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The Common Uncanny: Ghostlore and the Creation of Virginia History

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The Common Uncanny: Ghostlore and the Creation of Virginia History

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
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DEDICATION

To the hosts, tour guides, storytellers, curators, volunteers, and fans who knew Virginia’s spectral history all along.
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There are many people who contributed to this dissertation in comments, support, direction and encouragement. I would like to name them all, but for lack of room I will name a few. First, I want to thank Philip Levy, Nathaniel Fryburger, and Jenna Pirok. I would be nowhere without this trio.

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Thank you all.
Alena Pirok
May 2017
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ABSTRACT

Ghost stories have a long and diverse history, they appeared in religious contexts, in secular traditions, in entertainment, and in therapy and healing. Few elements of human culture have been as dynamic as the idea that the dead return to the living world as immaterial beings. Since the late nineteenth century Virginians have used ghost stories to talk about, interpret, and understand the historical significance of place. This dissertation argues that Virginians have used ghost stories to identify and make meaning of historical sites since the turn of the last century. These historical ghost stories sought to highlight the presence of the past, as well as Virginians’ close relationship with long-dead historical figures. Virginias used the ghost stories to argue that the commonwealth’s old structures and cities were especially historical and worthy of restoration. Founders of historical sites in Virginia used ghost stories as a way to offer their guests emotional, intimate, and personal connects to the celebrated past. The stories erased the distance of time, and suggested that past and present people cohabited in specifically defined historical places. Scholars who study historical sites often focus on the transition from volunteer to professional museum and public history workers. They argue that the professionalized workers rejected and silenced the public’s emotional understandings of place-based history, gave rise to more nuanced understandings of the field, and developed rich discussions on the roles that race, class, and gender play at historical sites. In that turn scholars have tended to ignore the public’s emotional fascinations with historical sites, as seen through ghost stories. This dissertation illustrates that hauntings’ meanings and associations outlasted the professional turn and not helped establish the public’s trust in professional historical institutions, but continue to do so in the present day.
INTRODUCTION

One of the most haunted houses in America is in Williamsburg, Virginia—right in the heart of the nation's best-known open-air historical museum. Colonial Williamsburg boasts eighty-eight original eighteenth-century buildings, but the Peyton Randolph House is special.

Originally built in 1715, it was later home to its namesake when he served as the first president of the Continental Congress. After its notable Revolutionary use, it served as a way station on the Marquise de Lafayette's 1820s American tour and as a hospital after the 1862 Civil War Battle of Williamsburg. Eventually, John D. Rockefeller Jr. bought the home as he and local Reverend W. A. R. Goodwin transformed the city into a museum in the late 1920s. Today, it is restored to its original eighteenth-century look—a deep-red brick paint covering its entire exterior.

In 1998, researchers at Colonial Williamsburg did a paint analysis of the home’s colonial-era exterior and found that it was not white, as they had long painted it, but rather sported a brownish red on all of its exterior surfaces—siding, trim, doors, shutters, and all. Always striving for accuracy, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had workers quickly restore the home to its original color. The new paint job did much more than bring the home visually back to the eighteenth century—the change significantly altered the present day's visual landscape. A dark-red inkblot consumed a spot where once there was light.
At night, the already dark house becomes eerie. The sparsely lit road makes the structure hard to look at and somehow strange to the eye. Its edges and corners fade into the trees and empty streets. Neighboring homes still wear the incongruous white paint. Their bright angles and clapboard walls catch the lowest light and seem to glow in the twilight. After the sun sets, the Peyton Randolph house appears as a pocket of oblivion framed by eerily luminous homes. The odd vision is fitting, really, since the home and the city are rumored to be teeming with ghosts.

The Peyton Randolph House’s best-known ghost is a heartbroken woman. Guests have reported the wraith lurking over them while they sleep in the oak-paneled room at the top of the stairs. The ghost is Mrs. Peachy; her family moved into the house in the nineteenth century. Their tenure in the home was far from happy; tragedy and death stalked the family. Most of Mrs. Peachy’s children died in the house—her son, most notably, fell out of a nearby tree, which can still be seen today. The often-told story relates that Peachy’s ghost stayed at the home because she could not bear to part with her children, or perhaps because she blamed herself for their deaths.

Mrs. Peachy is not the only ghost that guests claim to see in the Peyton Randolph house. Guests have reported seeing a Revolutionary War soldier who sits in a parlor, a young child who haunts the basement, and a few other spirits who have visited from time to time since at least the eighteenth century. Even combat veteran Lafayette himself found their presence a bit too much for his liking and reportedly left the house in midvisit. The last full-time residents were all too happy to hand the keys over the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in the 1990s for the same eerie reason.
Today, these stories are alive and well. On any pleasant night, there are hundreds of people outside of the house, eagerly listening to tour guides recount the home’s many ghost stories and more recent creepy rumors. All four of Williamsburg’s independently run ghost tour companies make the Payton Randolph home a regular stop for their patrons, and night after night the visitors come in droves, cash in hand. As one observer of this booming ghost tour trade said, “there is gold in them thar ghosts.”

Gold indeed, and not just the monetary kind. The ghosts themselves were emotional “gold.” They were the much sought after “valuable thing” that brought guests to historical sites. Lafayette may not have been a fan of ghosts and haunted homes, but Virginians have had a genuine and enduring fascination with ghost stories—one that draws them to historical homes and downtowns in droves. Some like the idea of erasing the line between life and death, others appreciate a good story, and still others like the tales’ ability to give them a good fright. But there is more too. Ghost stories are a way of talking about the past and have been too long overlooked.

Even while filling the streets of Colonial Williamsburg with ghost tours, most Virginians don’t realize how significant the ghosts are to the state. I traveled from Florida to the Old Dominion for an intense multiday ghost tour research spree, and every ghost tour I came upon was hosted by or set in a respected historical home or downtown. I went on night tours of Williamsburg and Ferry Plantation in Virginia Beach and took daytime tours at Berkeley Plantation, Shirley Plantation, and a nineteenth-century home called Edgewood, to name a few prominent sites. Even so, I was only able to scrape the surface of Virginia’s large and lucrative ghost tour industry. There was an event at Stratford Hall,

ancestral home of the Lee family, one of the nights; there was a ghost tour hosted each night in Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and other cities too far and wide to be taken in at once. There were events in nearly every city in Virginia. From the eastern coast to the far west Appalachian Mountains, guests flocked to the commonwealth’s beloved historical sites to hear haunting stories that wove together traditional historical narratives and spooky, unexplainable events.

Ghosts are not simply Halloween “things”; they are Virginia things, and historical things too. One would be hard-pressed to find a tour that does not reference a historical hero or event. The history adds to the fun by blurring the line between fact and fiction and reinforcing what people already know: that Virginia is especially historical.

Interest and belief in ghosts has been on the rise since the mid-1960s in the United States. The number of books, films, and television shows concerning ghosts have all risen steadily and sold well since 1980s. Following the same pattern, ghosts tours and events in Virginia have proliferated as well. A burst of publications at the turn of the last century correlated with a bump in the number of tours and events offered across the state. Armed with more and more published sources, event directors at historical sites felt more comfortable providing ghostlore as educational options. Television shows also experienced an end-of-century increase in popularity. While the number of new programs fluctuated from year to year, the total of shows about ghosts has stayed high. There is clearly a popular national market for ghosts, and there is the no end in sight for creative usage of the spectral, the ghostly, and the “uncanny.”

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2 This data was compiled from publication information gathered from The Library of Virginia and The Library of Congress catalogues, the bookseller Amazon.com and limited publication information provided by Wikipedia.com.
Ghost-inflected popular television shows and literature, though, rarely recognize their relationship to history. Thus, people don’t automatically recognize that ghosts are, in their way, always talking about some aspect of the past and its relationship to the present. Every ghost story implies a relationship to the past because every ghost represents something, or rather someone, from a time before.

“The Common Uncanny” argues that ghost stories are essential to how Americans have understood the past and, most significantly, the meaning of historical places. This work takes a close look at the particular understanding of the past in Virginia—a place boasting one of the oldest, richest, and most visited collections of historical homes and sites in the nation. The Old Dominion’s ghost tales work to locate historical characters and past events within present-day places. They erase the distance created by time and produce an idea of history in Virginia that sees the past as still alive—and even active—in the present. Through ghost stories, present homes and places were permeated by the past and its people and in that way represented real, almost tangible links to people and times long gone. Scholars of Virginia’s many house museums, historical sites, commemorations, and various preservation movements have thus far not considered the role that ghosts and ghost stories have played in the making of the commonwealth’s historical places. But it is precisely the tradition of haunted histories that inspired the preservation movement in Virginia and led to the creation of the state’s famed historical sites. Far from being something distinct from or at odds with history, ghost stories are part and parcel of making Virginia historical. Those long lines of Williamsburg ghost tourists are enjoying something far more historical than most of them would recognize.
Ghost stories have a long and diverse history in the United States and, more broadly, in the Western world. People have used ghost stories in religious contexts, in secular traditions, in entertainment, and in therapy and healing. Few elements of human culture have been as dynamic as the idea that the dead return to the living world as immaterial beings. Since the late nineteenth century, Americans, and especially Virginians, have used ghost stories to interpret and understand the historical significance of places.

Virginians shared these stories to engage other people with their home or site’s historical narrative in a way that both illustrated the storytellers’ personal knowledge of the past and their intimate familiarity with historical characters. By playfully embracing “irrational” thought, storytellers connected the present to the past by erasing time and distance and suggesting that past and present people cohabited.

These orally shared stories made their way into books in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when old-home biographers like Marion Harland, Robert Lancaster, and Edith Tunis recognized the tales as elements of Virginia’s historical character. These books influenced the way Americans viewed colonial architecture in Virginia and helped inspire the Colonial Revival decorative movement—an imaginative reinvention of colonial style that shaped elite homes and rooms from the 1890s through the 1940s. Harland, Lancaster, Sales, and others presented the association between ghosts and historical homes as something commonplace and to be expected: there was nothing shocking, alarming, or out of place about a home having ghosts. Virginians understood haunted homes as being blessed by historical heroes, not tormented by the dark reminders of the past.
When the Reverend W. A. R. Goodwin first dreamed up the idea of remaking his beloved Williamsburg as a special and treasured historical gem box in the 1920s, he was inspired by the town’s ghost stories as much as he was by its historical tales of patriotic glories. He read the ghost stories in the old-home-biography books, but he also heard others from his elderly parishioners—who were all eager to share their homes’ stories. He took these tales, though, and repurposed them to illustrate Williamsburg’s value to potential investors in his restoration scheme. He explained that the city needed to be restored to its eighteenth-century form because the post-World War I landscape was no longer a fitting home for the colonial ghosts that remained in the city. Early-twentieth-century changes in the city had not only transformed how the town looked, but they also made the old ghosts homeless. For Goodwin, the presence of ghosts in Williamsburg was a sign that the Founding Fathers favored the old capital and perhaps even endorsed his plans. In time, he sold the city to John D. Rockefeller and other backers by claiming that interacting with the colonial landscape and its spirits would be emotionally and educationally beneficial for Americans.

Goodwin was not the only Virginian then considering the meaning and use of the commonwealth’s treasury of ghostlore. In the early twentieth century and into the 1930s and 1940s, writers, folklorists, and story collectors, under the auspices of the Federal Writers’ Project and the Virginia Historical Initiative, were busily combing the countryside, collecting tales from old Virginians. Their stated goal was to collect and preserve what they saw as a disappearing preindustrial American culture. Along the way, though, they built a large collection of transcribed ghost stories. Their informants represented a cross section of old Virginia—from wealthy white homeowners to African American laborers, and from
poor farmers in the low-lying Tidewater to Appalachian “mountaineers.” The diversity of this collection brought out a need to classify the kinds of tales Virginians told. This sorting and sifting led to some tales being considered “historical,” a terrain controlled by elite whites, while others became “folklore”—the arena of what these collectors came to call “the folk.” These categories were deeply rooted in 1930s and 1940s white Americans’ notions of race and class. The value of an individual story depended largely on whose mouth it came from. By end of the 1940s, when the researchers’ funding dried up and the research stopped, ghost stories had become the property of the folk and thus carried all the negative assumptions of low intellect and irrationality that the researchers assumed for their tellers. This created a problem for the elite whites, who for so long had proudly shared their homes’ ghost stories. Their response was to simply jettison the uncanny from their house stories and thus protect their claims to historical significance. For the old-home biographers and backward-looking nostalgic promoters like Goodwin, ghost stories were a link to a real historical past. The newer and often university-educated researchers undid the long-standing connection between ghosts and history, leaving them thereafter separate. By the 1950s, few old-home biographers featured ghostlore in their entries for the old plantation homes that dotted the commonwealth.

Ghost stories and history stayed divorced until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a national commercial culture around a mixture of ghosts, New Age Spiritualism, and even academic trends like the New Social History enabled a rethinking of the significance of ghosts. During this time, a plucky retired journalist and PR man named L. B. Taylor, from Williamsburg, began writing a series of books called The Ghosts of Virginia. He was an avid collector of contemporary stories as well as the tales originally collected by the old-home
biographers and those found in the Federal Writer’s Project archives across that commonwealth. Taylor’s books capitalized on a popular mood that made readers and guests willing to consider alternative interpretations of the past and even allowed ghosts access to historical narratives and sites. Like the early home biographers, Taylor liked to locate his ghost stories at recognized historical sites and link them to major events. His most important contribution was teaching his readers to understand ghosts as evidence of historical significance and to know the stories as cultural treasures.

It did not take long for museums and historical sites across to Virginia recognize Taylor’s popularity, his wide readership, and his books’ historical tone. Some historical sites wanted to share in his success and use the haunting narratives to regain guests at a time of faltering visitation. While many sites in the late 1980s rejected Taylor’s initial questions about ghostly stories and rumors, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, some of the same sites eagerly invited Taylor to come talk at their special ghost events. The popularity of these events spread across the state and inspired numerous independent tour companies to run ghost tours in Williamsburg, Alexandria, Richmond, and other cities. By the time Taylor passed away in 2014, ghost stories had returned to historical sites with gusto.

Those lines of paying customers waiting to hear tales of antebellum children falling to their deaths at a Williamsburg home so haunted that the Marquis de Lafayette allegedly fled it in a panic are there because of Taylor as much as because of Goodwin or even Payton Randolph. The long-exiled ghost stories are now back at historical sites, rubbing elbows with history in a way that once again blurs the distinction between history and ghostlore. They have become a vital tool in the curator’s arsenal for engaging the public and making
the past come alive for visitors while helping pay the bills that keep museums and sites afloat.

For years, historians have overlooked the metaphysical ideas that lay at the center of the preservation movement. The scholarship tells a story of mostly male university-educated professionals replacing the largely female volunteer work force that had both created and run museums and sites from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1940s. The original wave of preservationists clung to romantic, fanciful, and often unsupported and unsourced bodies of traditional place-based storytelling. These people were as interested in reifying and validating deeply personal family and community connections as they were in promoting national narratives or even history itself. The professionals, on the other hand, graduated from newly minted programs in museum studies, historical architecture, and the social sciences. They were in the business of promoting evidence-based objective narratives and righting the past narrative wrongs. This set them on a collision course with the older generation of preservation women’s groups.

The earliest discussion of the preservation movement came from Charles B. Hosmer in 1981. In two volumes, Hosmer traced the evolution of preservation, arguing that the major turning point in its history was the transition from volunteer workers to professional workers—as seen in the development of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1930s. Hosmer’s influence lay in his dividing of sites and buildings into those preserved by volunteers and those preserved by trained architectural historians. The divide insisted that the difference in training resulted in vast differences in curation. The volunteers, mainly women, restored

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homes to reflect their “romantic” sense of history, while the male university-trained professionals restored homes strictly based on historic and scientific research.

Eight years later, Karal Ann Marling explored one of the main results of the romantic preservationist sensibility—the Colonial Revival moment, roughly spanning 1890 to 1940.\(^4\) Marling argued that the people who restored homes according to the Colonial Revival aesthetic intended the restorations to be educational guides for people seeking to use architecture and decorative accents to create a closer relationship with the beloved past. But, as she pointed out, the Colonial Revival movement created a version of the colonial-era style that was more a Victorian than an eighteenth-century understanding of decorative objects. In this way the movement did not revive the colonial architecture and décor, but rather, it brought the colonial style back to life by injecting it with Victorian sensibilities.

On the other hand, the idea that preserved homes were informed by forces other than historical authenticity had a lot of traction. James Lindgren agreed with Hosmer to a point. His 1993 study of the Association of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities—the Old Dominion’s flagship historical preservation group—argued that, indeed, the early female preservationists curated sites based on their emotional understanding of the past and used those as style markers. But he added that their main goals were to preserve the legacy and life style of the white antebellum South—not the colonial one, despite their adoption of its flare.\(^5\) This addition of regional and political considerations to preservation’s narrative recognized that gender and training alone were not solely responsible for what the public saw at historical sites. Though Lindgren added an important and previously unrecognized

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consideration of race and class to the history of preservation, he did not challenge Hosmer’s dichotomy much.

In 1999, Patricia West argued that the narratives presented in preserved house museums were more the product of their specific political milieu than simply gender, training, or issues of race and class.6 West profiled a number of historical sites and explained in each case how historical context drove their creation and subsequent interpretation. Notably, she explained that the Mount Vernon Ladies Association saved George Washington’s home to unite the nation after the Civil War. Her Mount Vernon gave all domestic and naturalized Americans a shared symbolic home. Likewise, she argued that Monticello was transformed into a museum by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation to illustrate the ability of nongovernment professionals to present trustworthy and authoritative narratives at a time when the government had cornered the market. West made it clear that the narratives that preservationists and curators shared at historical sites were not the product exclusively of training but were linked to the message and story each group wanted the homes to tell. Her work recognized that historical house museums were politically expedient tools—more the products of their preservers’ time and politics than the ethos of the original builders.

More recent works that look at preserved and historical homes adopt the dichotomy of volunteer and professional that Hosmer wrote about. They do so with varying levels of consideration for gender, race, and political context. One example is Seth Bruggeman’s examination of Washington’s birth site. He explained that the local female volunteer group that endeavored to rebuild Washington’s home ended up building a home that mirrored

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contemporary tastes rather than a building based on fact or research.7 Anders Greenspan’s 2002 look at Colonial Williamsburg accepted Hosmer’s understanding of the outdoor museum as the turning point in preservation history but added that the museum’s interpretation evolved over time.8 There are those, though, not working within Hosmer’s dichotomy. Jessie Swigger’s History is Bunk has stepped outside of the traditional narrative.9 Swigger’s book looks at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village, a site that is more created than restored. She explains that the museum grew in dialogue with the local Detroit population. The museum is best understood not by its initial creation but by its dynamic relationship with Michigan. Different too is Philip Levy’s work on Ferry Farm, George Washington’s Boyhood Home. Ferry Farm’s decades-long story of stumbling to become a preserved historical site—and its many actors, champions, and foundational logics governing a succession of failed attempts—places his work outside of Hosmer’s smooth creation framework.10

My work builds on these scholars, but I contend that they overlook the importance the metaphysical had for the creation of historical sites and preservation projects. Ghost stories have not been given their due credit for shaping the way Americans, let alone Virginians, approached the restoration projects and culture they helped create. Nevertheless, there is a scholarly literature of ghosts and ghost stories in western societies.

