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HOW GHOST STORIES SHAPE THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI AND THE PEOPLE

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the School of Journalism and New Media

The University of Mississippi

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August 2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis project was to see how ghost stories shaped the state of Mississippi and its people. Through research consisting of interviews and articles, it was determined that the effects of the ghost stories were positive depending on location and people. Certain businesses thrived on the ghost stories as they increased tourism and revenue for the people living there. However, people who lived in the towns where the stories were most popular didn't seem interested in the stories.

Many people chose to brush off the stories and, when asked about them, they would skip around the story to talk about the history of a place. Those who embraced the stories were not only knowledgeable about the stories but also the history. They tended to give both sides with equal enthusiasm and seriousness.

Over the years, Mississippians have learned about their neighbors through the stories that they told around the campfire or at sleepovers. These stories have been passed down from one generation to the next and have a way of not only identifying a place, but also a tradition and a person. While some people choose to ignore ghost stories due to religion, others find them fascinating and want to seek out paranormal activity. Why they do that though remains a mystery.

DEDICATION

To my brother Cole, Dru, and Eli. I hope you guys enjoy
these stories as much as I have.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my advisor and chair of my thesis committee, Professor Joseph B. Atkins, for his guidance and support. I would also like to thank Professor Charles D. Mitchell and Dr. Nancy Dupont, member of my thesis committee, for their encouragement and support.

I would like to thank my parents for always being there for me through the good and the bad. They are and will always be my biggest cheerleaders.

Finally, I want to thank Robert Palmer, whose love and support means the world to me. I could not have asked for a better travel buddy to help me investigate these ghost stories.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Mississippi, I was always fascinated by stories. More specifically, ghost stories. I have fond memories of my Uncle Shay gathering all the cousins around a camp fire and telling us the story of Sucky Blue Skin. Sucky was a story concocted by my great grandfather, Papaw Sumrall, to get my mom and uncles to behave. Sucky was a big, hairless animal that would follow you around and eat children that were acting up. She was like a cross between a sasquatch and a chupacabra. She had blue skin; large, sharp teeth; and big, red eyes that glowed at night. When my mom and uncles weren't acting right or wouldn't go to bed, Pawpaw Sumrall would point outside to two glowing red orbs and say, "You see that? That's ol' Sucky! She's a watchin' ya!" As my mom and uncles grew older they found out that those two glowing red eyes they thought were Sucky's eyes were actually lights on an electric fence.

The story stuck and continued to grow. Any time we went camping or were gathered at Nana's, my uncles would build a campfire and we'd all gather around to listen to the legend of Sucky Blue Skin. Uncle Shay was the best story teller and had a way with getting us hooked in the story while my Uncle William and Papaw Dan went into the woods to hook up the red lights that were suppose to be Sucky's eyes. Uncle Shay would then lead us into the woods, where my uncle and grandfather were waiting. As soon as we got closer, Uncle William would turn on the lights and Papaw Dan would start howling. It scared us, but we loved it. Even looked forward to it.

Recently I started thinking back to Sucky, and it made me curious about the ghost stories in Mississippi. How did they start out? What about the stories intrigued people? Why were people going to these places? Were they just as captivated by these stories as my cousins and I were with Sucky Blue Skin? It is with this in mind that I began doing research on four Mississippi ghost stories that I and many others grew up hearing about: the witch of Yazoo, King's Tavern, the ghost of a little girl that haunts Waverly Mansion and Stuckey's Bridge.

Like most Mississippians, I grew up hearing the legend of the witch of Yazoo. This was in part because of Willie Morris' *My Dog Skip* and also because of a trip I took to Yazoo with my aunt, uncle and cousins to see the witch's grave in Glenwood Cemetery. My Uncle John had hired a tour guide who was familiar with the local legend. It was there that we learned that Yazoo City was once the home of a witch that is rumored to have cursed the town in the 1800s. No one really knew who the woman was, just that she lived alone on the Yazoo River and because of that people were suspicious of her.

She was suspected of having killed several fishermen whom she lured from the river. When the sheriff went to arrest her, he and his deputies chased her into a pool of quicksand. As she sunk she swore her revenge on the city of Yazoo. She promised to return in 20 years and burn the town down. No one really thought much about it, but they still placed chains around her grave. The sheriff, in a joking manner, claimed that if she could get out of those chains then she deserved to burn the town down.

On May 25, 1904, twenty years after the witch swore her revenge, the town caught fire and Yazoo City burned to the ground. To this day, the legend of the witch of Yazoo still haunts the town. However, the name of the witch has changed over the generations. According to Dawn

Davis, the communications coordinator for the Yazoo County Convention and Visitors Bureau, people called her the Witch when she was a kid. Now, they call her the Chain Lady.

I remember the first time I visited King's Tavern. I was 12-years-old and was with my mom for a yellow ribbon function. King's Tavern is the oldest structure in the Natchez area. While it isn't exactly known just how old the building is, we do know that it was around in the 1700s. It was named for its original owner, Richard King, who constructed the building into a place where people could stop and rest while traveling the Natchez Trace. Some believe it to have been a brothel, but others say that for many pioneers, it was their last stop.

Many ghosts haunt the building, but there is one ghost that is particularly famous and that is Madeline. She was the mistress of Richard King and she is believed to have been murdered by two men Richard King's wife hired to kill her. No one knew that she had been murdered until three skeletal remains were found in the tavern's fireplace during construction. The remains are believed to be of Madeline and of the men who were hired to kill her. No one knew that she had been murdered until three skeletal remains were found in the tavern's fireplace during construction. The remains are believed to be of Madeline and of the men who were hired to kill her. How they got there, remains a mystery.

The ghost that haunts Waverly Mansion, wasn't something I was familiar with until recently. I had heard about it while visiting family in Columbus and decided to go check it out. What I learned was that Waverly had a unique history. The mansion was built in 1820, by Colonial George Hampton Young for his wife and 10 children. Sadly, the colonial's wife, Lucy, died before the mansion was completed. Colonial Young raised their 10 children alone at

Waverly. During the Civil War, Colonial Young would often open his home to people looking for shelter from the war. So, it wasn't surprising when the family of Dr. William Burt moved in.

Dr. Burt had sent his wife and two daughter to live at Waverly while he was serving at the Battle of Shiloh. Since they had no slaves of their own to help around the house or with the children, Mrs. Burt and her two children took up residence with the Youngs. One morning, while everyone was still asleep, the Burt's youngest daughter, Cynthia, woke up wanting to play. She knew that everyone else was asleep, so she decided to play quietly on the stair case. She was between the second and third floors when she stuck her head between the stair case spindles and found that she was stuck. The little girl died trying to free herself.

Colonial Young died in 1880, two of his sons, Major Val and Captain Billy Young took up residence at Waverly. It was after the death of Billy in 1913 that Waverly became abandoned for many years. Then, in 1962, the Snows bought the property. It took the Snow's two years before they realized that they weren't the only ones living in the house. Mrs. Snow was in one of the upstairs room cleaning when she heard the voice of a child call out " Mama, Mama." The voice was so close that it sounded like someone was standing next to her. But she was the only one in the room. The voice would call out to her daily. Occasionally, in one of the upstairs bedrooms, a small indentation could be seen on one of the beds. Almost like a small child was sleeping. Mrs. Snow had grown accustomed to the child's visits, but then the child called out to her again for the last time.

The ghost of Stuckey's Bridge was another legend that I was familiar with. This was in part because my dad had grown up in Meridian and my mom had grown up in Newton. Both of them knew about the legend and would often tell me about the multiple times they had visited

the bridge in hopes of seeing the ghost of Old Man Stuckey. The legend of Stuckey's Bridge wasn't as popular a tale as Sucky Blue Skin to the family, but it became a close second. The legend goes that, in the late 1800s, Old Man Stuckey would walk across the bridge waving a lantern, luring people to his inn with the promise of a bed and a hot meal. Little did they know that they would never check out of the inn. Then in 1901, while workers were rebuilding the bridge, bodies were discovered on the river banks. The dead bodies were linked to Old Man Stuckey and his bridge, but before the sheriff could get to him the town's people had already caught him. They hung him on the bridge for five days before cutting him down. Now the bridge is said to be haunted, not by Stuckey's victims, but by Old Man Stuckey himself.

