its identity as a nighttime haunted attraction in the fall. TBTW does not make reference to any actual prisoners, guards, or events from the history of the penitentiary. TBTW has its own branding and marketing campaigns that are separate from the historic site's branding and marketing campaigns. <sup>163</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," Terror Behind the Walls at Eastern State Penitentiary, accessed 15 April 2018, https://www.easternstate.org/halloween/visit/faqs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Kaci Johnson, "Historic Site Dark Programming Questionnaire: Eastern State Penitentiary," author's collection, 16 April 2019.

<sup>163 &</sup>quot;Historic Site Dark Programming Questionnaire: Eastern State Penitentiary."

Many visitors who come to the "Terror Behind the Walls" event are first-time visitors. To draw them back to their daytime tours, the museum plays promotional and informational videos along the queue line. Their website has information regarding what they do with the revenue from the tours:

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Inc. is a charitable nonprofit organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All proceeds from Terror Behind the Walls help us operate and preserve this National Historic Landmark. Terror Behind the Walls is the single largest source of revenue for the historic site. Thank you for your support!<sup>164</sup>

Someday the staff hopes to distance themselves from the tours, but they recognize the draw of the tours to visitors. The revenue the tours generate is also hard to walk away from, a similar situation to what Bonanzaville faces, although on a much larger scale. Eastern State Penitentiary is one of the most successful museums in the country in terms of its dark programming. They have managed to separate the dark programming events and their dayside events and handle the dark nature of their site sensitively.

While sites like Eastern State Penitentiary and Bonanzaville have benefited financially and received very little negative feedback, some sites face negative backlash from community members when engaging in dark tourism. This feedback can range from visitors upset that a site's memory and purpose is being taken away by a focus on paranormal to feeling that museums should present programming that is based on historic sources and research and not on superstitious beliefs and folklore. Two sites that have faced negative feedback from community members are the Comstock House and Fort Totten. The former, after that feedback, removed the dark programming, while the latter continues to produce their dark programming despite the feedback.

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<sup>164 &</sup>quot;Frequently Asked Questions."

### **Comstock House**

The Comstock House in Moorhead, Minnesota, is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society and operated locally by the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County. It is open for tours from Memorial Day to Labor Day and hosts student and scholar lectures, evenings of music, and other events throughout the year. It stands as a memorial to Solomon G. Comstock, who built the Queen Anne stick-style home in 1883.

Comstock came to Moorhead with the railroad at the age of twenty-nine in 1871. The young city had few permanent structures and a reputation for drunkenness and lawlessness.

Comstock, the only person in the area with a law degree, became the first Clay County attorney, served as a representative in the Minnesota legislature, and eventually a Senator from Minnesota in the U.S. Congress, a political career that spanned nearly 30 years. As one of the earliest residents of the town, he and his wife, Sarah, were instrumental in shaping the community.

Solomon donated land for two colleges in town, which became known as Concordia College and Minnesota State University Moorhead. He built a bank, and a hotel, and he even tried to build a manufacturing plant. Sarah, a former schoolteacher, was a founding member of the Moorhead Women's Club and responsible for building a Carnegie Library in the city.

The couple had three children, Ada, Jessie, and George, and members of the family lived in the house for nearly eighty years. Shortly before he died in 1965, George Comstock gave the house to the Minnesota Historical Society. The house went through a decade of restoration to bring it back to its former glory, with tours beginning in the early 1970s. The house has been

open for tours ever since, interpreting the story of Comstock and his family, as well as the early history of the area.<sup>165</sup>

It is known that Sarah Comstock passed away at the age of 97 in 1939, after falling asleep in her favorite chair, which is still on display at the house. Neighbors have reported seeing lights or objects moving inside the house when no one was there, and staff and volunteers have said they heard noises that were outside the ordinary in an old house. Numerous times on tours, guides are asked if the house is haunted or if they have experienced anything unusual. <sup>166</sup> Because of the interest in the topic, staff planned a student lecture revolving around a paranormal investigation in October 2016.

Several amateur ghost hunters spent a few hours exploring the house with their equipment, a voice recorder, and electromagnetic field detector. The following night, the ghost hunters presented the findings of the night to the public as part of the Comstock House student lecture series. The night was a big hit, with people being turned away from the doors. The house has a capacity of just fifty people and that number arrived a half-hour before the scheduled start of the lecture. Staff added a second talk for the night and it was also full. People wanted to know what, if anything, haunted the Victorian home. The weekend after the lecture was one of the busiest weekends the house's staff experienced, with people showing up for tours and asking what, if any, evidence was uncovered.

Due to the success of the event, Comstock House staff planned to open the house for ghost tours. The plan included giving guests a standard house tour and interspersing stories of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> "Comstock House Interpreter Training," Minnesota Historical Society (Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, 2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> The author of this paper has been a site interpreter from 2016 to 2020 at the Comstock House. This statement comes from my knowledge and through discussion with other interpreters.

creepy circumstances that tour guides past and present reported. However, a Comstock family descendant contacted the Minnesota Historical Society and asked that the event not take place. The family worried that the house would stop serving as a memorial to their family and start to have a reputation as a haunted house. Staff canceled the tour and created a display describing Victorian funeral practices and mourning rituals instead. Eventually, flashlight tours were incorporated into the Halloween season as well. The description of the event from their Facebook page read as:

Join us for a spooky tour as we explore the Comstock House by flashlight after dark. With all the lights turned off, guides will accompany guests through the historic 1883 mansion, using flashlights to illuminate artifacts and architectural features along the way. Guests will have access to areas usually not open on tours, including the attic and basement.<sup>167</sup>

The reference to the season was the use of the word spooky. Otherwise, the description describes a tour highlighting architectural features and not often seen areas of the house.