11 The spectral has played a significant role in anthropological and folklore research, but historians have been more reluctant to bring ghosts into their work. Ghosts have most notably played roles in the scholarship of pre-Enlightenment European religion, nineteenth-century Spiritualism, and contemporary ghost tourism.

All ghost stories make arguments about the relationship between the past and the present. In some stories, the ghosts are a reminder of bad relationships, unfinished business, or injustice, such as Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, Beloved in *Beloved*, or any horror classic involving a Native American grave site. In others, they are representations of a longing for lost time or love, like so many “lady in white” stories in which a jilted woman haunts a site out of sorrow. And others, perhaps the most interesting, are ghosts who simply continue to exist. Many of the ghost stories featured in these chapters occupy this third category. Those in tune with popular literature will best understand these ghosts as similar to those that haunt the halls of Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* books. In each case, the ghost represents a past person and illustrates a lingering relationship between the past and the present that cannot be shaken off or undone.

This dissertation also makes an important distinction between historical ghost stories and the vision of ghosts and hauntings promoted by nineteenth-century Spiritualism.12 Nineteenth-century Americans understood the movement as an unorganized religious—or cult-like—belief in a spirit world and humans’ ability to make contact with that world through a series of mediations and mediums. Spiritualism came to

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the United States from England and stayed primarily in the Northern and developing Western cities—there certainly were Southern adherents, particularly in the larger cities.13 From most accounts, Spiritualism did not take off as a popular form of religion in the South. Like many other Americans, those in the South enjoyed elements of its rituals, such as séances and table tipping, as engaging parlor tricks at the turn of the twentieth century, but it was not as religious in tone for the Southerners as it was for Northerners.

The ghostlore and rumors of hauntings that many Virginians shared were distinctly different from the Spiritualism that became popular in the North. Virginian ghostlore was an echo of an earlier pre-Enlightenment “irrational” form of ghostly storytelling, whereas Emanuel Swedenborg and Franz Mesmer—the fathers of nineteenth-century Spiritualism—sought to blend their occult with then-emerging languages of science and Enlightenment inquiry.14 Virginian ghost tales are essentially basic storytelling that establishes a history and a narrative for physical places. In Virginia, ghosts, rather than a religious element, are a means through which people associate the past with the present world.

Furthermore, one of Spiritualism’s main tenets was the idea of calling out spirits and making them communicate. Virginians’ ghosts were like neighbors and roommates who lived in the same homes and communities as the living—they did not need to be summoned; they were always around. Spiritualism also had a notable technological

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element, which Virginian ghostlore did not share. The Southern ghosts did not need to be pulled from another world using recordings or mediums—they took care of themselves.

The ghostlore in Virginia also lacked the link to feminism that scholars have seen in the Spiritualism in the North. Many Northern Spiritualists also were active suffragists, while Virginian ghostlore was tied more closely to traditional domestic female roles. The women who reported ghosts in their homes did not claim a special skill that allowed them to contact the dead; rather, for them, the dead were a normal part of their domestic lives. Northern Spiritualism was a thing to share with friends—it was exciting, social, and special—whereas in Southern homes, ghosts were just another part of domestic life. For Southern women, they were no more remarkable than a broom, a cupboard, or a pile of bed linen in need of washing.

Scholars have also seen ghosts as being metaphors for loss, surrogates for guilt, or ways to silence politically risky discussions of the past. Renee Bergland looked at how white Americans used the idea of Native American ghosts to shape the United States’ identity. She explained that Native Americans, as ghosts, represented the nation’s guilty conscience and, at the same time, a longing for an imagined past. The Early European Americans who wrote about Native Americans in terms of their ghosts normalized the idea that Native Americans were a people who no longer existed and were of the past. That allowed other European Americans to at once feel ashamed for having wiped out an entire people and righteous in their sense of superiority over a conquered group.

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Judith Richardson’s look into ghosts and their relationship to the past ties ghosts to geographic space. Her research on the use of ghostlore in New York’s Hudson Valley region argues that ghost stories emerged to illustrate the diverse narratives of the past. She explains that rapid change and development in the area threatened to erase the memory of Native Americans and various immigrant groups. The ghost stories asserted the presence of a missing past.

Archaeologist Julia King wrote that ghostlore and ghost hunting at the Maryland Civil War site and recreational park, Point Lookout, shaped the narrative of the park into one that was sympathetic to the Confederacy and all but erased the legacy of African American involvement on that site. While Richardson argued that ghosts represent unseen narratives on the landscape, King asserted that ghost stories can just as easily eliminate histories. Tiya Miles’s research into ghost tourism in the lower South produced similar findings. She asserted that ghost stories transform the narrative of slavery into a gruesome horror story that lacks critical engagement with the real events and turns long-suffering enslaved people into monsters in the afterlife.

The interdisciplinary discussion around ghostlore adds new concerns to the historical study. Sociologist Avery Gordon established an important paradigm for ghost stories by arguing that they give voice to marginalized groups like women, African Americans, and Native Americans. For her, hauntings are “generalizable social

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phenomenon of great import” that encourage people to dig deeper, research, and ask questions that ultimately reveal things that were previously hidden. Sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers like Michael Mayerfeld Bell, Steven Pile, and Elizabeth Bird have illustrated that ghost stories give meaning to landscapes. Bird pointed out that people use ghost stories to create a sense of place and identity that both unites and defines the limitations of social groups. Bell argued that ghosts—or “the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there”—is a “ubiquitous aspect of the phenomenology of place.” Or rather, the concept of ghosts and hauntings is central to how people understand the past and place. There are others, like Gillian Bennet, Charles F. Emmons, and Susan Kwileki, who have studied ghosts in light of the New Age Spiritualist movement in the 1990s and found that ghostlore and hauntings offer a valuable therapeutic element for those seeking relief from the pain of loss. Their research explains that for many, a belief in ghosts offers grieving people comfort, forgiveness, and even a reconnection with lost loves ones.

Despite the diversity of meanings associated with ghosts that these scholars present, one of the most dynamic areas of ghostlore research is “dark tourism” and thanatourism. This discussion became famous under Philip Stone’s use. He explained that dark tourism “alludes to a sense of apparent disturbing practice and morbid products (and

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experiences) within the tourism domain.”

The examples he gives for places that are included in the dark tourism category are Ground Zero in New York, the Hurricane Katrina ruins in New Orleans, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the killing fields of Cambodia. More generally, he sees execution sites, prisons, graveyards, slavery-heritage sites, celebrity death sites, and battlefield sites as sharing the same “dark” quality. Specifically, he argues that sites of dark tourism are purposefully “dark” and aim to attract people seeking to have a very shallow engagement with the taboo of death. The concept of “Dark Tourism” as outlined by Stone assumes that people who travel to the death camps in Poland or to Southern plantations do so primarily out of a desire to have macabre or voyeuristic experiences.

Stone’s research does not consider the many other reasons why people travel to sites of mourning and loss. As helpful as the category “Dark Tourism” seems, it carries with it a sense that people seek out sites of pain for inappropriate and disrespectful reasons. There are a number of scholars who have challenged Stone’s assertions and have made calls for redefining the category to make it more useful. Stephan Miles recognized the problems in Stone’s work and reached out to the public to test his theory. He found that when asked, visitors showed “no evidence of a considered appreciation of the sites’ ‘darker’ aspects.” Miles explained that visitors expressed a “lighter set of values” and asserted that the commercial aspect of the sites—in this case English battle sites—kept the darkness at bay. Similarly, Michael S. Bowman and Phaedra Pezzullo explained that calling tourist

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practices “dark” contributes to “the already-formidable body of criticism and popular opinion that attributes only vulgar, base, and superficial motives to tourism.” They also point out that the term “dark tourism” further marginalizes historical tragedies and the people who experienced them and silences discussions about death, pain, and oppression. For African Americans, Native Americans, and other nonwhite minorities, sites of pain and loss are how their histories are represented on the national landscape. Calling those sites “dark” devalues their stories in favor of less complex histories that focus on those who did not suffer while also reinvoking color-based stigmas. Lastly, Avital Biran, Yaniv Poria, and Gila Oren surveyed tourists at Auschwitz, a place Stone called “the darkest edges of the dark tourism spectrum.” They found that Stone’s concept of “dark tourism” flatly ignores these tourists’ real motivations, ones more about religious faith and affirmations of life and anything but wallowing in titillating ghoulishness and grim voyeurism.

Stone assumes that death is always and only macabre—that the only possible experience of death is filtered through a very contemporary (and somewhat juvenile) popular culture and video-game-informed sensibility. Stone’s “Dark tourism” assumes that there is a strong and impermeable divide between life and death and that death, dying, and suffering are not part of a larger shared human condition experienced by many and in different ways.

For that reason, this study challenges the category of dark tourism and sees
ghostlore as much more than spooky tales that add macabre elements to domestic settings. Unpacking historical and place-based ghostlore offers public historians a new understanding of how the general public creates and uses ghost stories to shrink the distances between the past and present in order to develop a relationship with the past. Unlike material antiques such as lamps, plates, or even historical homes, ghosts suggest that the past, or the much-celebrated events in history, still exist. Hauntings challenge the progress of time, insisting that the people and events that happened at one point in time continue to happen for all of time.

I chose to locate this study in Virginia for three reasons. First, Virginians have had a long and documented interest in the commonwealth’s many ghost stories. Second, the Old Dominion’s history is appreciated well beyond its borders. And lastly, the state benefits significantly from its past.

In 1887, the *New York Times* published an article called “A Virginia Ghost Story,” which stated there were “few if any old plantations in Virginia” that do not have a “supernatural character.” In 1890, a writer at the *Staunton Spectator* asserted that a ghost story set in “the ancient capitol” of Williamsburg was “purely in the eternal fitness of things,” reasoning that the city was “a very sepulcher of departed spirits.” In 1900, the *Richmond Dispatch* ran an editorial that claimed, “Virginia people can tell more ghost stories than those of any other state.” As we will see, Virginians continued to tell ghost

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33 “Williamsburg Ghost Story,” *Staunton Spectator*, (16, July 1890).
34 “Virginia Ghosts,” *Richmond Dispatch*, (9, December 1900).
stories throughout the twentieth century, but as historical knowledge changed, so did ghost stories’ relationship to the past.

The national popularity of Virginia’s past makes it an especially valuable place for studying public history and what anthropologists have called “heritage,” or the celebration of culture and identity associated with the past. Virginia made its mark on the nation early as a large and successful British colony. The colony’s potential wealth attracted many planters and investors who would go on to produce eight US presidents, including four of the first five. The presence of Virginians in the young nation’s leadership ensures that present-day Americans keenly associate that state with the nation’s early years and formative ideals like freedom and liberty.

Of course, the celebration of Virginia’s most famous Revolutionary sons is nearly eclipsed by the devotion to its Civil War dead. From 1861 to 1865, Union and Confederate troops tore the state apart. Eastern Virginia’s landscapes and buildings still bear the scars of its much-recalled war years, and Americans love the commonwealth for that. This fascination with for the commonwealth’s first three centuries resulted in the creation of some of the most famous historical restoration projects—Jamestown, Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, and Monticello, to name a few—and numerous preserved battlefields and grave sites.

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These efforts to preserve the state’s physical history have allowed heritage to become a vital part of Virginia’s identity, economy, and quality of life. Today the state makes around $3.9 billion from historical restoration alone.\textsuperscript{36} Business Insider reported that Virginia was the sixth most popular state for US travelers—six, of course, being a very good score, considering that California, Florida, Nevada, Texas, and New York claim their own distinct destination identities and have sites like Disney World and Disney Land.\textsuperscript{37} In 2015, the Virginia Tourism Corporation reported that in that “historic sites/Churches,” museums, and “old homes/mansions” were among the top activities that brought people to Virginia.\textsuperscript{38} Around 30 percent of all the tourists who traveled to Virginia came for its historical places.\textsuperscript{39} The state not only identifies itself through its history but also benefits immensely from its association with the past. The commonwealth officially encourages celebration of its historical identity because it attracts national and international visitors whose tourist dollars fill governmental coffers. History is so deeply woven into Virginian life that it creates the perfect laboratory for understanding how history functions in people’s lives and how they understand their relationship to the past.

To that end, in this dissertation I explain the complex relationship that ghost stories had with the creation of the historical sites in Virginia. Chapter Two looks at the authors who created the foundational texts of Virginia’s occult heritage. Few historians have looked

\textsuperscript{36} “VCU Study Find Historic Preservation Contributes to Virginia’s Economy By Upwards of $3.9 Billion.” Preservation Virginia, Pressroom. 5, Feb 2014.

\textsuperscript{37} Jennifer Polland, “A Details Look at How Americans Travel Within the US.” Business Insider (30, October 2014).

\textsuperscript{38} Virginia Tourism Corporation, “Travelers to Virginia, 2015” from “CY2015 Virginia Travelers Fast Facts,” in Travel Data and Profiles. Accessed December 5, 2015 (https://www.vatc.org/uploadedFiles/Research/InfographicCY2015TA.pdf). The Virginia Tourism Corporation in conjunction with The Virginia Tourism Authority run the state’s “Welcome” Centers, promotes Virginia travel, and compile data. Their goal is to “more people, staying longer, spending more money.”

at these authors, and those that have mainly saw them as architectural writers. Writers such as Edith Tunis Sale, Robert Lancaster, and Marion Harland published illustrated coffee-table books that profiled the colonial-era homes in Virginia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their work established old homes’ architectural and historical significance and taught readers how to evaluate and ultimately preserve those homes. These books were the manuals for the Colonial Revival movement that swept across the United States, and they were filled with ghost stories. Chapter Two considers the historical information and ghost stories that they provided alongside the architectural details, to explain how ghostlore was seen as common and necessary elements of historical homes. I argue that the authors’ understanding of ghost stories as historical information reflected and encouraged Virginians’ association of ghostlore with a historical home’s significance.

Chapter Three picks up the narrative in the 1930s, when the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Federal Writers Project (FWP) collected ghost stories from non-elite Virginians and labeled their stories “folklore.” Together, Chapters Two and Three illustrate the popularity of historical ghostlore in the commonwealth and trace the changing ideas around ghost stories alongside the professionalization of restoration. They offer an explanation for why ghosts were celebrated, and later hidden, at historical sites.

Chapter Three illustrates how poor whites and African Americans used ghostlore to establish historical narratives at abandoned homes, ruins, and nondeveloped sites. Their stories were similar to those told about plantation homes, but they lacked the elite identity their counterparts possessed. For this reason, middle-class and upper-class whites, researchers, and professional museum workers considered the poor whites and African Americans’ ghost stories to be folklore and not history. I argue that racial and class
components of the title “folk” saw ghostlore as products of the uneducated African Americans and poor whites. This new understanding of ghostlore as “non-historical” and attached to the racially inferior made ghost stories no longer appropriate for the professionally curated historical sites. In the 1930s, the term *folklore* carried a dismissive sting—echoes of which still exist. Removing these stories from historical sites effectively silenced African Americans and poor or Appalachian whites in the historical landscape.

Chapter Four is a case study of Colonial Williamsburg. This chapter looks at how in the 1920s and ’30s, W. A. R. Goodwin used ghostlore and references to hauntings to explain why Williamsburg was both historically significant and in need of restoration. But as Williamsburg the city became Colonial Williamsburg the museum, newly hired professional museum workers, historians, and architects silenced the ghost stories that had so motivated Goodwin at the outset. Losing the ghosts left a hole in the museum’s core mission and meaning and forced curators and “hostesses” to explain Williamsburg’s significance to guests without referencing the spiritual connection that Goodwin used to establish the city’s value. They did this in a variety of creative ways that invoked the language and consequences of hauntings without referencing the ghost stories themselves. Advertisements and guides promised and even insisted that historical figures would walk the same streets alongside contemporary visitors; first-person historical interpreters became the historically acceptable embodiment of these promises and the new historically valid versions of the “ghosts” that populated Goodwin’s vision of the old city. In that way, the ghosts never really left Williamsburg—they just took different forms.

Chapter Five explains how national and local culture in Virginia created a space in which ghostlore could become an acceptable way that mass audiences could again
understand the relationship between the past and the present. I explain how author L. B. Taylor's Ghosts of Virginia books helped bring the uncanny back to historical sites by situating engaging ghostlore within historical narratives and settings. Written in the 1980s and ’90s, Taylor's books were perfectly timed. They spoke to a rising popular interest in ghosts evidenced in films, TV programs, and the New Age spiritualist movement. This chapter takes us to the present day and explains how contemporary ghostlore at historical sites is both the product of cultural forces unique to the 1990s and early 2000s and the legacy of historical haunts.

In Chapter Six, I conclude with a look at the current state of ghost tourism in Virginia. Williamsburg’s Peyton Randolph house is just one of many benefiting from ghost tours and tourism. Promoters in cities throughout the commonwealth argue that Old Dominion is teeming with ghosts. The chapter uses scripts of ghost tours and tourist responses to the tours to explore the historical content of these experiences. I use this as a way to engage with and critique the interdisciplinary discussion of “dark tourism” and “Thanatourism.”

Finally, a word on terminology. Like the spirits themselves, the language that English speakers used to describe them can seem nebulous. For that reason, I find it necessary to define the words “ghost” and “uncanny.” The exact meaning of the noun “ghost” is debatable and subject to many ideologies. I recognize that and seek to establish, for the use of this manuscript, a working definition. On the other hand, “uncanny” has clear taxonomy and definition and is an extremely useful adjective.
The definition of a ghost depends on whom one asks. Gillian Bennett pointed out that her research participants were not always comfortable with using the terms “ghost” and “haunting” but would talk about “visitations” and the sense that places have “happy” or “sad” energies. Other people might describe ghosts as the up-side-down U-shaped creatures seen in simple drawings or that they look like a dollop of whipped cream. Most often people identify ghosts as nearly translucent representations of once-living people, as in *Hamlet* or the 1980s film *Ghost*. Others might claim that ghosts don’t have feet and that you can tell a ghost from a human because ghosts float whereas people walk. For some people, ghosts do not need to be seen at all. Those invisible ghosts move things; they leave doors open, play with lights, and make noises.

On the other end of the spectrum are the “unfriendly” or frightening ghosts, which are like demons with the power to possess people and things—such as the television set from the film *Poltergeist*, to cite one popular example. These ghosts are unpredictable because they have unknown power and unprecedented access to the world of the living. They can slide through walls and floors, appear in mirrors, disappear and reappear, all while interacting with the living—an unnerving access that no human can gain. Often times, these ghosts look the way they did at the moment of their death: mangled, sickly, or

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suffering. They bring the decay and horror of the grave into the homes and workplaces of the living.

There are still other believers who describe ghosts as a sort of experienced energy. They will say that they felt the presence of their long-dead grandmother or a Civil War soldier. These ghosts are rather benign and are not described as “ghosts” but rather as “energies” or “feelings.” This can be a way for people to distance themselves from the stigmatism of irrational belief, or signal that the speaker is unsure of the experience altogether.