I believe William Faulkner said it best when he said, "To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi." Mississippi is a state that is rich in history and culture. Some of it is good (like catfish and sweet tea) and some of it is bad (murders of Civil Rights workers), but in the end one cannot deny the impact history has had on the Magnolia state. It's like it's own little country with its different regions and people. Diane Williams even says in her book *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell* that Mississippians "cannot be identified as one particular culture," and she's right. Mississippians are a unique blend of people. We have our own unique set of traditions and part of that tradition includes telling stories.

In my thesis, I plan to delve further into the history of these stories and other legends and ghost stories that haunt Mississippi's towns. I want to see what it is about them that shapes the region they are in and the people who live in them. I will be interviewing people to see how their perception of the story affects them in their day-to-day lives, if it does. I also want to look at what it is about the stories that keep people coming to the area to investigate. Ghost hunters and

dark tourism will be among the topics I will explore to show the impact these stories have had on communities.

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE GIRL GHOST OF WAVERLY



Figure 1

Waverly Mansion, as seen in Figure 1, is located in West Point Mississippi and was built in 1852 by Colonel George Hampton Young for his wife, Lucy, and 10 children. A native of Oglethorpe County, Georgia, Colonel Young studied law at Franklin College in Georgia and Columbia College in New York. He practiced law in Georgia and served in the state legislature.¹ In 1835, Colonel Young came to Mississippi to attend the land sales in Pontotoc. It was there that

¹ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

he found a piece of land that he really liked and decided to stay.² He purchased fifty thousand acres of land from the Choctaw Indians. The land was situated in a “strategic location place on high ground with good soil,” and was located on the Tombigbee River making it an ideal transshipment point.³



Figure 2

For his home, Colonel Young, who is seen in Figure 2, chose a spot that was a quarter of a mile from the river as the site of his future home. He hired an English architect named Pond to design the house as well as two Irishmen for the ornate plasterwork and a Scotsman to do the marble work and make the mantles.⁴ It took twenty-two years for the house to be built. While the house was being constructed, Colonel Young, his wife and children stayed in a two story log

² Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

³ Adams, W. H. (1980). *Waverly Planation: Ethnoarchaeology of a Tenant Farming Community* (pp. 1-633, Rep. No. ADA127617). Bloomington, IN: RESOURCE ANALYSTS. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a127617.pdf>.

⁴ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

cabin.⁵ During the move from Georgia to Mississippi, Mrs. Young decided to bring some boxwood plants with her as a reminder of the family's ties to Georgia.⁶ As soon as her family moved in to the log cabin, she planted them and looked forward to the beauty that they would provide to landscape of their new home. Unfortunately, Lucy died before the mansion was completed.⁷ Despite the loss, Colonial Young and the children moved into the mansion shortly after its completion. Four of the children took their vows in what is known as the wedding alcove.⁸ All six of the Young boys served as officers in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.⁹ Two of Young's sons, Val Young and William "Captain Billy" Young lived in Waverly after their father's death in 1880. When Val Young died in 1906, that left Captain Billy the owner of the mansion until his death in 1913.¹⁰

The house would be abandoned for 49 years after the death of Billy Young. The house was often used as a place for teenagers to go and hang out or throw parties.¹¹ Campers, hunters, and fishermen would often use the place as a stopping point.¹² The house remain abandoned until Robert and Donna Snow came upon the house after hearing about it from a stranger who walked

⁵Adams, W. H. (1980). *Waverly Planation: Ethnoarchaeology of a Tenant Farming Community* (pp. 1-633, Rep. No. ADA127617). Bloomington, IN: RESOURCE ANALYSTS. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a127617.pdf>.

⁶ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Tour of Waverly Mansion [Personal interview]. (2019, January 17).

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

into their antique shop in Philadelphia.¹³ The Snow's fell in love with the house and decided to buy it.¹⁴ The Snows moved in to Waverly on May 31, 1962. Their move was hurried due to news of the house's purchase peeking the curiosity of locals.¹⁵ As soon as they moved in, the Snows knew that they had some work to do on the old house. Vines of honeysuckle had snaked up all over the house. There were branches poking through broken windows and a few faded green shutters were dangling while others were scattered on the ground. The Snows had to hack their way to the rotting front porch where they found steps missing and the front door wedged ajar. Things didn't look much better on the inside either. Carpeting the floor was a mat of moldy leaves, branches and human waste. The house was infested with possums, squirrels, birds, bats and insects.¹⁶ Figure 3 shows what Waverly looks like today after reconstruction.



Figure 3

¹³ Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

¹⁴ Tour of Waverly Mansion [Personal interview]. (2019, January 17).

¹⁵ Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

¹⁶ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

Despite what was left of the mansion, the Snows immediately got to work on restoring the house to its former glory. The family, consisting of Robert, Donna and their children slept on mattresses on the dining room floor until it was safe for them to sleep in the bedrooms upstairs.¹⁷ That's when they noticed that there was more to Waverly than what meets the eye.

The Snow's first week in the house was met by what sounded like an explosion in the middle of the night. Thinking something terrible had happened, the Snows searched the house but found nothing out of the ordinary. A few nights later, the same exploding sound would awaken them again. A search of the house, once again, yielded no evidence of an explosion. The sounds of an explosion would happen frequently over the next few months. Eventually, Donna, Robert and their children became accustomed to the sound and would just fall right back to sleep. After a few months of the Snows being in the house the noises stopped all together.¹⁸ The Snows thought that was the end of the strange happenings in their house. Little did they know that they would soon come in contact with Waverly's most famous ghost: a little girl.

The ghost of the little girl was first discovered by Donna Snow just two years after she and her husband, Robert, moved in. The Snows were repairing the house. Donna was in one of the upstairs bedrooms when she heard a voice say, "Mama, Mama."¹⁹ According to Donna, there

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

¹⁹ Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

was no warm air or bright lights and the voice did not seem to be in distress.²⁰ The voice sounded so sweet and angelic that at first she thought it might have been a bird chirping, but then the voice began calling out to her once a day. It didn't happen at any particular time or in any certain part of the house, but it did seem to be particularly drawn to Donna.²¹ In addition to hearing the voice daily, Donna also began seeing the ghost. In the same bedroom where she first heard the child's voice, Donna began to see an indentation on the bed as if the ghost child was taking an afternoon nap.²² The child would take naps there in the early afternoon and would be gone around 4:30 that afternoon.²³

Having heard the sweet little voice of the girl for years, Donna was in shock when in 1974 the girl made one final attempt at communicating with her. She was in the kitchen when she heard the little girl scream out "Mama, Mama!" This was a shock for Donna who had only ever heard the sweet call of the little girl. Donna at one point claimed that the voice was so close that she thought the ghost would "reach up and grab my apron."²⁴ Because the voice sounded so

²⁰ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

²¹ Ibid

²² Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

²³ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

²⁴ Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

distressed, Donna asked if she could help. But then the voice stopped. Since that day, Donna hasn't heard the voice or seen the little girl taking a nap on the bed again.²⁵

After the child stopped trying to communicate with her, Donna often wondered who the little girl was and what had happened to her. Previously, Donna and her husband, Robert, had done some research on Waverly after hearing stories from locals about Waverly and its past occupants.²⁶ Many people would tell about hearing music, laughter, and people dancing in the house when it was deserted and some even said that they had seen peoples faces in the mirrors.²⁷ Hearing other peoples' accounts of the ghosts that haunt Waverly made the Snows curious enough to dig in to old records of Waverly. They had even managed to find out who some of the ghosts were.²⁸

With the help of her husband, Donna began to search for information about the child and how she came to haunt Waverly. Her efforts came to fruition in 1997 when records revealed that the child was related to a physician by the name of Dr. William Burt (Brown, 2016).²⁹ It is unclear how the girl is related to Dr. Burt as different sources have differing opinions. Alan Brown writes in his book that the little girl was Dr. Burt's four-year-old daughter who had come

²⁵ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

to Waverly with her mother and older sister.³⁰ James “Jimmy” Denning Jr., who is a tour guide at Waverly, claims that the girl is Cynthia, the 18-month-old granddaughter of Dr. Burt.³¹ Denning says that Dr. Burt’s daughter and three grandchildren came to Waverly to escape the Civil War while he and his daughter’s husband, Dr. John Hampton Young, were away at war. Kathryn Tucker Windham reveals in her book, *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey*, a similar story. She writes that the child is “one of the Young grandchildren who returned to Waverly with her mother to spend the War years there.”³² Windham also mentions that during the war, Colonel Young would often invite people seeking refuge to stay at his house, so the girl could have been a child that came with her family to escape the war.³³

Regardless of who the child was, many agree that the little girl died of a broken neck, somewhere around the second and third floor. There is some speculation on how she managed to break her neck, though. Some believe that she woke up one morning while everyone else was asleep.³⁴ She was playing on the stairs leading from the second and third floor, when she got her head stuck between the spindles of the stair case. The little girl tried to free herself but in the process of so doing she broke her neck. By the time the girl’s mother had awoken, the girl had died. Others believe a different tale. According to Denning, the little girl got up in the middle of

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Tour of Waverly Mansion [Personal interview]. (2019, January 17).