Even though the ghost tour was canceled, it did not stop visitors from asking if the home is haunted or believing that it is. Victorian houses are often associated with haunted houses by the public. Television shows like *The Addams Family* or even the movie *Psycho* depict oncestately Victorian homes with a spooky edge. According to art historian Sarah Burns, author of the article "Better for Haunts: Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination," the trend of viewing houses as haunted can be traced to disenchantment with the Victorian Era in the early twentieth century. <sup>168</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> "Comstock Flashlight Tours," *Facebook*, accessed 20 April 2020, https://www.facebook.com/events/748314515613173/?acontext=%7B%22event\_action\_history %22%3A[%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22search\_results%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22search%22%7D]%7D.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Sarah Burns, "Better for Haunts: Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination," *American Art*, Vol 26, no. 4 (2012): 2

The Victorian Era lasted from 1837 to 1901 and coincides with great technological and progressive advances. Houses from the era feature towers, wraparound porches, decorative railings, turned posts, and gingerbread details. Burns states that the homes began to be mocked shortly after the era ended, as they were indicative of new money and ostentation. As styles evolved, people started abandoning the houses and artists began to depict them with creepy characteristics, such as dead trees or broken shutters. After World War I, returning soldiers saw the houses as ghostly reminders of a corrupt past, imbuing them with all sorts of negative connotations. The architecture of the old homes became the architecture of fear. Artists and authors alike made Victorian homes the settings of psychological angst. Murder mysteries were set in Victorian houses and many of the once prominent homes were torn down to make way for new designs, such as those of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. 169 Today, many Victorian homes are being restored to their former glory, with gingerbread details once again tucked into gables and wraparound porches featuring porch swings. But the connotation of Victorian homes as haunted has stuck around. As long as that image exists in popular consciousness, homes like the Comstock House will be subjected to the question: is it haunted?

The Comstock family descendants, while not directly involved in the running of the house, were right about the changing memory of a place. When a house or historic site is publicized as being haunted, the perception of it is altered. Suddenly, the home is not the Comstock House, a monument to an early town founder, but rather becomes, the creepy haunted house on the corner. The Comstock House staff are a good example of listening to stakeholders and adjusting the programming accordingly. For them, the rewards of doing dark programming did not outweigh the risks.

<sup>169</sup> Burns, 2.

The descendants' concerns also raise questions about the ownership of the history of a place, separate from the property ownership. Not only are they descendants, they are members of the community in which the house sits. They are equally as invested in its interpretation as the Minnesota Historical Society and staff, something called shared authority. The state of ownership of a place is something numerous historical sites struggle with, particularly when dealing with a sensitive subject like the paranormal. Fort Totten in Benson County, North Dakota, is another site that several heritage groups of people can claim intellectual ownership. The European Americans, who built the site as a military fort, and the Native Americans, for whom the site served as a boarding school for the assimilation education of their children, both have a story to tell about the place. The ownership of Fort Totten is a central issue when the site runs its annual haunted house.

### **Fort Totten Historic Site**

Fort Totten State Historic Site is located on the south shore of Devil's Lake in Benson County, North Dakota. Established in 1867, the fort oversaw the relocated Native American tribes on the reservation nearby, as well as to protect trade and transportation routes. Originally a group of crudely constructed log cabins, in 1868 a more permanent structure of brick was built. The buildings on site in 1870 included officer's quarters, hospital, office, magazine storehouse, barracks, mess hall, bakery, stable, corral, and guardhouse. Eventually a brewery and store were built nearby to serve the fort's occupants. 170

A mission school, St. Michael's Mission, was built near the site and served the children living on the reservation. When Congress decommissioned the fort in 1890, it passed into the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> "Fort Totten Nomination Form" Department of Interior-National Register of Historic Places, 09 December 1971. Accessed 6 December 2018, https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/e28846de-60ca-42da-a860-24ccfda9e5be.

custody of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who operated the site as a Native American boarding school. The school gave students the academic and vocational training to prepare them for life away from the reservation. At times, enrollment at Fort Totten reached 400 students, beginning first with Lakota and Dakota children before Ojibwe children joined them. Native American boarding schools, alternatively known as Indian Residential Schools, existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States to assimilate Native American children into Euro-American culture. The schools removed Native American cultural signifiers. The process of culture removal involved Euro-American haircuts, changing names to more Christian sounding ones, and forbidding native languages to be spoken. Fort Totten operated as a school until 1959. Over time, more control and input were given to tribal leaders.

Fort Totten became a North Dakota State Historic Site in 1961, and in 1971, isted on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form for the register briefly mentions its history as a Native American boarding school in three sentences, but focuses on its significance as a preserved military post. Today, the state historical society interprets both parts of the site's history, with buildings referred to by both the fort name and the school name on the website. The site is a name of the school name on the website.

Fort Totten often pops up as a top ten site in internet searches on haunted North Dakota.

Workers and former students share stories of strange happenings and apparitions. A YouTube

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> "Fort Totten" *State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 2018. Accessed 6 December 2018, http://www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/totten/index.html.