Descriptions of “feelings” and “energies” make the stories as shadowy as the ghosts themselves. It is easy to assert that there is a difference between seeing a ghost and feeling energy from the past—or the “spirit” of the past—or from a certain character. But I argue that ghosts, spirits, poltergeists, haunts, spooks, “haints,” visions, specters, energies, eerie feelings, and the like are all a part of the same thing. The desire to think otherwise comes from the pressure to disassociate oneself from the irrationality of ghosts. That need can be easily fulfilled by realizing that ghosts are a common feature in American, Western, and global cultures. Rather than worrying about whether or not ghosts are real, we do better to focus instead on what role ghost stories have played over time.

In each of my chapters, Virginians give ghosts a new definition. In Chapter One, the old-home biographers see ghosts as evidence of the past. In the Chapter Two, the Federal Writers Project and the Folklore Project define ghosts as folklore. In Chapter Three, we see how the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation transformed their interpretive staff into a species of ghost, and Chapter Four explains how L. B. Taylor taught Americans to see ghosts as heritage. Chapter Five explains how ghosts today are evidence of the past, folklore,
heritage, and interpretation. No matter the milieu or the delicate shifts in understanding, for the bulk of the twentieth century and the first bit of the twenty-first century, ghosts have represented the inexplicable presence of past people on the present-day landscape.

The term “uncanny” is easy to define. It comes to us by way of Sigmund Freud. He used “uncanny”—or “unheimlich”—to mean something hidden or unfamiliar. He divided the German word in two: “un” meaning “not,” and “heimlich” meaning “home.” For Freud, home was a reliable, familiar metaphor for a place where one found comfort in the things one knew to be true. Uncanny, then, is the opposite of the comforts of home and refers to something unexplainable, deeply odd, and intrusive, which forces one to confront a mysterious unknown.

Take, for instance, when Lafayette bedded down in Peyton Randolph’s Virginia home—something he had done many times before. He expected that a night in the home would be a quiet and restful. Instead, his expectations of home were shattered by something spectral and uncanny. Did any of that happen? Lafayette, of course, never mentioned the incident, and there is every reason to suspect that the story is simply an invention of an imaginative Peyton Randolph House tour guide. However, the anecdote connects home and ghost in a way that encapsulates the idea of the uncanny—the ghost makes the place both home and un-home, two logically opposite things placed in relative harmony. The mixture of emotional connection and intangible mystery is exactly what Virginia’s house museums offer. Lafayette was not a Virginian. Perhaps if he was, he might

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44 Not to be confused with “Heimlich” as the proper name which refers to Dr. Henry Heimlich’s first aid procedure for removing obstructions from the airways known as “The Heimlich Maneuver.”
have been more accustomed to the idea that while ghosts might be alien, they were also just a fact of life in Virginia’s old homes—a common uncanny.
CHAPTER ONE
WHERE GHOSTS WALK

In 1806, Massachusetts politician Josiah Quincy III spent the night at Mount Vernon. Bushrod Washington, the then owner of the home, set him up in the very room in which George Washington had died only seven years earlier. He told Quincy that previous guests reported seeing the general’s ghost in the room at night. Having heard this, Quincy spent part of the evening lying awake, pondering “the possibility” that he might be “worthy to behold the glorified spirit” of “him who was so revered by his country men.”\textsuperscript{45} He assured himself that he did not\textit{ truly} believe in the possibility of ghosts, and fell asleep. But, sleeping lightly, he happened to open his eyes in the darkened room to see none other than George Washington’s specter looming over him. After that night, he had to question exactly what he was willing to believe.\textsuperscript{46}

Quincy took part in what was already a well-established tradition of Americans visiting Mount Vernon. Originally, visitors came to see George Washington himself, but Quincy visited long after the great man was dead. The general’s nephew, Bushrod, wanted to continue the valuable tradition of taking in guests. But his proprietorship of Mount Vernon was vastly different from his uncle’s. Rather than offering people the chance to meet the real-life George Washington, Bushrod offered them the chance to experience the

\textsuperscript{45} Josiah Quincy,\textit{ Figures of the Past: From Leaves of Old Journals}. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 247.
\textsuperscript{46} Quincy,\textit{ Figures of the Past} (1883), 247.
president’s lingering ghost. He was happy to let guests know that even in death, George Washington was still holding audiences with “his” visitors.

Bushrod was not the only nineteenth-century Virginian sharing tales of the colonial era’s best-known people haunting their historic homes. Indeed, Virginians expected ghosts to haunt the halls in the Old Dominion’s plantations. “No old Virginia mansion is quite complete without a ghost,” wrote one observer; in fact, “every neighborhood” had “its haunted houses.” Architectural researchers Selma Farmer and Core Rowena Townsend proclaimed “every old house” in Virginia “should have a romance and a ghost.” Many owners of the departed great and good’s homes were happy to claim a haunting, because the presence of past people helped to maintain their and their home’s historical elite identity. The owners of Westover, William Byrd II’s elegant James River Georgian mansion, claimed that the great man’s daughter Evelyn haunted the home long after her eighteenth-century death. Her story recalled the family’s preeminence and notable social sphere. The owners of Federal Hill, a rambling framed home in Fredericksburg, claimed that Governor Alexander Spotswood roamed about the property in his hunting attire—

even though he had died in 1740 and had no association with the home.\textsuperscript{52} Locals were unsure of the true site of Spotswood’s home, but the ghost story gave the honor of the Virginian Governor to Federal Hill. Residents of James Monroe’s Ash Lawn, just outside Charlottesville in the shadow of Jefferson’s Monticello, said that late president’s ghost rocked an old chair in the oldest part of the home—they needed evidence that they shared their home with the celebrated statesman and uncritically associated the sound with Monroe.\textsuperscript{53} The various occupants who slept at the Wythe House, in Williamsburg—itself known as the “very sepulcher of departed spirits”—had reported no less than three respected ghosts, George Wythe and George Washington among them.\textsuperscript{54} The stories offered evidence that the fanciful eighteenth century existed and was observably true at the turn of the twentieth century. The ghost stories helped homeowners associate themselves with the famous elites that they had no chance of meeting.

These tales worked well to establish the sort of “trans-temporal” relationship that many Virginians longed to claim. But it is important to note that ghosts were not independent agents; they could not make sense of themselves or explain the significance of their hauntings. Rather than the ghosts, it was the stories, both told and written, that made them valuable. The wraiths needed living advocates who could locate them, invent and tell their stories, and most importantly, bring them to wide audiences. Writers—or specifically, writers with an interest in old homes—took it upon themselves to be Virginia’s ghost advocates and recorded the uncanny’s relationship with the historical. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, writers including Marion Harland, Edith

\textsuperscript{52} Lee, \textit{Virginia Ghosts}, (1930), 69.
\textsuperscript{53} Lee, \textit{Virginia Ghosts}, (1930), 143.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Staunton Spectator} "Williamsburg Ghost Story" 16, July 1890.
Tunis Sale, Robert Lancaster, Marguerite DuPont Lee, Susan Williams Massie, Francis Archer Christian, Hildegarde Hawthorne, Agnes Rothery, and Emmie Ferguson Farrar combined the ghost stories that homeowners told them with architectural information to explain that Virginia’s old homes had simultaneously emotional, historical, and architectural value—a unique mix facilitated only by the uncanny. These authors ranged from established, well-published writers and architectural historians to storytellers and historical enthusiasts. They shared a passion for old homes, and they valued ghost stories as sources of historical information.

During their travels across the Old Dominion, these writers collected a variety of ghost stories at the homes they visited. The stories Virginians told came in three distinct types with three distinct missions that illustrated how and why white-elite Virginians used ghost stories to talk about that past. The first type were the overtly historical, which highlighted the historical narratives homeowners read in books; the second were the suggestively historical, which illustrated a presence of the past that was often vague, and lacked developed historical characters; and the third were the familial, which highlighted the homeowners’ ancestral relations to historical characters. They all offered evidence of and illustrated the presence of white Virginians’ fanciful vision of an unproblematic white-elite eighteenth century. The specific place-based stories directly associated twentieth-century owners with the imagined past and helped them sustain their own historical-elite identities and family legacies. Even so, the most generic tale worked to draw attention to the owner’s relationship with the place-based past.

Few historians have studied the old family ghost stories or the old-home biographers. Camilla Well’s “Multistoried House” was perhaps the only essay to recognize
both Sale and Lancaster’s contributions to how Americans understood and spoke about the intrinsic value of old homes.\textsuperscript{55} The emotional value and ghost stories that early authors recognized and encouraged were central to the historical meaning of old Virginian homes and have been universally disregarded in scholarship in favor of the objective evaluations of the homes’ construction.

Virginia’s historical preservation movement is the subject of long and growing scholarly discussion. Charles Hosmer’s 1981 work created the structure that scholars have universally adopted to talk about preservation. He argued historical preservation’s history is split between a romantic period, in which volunteers created and curated historical sites and buildings, and a professional period in which university-trained curators and directors crafted objective narratives.\textsuperscript{56} Hosmer saw the creation of Colonial Williamsburg as the dividing line. The multibuilding project employed professionally trained researchers and sought to provide the most accurate and authentic restoration possible. Rather than providing a narrative that celebrated what Americans already knew and loved about the past, Colonial Williamsburg sought to provide objective architectural studies, which gained value through associations with historical heroes.

For the past thirty years, historians have teased out the nuanced political issues that push and pull historical sites within Hosmer’s dichotomy. James Lindgren’s study of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), one the commonwealth’s major preservation bodies, explained that after the Civil War, white Virginians wanted to avoid association with the commonwealth’s recent rebellion and loss. Rather than looking

\textsuperscript{56} Hosmer, \textit{Preservation Comes of Age}. (1981).
forward, the early APVA sought to design Virginia’s historical identity around the English settlement at Jamestown and white Christianity.\textsuperscript{57} Patricia West broadened the argument by adding a consideration of gender to the discussion.\textsuperscript{58} She noted, as Lindgren had, that early female volunteers used preservation to assert their identities as stewards of the past, but added that volunteer and professional museum workers were far more influenced by political ideas than by their training.\textsuperscript{59} Her work explained that professional or not, those who funded an institution dictated what version of “the past” each institution supported.

Anders Greenspan’s study of Colonial Williamsburg added to West’s argument a consideration of constituents. He pointed out that historical sites are subject to the changing opinions and learning styles of their guests.\textsuperscript{60} Jessie Swigger’s study of Greenfield Village insisted that the communities surrounding historical sites shape their narratives as well.\textsuperscript{61} Hosmer’s division between volunteer and professional workers still stands, but scholars have asserted time and again that historical sites are much more tied to the field of historical memory than previously understood.

Michael Kammen’s early work on historical memory and heritage pointed out that societies use their pasts to create their present-day identities.\textsuperscript{62} David Glassberg argued, and Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen further proved, that Americans use the past to associate themselves with stories bigger than themselves, adding value to their lives and

\textsuperscript{57} Lindgren, Preserving the Old Dominion, (1993).
\textsuperscript{58} West, Domesticating History, (1999); Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age. (1981).
\textsuperscript{60} Greenspan, Creating Colonial Williamsburg, (2009).
meaning to their existence. The narratives these scholars created are complex and convincing, but they nevertheless miss that there was also something far less rational than interest politics and identity formation at work in many preservation projects.

This chapter argues that ghostlore inspired Virginians to restore old buildings and homes and that ghosts were also a way for Virginians to create links to people and events greater than themselves. In many cases, ghostlore was as influential a motive as patriotism. The prevalent narrative of gender politics and race politics has overlooked the preservation movement's uncanny roots. James Lindgren and Patricia West's argument that preservation began as white peoples' attempts to control historical narrative does not so much answer why historical sites were important to preserve, so much as it reveals the kinds of pasts that interested early preservationists and what was at stake in their invocation. Harder to get at is the emotional, experiential side of preservation: why did some historical places carry significance? Why was it important that places look as they did in the past, and what was at stake in what might be simple design choices? Why was it necessary that modern-day people saw and experienced representations of the past? Virginians found answers to many of these questions by explaining that the spirits of famed Virginians and beloved ancestors still roamed about the old halls and gardens.

Virginians shared ghost stories to establish that their homes retained the past. The ghosts themselves were understood as observable evidence of select homes' and sites' connection to historical events and people. They told stories that illustrated that their homes were distinct and worthy of attention and respect. The stories presented the

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argument that because specific old homes held on to intangible, yet visible, characters, events, themes, or emotions of the past, they were more deserving of celebration than other old homes. In addition, a select few Virginians told ghost stories that recalled their intimate and exclusive family relation to historical characters who haunted their homes. Old-home owners used the hauntings to include themselves into what one author called the “deliberate cult of the past.”

Each of the three kinds of ghost stories that Virginians told offered a unique vision of the place-based past and illustrated how Virginians made use of their specific pasts. The overtly historical ghost stories focused on one or more historical persons or events set in a given landscape. Homeowners used the spectral historical characters to explain how their homes held onto evidence of a specific narrative of the past. Rather than just claiming that an event happened or a person visited, hauntings offered evidence of the past event by establishing that the event continued to exist. These ghost stories made otherwise remote histories into observable facts. This let places retain their significance long after physical structures, landscapes, and residents had changed. It also made things once thought lost to time—history’s people, emotions, and esthetics—accessible to the living. It allowed people from one time period to claim a close, emotional, and at times personal connection to celebrated past people. Perhaps most importantly for the old-home owners, the hauntings allowed them to recall, and share in, their properties’ grand histories even if they personally could not live up to a previous owner’s grandiose lifestyle or heroic deeds.

The suggestively historical ghost stories did similar work. These tales focused on the peculiar or extraordinary events that led to the haunting and gave homes a romantic and

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idealized historical tone. Rather than relying on a specific historical event, these stories
took place in loosely identified pasts and sought to add unusual and interesting stories to
select old homes. Unlike the often-reused historical characters, like George Washington or
Thomas Jefferson, these tales gave homes their own characters and histories. The
hauntings let homeowners claim a past that was completely unique and exclusive to each
house. This allowed them to understand and advertise their homes as a part of the
commonwealth’s historical identity. As historical tourism became more and more of a
profitable business in the Old Dominion, these ghost stories allowed homeowners to join
more famous homes in making money off of the past. The new funds allowed homeowners
to maintain the properties and lifestyles that recalled their elite ancestors and ghosts. A
major part of this identity was the idea that Virginia was like a mosaic of local and national
histories. Some stories had stronger ties to national narratives about wars or heroes, some
sites had simply more attractive stories than others, but the ghost stories gave all places,
sites, and homes a competitive edge in a sea of historical sites and house museums. The
suggestively historical ghost stories affirmed the continued existence of a past and
incorporated homes and other sites in Virginia’s historical identity and economy.

Lastly, familial hauntings made homes even more individualized than the
suggestively historical tales. These ghost stories included long-dead family members, who
may or may not have had a claim to national-historic fame. Familial hauntings recalled the
lasting legacy of Virginian families and maintained the family’s presence long after
characters died or the family moved away. Many of these ghosts are members of the “First
Families of Virginia”: the Carters, Fairfax, Harrisons, Lees, Byrds, Beverleys, Nelsons, Pages,
Randolphs, Spencers, Washingtons, Wests, Taliaferros, Tayloes, and others—names that
still carry social prestige to this day. Ghosts of these families connected descendants, or new homeowners, to prestigious lineages.

The familial ghosts helped the new residents of old homes build a connection to the property and claim an elite identity by including them in the old family’s legacy. These stories made the elite white colonial past into something that subsequent residents could know intimately like a relative, love like a family member, and claim for themselves. They made elite historical identity as obtainable as a house and as transferable as a deed.

In all the stories that Virginians told at their old homes, they sought what Quincy reported after his stay at Mount Vernon: that the apparition of a famous Virginian would mark their homes as historical and their residents as “blessed.” It was the ghost that affirmed that the home and its owners still maintained the quality, prestige, and value worthy of the great eighteenth-century visitors from beyond. A ghost was a mark of approval from the past, bestowed on a lucky few. When people told the stories, they were claiming the mantle of age-old authority and status. In this way, far from being silly or superstitious prattling, elite Virginian old-home owners used and promoted their ghost tales to make very real-world claims to their own statuses and to legitimize their rights to sit at the top of social hierarchies.

Old-home biographers of the early twentieth century were central in spreading these stories and their messages. The writers helped give voice to homeowners’ spectral claims by confirming their authority and prestige. The biographers, just like the homeowners, used ghost stories to establish and reinforce place-based historical narratives in old Virginia homes while reestablishing homeowners’ connection to beloved characters and tales. To do this, the authors wove together established historical stories and
unexplainable experiences to assert the timelessness of Virginia’s colonial and antebellum pasts. The stories asserted that Virginians were not simply the descendants of great men and past people but also their housemates, intimate companions, and equal associates.

This was the case with the Wythe House in Williamsburg. Old-home biographers frequently stopped at the house because it conformed to all their specific interests: it was old, it was the home of elite white Virginians, it was relatively well taken care of, and of course, it had ghosts. Though few writers mentioned the names of the people they spoke with, the entries usually included the same three ghost stories. The early-twentieth-century homeowners whom Robert Lancaster spoke with bragged that “no less than three ghosts” haunted their old house, including Lady Skipwith, Judge George Wythe, and “the shadow of General Washington.”

One of the three ghosts was the home’s original owner, George Wythe. He was a law professor and judge in Williamsburg who went on to sign the Declaration of Independence and serve as a delegate in the Continental Congress. He was a well-respected man and a friend to many American revolutionaries. Before the Revolution, the Wythe House hosted delegates to the Virginia Assembly, including Thomas Jefferson, whom Wythe had mentored in the law. In 1781, the home served as George Washington’s headquarters during the Battle of Yorktown. The home had many moments upon which its twentieth-century owners could rest their historical claims.