³² Windham, Kathryn Tucker. *Thirteen Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey : Commemorative Edition*, University of Alabama Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=4312168>.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Brown, A. (2016). *Ghosts of Mississippi's Golden Triangle* (Haunted America). Charleston, SC: The History Press.

the night, probably to find her mother.³⁵ As she was making her way downstairs, she tumbled down and broke her neck in the process.

³⁵ Tour of Waverly Mansion [Personal interview]. (2019, January 17).

CHAPTER III
KING'S TAVERN



Figure 4

Natchez, Mississippi, is well known for its historical past. It was the location for plantation owners to build their town homes as well as the site of the marketplace for people to purchase slaves.³⁶ Natchez is also the end or beginning location of the Natchez Trace, a trade route carved by the footprints of Native Americans between the southern and central areas of the continent.³⁷ Near the entrance of the Trace, on 613 Jefferson Street, sits the oldest building in

³⁶ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

³⁷ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

Natchez: the King's Tavern, seen in Figure 4.³⁸ No one knows just how old the building is, but it was around during the late 1700s.³⁹ Back then Natchez was a rough and tumble town. The Trace was infested with robbers and highwaymen waiting on travelers to cross their paths so they could rob them of all their money and possessions. People traveling the Natchez Trace would band



Figure 5

together at the King's Tavern, known then as the Post House, to stop and rest during their travels.⁴⁰ King's Tavern stands at three stories high and is constructed out of scrap from sailing ships and the boards from flat riverboats.⁴¹

King's Tavern isn't like any other restaurants in Natchez. For one thing, everything is done from scratch, and they don't use a fryer to cook their food. Instead, they do it all in a wood-burning brick oven.⁴² The interior of the restaurant looks exactly like what one would imagine a tavern to look like in the 1700s. The main floor is dimly lit and bare except for a few wooden tables which are shown in Figure 5, a bar towards the entrance and the fireplace. On the tables are plates and silver-ware at the far end, with three little spice bowls and a small candle in the center. On the second floor is a little gift

³⁸ Miller, M. (1986). Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Retrieved from <http://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=222&view=facts&y=728>

³⁹ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

⁴⁰ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁴¹ Walser, L. (2017, January 12). King's Tavern in Natchez, Mississippi | *National Trust for Historic Preservation*. Retrieved from <https://savingplaces.org/stories/kings-tavern-in-natchez-mississippi#.XN2oPy-ZNdg>

⁴² Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

shop where you can purchase a variety of Mississippi-made products as well as bottles of Charboneau rum, which are made in the building next to the restaurant by co-owner, Doug Charboneau. The third floor is small, with two rooms on either side of the hallway. In the 1700s, they were often rented out to travelers looking for a place to rest.⁴³ Today they are a gateway to the supernatural. King's Tavern is said to be haunted by several different ghosts. The most popular of these ghosts is a young woman named Madeline.

The story of Madeline is tricky at best. There are many different versions of the tale. The gist of the legend is that Madeline was hired to work at King's Tavern as a barmaid. She would then go on to have an affair with the owner. There is some speculation over who the owner of the Post House was at that time. According to Diane Williams, who is the author of the book *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell*, the owner was a man by the name of Richard King.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Barbara Sillery, the author of *The Haunting of Mississippi*, believes that the owner was Richard King's brother, Prosper King.⁴⁵ A look into the Mississippi Department of Archives and History revealed that it is more likely the owner of King's Tavern at the time of Madeline's employment was Richard King.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁴⁴ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

⁴⁵ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁴⁶ Miller, M. (1986). Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Retrieved from <http://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=222&view=facts&y=728>

Richard King bought the property from his brother in 1798 for a total of fifty dollars and turned it into a public house.⁴⁷ He hired Madeline to work as a barmaid and have an affair with her. When King's wife found out about it she devised a plan to end the affair once and for all. It is believed that Mrs. King might have been the one to kill Madeline.⁴⁸ However, there is also the belief that she might have hired two killers to do the job for her.⁴⁹

According to Ricky Woolfolk, the current manager and bartender at the King's Tavern, this theory makes more sense because in 1932 three skeletal remains were found in the the building's fireplace wall (seen in Figure 6).⁵⁰ The skeletons were found while construction workers were remodeling the property.

They were in the process of ripping out a wall when they discovered the remains of two men and one woman.⁵¹ In addition to the skeletons, they also found a jeweled dagger stuck in the woman's side.⁵² According to an article in the *Natchez Democrat*, the dagger is made of brass, with an ivory handle and is believed to be of Spanish origin.⁵³ The identities of the two



Figure 6

⁴⁷ Miller, M. (1986). Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Retrieved from <http://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=222&view=facts&y=728>

⁴⁸ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁵¹ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

⁵² Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁵³ "Spanish Dagger Back." (1977, March 13). *Natchez Democrat*. Retrieved May 30, 2019.

men remain unknown, but the woman is believed to be Madeline.⁵⁴

“They think that what happened was that the two men were able to kill Madeline,” Woolfolk says. “Richard King caught and then killed the two men. Rather than try to explain why you have three dead bodies in your tavern, he decided to just brick them into the wall and he didn’t have to tell anybody.”

More ghosts may haunt the King’s Tavern. There have been reports of a baby crying, images appearing in mirrors and “unseen forces” pushing customers and pulling their hair.⁵⁵ Some attribute these experiences to the violent acts of the Harpe Brothers, Micajah “Big” Harpe and Wiley “Little” Harpe. The Harpe Brothers were the most feared and brutal of the highwaymen along the Natchez Trace.⁵⁶ They delighted in torturing and mutilating their victims before they killed them. Often times, they would rob people and take the stolen money to spend at the King’s Tavern.⁵⁷

On one of the occasions they happened to be at the inn, Big Harpe was in the tack room when a woman, holding a crying baby against her chest, walked in to check her mail.⁵⁸ Big Harpe wasn’t exactly the fatherly type. He was known to have killed a few children and had even

⁵⁴ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁵⁵ Walser, L. (2017, January 12). King's Tavern in Natchez, Mississippi | *National Trust for Historic Preservation*. Retrieved from <https://savingplaces.org/stories/kings-tavern-in-natchez-mississippi#.XN2oPy-ZNdg>

⁵⁶ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁵⁷ Gibson, L. (2017, January 27). Haunted History-The King's Tavern [Web log post]. Retrieved May 22, 2019, from <https://authorlyngibson.wordpress.com/2017/01/27/haunted-history-the-kings-tavern/>

⁵⁸ Ibid

strangled one of his own babies for crying.⁵⁹ He allegedly became so irritated by the crying infant that he would grab it by its legs and whack the child's head on the wall until it died.⁶⁰

King's Tavern would go from a combination tavern and inn to a home for the Postlethwaites family in 1823. Different generations lived there for 150 years until the last of the Postlethwaite family moved out by the 1970s. In 1974, the Natchez Garden Club banded together to restore the building to its original structure.⁶¹ The restoration was such a success that that the building got a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.⁶²

After the restoration, the question of who wanted to own the building was brought up. None of the ladies in the Natchez Garden Club were interested in owning a tavern or an inn. Only one person was interested in owning and operating the tavern and that was Yvonne Scott. Scott was an assistant teacher in special education for South Natchez-Adams High School⁶³ who had a deep seated fascination of the building and the story of Madeline. She bought the tavern from the Natchez Garden Club in 1987 and opened King's Tavern, named after the original owner Richard King, to the public the following year. was the one who opened the King's Tavern as a restaurant.