<sup>172 &</sup>quot;Fort Totten."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> "Fort Totten Nomination Form."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> "Site History: Fort Totten," *State Historical Society of North Dakota*, 2018. Accessed 6 December 2018, http://www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/totten/tottenhistory2.html.

channel, DevilsLakeGhosts, has two videos dedicated to stories from Fort Totten. <sup>175</sup> In 2012, the site decided to take advantage of the haunted history and produce a haunted house. The haunted house was successful enough to continue and the sixth annual event was held in 2018. The haunted house features zombies, and gore, and the description on their facebook event page reads "Come out to Fort Totten for some Halloween fun!" There is no connection with the stories and scenes being presented and the documented history of the site. The haunted house takes place four nights in October and on those nights ran continuously from 7-11 p.m. It takes visitors roughly thirty minutes to make it through the haunted house and the cost is \$5 per ticket. No one under the age of 12 is allowed. <sup>176</sup>

Ghosts, spirits, and other things that go bump in the night may seem like harmless

Halloween fun, but to the former residents of the school at Fort Totten and the area surrounding
the site, they have a different meaning altogether. The Plains Indian tribes that live near the fort
have a belief system that ties the physical living world to the spiritual plane. To them, spirits and
ghosts are a part of everyday life. Ghosts most often appear in dreams, but can physically
manifest with footprints, sounds, or even corporeal forms. Plains Indians believe that some
sicknesses are caused by "ghost illness," an intentionally malignant spirit that attaches itself to a
living person. Like the DevilsLakeGhosts YouTube channel illustrates, they believe the
former fort and school are haunted by spirits. What may seem like harmless Halloween fun for
some is intimately tied to the beliefs of those whose history is tied to the site. Even those who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> "DevilsLakeGhosts," *YouTube*, accessed 11 December 2018, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbLfDl4MAQGi2djHlBldggA.

<sup>176 &</sup>quot;Haunted Fort Totten," Facebook, accessed 11 December 2018,

https://www.facebook.com/events/846809885490069/?active tab=about.

Gary Varner, *Ghosts, Spirits & the Afterlife in Native American Folklore and Religion* (Raleigh, North Carolina, Lulu Press, Inc., 2010), 7-8.

operate the site do not profess that it is haunted, the folklore surrounding it gives it the reputation. Another issue is that the site is run by the state of North Dakota. The Native American people of North Dakota have a long and contentious relationship with the government of the state, which makes the interpretive narrative of the site and what programs are held there a potential issue.

The Haunted House at Fort Totten is one that should be retired. The community stakeholders are not all in agreement about the appropriateness of the program and it can be insensitive to those who have a living memory of the site as an Indian boarding school. Since there is not a notable spike in visitors from the event, the fact that very little money is made from it, and the contentious relationship between the government and the Native Americans with a history at the fort, the risks vastly outweigh the rewards in this case.

# **Waverly Hills Historic Site**

Some museums, like Bonanzaville, the Comstock House, and Eastern State Penitentiary, avoid explicitly stating that their museums are haunted. Bonanzaville and Eastern State prefer to let individuals decide for themselves, although in the case of Eastern State they receive a lot of publicity of being haunted that the museum condones. Avoidance of the term "haunted" stems from the fact that it would be difficult to prove. However, there are museums and historic sites, such as Waverly Hills Historic Site, that fully embrace the designation of haunted.

In the early 1900s, Jefferson County, Kentucky, struggled against an outbreak of tuberculosis. Louisville, Kentucky, was particularly susceptible because of its location in the Ohio River wetlands, the perfect breeding ground for tuberculosis bacteria. The county began construction on a new hospital to treat those affected in 1908 on the site of a former one-room

schoolhouse, Waverley School. In 1910, the Waverly Hills Sanitorium opened with forty to fifty patients in a wooden two-story structure.

The initial structure could not meet the needs of the community and new wings were added, including a children's ward. This ward housed not just patients, but the children of patients who would not otherwise be cared for. In 1914, the sanitorium could house 150 patients. Because of the constant upkeep of the wooden structure and more and more people becoming ill with tuberculosis, construction began on a new five-story building in 1924. It had a capacity of 400 patients. In 1943, a new drug, streptomycin, reduced tuberculosis cases. The sanitorium closed in 1961 and reopened in 1962 as Woodhaven Geriatric Center. The center closed in 1982 after charges of patient neglect.

The building changed hands several times before Tina and Charles Mattingly, history and paranormal enthusiasts, bought it in 2001 and began the tradition of holding haunted tours at the site. The tours capitalized on the site's history as a place of sadness and the final home of many patients. Stops on the tours include patient rooms, gathering spaces, and the "death chute," a 525-foot tunnel that stretches from the base of the hill to the sanitarium. Hospital staff originally used the tunnel to navigate the hill in the wintertime and to bring in supplies. The tunnel also allowed staff to discretely move the bodies of .

The Waverly Hills Historical Society formed in 2003. It is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit entity and its mission statement is to "preserve and restore Waverly Hills Sanitorium and memorialize its staff, patients, and those touched by sanatorium as well as educating the public about the history of tuberculosis, it's effects and impact on the local community." The goal of the society is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> "About Us," Waverly Hills Sanatorium, accessed 25 October 2018, https://www.therealwaverlyhills.com/historical-society.

to fully restore the building and open it as a hotel, conference center, and museum. To do this, the site hosts paranormal investigations.<sup>179</sup>

The paranormal investigations run between March and August. They can be reserved for two hours at \$23, six hours for \$75, or between \$1,000-\$1,500 for an overnight investigation. While guides manage the two and six-hour tours, the overnight tours offer free roam to the visitors and they are invited to bring their own equipment. No staff members or guides go along with guests. The overnight investigators are even offered a chance to sleep at the sanitorium, to expand their experience. 181

The current estimate for restoration of the site is \$40 million. In addition to the paranormal tours and haunted house, the site also offers a Christmas Laser Light Show as a fundraiser. While the site's primary mission is to preserve the building and the history of the space, the website is devoted to their paranormal tours. On the home page alone makes nine references to the paranormal, including a banner proclaiming that the site is "one of the most haunted places on earth!" The font used for the main title evokes the feeling of a horror movie. This is in direct contrast to many other historic sites that host paranormal events, which tend to avoid making claims of hauntings and often make the visitor search for information on those events. Some sites, like Eastern State Penitentiary, even have separate websites for their paranormal and haunted events.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> "About Us."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> "Waverly Hills Historical Society," Eventbrite, accessed 25 October 2018, https://www.eventbrite.com/o/waverly-hills-historical-society-8971424427.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> "Private Overnight/Investigation at Waverly Hills Sanitorium."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> "2018 Waverly Hills Laser Light Show," Waverly Hills Sanitorium, accessed 25 October 2018, https://www.therealwaverlyhills.com/laser-light-show.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> "Waverly Hills Sanitorium," Waverly Hills Sanitorium, accessed 25 October 2018, https://www.therealwaverlyhills.com/.