But to associate themselves with the home’s eighteenth-century residents, the twentieth-century residents spun and collected numerous ghost stories that illustrated

65 Robert Lancaster, Historical Virginia Homes and Churches (New York: Lippincott Company. 1915), 20. There are many retellings of the Wythe House ghosts. Lady Skipwith is a common ghost they all share, the other two change depending on who tells the story.
how the glamorous, dramatic, and patriotic past remained in their home. The stories became so well-known that writers Robert Lancaster, Edith Tunis Sale, Marion Harland, and Marguerite DuPont Lee saw no reason to mention who had told them the stories or where they originated—everyone knew the stories. Harland said the events in the Wythe House were so “often repeated” that the appearance of home’s non-“visible inmates” excited “no alarm” or “scarcely” a “remark” from the living.66

One of the most popular stories was about Lady Ann Skipwith.67 Sometime during the 1770s, Skipwith and her husband, Sir Peyton Skipwith, took up residence at the Wythe House while attending one of the dazzling balls at the nearby Governor’s Palace. The story that owners told began with a description of Lady Skipwith eagerly dressing herself in her finest clothes. DuPont Lee described the outfit as a “cream satin” dress and “tiny red slippers.”68 The outfit established the idea that trendy ladies hung around the Wythe House; it marked the home as a place of elite colonial society and high fashion. Second to her fashion was her drama; owners told DuPont Lee and others that some mysterious disturbance had upset Lady Skipwith that night and sent her “hastily” into the night and running back to the Wythe House.69

Sale, Lancaster, Harland, and DuPont Lee reported that since the event, people heard distinctive footsteps in the Wythe House. DuPont Lee said people saw Skipwith’s ghost preparing for another ball as if no time had passed. The people she spoke with reported seeing the wraith, “fully gown in Colonial Ball costume,” emerge from a closet

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66 Marion Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads and Their Stories (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1897), 497.
and, ever the meticulous dresser, examine her outfit in a nearby mirror. Lancaster said that guests could “glimpse” the “lovely” Skipwith descend ”the broad, dark stairs” in the home’s front hall just as she had done before the ball. Her red slippers also made an appearance, and on rare occasions, they saw the spirit “flittering restlessly” through the halls and rooms. Harland reported that the home’s nameless owner was so accustomed to the sounds of Lady Skipwith’s ornate red shoes tapping on the wood floors that she began dissecting the sound for its human characteristics. The owner asserted that she knew for certain that the sounds belonged to someone with the “buoyancy of youth” and with the “carriage” of a “highbred” Virginian. The stories about Lady Skipwith’s ghost transformed the old home into the site of colonial glamour and romantic mystery. Residents and guests knew precisely what fashionable outfit Skipwith wore, but their imaginations had to fill in what effrontery sent her from the party and back to the welcoming hearth of the Wythe House. The ghost story about Lady Skipwith made the home interesting and attractive. The tale not only asserted the presence of the past, but it suggested that there was a mystery, something left to discover in the house. The potential that the house had more to tell about the haunting and the past made the structure valuable and worthy of attention and care.

Skipwith’s ghost was only one of the wraiths that haunted the Wythe House. Like its ghosts, the house had many stories and identities. Not long after Skipwith visited the home, the Revolutionary War broke out and George Washington reached out to Wythe in need of lodging. While there, Washington made the major decision to call on the Marquis de

71 Lancaster, Historical Virginia Homes and Churches (1915), 20-21.
73 Though “Hostess” was the title given to the docents at Colonial Williamsburg, Harland’s use of the term does not reflect this; she is referring to the home’s female owner, not a tour guide.
74 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 498.
Lafayette and his troops to block English general Cornwallis’s attempted escape from the peninsula. Thanks to that crucial decision—made in the Wythe House—the war ended less than a month later. The war gave the Wythe House a more direct claim to national history. While Lady Skipwith offered an engaging and mysterious story, the war gave the homeowners the ability to claim a connection with George Washington.

Though the people of Williamsburg, and the Wythe House’s owners, knew that Washington had stayed at the house, they debated the true identity of his specter. Harland reported that someone more exotic—a “young Frenchman,” one of “Rochambeau’s officers”—haunted the home. Harland’s contact said the young man died in an upper room of an unknown illness and haunted the house. Sale’s source agreed and added that the officer died just before the battle of Yorktown, leaving his patriotic duty unfulfilled. Lancaster’s unnamed witness said that it was Washington’s ghost that paced the old home’s hallways. No matter the ghost’s true identity, the owners used their tales to claim a connection to the brave and heroic acts from Revolutionary War. The mysterious death, and the ghost’s mistaken identity, gave visitors and homeowners just enough information to fabricate their own romantic narratives to fill the house with meaning.

Residents reported that George Wythe’s ghost hobnobbed with the red-shoed Lady Skipwith, and Washington. Wythe’s ghost was different from the other two or three that haunted the home before him, because George Wythe’s nephew had killed him. The court nearly found Wythe’s grandnephew, George Wythe Sweeney, guilty of poisoning the judge,

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75 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads, (1897), 498.
76 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 498.
but Sweeney escaped punishment. An African American cook, whose race made her testimony illegitimate in Virginia court, was the only witness.\textsuperscript{79} Though he died in his Richmond home, Wythe’s specter returned to his Williamsburg dwelling. Those who believed the story said it was Wythe’s choice to haunt his Williamsburg home. This illustrated that he preferred the home, and it allowed later residents to argue that the home was the most significant of his properties.

The specific story was consistent; unlike the Washington story, most storytellers agreed on a series of core facts. Specially, Wythe’s ghost only appeared occasionally and only in his bedroom. Lancaster’s informants reported that each year on June 8, Wythe would appear in his old room and run his cold, ethereal fingers across the face of whoever was staying there that night.\textsuperscript{80} Harland’s informants said that in addition to laying his icy hands on people’s faces, the ghost would swing the room’s closet door open and closed and slowly blow cold air into the room.\textsuperscript{81} Harland added that many people challenged the homeowners’ story and demanded to sleep in Wythe’s room, but no one “cared to repeat the experiment.”\textsuperscript{82}

While Chancellor Wythe’s spirit as an ornery character, the Revolutionary specters, and Lady Skipwith’s spirit were shocking to see, the homeowners saw them as harmless. Harland reported that the owners of Wythe house knew them all to be “punctilious ghosts” who meant no harm to living people.\textsuperscript{83} Virginia’s ghosts showed the same fine manners as had their eighteenth-century contemporaries—residents and guests at the time believed

\textsuperscript{80} Lancaster, Historical Virginia Homes and Churches (1915), 20.
\textsuperscript{81} Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 499.
\textsuperscript{82} Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 499.
\textsuperscript{83} Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 499.
that encounters with the ghosts would be as genteel and elevating as they imagined it might have been to have an audience with them when they were alive.

The Wythe house’s stories worked especially well for the homeowners because the ghosts agreed with the historical narratives written in books and fantasies about the colonial era. But not all homes were as well matched with ghosts. In some cases, the stories that people told did not reflect historical documents or any kind of factual information. Residents of haunted homes sometimes claimed a resident ghoul who had never lived in or visited for long on their property. These hauntings were even more important for establishing the presence of the past, because there was so little information to establish a home’s specific history and the owner’s share in the home’s elite identity beyond the ghosts.

Such was the case for those who lived in and visited Federal Hill in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Marguerite DuPont Lee visited the property and its owner, Mrs. Theodora Randolph Keim, in the mid-1920s. Keim told DuPont Lee that she and her mother, Mrs. Henry Theodora Wight, believed that sharing their home with the long-dead governor Alexander Spotswood made their home special. Keim said that her mother had known that the “Spirit of Governor Spotswood” haunted the house since the day she bought it.84 It was a selling point. Wight may have recognized that the ghost authenticated the home’s historical character. After all, it provided her with years of interesting and engaging stories to tell her friends and guests and allowed her to claim a connection to a famous early Virginian.

But despite the previous owners’ belief that Alexander Spotswood built the house, Spotswood never lived at Federal Hill. Keim kept up the tradition and reported that she saw the governor’s ghost standing near a small sideboard in the dining room, wearing a “pink coat and hunting breeches,” just like in his portrait. She said he stood by the little cabinet and mixed drinks like “apple-toddlies,” eggnog, and “hot grog” in preparation for what was sure to be a riotous hunt. A friend and previous owner of Federal Hill, Mrs. Margaret Halsey Wier, told Keim that she saw the pink-clad man “hurrying up” the front step and on to the porch.

On one occasion, Mrs. Harriet Dickens Wight, who owned the home before Theodora Wight, found their kitchen completely abandoned by their African American staff. She explained that they had all run away scared, because the cook’s daughter had seen the ghost. The young girl described “an old gentleman” wearing pink “boy’s pants” and holding “a silver cup” just like the “old man” in the portrait on the wall. The Wights reasoned that “without any education” and too “young to have invented the story,” the child must have told the truth. But the “disappearance of the household staff” offered solid evidence. The Wights believed that unlike the elite white Virginians, African Americans did not revel in sharing space with colonial ghosts. They had a different view of the past, and it was not lovely, dramatic, and patriotic as the elite whites believed. Wight knew that both her fellow elite whites had seen the ghost, but she was not convinced that her staff knew about it until they refused to be in the ghost’s company.

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Though Spotswood did not build the home or live there, his ghost’s presence was evidence enough for the Keims, Wights, and Wiers to argue that the house was historical and linked to one of the most famous names in Spotsylvania County. While the history presented in the ghost stories differed from what actually happened at Federal Hill, the haunting established, for better or worse, that Spotswood haunted the property. Invoking him made the home important and gave the owners a special relationship with the past and with one another. For them, the haunting proved that the home’s history was not simply rhetorical; it was a fact that anyone could observe.

Just across town from Federal Hill, Kenmore’s owners claimed some similarly contrived elite colonial haunts. The ghosts at Kenmore established the home as a well-loved gathering place—a characteristic that the original owners, Fielding Lewis and George Washington’s sister Betty Washington Lewis, wanted but were never able to produce. The 1773 home was expensive and stylish—the Lewises had hoped to make their home the area’s center of entertainment. Much to their disappointment, war broke out before they could finish furnishing their high-fashion seat, let alone have many fine parties. Lewis spent his fortune helping to fund his brother-in-law’s war, and the house only became the gathering place they intended it to be through the twentieth-century owners’ ghost stories.

Despite the home’s history of fits and starts, owners and visitors to the old plantation filled its halls with the guests that the Lewises always wanted. Edith Tunis Sale spoke with an unnamed source at Kenmore, who reported that famous colonial specters like George Washington visited the home many times in search of much-needed rest. Sale

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added that the owners believed that at times, Washington brought Thomas Jefferson, Lafayette, and other nameless “famous men and women” with him to Kenmore. The owners suggested that all the fine and fancy colonial people patiently haunted the “drawing-room,” ready for the next party to begin. The party ghosts allowed the owners to turn the home’s unfulfilled destiny into historical fact and to play host to the some of history’s most honored Virginians. The stories allowed Kenmore to be, in supernatural form, what it could not be in a time of war and conflict.

But the glamorous party ghosts were not the only wraiths that Kenmore’s owners talked about. When Marguerite DuPont Lee visited the home, she heard a sadder story, which was more true to the home’s history and worked well to focus that history on the eighteenth century. Mrs. William Jefferies Chewning reported that a despondent and opaque Fielding Lewis paced the great house’s halls. Having spent all his money buying guns for the war, Lewis was broke by the war’s end. The seemingly endless bills “harassed” the last years of his life with “constant worry.” Many generations after his death, locals reported that Lewis’s apparition appeared in “broad day light,” either standing in his office or sitting woefully at his desk but always holding his bills. Those who had not seen Lewis had heard “the heavy tread of a man’s foot,” thudding through the halls and on the stairs. They said doorknobs turned on their own, and mysterious footsteps were heard in empty rooms. On one occasion, a door refused to close for several days until a caretaker

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announced he would have to call a carpenter, a service that would certainly result in yet another bill. Almost immediately, DuPont Lee reported, the door loosened.98

The Lewis family never used Kenmore as the party house they wanted. But the ghosts provided the old plantation with a different, perhaps more satisfying story that affirmed the homeowners’ preferred genteel colonial narrative. Lewis’s ghost, on the other hand, helped authenticate the party ghosts by association. His narrative was true—Lewis did lose his money during the war. It is probable that he paced the halls, bills in hand, wondering how to manage his debt. The story of his haunting reflected a factual history event and gave room for people to consider the other story as a reflection of a factual reality as well.

Furthermore, for later owners of Kenmore, the ghosts were especially important for associating themselves with the elite colonial world. They asserted not only the presence of the past, but a specifically fabulous eighteenth-century past. By the turn of the twentieth century, the old plantation house was hidden by newer homes. The old colonial-era plantation was then a modest downtown best known for a bloody Civil War battle. Claims about ghosts in Kenmore, no matter how improbable, asserted that the home was a capsule for a lovely, yet tragic, colonial-era history. The ghosts were the observable remains of a time long gone. They alone reinforced the homeowners’ preferred historical narrative by offering observable evidence of its existence.

Ghosts worked well to establish a home’s given time period. Stories of an eighteenth-century ghost would direct homeowners and guests to understand a building’s significance to be of the eighteenth century, while a nineteenth-century ghost would

establish a home’s significance to be from the nineteenth century. The ghosts worked a lot like antique objects; their existence in a place helped to define the time period. They also provided much needed historical evidence. The owners of Ash Lawn depended on a haunting to assert their incorrect claim that their old home was in fact James Monroe’s home, Highland. The property sat just outside of Charlottesville in the Appalachian Mountains. On a dry autumn day, one could see Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello sitting high above the property on the same mountain. The owner of Ash Lawn had a reason to suspect their home was historically significant. James Monroe had owned the property, but the twentieth-century owners did not have sufficient evidence to prove that Monroe owned the specific house that was then (and still is) sitting on the property. In 1867, the third family to own the property after the Monroes built the home named Ash Lawn onto what they believed was the Monroe’s home, Highland. The structure itself was strange and appears today, as it did then, to be two distinct homes, one piggybacked onto the other. For Mr. and Mrs. Massey, the owners of Ash Lawn in the 1920s, Monroe’s ethereal presence in their home offered clear evidence of the home’s identity despite architectural evidence to the contrary.

Mrs. Massey claimed that she heard the ghost walk along the old bushes, enter the oldest part of the home, “seat itself” in a rocking chair, and “violently” rock it “to and fro.”99 Monroe did not spend much time at Ash Lawn when he owned the property. As the minister to England and France, he frequently traveled abroad. But Mrs. Massey insisted that after his travels he would return home to his chair and rock away his travel-weary woes.

Massey’s ghost story asserted that the strange little home attached to Ash Lawn was truly Highland—the earlier home on the site. She had no documented evidence that definitively said that the structure was the fifth president’s home. But his specter illustrated that it was. The haunting was allegedly evidence that the home still retained enough of the qualities that Monroe liked to warrant repeated post-death visits.

York Hall’s wraith provided similar narrative-affirming evidence. Thomas Nelson had York Hall built in 1730 in Yorktown Virginia. Locals noted the Georgian home for its location on what became the Yorktown Battlefield and for sustaining great damage during the war. The story goes that during the Battle of Yorktown, the English general Cornwallis made his headquarters in York Hall. Thomas Nelson Jr., then a general in the Continental Army, was dismayed to find his home occupied but told General Lafayette not to spare his home. On Nelson’s orders, the house was “completely destroyed” in the battle.100

Years later, a couple, Mr. and Mrs. George Preston Blow, bought and restored the home. Much to their surprise, the home’s reconstruction did not dissuade ghosts from haunting it as if it were fully original. A mutual friend of the Blows’ and DuPont Lee’s, Mrs. William Jeffries Chewning, reported that the spirit was a British soldier who died hiding in a “secret staircase” that Thomas Nelson Sr. had built in the original structure.101 She explained that during the battle, a bullet struck the soldier, and he died alone behind a panel in the dining room.

On one occasion, when the Blows were entertaining guests in the dining room, Mrs. Chewning brought up the haunting. Mrs. Blow said she had heard of the ghost but had not seen anything since moving into the home. At that moment, Mrs. Chewning reported, the

100 Lee, “York Hall,” Virginia Ghosts (1930), 204.
door to the secret staircase burst open, smacking the sideboard and causing several dishes to fall from their places, sending a mighty explosion of ceramic sherds sprawling across the dining room floor. “The faces of the guests blanched!” DuPont Lee added. The moment the ghost opened the door, Chewning said she knew that the stories were true.

The story of the ghost’s rumblings asserted that the past was not only present but that it was responsive—the Blows truly lived with the past. The old home did not simply carry a story; it held within it a nearly live Revolutionary-era soldier who could hear conversations and control the material objects in the house. No matter how the house changed or who owned it, the ghost forever established that the building’s experience during the Battle of Yorktown defined it and made it historical.

The story of Evelyn Byrd’s haunting of Westover plantation in Charles City is perhaps the best-known ghost story in the area and maintains the plantation’s eighteenth-century identity. Despite changes in scenery and ownership, and the Byrd's financial ruin, the ghost at Westover provided evidence that the home maintained its eighteenth-century life and identity. This story stands out from the others because of its great detail. Owners, guests, and neighbors have told the story so many times, over many years, that it has picked up rich details that assert the Byrds’ elite status, the importance of their colonial identity, and the home's retention of their lives.

William Byrd II had Westover built in 1726. DuPont Lee called him one of “the brightest stars” in Virginia’s “social skies.” But William did not haunt the old plantation. Rather, his lovely daughter, Evelyn, was the resident wraith. Harland explained that William brought her to England at the tender age of sixteen. In London, he introduced her

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103 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 33-38.
to the king and his court. Evelyn fell deeply and “passionately” in love with Charles Morduant, “the grandson of Lord Peterborough.”104 Despite their love, the pair could not marry. Morduant was a Catholic, and Byrd was a Protestant, and William Byrd would not consent to the match.

DuPont Lee explained that Evelyn was heartbroken at her father’s refusal.105 Evelyn refused to marry any suitor who expressed interest in her, and never gave a reason for her rejections. DuPont Lee said that Evelyn kept her love “buried so deep in her heart,” and Harland specified that the sadness “ate” her heart out.106 She soon became sick from heartbreak and died, having never grown old.

Fortunately, Harland explained, a week before Evelyn died, she told her good friend and confidante Anne Harrison that she would come to the garden to meet with her once she “passed out of others’ sight.”107 One year after Evelyn’s death, Anne Harrison took a walk down to the garden, to the same spot she had spoken about with Evelyn the day before she died. Much to Anne’s surprise and delight, she saw Evelyn standing beside her tombstone “dressed in white and dazzling in ethereal loveliness.”108 Anne reported that Evelyn’s wraith came fluttering towards her, grabbed her hand, and kissed it before she smiled “tenderly” at her old friend and vanished into thin air.109

Since then, residents of Westover have reported seeing Evelyn’s ghost in the home’s rooms and near the kitchen.110 DuPont Lee reported that Mrs. Richard H. Crane strove to keep the home’s “delightful atmosphere,” which made “the old mansion” famous “in the

104 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 47.
106 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 48
107 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 50
108 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 50
109 Harland, Some Colonial Homesteads (1897), 50
heyday of Colonel Byrd’s prosperity.”

To prove her ability to bring the past back, Crane often told stories of how Evelyn “reappeared from time to time.” On one occasion in the 1920s, Crane’s daughter and a school friend awoke to see Byrd standing at the foot of their bed.

DuPont Lee said that one evening at Westover, the Cranes entertained a group of Virginians who began to recall all the ghost stories they knew and ended the chat with the understanding that spirits “haunt so many of the famous old houses of Virginia.” Mrs. Crane agreed with the idea but admitted she had not seen the ghost herself. That same night, Mrs. Crane said she found herself looking out of the window and saw Evelyn’s ghost in the garden below. The spectral woman turned her head and raised her arm, gesturing for Crane to step away from the window and go back to bed. She said that she did not feel afraid of the ghost but knew it was best to do as she was instructed.