⁵⁹ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Miller, M. (1986). Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Retrieved from <http://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=222&view=facts&y=728>

⁶² Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁶³“Ruth Yvonne Scott Bean Obituary.” (2011, June 3). *Mississippi's Best Community Newspaper*. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from <https://m.natchezdemocrat.com/2011/06/03/ruth-yvonne-scott-bean/>

Scott was so intrigued with the story of Madeline she decided she wanted a portrait of her to hang in the main dining room, just over the fireplace where she was found. While there was no way of knowing who Madeline was or what she had looked like, Scott had a vision in her head and began the search for a portrait. She eventually found one at a local thrift shop. The portrait is of a young girl, maybe 15 or 16-years-old, who looked “Spanish with dark alluring eyes and hair.”⁶⁴ Determined that the girl in the portrait was Madeline, Scott bargained for the portrait and bought it for fifteen dollars.

When illness began to overtake her, Scott sold the restaurant to Tom Miller and his partner, Shawyn Mars, in 2005. She was originally going to take the portrait of Madeline with her but Tom convinced her that “she belongs” at the King’s Tavern.⁶⁵ Yvonne Scott passed away six years later on June 1, 2011.⁶⁶

Tom Miller and his partner found that the decision to keep Madeline in the dining room was good for business. A lot of people coming to dine at the restaurant were drawn to the portrait. One customer in particular seemed to be very interested in the portrait. According to a quote by Miller in Sillery’s book, this customer claimed that the picture was “a copy of a very famous picture” called *The Alluring Madeline*.⁶⁷ Miller went on to tell this customer that

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ “Ruth Yvonne Scott Bean Obituary.” (2011, June 3). *Mississippi's Best Community Newspaper*. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from <https://m.natchezdemocrat.com/2011/06/03/ruth-yvonne-scott-bean/>

⁶⁷ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

Madeline is one of their ghosts, but the customer didn't know who she was. All he could tell him was that the picture was called *The Alluring Madeline*.

After seven years of being in business, Miller and his partner closed down the King's Tavern. The economy had been hitting them hard and to make matters worse Miller was having heart problems.⁶⁸ They filed for bankruptcy in September 2012 in the hopes of keeping the restaurant open⁶⁹ but Concordia Bank ended up taking possession of the restaurant.⁷⁰ Tom Miller passed away in Metairie, Louisiana on August 14, 2012.⁷¹ The following year, King's Tavern would find its doors opening again, when Chef Regina Charboneau and her husband, Doug, bought it.

Chef Charboneau was born and raised in Natchez. She left home in the 1970s to take a job in rural Alaska as a camp cook for a construction site.⁷² She wanted to earn enough money to attend culinary school in Paris. By the 1980s, she had become a key figure in the American food scene, especially in California. In 1985, Charboneau opened Regina's at the Regis which is in the

⁶⁸ Lane, E. (2012, February 26). "King's Tavern Closes Its Doors." *Mississippi's Best Community Newspaper*. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from <https://m.natchezdemocrat.com/2012/02/26/king's-tavern-closes-its-doors/>

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁷¹ "Thomas Edward Miller Obituary." (2012, August 16). *Mississippi's Best Community Newspaper*. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from <https://m.natchezdemocrat.com/2012/08/16/thomas-edward-miller/>

⁷² Severson, K. (2014, November 11). "How to Dazzle Without the Frazzle." *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/dining/thanksgiving-dinner-recipes-and-tips-from-regina-charboneau.html?_r=0

heart of San Francisco's theater district.⁷³ She would then go on to open Biscuits and Blues, a block away from Regina's, in the 1990s.⁷⁴ It wasn't until 2001, after her dad died, that Charboneau returned to Natchez to spend time with her mom.⁷⁵ Originally, she was going to stay in Natchez for six months. Six months soon turned into a year until Charboneau and her husband Doug started looking for house to raise their two sons.⁷⁶

In 2013, Regina and Doug Charboneau purchased the King's Tavern from Concordia Bank. Originally, they were searching for a building to house Doug's rum distillery. From the way Regina tells it, Doug and their son Jean-Luc both wanted to open a rum distillery in Natchez. While he was out searching for possible locations, Doug came across the perfect building that was right next to Natchez's oldest building. There was just one problem, in order to get the building he wanted, Doug needed to purchase the entire property and that included King's Tavern.⁷⁷

Doug immediately went to his wife and said, "Come on get in the car. I got a great building for you."

At the time, Regina was already the proud owner of a bed and breakfast and a restaurant, and she was also the culinary director of a steamboat called the American Queen, which floated

⁷³ Chef Regina Charboneau. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2019, from <http://www.twinoaksnatchez.com/chef-regina-charboneau.html>

⁷⁴ Severson, K. (2014, November 11). "How to Dazzle Without the Frazzle." *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/dining/thanksgiving-dinner-recipes-and-tips-from-regina-charboneau.html?_r=0

⁷⁵ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁷⁶ Chef Regina Charboneau. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2019, from <http://www.twinoaksnatchez.com/chef-regina-charboneau.html>

⁷⁷ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

along the Mississippi River.⁷⁸ She told him, “I’m not looking for a building,” but eventually she got in the car with Doug and they drove to the location. As soon as she saw the building she fell in love. Regina and Doug closed on the property in April of that year and by September there two businesses were operational.⁷⁹

“I always say I have the curse of vision,” she says. “[Immediately] I saw what I thought would be a great restaurant there.”

Being a Natchez native Regina is no stranger to the stories and ghosts that are said to haunt the King’s Tavern. Her family had been there for seven generations. She knew the place well, but she didn’t believe in ghosts or the supernatural. She never figured that the building she just bought was actually haunted. In fact, she claims to not be a “woo-woo person.”⁸⁰ Her beliefs soon changed after she became witness to some of the supernatural in the building herself.

One of the instances happened during reconstruction of the building. Regina, a friend of hers, and two other people were in the building around two o’clock in the afternoon. They were standing around going over construction details when out of no where they catch a glimpse of someone walking through the room. No one knew what they had just seen.⁸¹ Another instance involved Regina being locked in the bathroom upstairs while she was cleaning.⁸² Upon realizing she was locked in the bathroom, Regina began shouting for someone to let her out. Luckily,

⁷⁸ King’s Tavern Natchez (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2019, from <http://www.kingstavernnatchez.com/aboutus.html>

⁷⁹ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁸⁰ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

Ricky Woolfolk, the manager and bartender of King’s Tavern, was there to hear her shouts and let her out.

“I was on the second floor with my computer when the door closed and locked,” he says. “She wasn’t able to get out. You have to have a key to either lock or unlock it. I just happened to be there with my keys. She was up there screaming so I went up and unlocked the door. It was the weirdest thing.”⁸³

This wasn’t the first time the bathroom door closed and locked itself. Apparently, two other women had been locked in the bathroom as well.⁸⁴ There have also been accounts of doors

opening and closing, electronics becoming unplugged, lights coming unscrewed, and even the ice machine has come unplugged seemingly on its own.⁸⁵ Other manifestations have occurred in the King’s Tavern over the years. There have been reports of “the sound of a creaking door” and “feeling a cold draft.”⁸⁶

In the book *The Haunting of Mississippi* by Barbara Sillery, Tom Miller, a previous owner of King’s Tavern, insists that these “pranks” are



Figure 7

⁸³ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

⁸⁶ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

from Madeline. He claims that there was a chain in the back of the restaurant that would sometimes “swing back and forth” on its own and that water would pour from the ceiling enough there weren’t any pipes in that part of the ceiling.⁸⁷ There have even been reports of people hearing what sounds like a woman’s hoop skirt hitting the steps as if someone is descending down the staircase.⁸⁸ *The Enquirer* published an article, as seen in Figure, that claims people have seen the ghost of Madeline. One of the bedrooms upstairs seems to be a hotspot for supernatural activity as there have been reports of people being tapped on the shoulder and women having their hair tugged by an unknown force.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

⁸⁸ Bell, S. (1977, June 12). “Ghosts, they say, are at King's Tavern.” *Natchez Democrat*. Retrieved May 30, 2019.