The Waverly Hills events are not without criticism. Individuals, such as museum professional Julia Nashwinter, raised questions about the appropriateness of hosting a theatrical and haunted event on a site of so much suffering. Waverly Hills, while never the home of the mentally ill, chooses to portray insane and tortured patients in their haunted house. Even as these questions are raised, the events are successful, with tickets often selling out as soon as they are posted.

Waverly Hills is an interesting case because there has been little negative attention from the press, but the professional community is more skeptical. While trying to raise money to preserve the site using the folklore surrounding the site is worthwhile, they need to improve how they tell the story. They need to get rid of the portrayals of the mentally ill and focus on the actual tragedy that occurred there. If the paranormal tours and the haunted house are going to be the only impression of the site visitors get, the patients and staff should be highlighted and their memory preserved. These tours need to be handled more sensitively. They should separate the haunted house from the site, similar to how Eastern State Penitentiary has done. They also need to have guides for their paranormal tours, as guardians to protect the site and to relay information.

The preceding case studies highlight the issues that can come with edutainment-based programming. Reconciling programming that makes a significant amount of revenue while flouting the museum's mission and moral implications of possibly altering a site's original memory or purpose are just a few of the issues. Morality and ethics are also called into question when programming presents information that is not source and research-based. Dark programming even brings up questions of history ownership and shared authority: when different cultures hold differing beliefs, how do museums decide which is the story they will present?

# **CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS**

These case studies have shown that numerous considerations must be taken into account when museums and historic sites are considering dark programming. For some sites, like Eastern State Penitentiary or Waverly Hills Sanitorium, the site's dark history reflects why they are considered dark tourism sites, regardless of the programming choices they make. Others, like Bonanzaville or the Comstock House, do not have a dark history, but they have used dark tourism in their programming. They all grapple with the implications and complexity of dark tourism, from ethics and funding to the role of edutainment in museums.

## **Ethics**

Ethics in museums leads to public trust and value. By behaving ethically and adhering to industry standards, museums continue to show the public that they are good stewards of their physical collections and public memory. Ghost tours and paranormal investigations are a contested issue because of the ethical dilemma they present. The Code of Ethics of the American Alliance of Museum (AAM) gives several guidelines that museums should follow, including ensuring that the programs are based on scholarship and intellectual integrity, do not seek to make money, but rather serve the public, and, above all, follow the museum's mission. <sup>184</sup> Ghost tours and other similar programming are not based on historical evidence. Evidence is bread and butter for historians, and they look for written documents or artifacts from the period to verify historical claims. No evidence of ghosts exists except in an experiential form found in oral histories and folklore. In the cases of Bonanzaville, Waverly Hills, and Eastern State

Penitentiary, programming relies on local legends and folklore, not documentary evidence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> "AAM Code of Ethics for Museums: Programs," American Alliance of Museums accessed February 11, 2019, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/.

These places also benefit financially from dark tourism programs to the point that it would take a significant chunk out of their operating budgets if they stopped offering this kind of programming. James Bradburn, in his article "Wagging the Dog," warns of the pitfalls of museum programming decisions based on finances rather than mission. However, Waverly Hills is using the revenue from its paranormal tours for building restoration. Bonanzaville, with its numerous buildings and acreage, relies on the money from dark programming for building upkeep. Moreover, Eastern State Penitentiary would not have been able to stabilize and restore their building without the income from their "Terror Behind the Walls" event and paranormal tours. Without these sources of income, these sites might not be around to have mission-based programming and interpretation.

In situations like the "Terror Behind the Walls" event, industry standards can give clear guidance to hosting alternative events. AAM develops best practices and overall industry standards, which includes ethical guidelines for museums and historic sites in the United States. Since 1971 they have offered accreditation to museums based on peer-based reviews.

Accreditation enhances and elevates a museums credibility. 186 The AAM code of ethics, adopted in 1993 and modified in 2000, is a framework for all museums. Museums that seek to become accredited use the AAM model to guide them in crafting their ethical code. These professionally developed standards also guide museums in everything from interpretation and programming to mission planning and financial stability. While no museum is legally required to follow the AAM principles, museums benefit from aligning themselves with a set of professional standards.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> James Bradburn, "Wagging the Dog: Managing Museum Priorities in a Difficult Economy," 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> "Accreditation," American Alliance of Museums, accessed February 11, 2019, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/accreditation/.

At first glance, the AAM core standards are at odds with dark programming. In the education and interpretation section, AAM advises that interpretive content, which includes programming, should be based on appropriate research and done to scholarly standards. They also stress that content should be accurate and appropriate for audiences. Dark programming such as paranormal investigations and haunted houses cannot rely on scholarly research because there is none. Can museums present something that has no scholarly evidence and cannot be described as accurate?