At Westover, like so many other old Virginia homes, biographers, guests, and residents reported that kindly specters haunted the halls and property. Evelyn Byrd’s ghost was evidence of a lingering eighteenth-century past and Crane’s ability to make the home like it was when Byrd lived there. The stories, ghost sightings, and Crane’s efforts to recreate the Byrds’ hospitality illustrated how Virginians read and understood the home. Taken together, the ghosts and the owner’s efforts to maintain the home affirmed the home’s eighteen-century identity and made it accessible to present-day people.

114 Lee, “Westover” Virginia Ghosts (1930), 34.
Importantly, the historical ghost stories that homeowners told focused on and offered evidence for a genteel eighteenth-century history. None of their ghost stories talked at length about slavery or recognized the inequality that made the plantation lifestyle possible. Homeowners did not want complicated narratives in their homes. This is the same reason that ghost stories were not scary. Homeowners wanted the uncomplicated, pleasant, and friendly, if not a little temperamental, past to linger in their homes, not the violent or scary past. Though the ghosts’ stories may have been tragic or dramatic, homeowners consistently portrayed their ghosts as benign and not frightening or threatening in any way. The easiest way for them to create a sense that their homes’ pasts were admirable and that their ghosts were friendly, if not sad, was to borrow well-known characters and events from traditional historical narratives.

But for many homeowners, well-known characters were hard to find. Many homeowners were satisfied with claiming that their houses were haunted by mysterious or vague characters from the past. Their ghostlore did not conform to previously known stories about past characters; rather, they established uniformity with ideas about the past, like the glamour of the colonial social world or the heartbreak of war. Importantly, homeowners and locals told these ghost stories to suggest that their homes had historical significance without having to make a definitive claim to a historical narrative that could be disproven. This allowed them to claim a historical significance without having to prove it through primary source material or scholarly work.

Homeowners did this by insisting that a “lady in white” haunted their homes, or an unnamed soldier, or the spirit of someone unrelated to famous people or events, who lived during the Civil War, American Revolution, or colonial era. These hauntings simply
illustrated that a past happened in a specific place. The ghosts provided evidence of things that could have happened anywhere but happened to have played out in a specific places. Rather than conforming to a well-known historical narrative about famous people or specific events, these stories conformed to well-believed historical themes like love, tragedy, and drama and represented the same elements in elite white Virginians’ imagined eighteenth-century past.

The most famous in these types of stories were tales about Virginia’s various “ladies in white.” Evelyn Byrd’s ghost was the archetype for these kinds of accounts in the Old Dominion, but the “ladies in white” occupied innumerable homes across the commonwealth. The owners of Chatham had a “lady in white” similar to the one that the Cranes had at Westover. They shared the tale from time to time, and because it was vague to begin with, they allowed it to gather more details as it aged, and shaped it to perfectly fit their vision of an uncomplicated eighteenth-century Virginia. Outside of Fredericksburg, Chatham overlooked the Rappahannock River. A wealthy planter, William Fitzhugh, had the home built in 1771. The home had plenty of potential actual historical narratives; Fitzhugh had graciously hosted George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and the like, and the house was the site of a locally famous slave revolt and suffered greatly during the Battle of Fredericksburg. But none of its famous guests saw fit to return to the plantation as specters.

Rather, past owner Mrs. Randolph Howard and her guests agreed that the home’s ghost was a “white lady.” They explained that the specter emerged every year on June 21, when the “moon rises” from behind the trees. They knew Chatham’s “white lady” to walk
along a strip of garden they called the “Ghost Walk.” Edith Tunis Sale reported that unnamed visitors recounted that an “ephemeral” woman floated “back and forth” in the garden, weeping and wringing her hands. DuPont Lee said the woman was a heartbroken, “longing for the days” that were “forever irrecoverable.” Howard claimed to have seen the ghost during the afternoon, as well, but said she did not speak about it for many years for fear of scaring off her servants. Howard explained that no one knew who the ghost was but insisted that she was once happy.

Without many details, the story took on details reminiscent of Evelyn Byrd’s story. Howard understood the “white women” to be heartbroken and tragic. She dated the ghost to the eighteenth century and let the mystery inspire more detailed stories from her guests. One version she liked best came from a visiting “French scholar” who stopped by the house. The unnamed man happened to be interested in the history of Chatham and found the ghost’s story in a French book among the stacks in, of all places, the Newark Library in New Jersey. The story was contrived, but Howard memorized it and shared it widely. The Frenchman told Howard that the “white lady” of Chatham was English and daughter of a “distinguished man of letters.” In England, the girl fell “madly” in love with a “dry-salter” of fish. The young girl’s father was outraged that the working man planned to wed his daughter, so he wasted no time sending her to Virginia. There, the Frenchman told Howard, he hoped to find her a better man to marry.

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118 Sale, Manors of Virginia in Colonial Times (1909), 47.
120 Lee, “Chatham” Virginia Ghosts (1930), 231; Sale, Manors of Virginia in Colonial Times (1909), 47.
122 Lee, “Chatham” Virginia Ghosts (1930), 231.
In Virginia, the girl and her father stayed at Chatham. Howard told DuPont Lee that the girl, like Evelyn Byrd, “languished in spite of the gay life” on the plantation. But she did not lament over her dry-salter for long—he followed her to Virginia, and they once again hatched a plan to escape through a window during the night. Howard recalled that the day of the escape, a servant of George Washington, a frequent guest to Chatham, got wind of the plan and told his master. Washington told the father about his daughter’s plans and, for good measure, had the dry-salter locked up. Howard explained that the night the young English girl quietly climbed out of her window, she was disappointed to find herself not in “her love’s arms,” but wrapped up in General Washington’s “stout grip.” Not long after, Howard reported, the father married her off to a well-suited man to whom she bore ten children. On the girl’s deathbed, she announced that her spirit would haunt Chatham every year on June 21, the date of the attempted elopement.

Howard’s ghost story did many things: it established the presence of historical characters in the home, claimed that the home offered a “gay-life” to all who visited (implying of course that it still offered the “gay-life”) and established a romantic and tragic story for the homeowners to tell. The cameo appearance of George Washington—who was in fact a neighbor to the Chatham property in his youth—in the story reminded listeners that, as DuPont Lee said, he enjoyed “good dinners, good wine, and good company” at Chatham, and twentieth-century guests could perhaps expect the same thing. Howard’s story itself was packed with enough details and mystery to make Chatham seem like an

interesting place and allowed Howard to claim an equally interesting and historical identity as the home’s owner.

The Howards used the stories to define their home’s value, and their identities, through a charming and gentry-laden celebration of the colonial past. The spectral residents allowed the living residents to fold the lovely and tragic vision of Virginia before the Civil War into homeowners’ daily lives. Rather than talking about spirits of the little-known, but locally famous, 1805 slave rebellion that took place in the property, Howard and her Frenchman gave the home a much less complex history. This story embodied the exclusively white genteel history that the owners wanted their home to present.

The homeowners who told vaguely historical ghost stories supported talk of their home’s engaging mysteries over historical complexity. These stories suggested historical narratives but did not incorporate well-known characters or focus on singular historical events. Rather, these ghost stories were about people and events that were unique and added historically themed interest to each home—in most cases, the characters did not have name recognition outside of their ghostlore. More so than the overtly historical specters, these wraiths suggested that the homes were important because of the distinctive events and people that existed only on specific properties.

Edgewood, in Charles City, claimed a ghost that fit this category well. Mrs. Grace D. Harrison, the owner of nearby Berkeley plantation, told Marguerite DuPont Lee that the home had a little-known female spirit from the Civil War named Elizabeth (Lizzie) Rowland. Richard S. Rowland had Edgewood built in 1854. The Rowland family moved to Virginia from New Jersey to run the old Harris mill, located on the property. The family

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shared a huge three-story Gothic Revival house that poked out from dense trees right near the road.

In the 1860s, Confederate troops occupied the home. DuPont Lee explained that its tall upper rooms served as wartime lookout points. But soldiers were not the only ones impatiently staring out of the grand home’s windows. Harrison added that Rowland’s daughter, Lizzie Rowland, was looking too. Before the war, she fell in love with and was being courted by a man from an “adjacent” plantation.129 Though the young man’s ghost did not have a name, his swift riding skills made him distinct. Harrison said that people could hear the horse’s quick hooves far and wide. When he came to visit Lizzie, most everyone knew.

In the 1860s, though, the sounds of war replaced the distinctive hoof beats of the lover’s horse and Lizzie’s lover left her waiting. Harrison said she spent her days sitting beside her bedroom window, looking at the road below, hoping to hear her lover’s horse tearing down the road. Sitting was not easy; in fact, it was dull and tiresome. To pass the time, Harrison said, Lizzie began to scratch her name, “Lizzie Rowland,” deep into the window’s glass. Her lover never returned to Edgewood, but Harrison recalled that Rowland kept her vigil for her whole life. In 1870, Lizzie died in her bedroom, and her family buried her in the nearby Westover churchyard.

Harrison told DuPont Lee that “Miss Lizzie’s” ghost was still in the house in the early twentieth century.130 The specter never appeared to people while they were in the house; she had no interest in residents. The only thing that could rouse her, Harrison added, was

130 Lee, “Edgewood” Virginia Ghosts (1930), 228.
the sound of "hoof beats" or a "passing traveller" on the road.\textsuperscript{131} She would appear in the "moonlight," standing by the home's side door or moving from room to room with a "light in her hand."\textsuperscript{132} Harrison told DuPont Lee that she would stop and "peer out" of each window in hopes of catching a "glimpse of her lost love.\textsuperscript{133}

Harrison was confident that Lizzie preferred the "place to herself" and was not there to bother any living soul. She was free to roam about the empty home, looking for love, and the residents were happy to have her. She defined the home as a Civil War-era structure and gave the home a "romance" that its owners were proud to tell their guests about. Lizzie made the house more than an old home and the residents more than homeowners; she made the property into the site of a tragic love and a place for people to stop and consider the dreadful cost of war, and she made the homeowners into stewards of her history.

Romantic love was a key element in many of these ghost stories. A romantic haunting associated the home's history with other better-known historical tales, such as Evelyn Byrd or Lady Skipwith's ghosts. The vague stories recalled the more famous tales and borrowed the better-established historical tone. They also helped old houses that were frequently bought and sold retain their intimate, homelike feel. Virginian homebuyers knew that the old homes were valuable and unique because they held stories that defined the homes as places and transformed homeowners into local historians and elites by association.

In some cases, homeowners preferred the romance implied in a ghost story to the stories of the home's famous resident, because they found it more interesting. This was

\textsuperscript{131} Lee, "Edgewood" \textit{Virginia Ghosts} (1930), 227.
\textsuperscript{132} Lee, "Edgewood" \textit{Virginia Ghosts} (1930), 227.
\textsuperscript{133} Lee, "Edgewood" \textit{Virginia Ghosts} (1930), 227.
precisely the case at Cranford. The owner, Rev. Edward Burwell, told researcher Francis B. Foster that his home was the birthplace of General Lewis Armistead and had an unrelated haunting. Armistead was an officer in the US Army who became a Confederate general during the Civil War. He famously led his Virginians during Pickett’s Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg and died shortly after the battle. He did not haunt the house. In his stead, a “lady in white” haunted Cranford.134

Burwell told Foster that the ghost was a mysterious female shrouded in white. He gave very little backstory. Burwell said she haunted the house for no clear or apparent reason, but he speculated she was heartbroken.135 The apparition was an important element for the Burwell’s Cranford because it was the only thing he had to situate their home in a meaningful past. Despite what the homeowners claimed, Armistead was not born at Cranford; he was born in North Carolina. The “lady in white” established the presence of a past—a story that made the home notable and allowed the homeowners to make claims to the commonwealth’s historical heritage and often fantasied elite-gentry life style. She had no date or era, but the presence of a haunting suggested that there simply was a story, shrouded in mystery, to tell about Cranford.

Even without many details, the haunting helped to emphasize a place-based history and insisted that, like the ghost of Washington that Quincy saw, a person who lived in the home thought enough of the place to remain there after death. John Tillman told researcher Annie L. Harrower that his home, “Johnson Place,” had a ghost whose lingering presence established his property’s historical significance. Tillman reported hearing a ghost in his

home and linked it back to a story he had heard about a man being hung in the attic. Tillman estimated that their wraith arrived “during war times, or before,” but he was unable to decide which war. Their home, which was “nearly two hundred” years old, left the possibility open of either the Civil War or the American Revolution. To the Tillmans, the details of the ghost’s origins did not matter as much as its presence in the house. The haunting reinforced the idea that the house was old and historical. The details were unnecessary, because the haunting itself made the home historical, and the mysterious lack of details inspired guests to imagine the past at the Johnson Place.

The people who owned and lived in the Garland-Lambert house in Alexandria had a similar story, but they read the spirit as an eighteenth-century man. Colonel George Michael Swope had the house built after he returned from the American Revolution. Swope moved into his new home in Alexandria after the war and lived there until his death in 1792. The home did not see the Revolutionary War action, but a “direct descendant” of Swope told a story that argued the home was a significant Revolutionary-era building.

W. B. McGroaty told researcher Virginia Daingerfield that the home had a distinctive Revolutionary-era identity. McGroaty said that the “uneasy spirit” of an American spy haunted the home. People reported seeing the “dashing tragic figure” moping around the garden and walking listlessly around the house. They did not have name, and he did not speak to the living. But his specter was a familiar resident of the Garland-Lambert house.


McGroaty said that the young man was an American spy infiltrating the British Army. His task was to report what he heard in the Garland-Lambert house to an unnamed contact in the Continental Army. The young man did not spend a long time as a spy before the British discovered him. To stop him from giving crucial information to the Continental Army, the British troops grabbed the young man, carried him up to the attic, and hung him from the rafters. McGroaty told Daingerfield that no one knew where the young man came from, who his family was, or what happened to his body. But those who saw him insisted that he was handsome, young, “heartbroken,” and definitely from the Revolutionary War.

The Garland-Lambert house’s ghost story worked especially well to establish its history because the house was unremarkable. It was surrounded by other old eighteenth-century homes. Nearly all of the townhomes on Prince Street look like the Garland-Lambert house. In Alexandria, little details like changes in brickwork, color, and door placement blur together for the passerby, creating long streets of “old” but not “special” homes.

More importantly yet, McGroaty’s spectral resident established that no matter what had happened in the home since the eighteenth century, the old home was perpetually stuck in the Revolution. While Swope built the home after the war, McGroaty and others tied the home’s identity to the ghost story.

The wraith illustrated ghosts’ special power for establishing a place’s historical narrative. The home’s life began after the war; its material objects and its date of construction all postdated the spy incident in the story. The home was not even built at the time of the war. But the handsome spirit and his tragic tale silenced all the historical data to assert the presence of the Revolutionary past. The tale transformed the otherwise common, postwar, Early Republic-period row house into a special place. McGroaty’s story
encouraged guests and residents to think about the home in terms of the Revolutionary War and pose the question as to what happened on the property before the house was built.

The owners, descendants, and neighbors of Virginia’s old homes told ghost stories to establish the past, set a tone of the past at old homes, and control the historical narrative of their old homes. Some ghost stories transformed the relationships between slaves and their charges into loving friendships. Virginians believed that these spectral residents, like so many others, haunted homes because they loved the people and the residences. Despite the brutal realities of bondage, these stories argued that enslavement was just as pleasant for slaves as it was for their white masters.

Mrs. Bessie Taylor Robinson of Fall Hill told DuPont Lee that owners of the Falls in Fredericksburg swore that a beloved slave girl haunted the home for generations. The home was built for Francis Thornton around 1720, when he settled the land. He left the home to his sons, who lived in it until Francis Thornton II built a newer home called Fall Hill, where Robinson lived around 1790. In the time between, the Thornton family made many memories and tales of the ancestral home.

Robinson said that the stories of Katina were favorites around the two homes. She explained that Katina was the family’s Native American slave girl—a “nurse and devoted companion” to Francis Thornton III and his siblings. Robinson said that Katina was the source of many happy memories for the Thornton children but had a special relationship with Francis Thornton II. Katina passed away when Francis Thornton II was nearly a

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man. Robinson reported that he buried her near the stream, under a tree, and out of respect and love, he left a few boulders on her grave to mark the spot.¹⁴²

Not long after Katina’s death, Robinson said that Francis Thornton II built Fall Hill on the property’s high point farther away from the humid river. The Falls sat unoccupied “hoary with age.”¹⁴³ Robinson said the old home bore “a mystic atmosphere” for years after Thornton moved out.¹⁴⁴ After the move and up into the 1920s, Robinson assured DuPont Lee that residents saw Katina roaming around the old house at night in search of her “playmates.”¹⁴⁵ Robinson said that a young guest to her home claimed that Katina entered his room one night and playfully pulled the covers off of him, only to find that the guest was not her childhood playmate.¹⁴⁶

Thornton abandoned the Falls, and the house fell to ruin, and those who lived at Fall Hill used Katina’s ghost as evidence of the old home’s existence long after it disappeared and people’s memory of it faded. While an archaeologist could easily find the home’s cellar or remnants of inhabitants in the earth, Katina represented the emotion associated with the house. Before the 1930s, people could not find her specter in the material record, but she was important to the Virginians who lived on the property. Robinson, and Katina, encouraged people to understand the site as a happy colonial plantation where free and enslaved children played side by side. The spirit was all the evidence that Robinson needed to demonstrate the past’s uncomplicated pleasantness.

But of course, not all hauntings represented happy stories. The stories homeowners told about their homes’ gloomy past embraced the dramatic element of ghostlore to add flare and intrigue to their homes. The drama of a long, gossipy ghost story completely blurred the line between the past and legend. These dramatic ghost stories transformed homes into theatrical sites and asserted that the past lived on in story and spirit.

One such story took place at the Quick House in Lynchburg. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Woody were more than happy to tell Agnes Rothery their home’s story even though it was a violent and tragic tale.\textsuperscript{147} Surprisingly, the story behind the haunting maintained the same genteel historical tone that tales at other Virginian plantation homes adopted.

The Woodys said that a widow who once lived in the Quick House picked up a young “French speaking” slave girl in St. Louis and brought her back to Virginia.\textsuperscript{148} Soon the widow developed a deep jealousy. Like Snow White’s wicked queen, the white woman feared that “the girl’s beauty” was “a threat to her own.”\textsuperscript{149} To resolve the issue, the Woodys told Rothery, the widow took to mercilessly beating the young girl.

After an especially abusive beating and an imprisonment in the basement, the young slave girl tried to escape. The Woodys said she “tore at the window sash” with her bare hands “until it gave way.”\textsuperscript{150} She opened the window enough to pull her body through and ran from the house as fast as she could in search of any kind of kindness. She ran down to the river, and the Woodys said men found her lifeless body floating in the nearby eddy.