⁸⁹ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company.

CHAPTER IV

THE WITCH OF YAZOO CITY

Yazoo City native, Willie Morris' book *Good Old Boy* describes his hometown as “a lazy town, all stretched out on its hills and its flat streets” and as “a dreamy place, always green and lush except for the four cold months at the beginning and end of each year.”⁹⁰ Another book by Morris *My Dog Skip*, reveals that while he was growing up in Yazoo City there was something in the air that was “spooked-up and romantic”⁹¹ and it “did funny things to the imagination”⁹² especially at night when the town was “full of noises and lost ghosts.”⁹³

Yazoo City is like most small towns in the South, has its share of legends. There's the story of the giant Indians who were buried in the Indian mounds which was leveled to build the town, Casey Jones crashing into a freight train, and the Yankees in a gunboat that sunk in the River during the Civil War.⁹⁴ The most famous of these legends is the witch of Yazoo City.

The story goes that there was a mean and ugly woman who lived alone near the banks of the Yazoo River. The people of Yazoo City didn't know her, yet they hated her. Somehow word got around that her hobby was to go out on stormy nights and lure fishermen into her house and

⁹⁰ Morris, W. (1995). *My Dog Skip* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Vintage Books.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Morris, W. (1980). *Good Old Boy*. Oxford, MI: Yoknapatawpha Press.

⁹⁴ Ibid

poison them with arsenic. She would then bury them on “a densely wooded hill” nearby.⁹⁵ Many people suspected her of committing these crimes, but were unable to prove it.

This remained the case until one late afternoon a boy by the name of Joe Bob Duggett caught her in the act. He was passing by her house on a raft when he heard “a terrible, ungodly moan.”⁹⁶ Curious, he tied his raft to a nearby tree and ran to the house. When he looked through the window he found two men, stretched out dead on the floor and the woman with her face up to the ceiling, singing a “dreadful incantation” and waving her arms in demented circles.⁹⁷

Terrified the boy ran back to his raft and floated back into town to tell the sheriff and his men about what he had seen. They immediately got a horse and buggy before speeding to the old woman’s house. They searched the house but couldn’t find the old woman or the two men.⁹⁸

From the backyard, they heard the sounds of footsteps and a look outside revealed the old woman trying to sneak away to the swamps.

The sheriff shouted, “Stop in the name of the law!” But the old woman took off into the swamps.

The sheriff and his men followed her for miles until she managed to trap herself in a patch of quicksand. The woman was seconds away from going completely under when she shouted, “I shall return. Everybody always hated me here. I will break out of my grave and burn

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

down the whole town on the morning of May 25, 1904!” With those last words, she sunk to her death.⁹⁹



Figure 8

The authorities were able to retrieve the witch’s body with the help of pitchforks and some long tree limbs. They buried her the next day in the center of the town cemetery in a cluster of trees and bushes. When they buried her they put the heaviest chains, such as the ones shown in Figure 8, they could find around her grave. The sheriff made the comment of “if she can break out of those chains then she deserves to burn down the town.”¹⁰⁰

Twenty years later, on the morning of May 25, 1904, Yazoo City caught on fire. The fire originated in the home of H. Wise on Mound Street.¹⁰¹ Miss Pauline Wise was planning her wedding. She entered her parlor to show her visitor some gifts when she discovered a small blaze. It is believe that the fire started with the Wise son, Willie, playing with matches.¹⁰² A

⁹⁹ “Devil’s Playground” [Television series episode]. (2018, October 14). In *Most Terrifying Places in America*. Travel Channel.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Morris, W. (1996). *A Pictorial History of Yazoo County*. Yazoo, MS: Heritage House Publication.

¹⁰² Ibid

strong wind, which was unusual due to there being no reports of high winds in the forecast, suddenly spread the fire to the adjoining house.¹⁰³ The fire spread from Main Street to all intersecting streets and soon reached the residential sections.¹⁰⁴ The fire consumed 324 buildings, over 200 residences, and almost every business and church.¹⁰⁵ Miraculously, no one was killed in the fire.¹⁰⁶ The next day, once the flames had died down, a group of citizens made their way into Glenwood Cemetery. The large chains around the grave had been broken in two.¹⁰⁷ A year after the fire consumed the town, the downtown district was restored.¹⁰⁸

Over the years, the story of the witch has grown to be a popular tale among the people of Yazoo City and even those who are not from Yazoo County. This is in part due to the publication of the two books by Willie Morris, *Good Old Boy* and *My Dog Skip*. *Good Old Boy* relates the adventures of Morris and his friends while growing up in Yazoo City. The story of the witch is brought up in the opening of the book as a way of illustrating the effect the legend has on the children of Yazoo City. *My Dog Skip* is more of a memoir of Morris' dog Skip but it also tells about the adventures Morris and Skip, who the book is named after, had growing up in the town of Yazoo. *My Dog Skip* tells of Morris as a young boy and his dog Skip going out to her grave

¹⁰³ Interview with Dawn Davis [Personal interview]. (2019, March 1).

¹⁰⁴ Morris, W. (1980). *Good Old Boy*. Oxford, MI: Yoknapatawpha Press.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Dawn Davis [Personal interview]. (2019, March 1).

¹⁰⁶ Morris, W. (1996). *A Pictorial History of Yazoo County*. Yazoo, MS: Heritage House Publication.

¹⁰⁷ CVB, Y.C. (2013, November 26). The Legend of the Witch of Yazoo. Retrieved February 4, 2019, from <http://visityazoo.org/witch-of-yazoo/>

¹⁰⁸ Morris, W. (1996). *A Pictorial History of Yazoo County*. Yazoo, MS: Heritage House Publication.

one night on a dare. The two of them had to spend the night at the cemetery next to the witch's grave. In exchange, Morris would receive \$8.50.¹⁰⁹

Many have stipulated over the years about the identity of the witch. The original stone on the grave just had the letters T.W. engraved in the stone, leaving people to assume the letters stood for "The Witch." A look into the records provided no help in finding out the identity of the witch. This is in part due to the records being burned in the 1904 fire.¹¹⁰ Some even believe that a man is buried in the plot, not a woman.¹¹¹



Figure 9



Figure 10

Today, the witch's grave sits in the middle of the historic section of Glenwood Cemetery and is thirteen paces to the left of Willie Morris' grave seen in Figure 9. The grave is marked by a tombstone that looks like it was knocked over and broken in the process as seen in Figure 10.

¹⁰⁹ Morris, W. (1995). *My Dog Skip* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Vintage Books.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Dawn Davis [Personal interview]. (2019, March 1).

¹¹¹ Apel, T. (2014, October 28). "The Witch of Yazoo still haunts the town she burned." *The Clarion Ledger*. Retrieved February 4, 2019, from <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2014/10/28/witch-yazoo-still-haunts-town-burned/18093723/>

Inscribed on the tombstone are the details of the 1904 fire that is believed to be caused by the witch. Many people come to visit the grave and will often leave trinkets much like the ones found on Madame Lalaurie's tomb in New Orleans. Some of these offers include coins, beads, little figurines and bells as seen in Figure 11. True to tale, the grave is surrounded by chains. Some look to have been placed there years prior, though probably not the ones placed there in 1884, while others look to be much newer.



Figure 11

While there is some uncertainty of there being an actual witch buried in the cemetery, the legend remains very much alive.

“We don’t like to say that the witch is our biggest seller,” says Dawn Davis, the Communications Coordinator at the Yazoo County Convention and Visitors Bureau. “But to a large degree she is. There’s a page on our website dedicated to the witch. The witch is the number one page that gets year round traffic other than the fair. People love it.”¹¹²

¹¹² Interview with Dawn Davis [Personal interview]. (2019, March 1).