Citing the lack of scholarly evidence for the lore behind dark programming ignores the value of oral traditions and folklore to historians and museums. Naomi Eide sheds some light on oral traditions and dark tourism in a 2015 interview with several authors of "In Search of Maryland Ghosts: Montgomery County." Among those authors were Karen Yaffe Lottes, program coordinator at Gaithersburg Community Museum, and community researcher Dorothy Pugh. They believe that oral histories can connect and ground a person in a community. They argue that ghost stories are handed down from generation to generation and ultimately become folklore. They used this folklore to share the history of the county in a new way that can attract a younger audience. They were not trying to prove or disprove the stories themselves, but to explain why there is a story to be told. Ghost stories and the folklore that surrounds them are a commodity, a selling feature. While Lottes and Pugh do make a point of saying that many oral histories or folklore can take a tragic story and distort it, they argue that there is a grain of truth

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> "Ethics, Standards, and Professional Practices: Education and Interpretation Standards," American Alliance of Museums, accessed February 11, 2019, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/education-and-interpretation-standards/.

in the stories, and that is what they want to convey in their programs at Gaithersburg Community Museum, using stories as a tool. 188

Folklore and oral histories can be used by historic sites that use the history underneath a macabre story to bring in different audiences. Scriptwriters for the 2018 Bonanzaville ghost tours heard the local legend surrounding the public library in Harvey, North Dakota. A man murdered his wife in their home, located where the current library now stands, and local folklore holds that the library is haunted. Instead of claiming the Harvey library was haunted, scriptwriters shared the story of why the rumors exist. 189

Oral traditions and local folklore have historical value and are addressed in the AAM code of ethics. The code supports "respecting pluralistic values, traditions, and concerns," which include oral and folk traditions. <sup>190</sup> This ethic supports one pillar of dark programming, ghost tours. While academics may scoff at the idea of ghosts, many cultures have a belief system that allows for the existence of ghosts. The Mexican Day of the Dead tradition includes families placing food near the graves of their deceased relatives, who they believe return and partake. The Chinese celebrate the Hungry Ghost festival, celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar, where the gates to the spirit world open, allowing the deceased to visit the living. There are even theater performances for those visiting ghosts, where the front rows are reserved for the dead. <sup>191</sup> Halloween has Celtic origins, where bonfires were lit

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Naomi Eide, "From History to Haunted: Past Events, Lore Can Become Today's Ghost Stories," *Capital News Service Maryland*, University of Maryland, College Park, 29 October 2015, accessed 10 July 2019, https://cnsmaryland.org/2015/10/29/from-history-to-haunted-past-events-lore-can-become-todays-ghost-stories/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Kaci Johnson, "Bonanzaville Ghost Tours Script: Harvey, ND Library," (Cass County Historical Society, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> "AAM Code of Ethics for Museums: Programs."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> "Hungry Ghost Festival," *China Highlights*, accessed on 26 April 2019, https://www.chinahighlights.com/festivals/hungry-ghost-festival.htm.

to keep the spirits away. <sup>192</sup> There is no one belief system that all Native American tribes subscribe to, but many of their beliefs in the spirit world share similarities. To the Plains Indians, interactions between humans, ghosts, and spirits are a normal part of everyday life, with ghosts and spirits often appearing in their dreams. <sup>193</sup> The Japanese have a three-day festival where lighted fires guide spirits to the land of the living for a visit. At the end of the festival, lanterns are placed on a river to guide the dead back to the spirit world. <sup>194</sup> Even many Americans profess a belief in the paranormal. <sup>195</sup> Museums do not exist to cater to one group of people within a community, but communities as a whole, who have diverse beliefs and their programming should reflect that.

Many of the various cultural traditions and festivals for the dead evolved from a tradition of folklore and oral histories. While academic historians traditionally privilege archival and artifact primary sources over oral histories, public historians at work in museums have long understood the value of oral histories and folklore as a way to involve the public in history. 

These stories are often handed down from family to family, and, as we know from Rosenzweig and Thelen's study on the uses of the past, the public identifies most with the past that is

festival/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> John Gilroy, "Samhain (Samain) - The Celtic roots of Halloween," excerpt from *Tlachtga: Celtic Fire Festival*, accessed on 26 April 2019, https://www.newgrange.com/samhain.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Gary Varner, Ghosts, Spirits & the Afterlife in Native American Folklore and Religion, 8.

<sup>194</sup> Dave Afshar, "The History of Toro Nagashi, Japan's Glowing Lantern Festival," *CultureTrip*, 6 February 2018, accessed 26 April 2019, https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/the-history-of-toro-nagashi-japans-glowing-lantern-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Rice, "Believe It or Not," 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 11-12.

personal to them. History is often used by individuals to address questions of personal identity.

Oral history and folklore are ways in which the public accomplishes those goals.

When planning their programming, museums need to be transparent to their visitors about the sources and materials they are using. Museums and historic sites can describe to visitors how folklore and oral history play a role in history. In the case of ghost tours, there is benefit in describing how paranormal beliefs have folkloric origins. Ghost tours, which most museums use as a way to focus on narratives buried by time, can rely on scholarly methods and research to share otherwise untold stories.