\textsuperscript{148} Rothery, \textit{Houses Virginians Have Loved} (1954), 139.
\textsuperscript{149} Rothery, \textit{Houses Virginians Have Loved} (1954), 139.
\textsuperscript{150} Rothery, \textit{Houses Virginians Have Loved} (1954), 140.
Not long after the young girl’s death, the Woodys said that a mysterious woman appeared at the Quick House. The woman told the widow that the young girl she kept as a slave was the only heir to the fortune of one of “the first families of New Orleans.”¹⁵¹

The Woodys did not know what happened to the widow after she learned this information but they insisted that “nothing untoward” had “occurred at Quick House for a long time.”¹⁵² But they added that they heard sounds, which they related to the story, ring out in various rooms from time to time. Though they insisted they did not believe in the story, they attributed each oddity in the home to an event in the story. They said that sounds of a woman’s “sobs” were coming from the young slave girl. The window that turned gold at sunset was the one the young girl made her escape from.¹⁵³

The Woodys used their ghost story to control the narrative of their old home in a rather creative way. The ghost story established the presence of the past, but it also established the presence of a kind of American royalty at the house. In many old Virginian homes, the old owners hoped that others would recognize that they were similar to lords and ladies, and in this case the highborn character was a mixed-race slave girl. This story erased narratives about slavery at the plantation and replaced it with a tale about a case of mistaken identity and a savage woman. According to the story, the widow was not at fault for having slaves or for beating them; she was evil because she was jealous. The Woodys defined the Quick House not by its slavery or racial inequality but by a dramatic tale of jealousy, rage, and mistaken identity. The ghost who haunted the home offered observable

evidence to the story and, like so many other tales, implied that the specter of a highborn person lingered in its grand halls.

Family ghost stories are the last group of old-home tales that elite Virginians liberally told one another and to the old-home biographers in the early twentieth century. Family, genealogy, and legacy were extremely important to genteel Virginians. From the early days when families would form economic and social alliances by marriages, the commonwealth’s highest-born people and their descendants have understood their historical identities through the actions of their forbears.

These family ghosts did all the same work as the other haunts. They established the presence of the past and were limited to elite white fantasies of an uncomplicated eighteenth century, but these stories were much more intimate. They offered evidence that the Virginians of old lingered in their homes and maintained relationships with their descendants. The ghosts were a point of pride for Virginians’ families because they were the evidence that homeowners upheld and protected their family legacy and their little corner of Virginia history.

The Webb families of New Kent County were proud of keeping their 1820 Federal-style mansion, Hampstead, in the family. The Webb family descended from George Webb, a colonial-era judge in the county who later became a treasurer in Virginia.154 Like many Virginians with notable linage, the Webbs were happy to regale visitors with their family history and a who’s-who of famous and notable Webbs. They liked to point to their patriarch who established the family’s long history in the commonwealth, but Conrad Webb, who had Hampstead built, was a more legendary character in the family.

154 Lancaster, Historical Virginia Homes and Churches, (1915), 261.
When Robert Lancaster came to profile the home in 1915, he wrote that it boasted many lovely details and “alluring nooks and corners,” but what made it most interesting were the stories an unnamed older Webb told about Conrad Webb’s ghost. The unnamed older resident said that the Webbs young and old attested that a wraith loomed in the attic among the “trunks and chests” filled with the “apparel of past generations,” toys, and old letters.

It was a family home through and through. Generations of Webbs spent their childhoods playing in the house with siblings and cousins. The elderly resident of the home told Lancaster that on rainy days, she and her playmates would play among the boxes and trunks in the attic, but when the sun would set, they would all run screaming down “winding stairs,” afraid that Conrad Webb’s ghost would catch them in the dark. She and her cousins were not the only ones, she explained, since generations of Webbs had played in the attic and run from ghosts. The ghost was a beloved childhood tradition in the family.

The Webbs’ story illustrates an important element of Virginians’ ghostlore—family. Many of Virginia’s ghost stories originated from kin. The idea that loved ones, or distant relatives, remained in the family homes after their death made the property home to the living and the dead. The ghosts allowed the Webbs to understand Hampstead as truly a family place. No matter who the current owners were, the ghosts ensured the Webbs that their family would remain long after death, adding meaning to the land.

For subsequent owners, the presence of a familial spirit served as a reminder of a home’s long and well-loved family history. Such was the case with Elmwood. Located in

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156 Lancaster, *Historical Virginia Homes and Churches*, (1915), 261.
Essex County, the home was built for the Garnett family in 1774 by James Mercer Garnett. The large Georgian home had long connections to numerous old Virginian families, including the Mercers, the Taliaferros, and the Garnetts. The home transitioned from a family home to a girl’s school, then to boy’s school, and back into the Garnetts’ family home. The last known notable owner of the home was Virginian politician and Confederate, Muscoe Russel Hunter Garnett, who died of typhoid fever in 1864. After his death, the remaining Garnetts left the home to their “spiritual ancestors.”

In the mid-1920s, Edith Tunis Sale went by the property, inquiring about the home and its history. She found that the home had "faded to the color of eyes that weep." She said the property's sole occupants were the spectral visions “of happy living.” Sale did not name any of the living Garnetts she spoke with, but she insisted that they were comfortable with the old home’s haunts and were glad to share a story or two. Her contacts reported that ghostly “revels” would rage on into the night. There were some ornery spirits who would keep doors locked so tight that they would not open “under the greatest strength.” Other wraiths flung doors open, creating “great noise” and confusion. Sale reported that the “cry of a promising young son,” who died after having been hit by a horse, echoed in the home. A specter called “Doctor” also haunted the “great deserted house”

162 Sale, *Interiors of Virginia Houses* (1927), 244.
163 Sale, *Interiors of Virginia Houses* (1927), 244.
164 Sale, *Interiors of Virginia Houses* (1927), 244.
and “constituted himself caretaker.” In all, Sales asserted that Elmwood seemed to only “exist for the past.”

The family ghost stories at Elmwood asserted that the old abandoned home was not truly abandoned but still a part of the Garnett family. Their spectral ancestors claimed the home for the Garnetts. Unlike homes with living residents, Elmwood was more of the past than the present. The prior owners and residents who lingered in the home asserted that Virginia's past was alive.

White Marsh in Gloucester County also had a family specter, with whom the current residents lived side by side in relative harmony. According to a resident of White Marsh, Mrs. Catherine Tabb, the ghost of Evelina Matilda Prosser haunted their home. Tabb reported that Prosser owned the home after the Revolutionary War. Family members knew Prosser as a woman with “great dignity” who wore “elegant costumes” and liked to clean.

On one occasion, Tabb's good friend Mrs. William Byrd Lee saw an “elderly lady” dressed in Prosser's signature “black moire antique” walking down the stairs. She did not think much of the sight until the wraith walked into the dining room and disappeared in front of her eyes. Later, an unnamed member of the family was sleeping in one of the rooms when she awoke to see Prosser enter the room. She reported that Prosser entered quietly so as to not disrupt the sleeper and went on with her day. She walked over to a bureau and opened a drawer full of baby clothes and preceded to remove “each little article,” shake it out, refold it, and place it lovingly back in the drawer. After she finished

165 Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses (1927), 233.
166 Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses (1927), 233.
168 Lee, Virginia Ghosts and Others. (1932), 268.
169 Lee, Virginia Ghosts and Others. (1932), 268.
170 Lee, Virginia Ghosts and Others. (1932), 269.
her task, “the spirit” left just as “quietly and silently as she entered.”171 Though the sight of Prosser always caused alarm among the living residents, the old ghost never did anything frightening. She simply wanted to pick up around the house and make sure it was tidy to her standards.

Catherine Tabb did not worry about the ghost, because she felt that Prosser was a member of the household. She was there, no matter what or who lived in the house. The story firmly asserted that White Marsh was Evelina Matilda Prosser’s house.

Shirley, the Hill-Carters’ home in Charles City, had a family ghost of a different kind.172 Rather than haunting in person, the Hill-Carters’ ghost haunted a portrait. The home was built around 1732 for Edward and Elizabeth Hill-Carter on land that the Carters had owned since 1613. The newer home was a beautiful statement piece on the popular James River and one of the only ones that remained in family hands for its entire existence.

Aside from the magnificent architecture, the Hill-Carter family home boasted a large collection of family portraits. Lacking sufficient wall space for all of them, the Hill-Carters put some portraits in storage from time to time. The majority of the portraits have no opinion on this matter, but the painting of “Aunt Pratt” has made her dislike of the “attic closet” known “and understood” nearly 150 years after her death.173

Marion Carter Oliver and her sister Alice Carter Bransford knew the story well and shared it among their friends in the area. DuPont Lee reported that residents of Shirley have reported since the 1850s that when placed in the attic, Aunt Pratt’s portrait rocks back and forth on its wooden frame. Oliver and Bransford described the sound as being like

171 Lee, Virginia Ghosts and Others. (1932), 269.
someone rocking a chair in the lonesome attic. Each generation of Hill-Carters that have tried to put Pratt's painting in the attic have suffered Pratt’s “mighty disturbance” and have been “forced to bring” the portrait back to the first floor. 174 Oliver reported that the recent generation had the painting restored to the second floor and no longer hear “the sound of the rocking-chair.” 175

For the Hill-Carters, Aunt Pratt was a constant reminder that as residents of Shirley, they were also the keepers and caretakers of their family’s history. They had the responsibility for keeping the home in good order and to the liking of all their ancestors. Aunt Pratt’s night thumping not only made the past present, but it made sure that future Hill-Carters recognized and honored her properly.

Though the stories that Virginians’ told about their old homes varied, they all shared intent to historically contextualize place to an unproblematic elite white past. No matter if the underlying story was happy or sad, true or false seeming, they were all inherently historical. They all sought to bring the past and present closer together and give twentieth-century people a claim to the past.

Historical ghostlore was not limited to the white elites in Virginia. The commonwealth’s African Americans and poor whites had their own kind of ghostlore. As the kitchen staff at Federal Hill illustrated, working class African Americans did not embrace the Old Dominion’s ghosts. The non-elite ghost stories did not seek to establish a personal relationship with the past—most non-elites did not want to live with the past or its ghosts in any way. Their past was not romantic and beautiful, but it was just as complex and hard as the lives they lived. The ghost stories they told, just like their elite cousins,

reflected their view of Virginia’s history. Their ghosts were local; they did not conform to national or state narratives and rarely featured well-known historical characters. Their ghosts were frightening, shocking, and often represented hard truths about racism and economic disparity; they were not warm, and they were not inviting. Their ghosts represented bad times. Their landscapes were dotted not with the memory of elite white parties but with murder and suffering. The next chapter will explore how their ghosts, like their pasts, were not welcomed in the present day.
CHAPTER TWO
GOOD GHOSTS ALWAYS MIND THEIR OWN GHOST BUSINESS

In 1939, Susan K. Gordon came to Fredericksburg to collect stories. She worked for the New Deal’s Federal Writer’s Project (FWP) which had her and her fellow writers fan out across Virginia to gather old stories from the common man before the rapidly changing world of radios, automobiles, and immigration swallowed them up for good.

There she met a man named John Turner, a local laborer, who had a curious tale to relate. As a younger man, Turner had secured a job clearing a gravel pit on Charles Ruffin’s Nottingham Farm just outside of the city. One day, Turner looked up from his work. He was squinting from the sun, but he could clearly make out “the figure of man” not too far off in the distance. He was squinting from the sun, but he could clearly make out the image of man in the distance. The man was “dressed in a blue suit with brass buttons” and “a shirt with square black spots.” Turner thought the vision was strange. But he did not put too much thought into it and went back to work.

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176 Chapter title comes from a quote in Miriam Sizer, “Ghost Story,” Box 32, Folder 1 “Ghost Stories and Haunted Houses,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection, 1936-1940, Accession #1547, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. The original quote was written “Good Ghosties Always Be Mindin’ Dey Own Ghostie Buisness.”


178 Gordon, “John’s Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.

179 Gordon, “John’s Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
A few days later, Turner noticed that he and the rest of the crew were pulling up flowers along with the gravel. He thought that was strange too. This time Turner began to suspect that they were digging through a cemetery. He brought the issue to Ruffin and explained that it looked like they’d pulled up “grave yard flowers.” But Ruffin did not think that his property had a graveyard on it and told Turner he was not concerned. Not long after he went back to work, Turner started pulling “pieces of china” from the gravel. He knew someone must have lived nearby, because people didn’t just sprinkle china through the forest. The mysterious man, the flowers, and the ceramic pieces suggested that the site had a story beyond gravel. Turner knew that there was something much more to the land than Ruffin knew, but he kept on working and tried to remove it from his mind.

Try as he might, Turner could not ignore the strange things at Nottingham Farm. When the figure of the man returned, he called out to his friend Charley and asked if he could see the man. Charley could not see the figure. Turner asked a few more workers, and they could not see it either. He found this suspicious. The ghost continued, “standing just a looking” right at Turner all day, and he was the only one who could see it. Convinced that there was surely something the matter, Turner found his boss after work that day and quit the dig.

After he left, Turner did a little research and decided that the figure he saw in the distance was John M. Spotswood, the son of Governor Alexander Spotswood. John Spotswood had lived and was buried on a plantation in the area called New Post in the late 1740s. Generations after being built, the house fell to ruin and nature reclaimed the land,

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180 Gordon, “John’s Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
182 Gordon, “John’s Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
183 Gordon, “John’s Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
obscuring any sign of the home or the adjoining graveyard. The cycle of death and migration erased the home from memory. Though people knew about New Post and knew that the Spotswood family was buried on the land, no one knew the property's location.

A few days after Turner quit, the men working at Ruffin's gravel site turned up a casket. The city buzzed with excitement as news began to pour in that the graveyard and property of John Spotswood had been found. Just as Turner suspected, the property was New Post, the gravel pit was a grave site, and the figure was John Spotswood’s ghost, trying to warn him about the casket.

John Turner’s ghost story was a lot like the tales that the old-home biographers published in their books. The tale featured the ghostly apparition of a famous past person, an old plantation, and a mystery. Turner provided details about the site, a little history, and an explanation of how the ghost helped define the landscape. But Turner and his story were different from the elite whites and the stories they told the old-home biographers at around the same time. Turner’s tale did not illustrate the same sentimental welcome for ghosts as the stories in the old-home-biography book. His story did not suggest that the past was all that pleasant, and he did not try to create a relationship with the wraith that he encountered. In fact, once he identified the ghost, he quit his job to avoid it. Secondly, a federal researcher on assignment, not a writer who sought out grand mansions and elite storytellers, recorded Turner’s story. Sue Gordon interviewed Turner because she saw him as a typical black laborer, not because she felt he had a special relationship with or exclusive knowledge about a historical site.

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184 Gordon, “John's Narrative,” 1, September 1938. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
Of course, Turner was not alone in his understanding of ghosts and the commonwealth’s past. The stories that Virginia’s economically and socially marginalized peoples—African Americans and poor rural whites—told researchers echoed Turner’s view. Taken together with the tales that white elites told the old-home biographers, the African Americans’ and poor whites’ ghost stories illustrate that Virginians of all races and classes saw ghosts as their connection to the Old Dominion’s past. The major difference in their stories appeared in the way each group understood and envisioned the past. For the white elites, the past was a welcome and beloved guest; for African Americans and poor whites, the past was an unpleasant nuisance if not a warning of bad times to come.

This chapter looks at the ghost stories that African Americans and poor whites used to establish their own historical sense of place. Like their elite white neighbors, African Americans and poor whites used ghost stories to situate the landscapes they knew within the context of a more distant past. Though the stories were collected during the 1930s and early 1940s, they represent generations of ghostlore. Many of the stories were simply retellings of tales that interviewees had heard in their youth or had collected from friends and family members through the years. Perhaps more so than the elite white stories that were featured in the old-home-biography books, the stories collected by the FWP illustrate the popularity of historical Virginia ghostlore. Storytellers celebrate the collected, rumor-based, and community-crafted nature of the tales. Though researchers only interviewed one or two people for each story, the subsequent reports made it clear that the stories were not told in hushed voices and were more a product of open discussion than long-protected secrets. While the elite whites’ stories helped to establish how ghostlore functioned to
maintain place-based historical identity, these stories illustrate the wide popularity of using hauntings and ghosts to talk about the presence of the past.

The collection of these stories was neither a coincidence nor in direct relation to the old-home biographer's work. It was the early twentieth century's social progressivism and New Deal programs that instructed researchers to value marginalized Americans' stories and traditions. This newfound appreciation for non-elite, proletariat, working-class, poor, or otherwise marginalized and underprivileged lifeways resulted in the creation of a comprehensive, and yet unrivaled, collection of pre-twentieth-century and early-twentieth-century American stories.

This collection of ghost stories offers a different perspective on how Virginians used ghost stories to talk about the past in place. Significantly, where the ghost stories collected by elite whites saw ghosts as honored guests, the stories that folklorists collected from African Americans and poor whites saw ghosts as things to be avoided. They were suspicious of wraiths because their presence signified the past's misfortune and foreshadowed bad times ahead. Ghosts were certainly a Virginian fascination, but class and race conditioned what ghosts meant.

The ghost stories that African Americans and poor whites told each other and the FWP researchers differed from the stories their elite white neighbors told the old-home biographers in three significant ways. First, to Virginia's marginalized people, the past was not glamorous and ideal; it was just as complex and difficult as the present day. They did not wish to return to a past filled with memories of poverty and enslavement. In the stories, Virginia's African Americans and poor whites told researchers they made it clear that they did not ignore the past; rather, they preferred that it stay securely in the past. This desire
for distance did not preclude them from understanding that the past continued to shape their present day. The ghosts they told stories about illustrated that they recognized the importance that the past had in their daily lives, but the people who told the stories made it clear that the spirits they encountered were simply unpleasant. Second, whereas elites linked ghosts closely to prestigious homes, poor whites and African Americans used ghosts to define places other than their own, usually ghost-free, homes—though non-elite Virginians knew of many haunted houses, they did not live in them; they abandoned them. John Turner typified many African American and poor white Virginians who did not want to stay and embrace ghosts. When Turner saw the ghost, he left, quit his job, and never returned. In the place-based historical stories that poor whites and African Americans told researchers, the living did whatever a specter wanted them to do, in order to rid themselves of the spirit. Elite whites, and the writers who rhapsodized about their homes, welcomed ghosts as charming companions. But for Virginia’s African Americans and poor whites in the early twentieth century, lingering past people were seen and treated differently.

Lastly, unlike the collectors of elites’ stories, New Deal-era writers did not see African Americans’ and poor whites’ haunted tales as being legitimate histories. The

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185 Scholars of folklore have illustrated that African Americans, especially during and shortly after slavery, had complex relationships with ghosts. My dissertation does not seek to reiterate their argument, nor to fundamentally challenge it. Since the 1980s scholars are agreed that African Americans ghostlore does not illustrate a universal “fear” of ghosts, but rather a much more complex and varied relationship. In my research the stories that African Americans in Virginia told to researchers illustrate a penchant toward avoiding ghosts more than embracing them like the white elites’ stories illustrated. For more on African American ghostlore see Elliot J. Gorn, “Black Spirits: The Ghostlore of Afro-American Slaves” in American Quarterly 36. No.4. (Autumn, 1984), 549-565.

186 While the federal workers, and by in large the reading public saw folklore as secondary, if not interlay alternative to legitimate history, by the end of the 1950s folklore scholars understood such stories to carry untapped and permissible historical knowledge. For an example of such understanding see Clement W. Meighan, “More on Folk Traditions,” The Journal of American Folklore 72. no.287. (January-March, 1960), 59-50.
people who documented these ghost tales defined these marginalized peoples as the “folk” and their stories as “folklore,” a thing worthy of recording but, at the same time, something less than true history.