CHAPTER V

THE LEGEND OF STUCKEY'S BRIDGE

In Enterprise, Mississippi, a little outside of Meridian in Lauderdale County, there is a bridge that crosses the Chunky River. To any passerby it just looks like an ordinary bridge, a little old and in need of a repair but still durable enough for someone to walk across. To the locals, though, there's a dark and sinister force that haunts the bridge at night and his name is Old Man Stuckey.

The true identity of Stuckey is unknown. Rumor has it that he was once a member of the notorious Dalton Gang but he was so evil he got kicked out.¹¹³ Whether or not he was kicked out before or after the 1892 raid in Coffeyville, Kansas remains a mystery. According to William Robbins, a writer for *The New York Times*, "the [Dalton] gang rode into town six strong that sunny morning in 1892."¹¹⁴ The Dalton gang were going to cement their names in history by robbing two banks simultaneously.¹¹⁵

Wearing fake beards and wigs, the gang members divided up. Bob and Emmett Dalton went to First National Bank. Grat Dalton, Bill Powers, and Dick Broadwell went to C.M. Codon & Company Bank. If the rumors of a sixth member of the gang are true, then that may have left

¹¹³ Jacob, J. (2007, October 28). "The hanging man at Stuckey's Bridge." *Meridian Star*. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from https://www.meridianstar.com/news/local_news/the-hanging-man-at-stuckey-s-bridge/article_ad3288c7-dd80-5e53-ba83-25c02a1236a0.html

¹¹⁴ Smithwick, N. (2017, April 3). "The Dalton Gang Won't Ride Again: The Coffeyville Raid of 1892." Retrieved May 29, 2019, from <https://stmuhistorymedia.org/the-coffeyville-raid/>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

Stuckey guarding the horses in an alley. Little did they know that some of the towns people had recognized the gang as they rode into town—the Dalton brothers had once lived in Coffeyville—and began to arm themselves with weapons in anticipation of a fight.¹¹⁶

While all of this was going on, Grat, Bill and Dick found themselves hitting a snag in their attempts at robbing Codon Bank. The cashier told them that the bank’s safe was locked and would not open until 9:30 a.m. This was an attempt to stall the robbers while the citizens of Coffeyville armed themselves.¹¹⁷ Bob and Emmett on the other hand had managed to fill up their sacks with money and were just about to walk out of the front entrance of First National Bank when the firing of guns could be heard coming from Codon Bank.

In their haste to get away, the gang began shooting. They managed to kill four citizens; Lucius Baldwin, Charles Brown, George Cubine and City Marshall Charles Connelly.¹¹⁸ By the end of the raid all five of the gang members were shot, but only one, Emmett Dalton, would survive.¹¹⁹ As for the sixth member, possibly, he managed to get away on one of the horses

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Robbins, W. (1992, October 5). “Coffeyville Journal; Gunfight Defines a Town and a Family.” *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/05/us/coffeyville-journal-gunfight-defines-a-town-and-a-family.html>

¹¹⁹ Smithwick, N. (2017, April 3). “The Dalton Gang Won't Ride Again: The Coffeyville Raid of 1892.” Retrieved May 29, 2019, from <https://stmuhistorymedia.org/the-coffeyville-raid/>.

during the shootout.¹²⁰ If this truly was Stuckey, then he would later manage to find himself in Lauderdale County where he would open an inn along the Chunky River.¹²¹



Figure 12

In the 1890s, the Chunky River was part of a stagecoach route, as seen in Figures 12 and 13. The people traveling this route were usually vendors transporting goods and produce to the Gulf.¹²² Old Man Stuckey's decision to open an inn came after he took notice of all the people traveling the route. At night he

would pace the nearby bridge, waving a lantern, and offer travelers a hot meal and a soft bed.¹²³ Legend had it that those who Stuckey up on his offer would find themselves checking in but never checking out. As soon as they had gone to sleep, Stuckey would rob them of their valuables, kill them, and then bury them along the banks of the Chunky River.¹²⁴



Figure 13

It is rumored that Stuckey had a partner to help him with the killings and the disposing of the bodies. Wayne Smith, the owner of Stuckey Bridge Canoe

¹²⁰ Crane, L. (2013). *The Legend of Stuckey's Bridge*. Lori Crane Entertainment.

¹²¹ Crane, L. (2018, February 24). Stuckey's Bridge on the Travel Channel [Web log post]. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <https://loricrane.wordpress.com/2018/02/24/stuckeys-bridge-on-the-travel-channel/>

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Interview with Wayne and Pearl Smith [Personal interview]. (2019, March 13).

Rental, lives within walking distance of the bridge. Smith claims that Stuckey had a slave who worked for him.¹²⁵ “When the posse hung Stuckey, they also got his slave and hung him too,” says Smith. In her book, *The Legend of Stuckey’s Bridge*, Lori Crane writes that a boy by the name of Levi not only lived with Stuckey but would help him lure people to his inn.¹²⁶ In her blog, Crane says she “didn’t want Old Man Stuckey to be alone all the time so I had him run across a young boy named Levi.”¹²⁷ The character of Levi was made up but he would dramatically shift in the book and would only get worse in the sequel, *Stuckey’s Legacy: The Legend Continues*.

The Virginia Bridge and Iron Company was in the process of rebuilding the bridge when they discovered the bodies in 1901. The people of Meridian suspected that the creepy old man with the inn was responsible for the bodies being there. They immediately rounded up a posse to find Old Man Stuckey and bring him to justice. When they found him they took him down to the bridge where they tied a noose around his neck, and hung him from the iron rails of the bridge without a trial.¹²⁸ They left his body hanging on the bridge for five days until the sheriff cut him down. Once the rope was cut, Stuckey’s body fell into the river with a splash.

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Crane, L. (2013). *The Legend of Stuckey's Bridge*. Lori Crane Entertainment.

¹²⁷ Crane, L. (2016, March 14). Backstory of "Stuckey's Bridge" [Web log post]. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <https://loricrane.wordpress.com/2016/03/14/backstory-of-stuckeys-bridge/>

¹²⁸ Crane, L. (2018, February 24). Stuckey's Bridge on the Travel Channel [Web log post]. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <https://loricrane.wordpress.com/2018/02/24/stuckeys-bridge-on-the-travel-channel/>



Figure 14

People claim that they can sometimes hear the splashing of someone falling into the river when they walk across the bridge at night. David Childers, the founder of the Mississippi Paranormal Research Institute in Vicksburg, is one of such people. He was out with his friend, Gene Hamil, one night on Halloween filming a webisode for their website.¹²⁹ “We go out there and started investigating and we heard some weird stuff,” says Childers. “We heard splashing in the creek below us and it wasn’t fish. I know

what fish sound like. I’m a country boy. I was raised in the woods. But it was like somebody dropped something in the water.”¹³⁰

People have also witnessed ghost encounters. In an article in the *Meridian Star*, Jennifer Jacobs interviewed a Clarksdale student who said he had been attacked by a ghost on Stuckey’s bridge, seen in Figure 14. Apparently, the student had been pulled off the bridge and had the scars to prove it.¹³¹ David Childers reports a similar encounter of his own. “It felt like someone grabbed me by the sides and was trying to push me over the bridge,” he says. “It was the craziest shit to ever happen to me. It was weird.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Interview with David Childers [Personal interview]. (2019, January 27).

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Jacob, J. (2007, October 28). “The hanging man at Stuckey's Bridge.” *Meridian Star*. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from https://www.meridianstar.com/news/local_news/the-hanging-man-at-stuckey-s-bridge/article_ad3288c7-dd80-5e53-ba83-25c02a1236a0.html

¹³² Interview with David Childers [Personal interview]. (2019, January 27).

Enterprise residents Wayne and Pearl Smith have lived within walking distance of Stuckey's Bridge since 2005.¹³³ The previous year they had sold their home on Oktibbeha Lake to be on the other side of Meridian where their family was. When the couple started looking for a new home they fell in love with a cabin located on Stuckey Bridge Road but missed being able to buy it by six hours because somebody else bought it. They ended up talking to the people who lived on the property next to the cabin they wanted to buy and managed to buy six acres of land from them.¹³⁴ Not long after moving in to their new home the Smiths discovered just what living on Stuckey Bridge Road meant.