## **Edutainment**

Ghost tours, as opposed to other forms of dark programming, can engage and entertain while also educating. This combination, called edutainment, is contested in the museum programming field. The primary argument against edutainment is that more entertainment than education is occurring. Placing too much emphasis on entertainment diminishes the traditional role of museums. When this occurs, museums and historic sites risk sanitizing and sensationalizing history. The sites become little better than a Disney theme park by only wanting to grab visitor attention and increase visitation. But museums have evolved to compete in a rising tourism and entertainment industry. Not only do people want to be educated, they want to be interested and engaged. The authors of "Edutainment Heritage Tourist Attractions" found that visitors believe that the right combination of entertainment and education can be beneficial and enhance education at museums and historic sites. 197

The rise in the tourism and entertainment industries means that there are more options for the public to choose for their time activities. The popularity and usefulness of dark media

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Hertzman, et al., "Edutainment Heritage Tourist Attractions," 155.

programs in everyday life cannot be ignored. Shows like *Ghost Adventures*, *Ghost Hunters*, *Paranormal Files*, and *Paranormal Lockdown*, as well as a large number of popular YouTube videos on the paranormal, point to the public's fascination with such programming. Like author Goldstein describes, ghosts and the paranormal have become a commodity to be sold, to be capitalized upon. <sup>198</sup> But ghosts also serve as a way to connect the past to the present. If done right, museums can walk that line between education and entertainment with dark programming. The authors of "From Museum to Amusement Park: The Opportunities and Risks of Edutainment," state that staying true to a museum's mission is the best way to ensure that the edutainment line that museums often straddle does not veer too far in either direction. With the mission statement as a guidepost for programming, ghost tours in museums can be a viable way to entertain, educate, and engage.

Because engagement is a key component of museum success, ghost tours provide a compelling way to keep visitors engaged. Ghosts and tales of ghosts connect the past to the present. Ghost tours can serve as a gateway to educating the public about histories that are otherwise sensationalized or even ignored. This is how Bonanzaville utilizes ghost tours and stays true to their mission, in which they have a stated goal of connecting the past with the present. The curator and event coordinator work in tandem for months to develop a historically accurate script of events to present to visitors, educating them on area histories they may not have known existed. The primary goal of the tours remains to educate visitors. Plenty of entertainment value is still present in the tours. Lighting effects and make-up help to create a

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https://www.bonanzaville.org/about.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Diane E. Goldstein, "The Commodification of Belief," 174.

<sup>199 &</sup>quot;About," bonanzaville.org, accessed 23 April 2019,

haunted ambiance, and props, such as rifles and pistols firing blanks, add realistic elements to the production.<sup>200</sup>

The Comstock House staff in Moorhead, Minnesota, also stayed true to their mission with their programming and still were able to capitalize on the haunted perception of an old uninhabited Victorian house. When the planned ghost tours, in which guides would relay various stories from staff and volunteers that support the view of a haunted house, fell through, staff still wanted to participate in the Halloween season with a special tour offering. Staff came up with two solutions, flashlight tours and an exhibition on Victorian funeral practices. During October, a display in the formal parlor of the Comstock House shrouded mirrors in black crepe and placed funeral wreaths throughout in a recreation of a funeral scene from the Victorian era. Interpretation of funeral and mourning rituals described for visitors included practices such as death photography and wearing "widow's weeds." The house remained open on weekends and by appointment during the month, and visitors were able to experience something not available during the regular season. With the parlor decorated for mourning, guests were also immersed in and engaged in the Victorian era.

The display remained up during the flashlight tours in October. The tour description included nothing related to paranormal activity and no references to ghosts. Rather, they were advertised as a new way to experience the home, via the light of a flashlight, and tour areas off-limits during regular tours, such as the attic and the basement.<sup>202</sup> However, because the tours ran during the Halloween season, they automatically were associated with other paranormal and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Kaci Johnson, "Bonanzaville Ghost Tour Script," 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Both of these events were the suggestion of this author.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> "Comstock House What to See and Do: Flashlight Tours," *Minnesota State Historical Society*, accessed 23 April 2019, http://www.mnhs.org/comstock/activities/calendar/6969.

ghostly offerings around town. The tours ran two nights in October, with two tour groups each night that lasted for an hour and a half. Each person paid ten dollars to participate in the event, with historical society members given a five dollar discount. All four tours were sold out in 2018. Guests enjoyed not only the different views of the home, but the funeral set-up in the parlor. Visitor feedback was unanimously positive. During the tours, guests often asked if the home was haunted. Per the family's request, the guides did not share haunting information, but rather educated visitors on the origins of haunted Victorian homes, which most found interesting.<sup>203</sup> The tours were both entertaining and educational while staying true to the site mission.

Bonanzaville and the Comstock House have both been able to walk the line between their mission and edutainment programming. However, it is not always easy for museums and historic sites to do, especially if the programs significantly boost funding and visitorship. Bonanzaville, in addition to mission-focused ghost tours, offers paranormal investigations to the public, as does Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. Neither site claims to be haunted, but rumors persist about both. In the case of Eastern State, several paranormal television programs have been filmed there. They believe that by not promoting the sites as haunted and allowing visitors to decide for themselves, these sites can skirt the issue of entertainment programming with no focus on the mission.

Eastern State also offers its "Terror Behind the Walls" event annually and has done for several decades. Promoted as pure entertainment, the event has sound effects, actors, lighting, and make-up, which creates a terrifying experience for over 100,000 visitors over the course of

 $^{203}$  This information is from the author's own experiences as a tour guide at the Comstock House.

thirty-two nights.<sup>204</sup> Even though the event is hosted at the historic prison, no attempt is made to tie the event to the site, its history, or its mission. Instead, ghosts, vampires, mummies, and monsters take center stage. The staff at Eastern State are aware that what they offer has no educational value and is not mission-focused, but the draw of a two million dollars is hard to ignore, especially when the historic prison needs constant renovation and preservation.