The term “folk” represented a problematic grouping of peoples and beliefs that drew on decades of anthropological and sociological thinking to create a catchall category for people who were found by a dominant group to be in some way “other.” The often white and university-educated researchers saw “the folk” as an interesting underclass group who were very much at risk of losing their culture. John Lomax, the original director of the FWP’s directing program the Work Project Administration (WPA) brought this vision to the researchers. Like many in the age of the automobile and automation, Lomax saw rural and other nonindustrial, nonurban lifeways as something of an endangered species. He sought to salvage what he could of these cultural habits, beliefs, and practices before their possessors were fully modernized and blended into an industrialized mainstream—he did not trust them to preserve their own lifeways in the face of modernity’s onslaught.187 The program he ran reflected and institutionalized his racial and class hierarchy: those

assumptions were in the very fabric of the project and became part of the method his agents practiced.  

Historians Rosan Augusta Jordan and Frank De Caro explained that the early folklorists who distanced themselves from their subjects reinforced racial divisions. They argued that the early folklorists used African American lore to claim distinctly white Southern identities, rather than creating a sense of cultural pluralism. Lomax embraced the original folklorists’ definitions of folklore and history for his salvage project. Likewise, most historians are satisfied to accept the parameters that Lomax set and leave the African Americans’ and poor whites’ stories sequestered in folklore.

Scholars of the FWP or the folklore projects often look at the programs in terms of their labor or product output. Nancy Rose looked at the project’s researchers and pointed out that while various New Deal programs hired African Americans and women, it was difficult for them to rise among the ranks or gain compensation equal to their white male counterparts. Historians who studied the output, like Jerrold Hirsch, argued that the WPA’s publications helped Americans realize the nation’s cultural diversity. Claude F.

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191 The majority of historians have looked fondly on this project because it created a wealth of information for research and collected many now beloved tales. Few historians have ventured to study the FWP’s folklore project directly. Those who study the Federal Writers Project do so from its parent project the Work Progress Administration (WPA) and debate the success or failure of the New Deal programs. Those who see it as a failure argue that program did not fulfill its economic goals, and did not end the Great Depression. Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers’ Project* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) There are many books, some published by university presses, and others not, many in blog form that argue that the WPA was a failure. One good example of such argument comes from Jim Powell, *FDR’s Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression.* (New York: Crown Forum, 2004)
Jacobs pointed out that the FWP’s “America Guide” books made African Americans appear exotic and trivialized their religious practices. Jacobs pointed out that the WPA’s authors labeled African American culture “other.” They categorized African Americans’ churches and religious ceremonies as “local color” and made their neighborhoods destinations for white touristic voyeurism.

Donald Shaffer, Sw. Anand Prahlad, and others agree that the term “folk” and folklore disparaged African American lifeways and discounted their value in the broader American culture. But they believe the term can be saved, and their research seeks to recognize the negative association and reinterpret the term in celebration of “the folk’s” lifeways. Today, folklore scholars recognize that the title “folk” is limiting but work to remove the term’s stigma. Dan Ben-Amos pointed out that the term worked well in England, where it represented all the people and a shared past, but in the United States, class and race divisions transform “the folk” into a disparaged group.

Despite the outsider image that 1930s researchers had of African Americans and the poor whites in Virginia, these non-elites held a similar haunted vision of historical landscapes as their elite neighbors. The major difference was location. African Americans and poor whites told ghost stories about well-known roads, gathering areas, local ruins,

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and abandoned homes. Their stories recognized the presence of the past, reminded the living that the past played a role in the present, and illustrated a vision of the past as something other than ideal.

For many African Americans and poor whites in Virginia, the past made itself evident by haunting spaces that outsiders would not look at twice. The people of Norton knew a large rock, which sat about four miles north of town on the east side of Route 23 in the Appalachian Mountains, as the site of a murder and, as a result, numerous hauntings. They called the boulder the “Haunted Rock” and referred to it by name in passing conversation. There was nothing especially notable about the rock’s appearance. It had no markings, strange shape, holes, or uncommon material; it was simply a large rock. But the people of Norton understood it as a road marker that pointed out where exactly a grisly murder had happened. The stories that locals developed around the rock illustrated how they continued to make the site’s history relevant in their own time.

In 1937, Emory Hamilton, a FWP researcher, came to Norton, VA and sought out J. T. Hamilton to hear some Haunted Rock stories. J. T. Hamilton told Emory that locals had talked about hauntings at the rock since the Civil War. Hamilton said that at some point during those four years, three men “sprang” out from the woods and grabbed a wagoner passing by the rock. The robbers threw the man off his wagon and dragged him into the bushes. The three men murdered the man, mutilated his face, and stole his things. Even

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though the road was well traveled, Hamilton explained, no one found the man’s body for over twenty-four hours.\textsuperscript{199}

The event stuck with the people of Norton. In a state filled with Civil War killings, this murder seemed somehow senseless and unexplainable. From that time on, locals believed the site was cursed, and developed more stories that asserted that the murdered man’s ghost haunted the rock and conjured strange things on the site.

Like so many poor whites in Virginia, J. T. Hamilton knew all the stories but few of the characters’ name. He told Emory Hamilton that a man who’d passed the rock one morning saw a “big spinning wheel” and heard the sounds of bones “knocking together” above his head.\textsuperscript{200} Hamilton said the event was quick but was nonetheless disturbing and typical of the Haunted Rock.

Hamilton recalled a second story, which spoke to the diversity of supernatural elements that the rock produced. He told Emory of another man who reported that while walking past the site one night, a large black dog came out from behind the rock and started to walk right beside him. Hamilton said that the man did not think anything of it and the dog did not try to bite him or chase him—it simply walked beside him like a good friend. After some time, though, the man noticed that he could only hear his own footsteps—the dog’s paws were silent. Hamilton suggested that the man knew the dog was strange and the rock was known to produce odd stories. The man sought to investigate further and reached his hand down to pat his new friend on the head. But, as Hamilton related, the man’s hand did not make contact with the creature’s furry brow; instead, his


\textsuperscript{200} Hamilton, “The Haunted Rock” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
hand “went through it,” and all he could feel was “cold air.” Hamilton, and the man in his story, associated the ghostly dog with the rock, not simply because it emerged from behind it but because they knew the rock produced unexplainable events.

Over the years, locals created more and more stories about the rock that grew in significance and possibilities. For the people of Norton, a late-night visit to the rock became a rite of passage of sorts—a place where kids could test their bravery. Hamilton recalled that one boy proclaimed that “if there was a haunt” or ghost, he wanted to see it. Hamilton said that groups of young boys often visited the rock at night, hoping to see something strange on the location and test each other’s bravery. On one occasion, two boys saw a woman on a white horse walking past the rock. The boys said the woman was dressed in “spotless white” gown that covered her from her “feet to her neck.” But much to the boys’ horror, there was nothing past the women’s neck—Hamilton said she was “absolutely headless.”

On another occasion, a group of brave boys, who had not yet learned to avoid ghosts, visited the rock at night looking for something weird. Hamilton said that as the group investigated the boulder, one of them spotted a “human figure” sitting beside the rock with its back towards them. They were confident that the figure was a ghost because they knew the stories around the rock: the murder, the wheel, the dog, and the headless woman. As they passed the rock, the boys said that the eerie specter slowly cranked its head to see them. Out of the night’s darkness, the boys locked eyes with what they called the most

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204 Hamilton, “The Haunted Rock” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
“grotesque and horrible” face they had ever seen; it was truly “beyond description.”

Remembering all the other stories, they decided that the figure they saw was the man who had been murdered during the Civil War.

All of the ghost stories set at the haunted rock referred back to the rock's supernatural powers. The brave boys figured that the ghost with the mutilated face was the man in the wagon whom the robbers had left to rot in the bushes near the rock. The dog, the wheel, and the women were odd visions that offered an explanation as to why such a monstrous thing happened on Route 23. Taken together, the stories around the rock asserted that the area created horrid events. The murder at Nelson’s rock worked well to explain why the ghosts haunted that area of Route 23. Likewise, the spirits that haunted the rock offered an equally compelling explanation for why the mysterious robbers killed the man near the rock. Like their elite neighbors who told stories about their plantations homes, local Nortonians applied their knowledge of the local and notably proletarian history to argue that the past was still present.

Virginia's poor whites and African Americans frequently used the unwanted lingering past to explain that unfortunate local events were still relevant. Murder and death were major themes in stories with contemporary resonances. The ghost story that locals told about the house of a man named Emmitt Day illustrates this precisely. In 1941, James Taylor Adams traveled to Norton to speak with local man Bascom Hensley. Thirty years old at the time, Hensley already knew a good deal of information about the area's local history, and he used ghost stories to illustrate his knowledge to Adams.

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Hensley told Adams that the town of Norton had scheduled the old home for demolition because it was “haunted so bad” that no one would live in it. Adams learned that an old sheriff’s deputy, Emmett Day, had owned the house at the turn of the century. Hensley added that Day killed a well-connected local man named Bob Jones who had resisted arrest and threatened to send his family after the officer. During the arrest, Day shot Jones, but the courts ruled the murder an accident. Locals did not like the outcome of the case. The Jones family was a major part of the community, and they felt wronged by the police and the courts. Day recognized this and left the home not long after the trial. After he left, stories emerged in town about Jones haunting his home.

Hensley said that Day sold his house to a man named Newt Wilson. Wilson did not live in the house for long before he began to hear and see Bob Jones’s ghost. Hensley reported that every night after Wilson blew the lights out around his house and crawled into bed, Jones’s wraith start moaning as though he was “strugglin’ an’ dying” all over again. A little later into the night, Wilson reported that he would feel someone pulling the quilts off of his bed. If he managed to take his quilts back, a man would “raise right up” from the foot of his bed “an look at ‘em” as if Wilson’s actions were rude or insulting. Wilson knew the story of the murder and used it to explain the strange noises and visions he had in the house. Hensley said that Wilson was sure the ghost was Jones.

Hensley said that Wilson eventually tired of living with the past and moved out. New residents faced similar issues with Bob Jones’s ghost. Word traveled, and over time, no one

207 Adams, “Bob Jones Came Back,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
208 Adams, “Bob Jones Came Back,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
209 Adams, “Bob Jones Came Back,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
wanted to live or stay in Emmitt Day's old house. Nearly thirty years after the murder, the property owners tore the house down. Even after the home was removed, people still recognized the lot as the site of a haunted house and a murder that had rocked the town. No matter who moved into the home or what happened to the building itself, Wilson's story defined the home, and later the site, as Emmitt Day's haunted house. Wilson used the ghost story to keep the murder relevant years after it happened and years after Day left. The story was so popular and well-known that even Hensley, a thirty-year-old man who was not alive during the event, knew the story and easily recalled it to make sense of the local landscape.

Many Virginians in the rural mountain towns saw ghosts as the culprits of strange occurrences. Patrick Addington told James Taylor Adams a story he had heard from “old” Sam Robinette and “a lot of other people” about a woman’s ghost who haunted the swimming hole at Powell’s River. The story forever defined the ever-changing body of water as irreparably stuck in the past. Addington told Adams that the ghost was fitting, too, because the swimming hole was the “creepiest” place in town.

According to Addington, locals knew that ghost was a young woman named Sally Sturgill. She was the daughter of a local man, Andy Sturgill of nearby Roaring Fork, Virginia. Before she died, Sally had gone to stay with her sister and her sister’s husband. Addington said that not long after she moved in with her sister’s family, rumors began to spread that Sally was “caught up,” or pregnant, with her brother-in-law’s child. Upset by this turn of

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211 Adams, “The Haunted Swimming Hole.” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
212 Adams, “The Haunted Swimming Hole.” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
events, Addington said, Sally Sturgill ran from her sister’s home one night, went down to the swimming hole, jumped in, and “drowned herse’f.”

Rather than ignoring Sally Sturgill’s suicide, the community incorporated her death into their local history and used the story to add meaning to the swimming hole. Addington added that when people who never knew Sally Sturgill or about her suicide visited the hole at night, they heard the ghost “hollerin’. He said that on one occasion, a group of boys heard the sounds of “cryin’ an' snubbin' plimeblank.” They said it sounded “just like a woman.” The boys did not pay too much attention to the sounds until they saw a woman on the bank “dressed in white from head to foot.” They said that the woman put her hands above her head, gave “an awful scream,” and jumped into the water. When the boys swam up to where she dove in, she disappeared.

Witnesses’ accounts of Sturgill’s ghost both recognized the tragedy and insisted that people would not forget her life and death. Though only a handful of people reported having seen the ghost, the accounts they told the researcher were common. People talked about the swimming hole in terms of Sturgill’s suicide. One man reported that he struggled to decide if a noise he heard was the ghost or a panther. The story was so often told as a memorial that it was the first thing locals thought of when something strange happened around the area. No matter what changed about the river or the swimming hole itself,

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216 Adams, “The Haunted Swimming Hole.” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection. “Plime blank” means “just like” or “truthfully.”
locals knew it as the site of the Sturgill suicide and let the story shape their interaction with the environment.

In the same way that the white elites believed that sharing their homes with the ghosts of historical characters represented the permanence of the privileged and honorable lives that the ghosts enjoyed during their lifetimes and the subsequent homeowners sought to obtain, Virginia’s laboring classes believed that their ghosts represented a promise of perpetual tragedy or unsolvable mysteries. Ghost stories reminded locals of the bad things that happened on certain sites and suggested that a site itself produced bad or negative episodes. This allowed locals to argue that the past’s unfortunate or unexplainable events begat unfortunate and unexplainable events in their lives.

The people in the “Mountain section between Coeburn and Wise” used the story of three lonesome deaths at the Sulfridge place to explain the odd events and hauntings that occurred near the old abandoned home.  

James Hylton interviewed Mr. Taylor Nash about the house in 1941. At near eighty years old, Nash claimed to have heard the area’s oldest stories as a young boy from one of the area’s earliest white settlers. Nash explained to Hylton that he had never seen any phantoms, but he believed any ghost story about the site—he said that house and the road it sat on were a “spooky lookin’” and “seemin’ place.”

Nash told Hylton a story, which he knew to be the oldest, explaining why strange things happened near the old house. He said that three sisters lived in the home and

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220 James M. Hylton, “Singin’ Woman,” 16, April 1941. Box 3, Folder “Supernatural {White} Haunted Houses,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection, 1936-1940, Accession #1547, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

221 Hylton, “Singin’ Woman,” 16, April 1941. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.

became noteworthy in the community for “always” going “about their work singin’ old songs.” As time went on, the three sisters grew old and began to die off one at a time. After the first woman died, the remaining two began singing sad “old lonesome songs” at night. Much to the townspeople’s surprise, after all three women passed, people from miles away “through the hills and flats” could still hear the nightly songs. Despite the women’s passing, their sad singing haunted the house and asserted that it was still their home and that the home still held on to lonesome ghosts.

Nash had another story that illustrated the home’s supernatural power and how locals used the old stories to understand present-day events. Hylton learned that a young boy had recently been struck by lighting and killed right near the old home. Nash knew of it and told Hylton that the boy’s death brought “all the old tales concerning the place,” back into the local discussion. He said people shared stories of hearing the three women’s songs, of being trapped in the house, and of seeing ghosts. People throughout the area claimed they or someone they knew saw a ghost or other strange vision near the house. All the stories asserted that the house was, as Nash said, “spooky.” Nash’s neighbors used the old ghost stories to argue that what looked like an unexplainable calamity was actually the product of a lingering, unfortunate past. They knew the house produced strange visions and ghosts, so for them it was no surprise that a deadly lightning bolt struck a young boy right near the house. Like the Sturgill story, and the Haunted Rock, those who lived around

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226 James M. Hylton, “More about the Sulfridge Place” 22, April 1941. Box 3, Folder “Supernatural {White} Haunted Houses,” Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection, 1936-1940, Accession #1547, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
227 Hylton, “More about the Sulfridge Place” 22, April 1941. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
228 Hylton, “Singin’ Woman,” 16, April 1941. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection.
the Sulfridge place incorporated the area’s local history into ghost stories that they used to make sense of their present world.

Those who lived around the “haunted woods” in coastal Mathews County did a very similar type of story layering. Instead of tying all the odd occurrences to a narrative of specific local people, Mathews residents tied everything they saw around the woods to the idea of an English army marching through the woods to bury treasure. Marguerite DuPont Lee interviewed a few “reputable witnesses” in Mathews who said that people near the “Haunted Woods” had seen ghosts since 1789.\textsuperscript{229}

Residents told her a historically confused tale in which ghosts were men sent to bury treasure for King Charles II, or “pirates” who came to dig it up, and “men of Cornwallis’ (sic) army.”\textsuperscript{230} The stories were a mishmash of historical tidbits, but each was built on the rumored history that English military personnel, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, buried gold in the woods. Despite the fictitious story, Mathews residents used the ghost stories to claim a distinct historical colonial-era identity for their Chesapeake Bay town.\textsuperscript{231}

Local resident Jesse V. Hudgins claimed knowledge of the earliest ghost story. He told DuPont Lee that he passed the woods every day on this ride into work and was “not apologetic nor ashamed to say” he had seen the ghosts.\textsuperscript{232} Hudgins was well versed in the area’s historical (but largely fictional) lore and told DuPont Lee that in the late 1600s, King Charles II of England had considered abdicating his throne and sent a group of men to Jamestown to bury a treasure in anticipation of his arrival. The group did not land at

\textsuperscript{229} Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 37.
\textsuperscript{230} Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 37.
\textsuperscript{231} Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 37.
\textsuperscript{232} Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 38.
Jamestown; rather, they ended up near the mouth of White’s Creek near what became “The Haunted Woods.” Hudgins said that the king’s men buried the treasure but were “ambushed” and murdered by a group of “white bondsmen.” H His attention to historical detail and use of historical names and places made his story seem believable, if not entirely true. As with John Turner’s story, and so many others, Hudgins included historical information and illustrated a historical understanding just as the elite white homeowners had, but his status as a working class man led researchers to understand his story as “folklore” and not history—a distinction that did not seem to bother Hudgins.

Hudgins said he first saw a phantom on a dark October night when he was seventeen. He told DuPont Lee that he noticed a mysterious light moving along the road. Hudgins did not know the history of the area at that time and did not know the light was a ghost. But he said he knew what he saw at the time was “unearthly.” The figure of a large man wearing armor soon appeared floating above the side of the road. Hudgins said that as the armor-clad man slowly turned to face him, the woods came alive with “lights and moving forms.” He told DuPont Lee that the forms carried guns and “shovels of the outlandish type” and dug “furiously” at the ground near an old tree. None of this made sense to him at the time, but Hudgins later learned that the ghosts were King Charles’s men, hiding treasure in the woods.

Hudgins and his neighbors used the ghost sightings to assert that their little patch of the Chesapeake held a more interesting story than the earliest English colony in Virginia, Jamestown. To support the claim, Hudgins’s fellow Mathews County residents told the

233 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 37.
234 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 38.
ghost story widely but often mixed information and plot, creating a sense that more than one group of Englishmen haunted the woods.

