

When it comes to ghosts, "no one can prove they exist, and no one can prove they don't."

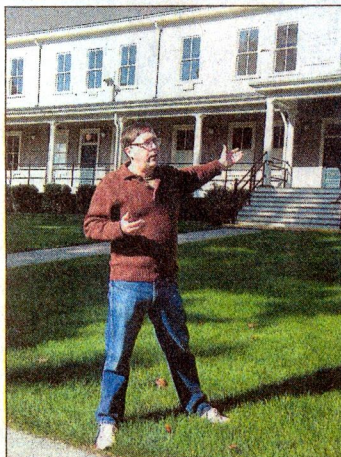
Jeff Davis, historian who leads a Halloween walking tour at Vancouver Barracks



Photos by TOM VOGT/The Columbian

Jeff Davis, right, tells members of a tour group about mysterious events at the Grant House on Officers Row.

Tour reveals spooky side of Officers Row, barracks



Jeff Davis previews his Halloween "Spirit Tales" walking tour with a stop in front of the Artillery Barracks.

By TOM VOGT
Columbian staff writer

For more than 160 years, a person could hear some compelling war stories at Vancouver Barracks, told firsthand by soldiers who had fought in conflicts ranging from the Seminole Indian War of the 1830s up to the current clashes in the Middle East.

Now the narratives lean more toward love stories and ghost stories. That's because the military has gradually moved out in the past few years, and all those soldiers have departed.

Or have they?

If they're all gone, then who's been stomping around in unoccupied rooms, squeaking the chairs in empty offices, or appearing out of nowhere and vanishing just as quickly?

Historian Jeff Davis will explore some of those questions in a Hallow-

If You Go

■ **What:** "Spirit Tales of Officers Row and West Vancouver Barracks."

■ **When:** 4 p.m. Saturday.

■ **Where:** Meet in front of Grant House, 1101 Officers Row, Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** \$10.

■ **Information:** www.fortvan.org or 360-992-1808.

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■ **What:** Vancouver Barracks Lantern Tours.

■ **When:** Nov. 21, "Thanksgiving at Vancouver

Barracks"; Dec. 26, "Christmas at Vancouver Barracks"; Jan. 16, "Kaiser Shipyard"; Feb. 13, "Romance at Vancouver Barracks." Tours start at 7 p.m.; meet at fort entrance gate by 6:45 p.m.

■ **Where:** Fort Vancouver, 1001 E. Fifth St., Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** \$10; \$7 for children 15 and younger. (National Park Service passes do not cover lantern tours.) Reservations and advance payment required.

■ **Information:** <http://go.usa.gov/3MS6j> or 360-816-6244.

Tours

From Page C1

een walking tour around the former U.S. Army post that was established in 1849. It is one of several Vancouver Barracks walks scheduled through Feb. 13, which will feature a nod to Valentine's Day with "Romance at Vancouver Barracks."

Love stories are pretty easy to document. But when it comes to ghosts, "no one can prove they exist, and no one can prove they don't," said Davis, a Vancouver native who grew up playing in and around Vancouver Barracks. He also worked at Vancouver Barracks during his 32 years in the U.S. Army and Army Reserve.

"So many things have happened that can't be blamed on animals in the walls or shifting earth," said Davis, co-author of "Weird Washington."

During a walk-through a few days ago, Davis shared some of the stories of the unexplained (and spooky) he has collected over the years. Then he discussed his follow-up research.

When Davis comes across a ghost story, "I look for historical events" — often tragic events — that he can weave into the tale. One such tale is of the mysterious parade-ground sentry that has been reported over the years. Davis found an 1880s newspaper account of a soldier who finished his sentry shift, then killed himself with his own rifle.

The Oct. 31 walk — "Spirit Tales of Officers Row and West Vancouver Barracks" — will benefit the Fort Vancouver National Trust.

The other tours are scheduled by the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and led by National Park Service personnel. That series opened earlier this



TOM VOGT/The Columbian

Author Jeff Davis shares stories of unexplained happenings at the old post hospital in the West Barracks.

month and will resume Nov. 21 with "Thanksgiving at Vancouver Barracks." They are 7 p.m. lantern-lit tours.

The Halloween afternoon tour led by Davis will feature Officers Row and buildings west of Fort Vancouver Way, which are managed by the nonprofit National Trust. The route includes the Artillery Barracks and the O.O. Howard House.

And there's the old post hospital: So many soldiers died of the flu following World War I that there wasn't enough room in the morgue. The overflow bodies had to be taken across the street to the post dentist's office, Davis said.

The Vancouver Barracks buildings east of Fort Vancouver Way are on National Park Service property.

The Vancouver Barracks tours are an addition to the popular lantern-tour series at the reconstructed fort. Those tours, featuring costumed re-enactors performing living-history vignettes, always sell out, Chief Ranger Greg Shine said.

"It takes a lot of time and volunteer hours, and we've maxed them out," Shine said, "so we looked at other stories we wanted to tell, and that was military history."

Each walk focuses on a specific event or holiday, including Thanksgiving, Christmas and Valentine's Day.

The lanterns tours are about 90 minutes long and are not recommended for children younger than 10.

More information is at <http://go.usa.gov/3MS6j>