

Q & A Session
History in the Shadows: Incorporating Dark Tourism at Historic Sites

January 16, 2025

1. Can either of you tell any of your personal ghost experiences you may have had at the site! Love that you are engaging in the spooky side of things!

Different staff members reported unusual occurrences, which are documented on the linked video [Ghosts of Beaumont: John J. French House Hauntings](#).

2. How would you recommend handling family members of past occupants of a historic house who are against discussing ghosts in their family's home?

We believe it's important to include descendants in decision making prior to offering this type of programming to the audience. It's always best to be respectful of those in the community, especially family.

3. Can you explain why you refer to shooting an intruder as a murder? Is that a calculated use of words that makes it sound more sensational and interesting?

There is no calculated use of words for sensationalism, but there is always a chance sensationalism occurs unintentionally. With the way this story is written in its historical documents, it was premeditated, though no charges were ever brought forth in this case. Both John and Sally French were older when this occurred and left to stay at a relative's home while the French sons and several other men from the neighborhood hid in the home waiting for "Charlie Yank" (Charles Parmenter) to arrive. All that to say, I think there's room for interpretation on each side of what constitutes murder in this scenario.

4. How do you balance the Ghost Texas investigation and your daily programming. We had two paranormal investigations and events and it started painting us in a less favorable light. It started to have the public question our academic researched exhibits and tours.

We're careful to connect all programming back to our mission with education as our primary objective with all offerings. The home's occupants were spiritualists, therefore discussing that belief system then expanding to explore paranormal happenings connects for us. Additionally, the program was supported by the board, who are involved in the community in a multitude of ways. Their support helped legitimize the program. Also, hosting the event during Halloween season only connected to other season program offerings. The Beaumont Heritage Society is a longstanding organization in the community, established in the 1960s. Due to that longevity and the quality of past programming, we're a trusted institution in our community.

5. Have you seen new long term engagement by those attending your dark tourism events?

We believe there is a correlation to increased visitation. After the program we saw an increase in tour bookings and our subsequent Pumpkin Walk event experienced increased attendance.

6. What would you have done if the paranormal investigation had taken a turn and it appeared that the crew was overdramatizing and not respecting the site?

We would've immediately halted filming and not offered the program. Our expectations were communicated prior to the paranormal investigators visiting the site. They were very respectful of our mission and goals.

7. How do you choose which topics to focus on for your dark tourism programs?

We intentionally connect all topics and programming back to our mission. We don't engage in topics that aren't relevance to the families who occupied our historic sites.

8. Have you had any events like these or success during non-Halloween times of year?

All of our dark tourism type programming, up to this year, was scheduled during the Halloween season. The downtown walking tours will only happen Sept - Oct so still spooky season. I think it keeps the rest of our programming legitimate in the eyes of our community to keep our Dark Tourism programming in the Fall.

9. Waxhachie, Tx is one of the most historic and haunted towns in Texas, I'm most interested in how you were able to obtain HOT Funds to fund your projects?

Our city welcomes cultural heritage organizations to apply for funds connected to programs that increase tourism.

10. Will the downtown walking tours be done during the week or weekend? Daytime or nighttime?

The Downtown Walking tours will occur on Fridays or Saturdays in the evening starting at 5:30 p.m. This project is still in development, you can keep track of the opening at beaumontheritagetours.org

11. What demographics have you found are most receptive to these darker subject matters?

Younger audiences, such as Gen Z and Millennials, enjoy this type of program. This is a population group that often doesn't engage with our program offerings. We loved meeting people at the program who had never engaged with the museum in the past. Our hope is that they'll consider us as a leisure time option.

12. do you have any advice for partnering with local businesses that may want a more sensationalized story?

It's important to us to always approach programming from an educational perspective. Our goal is to pique interest so our community will dive deeper into local/community history. We share our goals with our collaborators, so everyone is fully aware of intended objectives prior to entering a partnership.

13. In my experience, historical organizations are proponents of truth and facts - do you ever get push back about ghost tours and ghost hunting being hokum?

Engagement with spiritualism and ghosts was part of the lived experience for the French family who lived on site. We're intentional about connected our programming to the mission. We were careful not to present the paranormal investigators' findings as fact. We encourage our audiences to ask questions then form their own opinions.

14. How is it possible to equate paranormal programming with true tragedy sites like slave cemeteries, Japanese internment camps, and pearl harbor? These don't seem quite the same.

You're right that paranormal investigation is very different from the tragedies mentioned. The term "dark tourism" is associated with places who explore death and tragedy by those who study this genre of tourism.

16. One of our main sources of income are K-5 field trips. We are a living history museum that focuses on immersion. Are there any particular sensitivities we should keep in mind since most of our programming is centered around young children?

We thought it best to offer the paranormal investigation program to audiences 13 years and older. We also asked the investigators to consider our family audiences when presenting their findings. Our other seasonal programming, Pumpkin Walk, is child friendly. The event focuses on a pumpkin decorating contest, a hay ride, crafts, vendors, and tours of the house. The tours of the house do include volunteers dressed as the family of the past, in ghost/zombie makeup. Attendees are aware of the event's offerings and can choose how their family participates.

17. Do you allow visitors to bring their own ghost hunting equipment?

18. How did you all go about engaging audiences with attractions/exhibitions outside of the traditional "spooky season" window?

19. How will a community respond with antebellum status like Natchez.

It's really important to involve the board, all staff members, and the museum's community task force prior to offering public programming related to dark tourism. Additionally, connecting the program with the mission is crucial. This type of programming does provide an opportunity to talk about complicated history and address under told stories.

20. Has the Dark Tourism events changed how people see your organization outside of the events? We have people who are concerned at our historic house museum that talking about potential hauntings will scare people away from coming during daily operations.

21. Were you concerned that ghost tours or paranormal programming could encourage after-hours pranks or visitors exploring off-limits areas at your sites?

That type of activity happens at our site regardless of the programming offered. We have a stringent security plan, which we evaluate often.

22. I'm wondering about the language used when discussing dark history so we don't come across as passive narrators or alienate visitors.

23. You recommended reaching out to descendants - did any descendants participate in the development of your programming, and if so, how were they involved?

There is an honorary place on our board for descendants. They are part of all decision-making processes. One of the descendants is a published historian. She's instrumental in helping us craft our narrative by sharing her research on the family and area.

24. Can you tell us a little about the pumpkin walk and how it help to branch into the dark tourism?