To atone for straying so far from their mission, the staff created a clear separation between the "Terror Behind the Walls" event and the regular, mission-focused programming offered by the museum. No references are made to the site's history in the TBTW spaces and there are no depictions of real guards or prisoners. TBTW has separate marketing, branding campaigns, and website. The staff and site also attempt to encourage visitors to the haunted prison event to come back to their dayside tours, playing informational videos on televisions throughout the queues while people wait to enter the event.<sup>205</sup>

While the Eastern State staff works to reconcile their mission programming with TBTW, some historic sites choose to emphasize fundraising first. Waverly Hills Sanitorium staff run their dark programming to raise money with very little thought given to the history of the site and how it will benefit their dark programming. Similar to Eastern State Penitentiary in the 1970s, Waverly Hills needs extensive renovations. Current estimates are at forty million dollars. It makes sense that the staff would turn to programming to raise capital for the project. However, their dark programming is at odds with their mission statement. Waverly Hills names preservation and restoration of the site as a priority, but also includes education and memorialization of staff and patients of the hospital and the impact illnesses such as tuberculosis

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Kaci Johnson, "Historic Site Dark Programming Questionnaire: Eastern State Penitentiary," (Author's Collection, 16 April 2019).
 <sup>205</sup> Johnson, 16 April 2019.

have on communities in the mission statement.<sup>206</sup> Their paranormal investigations do not support that mission. They serve to sensationalize the dark history of the site, which is a fear of many historians and museum professionals when they hear the term edutainment. Just because an event is occurring at a museum or heritage site does not automatically mean it is inherently educational, and Waverly Hills dark programming proves that it is easy to be swept up in pure entertainment when capital raising programs are successful.

Fort Totten in North Dakota, on the other hand, is not motivated by fundraising for their haunted house tours. The former fort and Native American boarding school charge a minimal \$5 admission for their event.<sup>207</sup> Additionally there is no attempt to portray historic events or information, leaving the event as pure entertainment that does not support their mission or the mission of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, who manages the site. Interestingly, like Eastern State Penitentiary, any information on the haunted house is housed on a separate website with no mention of the programming on their official website. All advertising is done on Facebook, which would suggest that raising awareness of the site to potential visitors outside of the local community is not a priority.

Between ghost tours, paranormal investigations, and haunted houses, ghost tours fit most easily under the edutainment umbrella. The tours blend primary and folkloric research with theatrical components to present the past in new ways. Whether it is recreating historical events, such as those at Bonanzaville, or merely a docent in costume leading the way on a walking tour through the dark aspects of an area's history, ghost tours involve visitors just as much as they educate them. To underscore this point, historic sites and museums can be transparent about their

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> "About Us," Waverly Hills Sanatorium

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> "Haunted Fort Totten," Facebook

process throughout the event. For instance, the marketing can describe the events as based on a folk tale or a specific source. This will let visitors know the origin of the stories before the tour begins. Most ghost tours involve walking. If there is downtime between locations, docents could have the option of discussing various other bits of history of the area that maybe are not necessarily dark, but interesting all the same and could tie back to an exhibit at a museum or a different dayside event. After the tours, museums can provide a list of sources and other historical resources for people who want more information.

# **Memory and Place**

Another fear of edutainment programming is the belief that such programming can alter the memory or meaning of a place. Descendants of the Comstock family feared this happening at their ancestor's home if ghost tours were introduced to the programming schedule. The solution in that case was to drop the tours altogether. Eastern State Penitentiary decided to disassociate their "Terror Behind the Walls" event completely from their dayside tours. The museum serves only as a venue. Waverly Hills takes advantage of the memories and meanings sanitoriums hold in public memory, that of places of suffering, sadness, and loss, and uses that as a drive for their dark programming.

Bonanzaville is in a unique position. The buildings in the village have lost their original context because they have been moved from other places in Cass County. However, they have not necessarily lost their original memory. David Glassberg writes in *Sense of History* that a sense of history provides people with an understanding of where, when, and how of society, as well as a sense of with whom one belongs.<sup>208</sup> An object in its physical space is just as crucial as

<sup>208</sup> David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6-7.

its intellectual meaning. Because the buildings at Bonanzaville have been moved from their original spaces, the meaning visitors derive from them are different than they would be if visitors could get a sense of them in their original spaces. This fact allows Bonanzaville a little leeway in the stories they tell. For example, during the 2018 Ghost Tours, the Wolf family and their tragic murders were a featured story. A neighbor murdered the entire family, except a baby sleeping in a crib. Nine members of the family, plus their stable boy, met their deaths near the barn on their farm. Bonanzaville does not have the original barn, but they do have several barns on site. They recreated the story for their guests by utilizing one of their barns as a backdrop.<sup>209</sup>

Dark programming in museums and historic sites is not a black and white issue. There are many factors that institutions need to consider when deciding whether or not dark programming is a fit for their site. For instance, sites must consider the range of primary sources available to craft an accurate script, the current memory of the physical space, and the way public perception will be affected. While sites like Eastern State Penitentiary and Bonanzaville have successfully navigated these considerations, others like the Comstock House have adapted to find dark programming adjacent programs that work for them. Waverly Hills Sanitorium and Fort Totten have chosen to ignore the impact of their dark programming on their mission to educate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Kaci Johnson, "Bonanzaville Ghost Tours Script: Wolf Family Murders," (Cass County Historical Society, 2018).

# **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The issue of dark programming at historic sites is not a simple case of black and white. There is no right answer as to whether or not staff members should choose to implement it at their sites. The preceding case studies show that there are many considerations to take into account, from mission to stakeholders, when making the decision. But they also show that dark programming can be successful forms of engagement and programming if they are carried out in a deliberate and planned manner. While the issue is a little murkier with paranormal investigations and haunted houses, the case for source-based tours is stronger and should be the first program for historic sites to attempt if they want to implement dark programming.

