



Photos by NATALIE BEHRING for the Columbian

Jeff Davis talks about the history, mundane and otherwise, of the old hospital at the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site during a walking tour Sunday. The tour features ghost stories and history about the fort.

Specter of history at fort



Jennifer Braucht, left, reacts to hearing a ghost story during a walking tour of Fort Vancouver on Sunday. The tour, led by local author and sometime ghost hunter Jeff Davis, revolves around the everyday and spooky history of the site.

Spooky weekend leads author to hunt ghosts and folklore

By **ANDY MATARRESE**
Columbian staff writer

Images of Jason, Michael Myers and Freddy Krueger were going through Jeff Davis' mind as he checked each bathroom stall in the old, nearly abandoned military hospital.

Davis, a ghost hunter, got a set of keys and free reign to visit the old hospital at the Vancouver Barracks one weekend in the '90s, after befriending the few soldiers who still worked there at the time.

Davis, an author, historian and sometime ghost hunter, shared the story of his trip inside the closed hospital at the Vancouver Barracks on Sunday, as part of his regular tour of the fort site's haunted history.

The tour stops at several buildings around the barracks, including the old hospital, which, for part of its history, cared for injured soldiers returning from war in the Philippines.

On that first trip to

MORE SPOOKY TALES

Find more of Jeff Davis' collected ghost stories and research into the paranormal, or book a slot on one of his Vancouver barracks ghost tours, at www.ghostsandcritters.com.



Photos by NATALIE BEHRING for the Columbian

Jeff Davis, second from left, leads a walking tour of Fort Vancouver on Sunday. The tour features ghost stories, folklore and history about the fort.

Haunted

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the hospital, Davis and friends brought coolers with snacks and pop and what he jokingly called advanced equipment, a heavy VHS camcorder, to search for the paranormal.

They synchronized their watches with their car, parked outside and went in.

Davis' father was stationed at the Vancouver



A tour guest peers into a hospital window during a walking tour of Fort Vancouver Sunday. The tour centers on ghost stories from the barracks, including the old

stationed at the Vancouver Barracks, and the tour goes by the building where he enlisted at 17, and later, had his office, when he was one of the last Army Reserve officers working at the fort site.

"As far ghost stories go, I've always been interested in the paranormal," Davis said, saying he'd "haunt" the ghost story stacks at the library in the 1970s.

His ghost-related research works similarly to what historians do, he said.

"I start hitting the book stacks and the newspaper back files, and I look for a story that correlates."

He gathers information on hauntings and strange encounters from witnesses as well, and, on occasion, his own experiences.

That weekend at the fort hospital, he had gone to find a women's bathroom on one of the other floors, since it was the only bathroom he knew of in the building.

A good chunk of their time inside the old hospital had so far been spent fiddling with the video camera. It had a new, fully charged battery, he said, but whenever they tried taking it out of the central area and into a patient wing, the battery would die.

Later, after he finally found the bathroom and

on ghost stories from the barracks, including the old hospital.

"This is the life of a ghost hunter," he joked.

The morgue had since been converted into a library, he said, and was locked. They decided to set up camp for the night — as one does when probing for spirits in a dark building where people once practiced late-19th century medicine on men who survived the horrors of war — in the area outside the morgue. He slept on a couch, another on a foam pad and the third on a table.

"An hour or so later, I heard, I woke up to this squeaking noise," he said. The table was rocking.

His friend Brian, eyes huge, turned his head and whispered it wasn't him.

"So we left," he said. They found the time on their watches didn't match one another or the car clock.

Davis is not really into proving or disproving ghost stories. The tours are, in part, a way to kind of sneak in a bit of history, he said.

Davis studied anthropology at Portland State University, got his master's in archaeology in England, and he worked for several years as an archaeologist for the U.S. Forest Service.

he said.

One alleged haunt seems to be connected to a nanny who killed herself after having a child by the master of the house. Another, that of a spectral sentry at the parade grounds, to the nearby guard house, where the encampment meted out its tough discipline.

Finding that background information helps explain what might be going on with those bumps in the night, he said, and it makes for a better story.

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OVER

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LOSE

Later, after he finally found the bathroom and creaked open each stall door, he noticed all the seats were up, which seemed odd for a women's bathroom.

He set the seats down — "I'm trained," he said — and when he told his partners, they figured it had to be the cleaning crew.

But when nature called for one of his friends, he found all the seats had been put back up.

After the three were back together, they headed down to the basement, the site of the morgue, now checking every bathroom and stall they found along the way.

archaeologist for the U.S. Forest Service.

He's also written or contributed to more than a dozen books on military history and the paranormal, including the travel guide "Weird Washington."

"It's kind of an interesting thing: We can get older people who are interested in history, people my age and older, to come down," he said. "Trying to talk to people in their 20s and 30s about history, is a lot

more difficult. But the minute you say, 'Oh it's a ghost walk,' more interest piques."

Understanding the haunts and ghost stories takes historical context,

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