A week after moving in, the Smiths were awakened in the middle of the night to screams coming from the bridge. This happened more than once and it turned out to just be a bunch of teenagers coming to the bridge late at night and letting their imaginations get away from them. According to Pearl, they would get up in the middle of the night and go down to the bridge to see if anybody was seriously injured or not. Eventually, their neighbors told them the legend of Stuckey's Bridge but by then it was already too late to move. They were committed to staying.¹³⁵

Their commitment turned into intrigue as they began to do further research on the bridge and began talking to people coming to visit the bridge. They discovered that there wasn't really much information on the bridge or on Stuckey. All they had to go on were the retellings from their neighbors and from visitors. Both Wayne and Pearl had met a lot of people on the bridge

¹³³ Interview with Wayne and Pearl Smith [Personal interview]. (2019, March 13).

¹³⁴ Smith, W., & Smith, P. (2018, October 2). "Looking Back at Stuckey's Bridge on the Chunky River" [Interview by R. Putname]. In *Supertalk Meridan 103.3*. Meridian, Mississippi.

¹³⁵ Ibid

but one person in particular stood out to them. According to Pearl, he was an older man from South Carolina. He had pulled up one evening and said his name was Stuckey.¹³⁶

“I said, ‘oh my goodness,’” says Pearl.

The man had some newspaper articles with him and claimed that his family could be traced back to the bridge. He claimed not only to be a relative of Old Man Stuckey but that the story of Stuckey owning an inn, killing people and then tossing them in the river was false.

“Stuckey did live here at one time,” says Pearl. “He had three sons and a wife.”¹³⁷

One day a hog belonging to a man who lived close by Stuckey got out. It went into Stuckey’s yard and the sons ended up shooting it. Instead of dying the hog went back to the man’s house and the owner pieced together that Stuckey had something to do with his hog being shot. He went over to Stuckey’s place to confront him and his sons about it. They ended up killing the man. One of the sons would end up going to trial for the murder and was sentenced to hang. The family packed up everything they owned and went to down to Meridian to break the son out of jail. Once they did that they moved to Texas, where a bounty hunter eventually found the son and killed him.¹³⁸

This, according to Pearl Smith, is likely the true story as she and her husband, Wayne, know it. That doesn’t mean that they completely dismiss the legend all together. On the contrary, the Smiths know that people would rather hear the legend than actual story, so they’ve developed a way to share the story. Wayne likes to tell the legend and Pearl will tell the true story, if people

¹³⁶ Interview with Wayne and Pearl Smith [Personal interview]. (2019, March 13).

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Ibid

ask her to tell it. Wayne especially likes to have a little fun with people who come to the bridge at night and scribble graffiti on it, which can be seen on Figure 15.

According to Wayne, a group of teenagers came down to see the bridge one night. They were on the opposite side of the bridge, away from Wayne and Pearl, and were “cutting up and acting a fool.”¹³⁹ He and Pearl were outside by their fire pit and they had enough of listening to the rowdy teenagers. Wayne grabbed a lantern



Figure 15

and began walking the bridge. The teenagers at this point had quieted down and were backing away as Wayne got closer to them. Realizing what was going on, Wayne began waving the lantern. This sent the teenagers running back to their cars and speeding away from the bridge as fast as they could.¹⁴⁰

The Smiths have developed a deep appreciation of the bridge since moving to Stuckey Bridge Road. They are both apart of the East Mississippi Foothills Land Trust, which is a local conservation land trust that provides a way for land owners who have land with a scenic, historic or cultural value to set aside the property for prosperity.¹⁴¹ Pearl is a board member and Wayne is just a member.¹⁴² The organization was established in November 2003 and focuses a lot of its

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Conservation. (n.d.). Retrieved May 29, 2019, from <http://www.emflt.org/conservation.html>

¹⁴² Ibid

money and effort on the preservation of the Chunky River.¹⁴³ It is a volunteer organization that goes out and cleans up trash from the river.

One thing remains a mystery to the Smiths, however. They still haven't figured out the source of all that splashing along the river at night.

¹⁴³ Ibid

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I started my investigation of these stories thinking I already knew their effect on the communities where they took place because of my connection to the state, and because of how the legend of Suckey Blue Skin affected me and my cousins growing up. I thought that everyone who lived in the area knew about the stories/legends. I thought that the ghost stories were used as a way to generate business and to make a profit. This turned out to be true for the most part.

I noticed that ghost stories had affected tourism in Mississippi towns like Yazoo City, Natchez, West Point and Meridian. In Yazoo City, a lot of the business in town is due to the legend of the witch there. On the town's website, a page is dedicated to the witch so people can learn more about her and book a tour of the cemetery. This is also the case for Natchez. However, the haunting of King's Tavern is not the end-all be-all for that city. People can choose a variety of things to do in Natchez, like taking a walk on the walking trails, touring old antebellum homes, and taking a candlelight ghost tour of Glenfield Plantation. Waverly Mansion runs on tourism. It's a historic plantation that represents the antebellum South. In Meridian, the haunting of Stuckey's Bridge not only brings in people to see the bridge, but it also makes for a good brand. When they aren't working with the East Mississippi Foothills Land Trust, Wayne and Pearl Smith run Stuckey Bridge Canoe Rental where people can float down the Chunky River.

While the ghost stories generate a lot of business from these places, the people there don't give a whole lot of attention on them. They would rather focus more on the history of the town than on the ghosts. I noticed this was the case in Meridian and West Point the most because of the way people spoke about the legends. The tour guide at Waverly, Jimmy Denning, didn't speak too much about the ghosts and when asked about them it seemed like he would rather talk about the history of the house. He did touch on the ghost in his tour, but for the most part he stuck to the history of the house. Wayne and Pearl Smith were very helpful in answering any questions I had about the region, the bridge and the ghost. While they were very generous in providing any information they had, I could tell that Stuckey's Bridge meant a lot more to them than a silly little ghost story. They acknowledge that Stuckey's Bridge has a past and that people will continue to go there to try to catch a glimpse of Stuckey. They also really care about where they live and don't want people coming in and trashing the place.

The situation is different in Yazoo City and Natchez in that these towns have many other things to offer visitors than local ghost stories. As indicated above, Natchez has the Mississippi River, parks and historic walking trails, hand-crafted Southern home cooking, tours of the city, tours of antebellum homes, live performances, and casinos.¹⁴⁴ Yazoo City has the Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, museums, Blue Front Cafe, Wells Ranch, and the Yazoo County Fair.

¹⁴⁴ Visit Natchez. (n.d.). Retrieved June 12, 2019, from <https://www.visitnatchez.org/businesses/what-to-do>

Still many people come to these places specifically because of the local ghost stories. It's tough though to precisely estimate how large the paranormal industry is.¹⁴⁵ Much less ghost tourism. According to a study done by Pew, 65% of Americans say they believe in ghosts.¹⁴⁶ So what is it about the stories that brings those people in, sometimes from far away? It can be for many reasons but a large part of it can be explained by the concept of "dark tourism".

Dark tourism is the exploration of death, disaster, and suffering through travel by providing ways for people to mediate between death and modern life.¹⁴⁷ According to David Farrier, a journalist from New Zealand and the host of Netflix's *Dark Tourist*, dark tourism is a global phenomenon where people avoid the ordinary.¹⁴⁸ It usually evolves around war, slavery, and murder memorials.¹⁴⁹

Traveling to and experiencing sites that are connected to death and the macabre is not a new concept.¹⁵⁰ In fact, dark tourism can be traced back to the time of medieval executions and

¹⁴⁵ Wen, T. (2014, September 5). "Why Do People Believe in Ghosts?" Retrieved June 29, 2019, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/why-do-people-believe-in-ghosts/379072/>

¹⁴⁶ May, A. (2017, October 25). "How many people believe in ghosts or dead spirits?" Retrieved June 29, 2019, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/10/25/how-many-people-believe-ghosts-dead-spirits/794215001/>

¹⁴⁷ Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁴⁸ Farrier, D. (Writer), Rothbart, C. (Director), & Fryer, P. (Producer). (2018). "Latin America" [Television series episode]. In *Dark Tourist*. Netflix.