#### **Future Research**

Future research should consider describing dark programming as a fundraising effort. Currently, there are only broad standards from the American Alliance of Museums on fundraising. It is suggested that the way a museum acquires, manages, and allocates its funding should be legal and ethical and done in a way that advances its mission. Does this mean that fundraising efforts are limited to what is acceptably defined by the mission? Additionally, future research can further explore the difference in using museums and historic sites as rentable venues to create revenue, such as wedding rentals, and defining dark programming as events that use sites as venues.

Another area of future research is museum-sponsored dark programming versus publicsponsored dark programming. Not every ghost tour in a city is put on by a historical society or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> There are best practices and steps that museums can use to get successful results with dark programming. These can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums Press, 2008), 63.

museum. Is it better for museums to get out in front of this and make sure the information going out is as accurate as possible, rather than having tours run by for-profits sensationalizing or spreading information that is false? The public looks to museums and historical societies for accurate information and trusts them to provide it. Is there a responsibility to make sure that these tours, which will happen with or without the approval of the museum, are as close to accurate as possible? Finally, expanding the research beyond five case studies will allow for more information and best practices.

It is possible for museums to both produce sustainable, mission-based programming that educates, and to host entertainment events that may not be sustainable, but have the power to draw in guests. Rather than thinking of those types of programming as edutainment, the word engagement should be used instead. Engagement can then be thought of as events and programming geared toward involving visitors in an experience as much as it is about educating. Since museums evolve constantly, engagement provides a flexible strategy to draw visitors in. They can engage, and educate, and entertain. Eastern State Penitentiary, Bonanzaville, and the Comstock House have seen repeat visitors that were initially attracted through their engagement or entertainment programming. They return for more educational day tours. Perhaps one day, when Waverly Hills opens fully as a museum, their dark programming will do the same.

Museums and historic sites must decide on a case-by-case basis whether to implement dark programming or not. No two museums have the same mission and stakeholders. The scale of the operation and number of visitors can also impact programming decisions and varies greatly depending on the museum. What works for one site might not work for another. This research shows that when sites consider industry ethical standards, their individual mission, place, memory, and stakeholders, dark programming can be successful in both raising awareness

for their site and increasing visitorship and revenue. Ultimately, determining the risks involved in dark programming will help museums determine if the reward is justified.

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# APPENDIX A. HISTORIC SITE QUESTIONNAIRE, BLANK

1. Name and title?
2. Would you classify your event as:
Ghost Tour-Uses historical sources as a way of interpreting the past
Paranormal Investigation-allows groups to investigate and hunt for paranormal activity
Haunted House-Very little by way of historic sources, pure entertainment
Please briefly describe the event:
3. What are the origins of the event and what has been its evolution over time?
4. How often does the event occur?
5. How many visitors does the event draw? Are they local or out-of-towners?
6. How much revenue is received from the event and how is it used by the site?
7. How is the event covered by the press?
8. Does the event have the support of the Board of Directors/governing body?
9. How does the community in general react to the event?
10. Is there any additional information about the event you would like to share about the site

# APPENDIX B. BEST PRACTICES

There are several steps museums can take to ensure their dark programming events are successful while promoting their mission and site. While not all these practices will work for every museum and historic site, adopting even a few will strengthen programming on the whole.

## 1. Listening to stakeholders

Stakeholders in museums are anyone who has an interest in the museum. These can range from staff at the site to community members. With stakeholders comes shared authority, where the interpretation and even programs are a shared responsibility with the audience and museum staff. Listening to the feedback and suggestions of stakeholders ensures the exhibit, program, and the museum as a whole is successful.

In the case of ghost tours and other dark programming, the opinions of stakeholders are incredibly important. In the case of the Comstock House, they reversed their decision to hold ghost tours at their site after stakeholders expressed concern. They instead offered interpretive content on Victorian funeral practices and spiritualism, a compromise showing their willingness to share authority at their site.

Fort Totten Historic Site has numerous stakeholders, from the State Historical Society of North Dakota to the white community members in the area to the Native American community. The Native American community has a long and negative association with the site, from its earliest days as a military fort to its time as an Indian boarding school. This, coupled with the Native American belief in the paranormal, makes the Haunted House at Fort Totten a program that would be best gotten rid of. Fort Totten would do well to listen to their stakeholders.

## 2. Strengthen mission-based programming

Mission-based programming fulfills the requirements of site missions. If a site decides to host dark programming, they need to make sure their mission-based programming is robust. Eastern State Penitentiary makes sure that the guests visiting their Terror Behind the Walls event are exposed to their dayside programming. As guests wait in line, video monitors play ads for dayside tours and other programs the museum offers.

# 3. Separation

Another best practice is to have a separation between the museum and dark programming. Eastern State Penitentiary has a separate website for their Terror Behind the Walls event, as does Fort Totten Historic Site. Along with separate websites, sites should consider having separate social media pages for events. Eastern State Penitentiary also does well in making sure prison guards and inmates have limited portrayals at events and remain sensitive to their site's history. Finally, if the site is prone to questions about being haunted, such as historic houses or places with a tragic history, consider having a standard line for tour guides. When someone asks if a sight is haunted, guides can respond by saying "We're not going to focus on that in this tour, but after the tour if you have specific questions feel free to ask me." It keeps the focus on the history at hand while also acknowledging the request from the visitor.

# 4. Transparency

Museums and historic sites should always be transparent with their stakeholders.

By not being upfront and honest with the public, trust in the organization disappears, which could lead to a loss of donors, members, and accreditation. Sites should make sure the reasons why they are offering dark programming. If the reason is funding, make sure there is a plan in place for the funds, specifically what the funds will go towards. Waverly

Hills Sanitarium is currently raising money for the restoration of their building and their dark programming supports this. In the case of ghost tours, there should be transparency about the resources that are being used to create the tours, such as oral or folk histories. Sites should consider having a list of resources available to visitors.