¹⁴⁹ Deutsch, B. (2014). "Tourists' Motivations for Engaging in Dark Tourism: Case Study of Apartheid memorials in South Africa" (Master's thesis, MODUL University Vienna, 2014) (pp. 1-70). Vienna: MODUL University Vienna Private University.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

the Roman gladiators.¹⁵¹ What is new though is the increasing popularity of dark tourism in academia¹⁵², or more specifically the need to define and label death-related tourist activity.¹⁵³

According to Stone and Sharpley, it's difficult to place "an all-embracing label to the enormous diversity of dark sites, attractions and experiences" is dark tourism.¹⁵⁴ For example, there are many different aspects of dark tourism such as a lighter or darker form.¹⁵⁵ Darker tourism sites are more serious because they are where death and torment have actually occurred, such as Auschwitz or Mauthausen. Lighter tourism sites are more on the fun side because they aren't definitely places where death or torment actually occurred.¹⁵⁶ They just have a relation to death and torment, such as taking a ghost tour in Natchez or visiting the Voodoo Museum in New Orleans.

With this in mind, one can consider the cities of Natchez, Yazoo, Meridian, and West Point are a mix between "dark" dark tourism and "light" dark tourism. They are all places where death has occurred, but local residents have fun with it by offering ghost tours. In Tiya Miles'

¹⁵¹ Stone, P., & Sharpley, R. (2008). "Consuming dark tourism: A Thanatological Perspective." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2), 574-595. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2008.02.003

¹⁵² Deutsch, B. (2014). "Tourists' Motivations for Engaging in Dark Tourism: Case Study of Apartheid memorials in South Africa" (Master's thesis, MODUL University Vienna, 2014) (pp. 1-70). Vienna: MODUL University Vienna Private University.

¹⁵³ Stone, P., & Sharpley, R. (2008). "Consuming dark tourism: A Thanatological Perspective." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2), 574-595. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2008.02.003

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Miles, W. F. (2002). "Auschwitz: Museum Interpretation and Darker Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 1175-1178. doi:10.1016/s0160-7383(02)00054-3

¹⁵⁶ Deutsch, B. (2014). "Tourists' Motivations for Engaging in Dark Tourism: Case Study of Apartheid memorials in South Africa" (Master's thesis, MODUL University Vienna, 2014) (pp. 1-70). Vienna: MODUL University Vienna Private University.

author of *Tales from the Haunted South*, Richard Sharpley, one of the leading thinkers in the scholarly fields of dark tourism, says ghost tours are a “playful, frivolous end of the dark tourism spectrum.”¹⁵⁷ The main purpose of ghost tours is to entertain the audience by keeping them engaged. Simply talking about the history of place isn’t enough to keep the audience entertained. Tour guides need to be able to take visitors on a journey that combines history with “trills” along the way. This can range from walking people through the grave yard and having them stop at a specific grave or taking them to a haunted house. Ghost tourism is driven by what Beatriz Rodriguez-Garcia, the writer of “*Management Issues in Dark Tourism Attractions: The Case of Ghost Tours in Edinburgh and Toledo*”, refers to as “the desire to encounter ghosts, interests in the supernatural, and visitation of places associated with the spirit world such as cemeteries, haunted houses, castles, and historic towns.”¹⁵⁸ These experiences offer an authenticity to audiences where “you know you’re getting a secret, off-the-map, off-the-grid, unauthorized experience.”¹⁵⁹

Ghost tours are a capitalistic enterprise in that they bring about more business, increase tourist activity, and encourage visitors to spend more money by staying over night.¹⁶⁰ People desire to be closer to the tale and thus often will stay longer and to get more information and

¹⁵⁷ Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁵⁸ Rodriguez Garcia, B. (2012). “Management Issues in Dark Tourism Attractions: The Case of Ghost Tours in Edinburgh and Toledo.” *JUPTRR*, 4(1), 14-19. Retrieved June 10, 2019.

¹⁵⁹ Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

deepen their experience.¹⁶¹ Ghost stories offer a connection to the past that provides little bits of “knowledge that is otherwise suppressed, avoided, or euthanized” in public and can “dredge up unsettling social memories for reexamination,”¹⁶² such as slavery, rape, war, and murder. They’re also entertaining and fun even as they expose historical and cultural facts that some people would prefer to remain hidden.¹⁶³

The people of Mississippi have learned more about each other through the stories they’ve told.¹⁶⁴ Stories have a way of not only identifying a place and a tradition but also as a people. They enable us “to endure, to thrive, and celebrate” our heritage, a heritage that includes ghost stories.¹⁶⁵ Our culture tells us to dismiss the possibility ghosts and to take ghost stories “lightly, in jest,” even as “primitive or playful.”¹⁶⁶ At the same time, there is something about ghost stories that keeps people interested enough to seek out paranormal activity.

Chef Regina Charboneau, the owner of King’s Tavern, believes that the reason people are so attracted to ghosts is because of the nature of the South. “I think the South is kind of dark and

¹⁶¹ Gentry, G. W. (2007). “Walking with the Dead: The Place of Ghost Walk Tourism in Savannah, Georgia.” *Southeastern Geographer*, 47(2), 222-238. doi:10.1353/sgo.2007.0023

¹⁶² Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁶³ Holdren, M. L. (2015, February 20). “Ghosts within the Contemporary Dark Tourism Landscape.” Retrieved May 19, 2019, from <https://mattholdrenwordpress.com/files.wordpress.com/2015/11/tourism-final-paper-ghost-tourism.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ Williams, D. (2014). *Mississippi Folk and the Tales They Tell: Myths, Legends and Bald-Faced Lies*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

¹⁶⁵ Sillery, B. (2011). *The Haunting of Mississippi*. Gretna: Pelican Pub. Company.

¹⁶⁶ Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

stormy. Some of the movies that were made in the past like *Hush...Hush Sweet Charlotte* and *Sweet Baby Jane* do so much. Including the Southern writers. Last year the literary festival was about Southern gothic and how Southern gothic writers are always including that kind of dark side in their stories. People connect that with the South. Probably because of Faulkner and Tennessee Williams.”¹⁶⁷

Bartender and general manager of King’s Tavern Ricky Woolfolk added, “I think for the believers it matters. I think it’s as simple as that. For everybody else it’s a cool little niche thing. It’s part of the lore of the building or whatever. But for the actual believers it matters. People come in and claim to be in touch with stuff like that and they’ll come in to talk about how weird it is in here. They come back talking about how they’ve never felt anything like that. I’ve never felt any of it but I guess it depends on the person.”¹⁶⁸

As the Communications Coordinator for the Yazoo County Convention Center and Visitors Bureau, Dawn Davis says that ghost have a positive effect on the community. “Many people come from all over the world to see, hear about, or experience the living parts of these stories. In general, I think that the stories affect residents mostly in positive ways by encouraging storytelling and historical preservation.”¹⁶⁹

David Childers, the founder of Mississippi Paranormal Research in Vicksburg, believes that it’s Mississippi’s culture that keeps people coming back to find paranormal activity. “They hear these stories and that brings people to come and check it out. Mississippi is so rich in

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Regina Charboneau [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Ricky Woolfolk [Personal interview]. (2019, March 2).

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Dawn Davis [Personal interview]. (2019, March 1).

culture and backwood tales and that's a real positive thing. That keeps me going. It keeps me going out there and getting evidence of the paranormal."¹⁷⁰

Ghost stories help a place financially by bringing in tourism. They are meant to entertain the audience and encourage them to spend money at local businesses, stay overnight, and tell their friends about their experiences. They offer a connection to the past by inviting people to learn from one another and talk about issues that otherwise would have been left alone. While ghost stories are meant to be fun and playful, they also give a voice to a place's heritage. This, I believe, allows people to learn from past mistakes and to choose what parts of their heritage to keep or to change.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with David Childers [Personal interview]. (2019, January 27).

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