A man named Henry Forrest told DuPont Lee that he had “seen more strange things” in the woods” than he could “relate in a whole day.”237 Forrest reported that he saw an army of “British red coats” marching in the woods, along with the lights, just as Hudgins had reported seeing.238 Forrest recalled sitting on his porch with his mother, watching ghost ships pull up, put out rowboats, and bring ghostly “red coats” to the shore.239 Forrest said the phantom men left the boats, entered the woods, and began to dig. He said that could see their lantern lights and hear them digging throughout the night. Forrest told DuPont Lee that he was sure the ghosts were specifically “redcoats” because the color “shone brilliantly in the moon light.”240 Because of the coats, Forrest reported that rather than being King Charles’s men, the ghosts he saw were of Cornwallis’s Revolutionary War army. He told DuPont Lee that Cornwallis’s men “buried money and treasure” in the woods in the summer of 1781.

Ben Ferbee, having heard both stories and not really caring what time the ghosts came from, claimed to have seen the ship too. He told DuPont Lee that he was out fishing one night and saw a “full-rigged” ship sail right to the shore, skid on to the sand, and shoot up into the sky above the trees.241 He reported seeing men carrying “tools and other contraptions” climbing down a “rope-ladder” into the trees below.242 He was convinced that what he saw was the ghost ship he had heard about; there was no need to explain

237 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 40.
238 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 40.
239 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 40.
240 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 41.
241 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 41.
242 Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930), 42.
more. Rather than sticking around to take part in the ongoing discussion about the ghosts’ origin, Ferbee packed his family up and left for Richmond. DuPont Lee patronizingly described Ferbee as an “intelligent negro,” and like many African Americans in Virginia, Ferbee had no interest in developing the meaning behind the white ghosts who haunted their neighborhoods. His fellow neighbors certainly did not enjoy the hauntings, but Ferbee was not even willing to entertain engagement with the specters. He wanted a home that was free from the past’s lingering wraiths.

Forrest, Ferbee, Hudgins, and their neighbors kept reproducing stories about the Haunted Woods that reasserted the story that Englishmen buried treasure in the woods. The people who lived near, and those who saw the eerie events, contextualized what they saw through their spotty knowledge of the past. The widespread understanding that the past was present in the woods gave the multiple sightings and odd occurrences a kind of authenticity, even though the stories conflicted and their understanding of history was suspect. No matter the narratives, locals understood that their lives took place on the same ground in which Englishmen had buried treasure. For those who knew the stories, all the strange things people saw in the woods were not happenstance; they were simply the by-products of the continued existence of the past.

Ghost stories offered non-eliteVirginians the evidence they needed to explain that the past continued to wield control over the present day. The tale of “Sunset Cabin” was one such story. Marjorie Virginia Davis told Miriam Sizer in 1939 that her son, “Cotton” Davis, and his friend had found an abandoned haunted house three miles off the C & O

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243 Lee, *Virginia Ghosts* (1930), 42.
Highway. Davis and his friend wanted to camp in the cabin and came back reporting that three old women haunted it and did not want anyone to occupy their old home.

Cotton Davis described the house in the most unappealing terms, perhaps to ward off future inhabitants. He told his mother that the cabin was a little grey house with a “sagging” little grey picket fence that protected a lawn of tall weeds.\(^{245}\) His description made the house seem as uninviting as possible. He added that most of the windows were boarded up and the home had that “lonely detached” air about it.\(^{246}\) Outside of the little fence Davis saw three graves; he assumed that they held the three women who used to live in the home.\(^{247}\) Cotton reported to his mother that the women died of unfortunate circumstances: the youngest sister hung herself, the oldest sister got sick and died, and the last sister lost her mind and died in what he called “The State Hospital in Williamsburg.” The hospital he was referred to was “The Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds,” the first institution of the sort in North America and a prominent landmark in Virginia.\(^{248}\) To Cotton, the house had all the makings of a haunted home, and sure enough, that night he and his friends got the evidence they needed.

As soon as Cotton and his companions got into the cabin for the night, they moved a large wooden dresser to make more room for activities. After a while, they noticed that things began to move on their own and that they could not get the fire to cook their food, so they blamed ghosts. Cotton told his mother that since they’d disturbed the house, the ghosts were wanted them to leave. After a troublesome and noisy evening, the boys found a seventeenth-century letter in the old desk. The boys suggested that the ghosts left the letter

\(^{245}\) Sizer, “Sunset Cabin” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
\(^{246}\) Sizer, “Sunset Cabin” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
\(^{247}\) Sizer, “Sunset Cabin” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
\(^{248}\) Sizer, “Sunset Cabin” 10, October 1940. Folklore Project.
for them to find so they could learn more about the house. When they returned home from the trip, the boys spread the word that no one lived in Sunset Cabin because the three women’s ghosts were still living there.

Cotton and his friends reported that ghosts haunted Sunset Cabin partially to stop other people from taking up residence at the cabin. They might have wanted to keep the cabin for themselves, or they might have wanted other people to avoid the ghosts’ strange nighttime antics. Either way, the boys recognized that the past made itself known through ghosts and that hauntings were a deterrent for human occupants. Cotton Davis recognized that a ghost story and a little information about the past would keep other people away from the home where he and his friends camped.

Like so many working-class Virginians, Cotton and his friends knew that homes could be so haunted by the past that they became inhospitable for living humans. These stories explained why homes became abandoned and recalled how past events continued to dictate where and how people lived.

This was precisely the case at the David Story place in Criglersville. Evelyn Tunison came to profile the old home and spoke with W. A. Rennalds, Acrey Berry, and T. B. Clore. The three men told her that Henry Story, David Story’s father, had the house built in 1780. The men said the house was “nothing unusual,” but by the late 1930s, Tunison observed, it was going to “wreck and ruin” fast.249 No one had lived in the house for over fifteen years. Tunison noted that the roof had fallen into bad repair, some windows and doors were missing, and the house simply looked poorly. The old David Story place, as they called it,

was in desperate need of a human’s touch. But, as the three men attested, its ghost had made it an unappealing place to stay.

Rennalds, Berry, and Clore told Tunison that locals had long understood the land the David Story place sat on to be haunted, so much so that in 1830, David Story had the home moved a quarter mile away. Mr. Story believed that an unknown corpse in a nearby grave haunted his house. Adding to the legend, the three old men told Tunison that Story had to collect twenty-four oxen from various neighbors to move the house. It was a sensational event for the whole town. The aged Henry Story bragged to his friends that he “rode” the house from its old spot to the new one.

Despite the move, no one wanted to live in the old David Story place. Most people, including Renaldo, Berry, and Clore, still believed it was haunted. The people of Criglersville remembered the home’s move in terms of its ghost, and in their minds, no matter where the house moved, the ghost followed. The wraith claimed the house in the name of the past, so much so that present-day people let the house “go to wreck and ruin,” because they recognized that the past owned the house.

The poor white and African American Virginian’s conception of the relationship between the past and ghosts comes into its clearest form in abandoned homes and ruined sites. Virginians turned to ghost stories to demonstrate how the past remained secured to the land when there was no physical remains to guide people’s understanding of the past. By the 1930s, rural Virginia towns had few old buildings in good condition. The nineteenth century’s economic decline and the Civil War, coupled with the 1930s depression, made
ruin a common sight.250 Travelers around the commonwealth called Virginia a scene of “devastation,” desolation, and “mutilation.”251 One traveler remarked that “everything” in Virginia bore “marks of neglect.”252 He warned that “no one” could visit the commonwealth “without feeling regret.”253 Another said that only old homes owned by the few independently wealthy residents retained the beauty of “old plantation life.”254 Many more old homes had grown hoary and fallen down.255 Some homes, and especially outdated technology such as mills, disappeared from sight, leaving bumpy fields with mysteriously placed bricks overgrown with grass and weeds.

Like the ghosts that haunted natural sites like those in “The Haunted Rock” and “The Haunted Swimming Hole,” the ghosts at ruined sites were the evidence of the past that locals used to explain the historical significance of nondescript places.

Researcher Susan Morton came across one such site northwest of Manassas, down “old Jackson Hollow road.” There lay the ruins of what locals called “Jackson's Mill Site.”256 When Morton arrived, she noted that the site was only some old millstone “embedded” in the “tangle of underbrush.”257 Travelers on the road had no reason to stop and investigate

the overgrowth, and they would not know what to call it if they saw anything. But the locals Mr. Gosson, Maud Ewell, and Grant Bowles knew that the site was famous.²⁵⁸

They told Morton that famed Virginia legend Simon Kenton had his notorious battle on the site.²⁵⁹ They said the mill drew water from the mountains. They said for many years the patch of green had held an entire town, complete with cabins and coopers. But that was all long gone. Only ghosts remained on the site.

Gosson, Ewell, and Bowles did not tell Morton the ghosts’ names or lengthy stories; they simply asserted that the ghosts existed on the site. Even without stories, each of the wraiths offered evidence of the land’s long human inhabitance. To situate the land within Civil War history, they told Morton that a “headless horseman” charged “down Jackson’s Hollow Road” at “certain times of the year.”²⁶⁰ They added that the ghost was the last remainder from a Civil War “skirmish” that took place on Jackson’s Hollow Road.²⁶¹ They told her there were “numerous other ghosts” who frequented the spot, including one specter that they believed was a Native American left over from long ago.²⁶²

The ghosts that Gosson, Ewell, and Bowles told Morton about defined the unrecognizable mill site as a place that collected stories that referenced historical events and characters. None of them could explain why ghosts wanted to return to the mill site, but there was something special about the spot that made it unique and attractive to ghosts. It was nondescript and hard to find, but it was a unique place in town where multiple pasts coexisted with the present.

²⁵⁹ Kenton was a “Paul Bunyan” or “Johnny Appleseed” type figure in the South. For some information about Simon Kenton. Thomas Barden, *Virginia Folk Legends* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 227-238.
Some ruined sites were not as lost to time as Jackson’s Mill site. Between Troutville and Fincastle, Virginia, a tavern-turned-home was reduced to rubble only thirty years before researcher Layalette Dillon came to collect its story from locals. Despite having been knocked down, the empty space retained the structure’s ghost story.263

Locals E. S. Rader and C. H. Rieley told Dillon that John Kesler had built the original tavern on the main highway in Botetourt County in the early 1790s. They told her that travelers of all stripes used to stop in at Kesler’s place for a drink and a place to sleep. Dillon learned that the tavern was a “large and comfortable” place, but the itinerant travelers gave the structure an eerie vibe and plenty of strange stories.264

Rader and Rieley told Dillon that recently, a local child had found two skeletons “bleached and dry with age” in the demolished tavern’s cellar.265 Dillon learned that the people of Troutville and Fincastle believed that two men mysteriously died in the tavern long before the boy found the skeletons; Rader and Rieley told her that the two men stopped in the tavern in the early 1800s after a long night of “driving hogs.”266 Locals held the belief that someone murdered them “for their money” and left their bodies where no one would find them.267

Rader and Rieley said that since then, the two travelers’ ghosts had lurked in the old tavern. They reported that on various occasions, after a night of especially vocal spectral mayhem, the tavern’s keeper would go into the cellar to find wine and whiskey barrels

“smashed and overturned.” These nightly phantom raids made having a tavern difficult, and Rader and Rieley told Dillon that no one wanted to run the tavern after Kesler died. By the early 1900s, the structure’s last owners felt the property was better off without the tavern, and they tore it down.

Long after the building disappeared from the landscape, locals still knew the place as the site of the haunted tavern. No matter what happened on the property afterwards, locals like Rader and Rieley used the ghost story to explain the site and to give it historical meaning. To them, the ghosts were what made it a noteworthy place in their community rather than just an empty space.

African Americans and poor whites shared not only stories about local and ruined sites but also stories about the old plantation homes that dotted their rural neighborhoods. Unlike the homes featured in the old-home biographies, these were usually abandoned. Without white elites to control the narrative about these houses, the faded old structures became haunted homes. Local African Americans and poor whites incorporated wealthy people’s forgotten homes into their own landscape by telling ghost stories that defined the plantations as obsolete tools of a bygone era. Hauntings made quick work of this process. Ghost stories recognized that there was a past in the old homes but insisted that it was just a specter of its former self.

In 1936, researcher Evenly Tunison traveled to Madison County and found a home called Still Valley “nestled in the valley between two mountains” on “a little knoll among locust trees.” Ned Simms had built the old log home in 1792. The people who passed by

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the home “considered” it “very unusual.” But Tunison’s local contact, Flora Dulany Gallihugh, told her that the house was not simply strange looking; it was haunted.

Gallihugh said that people in Madison County had “always” known that Ned Simms, the eighteenth-century owner of Still Valley, haunted the old house. She said that “many” people had heard Simms’s ghost rattle unseen chains throughout the house. Tunison learned that everyone who spent the night at Still Valley was familiar with the mysterious knocking that came from the headboards in the middle of the night. Gallihugh suggested that if someone answered the knocking by asking, “Who is there?” an ethereal voice would respond, “It is old Ned Simms’s ghost.”

Most everyone in the area knew about the ghost, but no one knew why he haunted the house. Gallihugh explained to Tunison that one time Simms’s grandson, a senator from Arkansas, came to visit the house and found that his grandfather’s grave did not have a headstone. She and others assumed that the Simms’s ghost knocked on headboards, dragged chains, and was blunt about his ghostly condition in hopes that someone would go find and mark his grave.

Gallihugh and the people of Madison County did not have much to say about Ned Simms’s life. He was not noted for political office or for being well connected to any of the First Families of Virginia. Gallihugh knew the story behind Simms and his home because people said he haunted the house. When people passed by his house or when locals explained the home to others, they recalled the ghost story. Simms’s life was of very little
value for understanding the landscape. After the Simms left the property, locals used ghosts to show how the past lingered at the site.

In many cases, the traumatic stories lingered longer as haunting than simply the names of previous owners. Nancy S. Pate came across a “lovely old home” called Woodbourne that the people of Louisa County thought was haunted.274 Martin Baker had the home built around 1800, and Pate noted that in the 1930s it still retained much of its former self, including its original “paneled pine wainscoting” and floors.275 The home was certainly old by the time she came to collect its story, but the house was not special, and it did not carry tales about famous people or events.276 For a distinguishing story, Pate sought out local African Americans, believing they would have the kinds of stories she wanted.

Pate noted that the unnamed African Americans she spoke with held “the strong belief” that “Miss Lou Melton” haunted the old house.277 Melton was likely related in some way to Elisha Melton, who lived in the house around 1841. Pate’s African American contacts told her that Miss Lou Melton committed suicide in the house shortly after arriving there sometime in the nineteenth century. Since then, locals knew her ghost to “always came back.”278

Locals did not know much about the ghost or what she did when she “came back.”279 But the local African American community was sure that she haunted the house. The blunt assertion made the old home a significant place in the community. The story turned the

unassuming house into a site of local history and mystery. When people passed by the house, they knew it was the home of Miss Lou Melton, in both life and death.

Researchers frequently went searching for historical significance and came away with ghost stories. In most cases, these were as vague and unobtrusive as the story at Woodbourne, while other times they were more serious and threatening. Researcher William Sponaugle found that history of the Thompson and Morgan home held a dark story. Frederick Gart built the house in 1840. But, as with Woodbourne, the names of the owners held little interest to the community. Rather, according to Mrs. Elizabeth Patterson and the then current owner, Dr. George B. Lawson, that haunting was what made the home interesting and important to the community.

They told Sponaugle that inside the home’s old walls, there was a set of well-known floorboards speckled with dark-red splotches that testified to a kind of haunting. The spots were not part of the wood grain; they were not paint or the result of a sloppy stain job. Patterson and Lawson claimed the dots were droplets of human blood. The African Americans who were once enslaved on the property told them that someone had murdered an elderly slave in the house and that she’d left blood on the floor. Many of the local African Americans, or their family members, worked in or around the house, and they knew the home was holding a wicked secret. Patterson, Lawson, and the unnamed African Americans attested that the blood was permanent—the slave’s ghost ensured that no one could clean its memory off of the floor.

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For the African Americans living near the Thompson and Morgan home, the plantation home was not warm and inviting. Its history did not fill them with dreamlike visions of the past. It was a bad place when they were enslaved, and it was a bad place after emancipation. No matter who moved into the house or how the home’s décor changed, its history was inescapably written in blood on the floorboards.

Once the white-elite owners left or abandoned their plantations, there was little they could do to shape the local interpretation of their once grand homes. Once they left the places to rot, local people defined the home according to their own views of the past.

Francis B. Foster visited a home in Fauquier County called Avenel that she called a “wreck of its former self.” James Bradshaw Beverly had the home built in 1820, and the Beverly family had long since moved out of the home and left it abandoned. A family descendant from outside of the Fauquier community, Mrs. Beverly Herbert, knew the home as a grand place. Herbert reported that in its younger days, members of the Turner, Carter, Randolph, and Mason families, as well as other fine Virginians, “frequently visited” the house. She told Foster that during the Civil War, the home hosted Robert E. Lee, Col. Mosby, and Stonewall Jackson. The residents of Avenel took great pride in having prepared provisions for Jackson’s troops, as they passed by the home, and always having a bed for the Confederacy’s colonels and generals. An unnamed person who “knew Avenel in 1895” reported that the Beverlys welcomed “all comers.” The source said that the home and the grounds were a “veritable Paradise.” Foster learned that the home always had “sufficient

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servants” who created an “atmosphere of peace and rest.” For the old visitors, and Herbert, Avenel was “a place to be remembered.” But locals knew little of that house.

Locals were more familiar with the home’s ghost, the specter that the family called “The Lady in White.” The mysterious woman lurked among the trees around the home and near the home’s graveyard. No one knew who she was or why she haunted the property. The Beverley family understood “The Lady in White” as simply their home’s ghost. For them, just as it was with the old-home biographers, the property’s age and history made a haunting appropriate and expected. The home’s identity as a restful and joy-filled place suggested that the ghost simply wanted to stay at Avenel—a request the white inhabitants were more than happy to oblige.

For the locals, the only thing that remained on the property from the family’s stay at the home was its ghost. They might not have been able to enumerate who stayed in the house, but they knew that it was haunted. They knew that some part of the home’s mysterious past lingered on the landscape and claimed the home for the past, not the present.

The people who lived around Cloverland in Prince William County had even less information about the old plantation and depended on the stories they heard and told about home’s ghosts to understand its past. When Susan R. Morton came to record the home’s history, she learned that Edward Carter had the home built in 1799. One of her informants told her that Carter had died during its construction and left the home to his

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wife and children. By the 1930s, the Carters had long since moved out, and a pair of
descendants, who lived elsewhere, owned the home. She noted that the descendants left
Cloverland “clapboarded over” most of the year, mainly using it for storage.290 Luckily for
them, Morton noted, the family heirlooms were safe from theft because the community
knew that the “traditional Cloverland ghost” guarded the home.291

Morton identified “Uncle” Thornton as the expert on Cloverland’s ghost stories. The
family who lived at Cloverland had enslaved his mother before emancipation, and she gave
birth to him there. Thornton spent a good part of his life at Cloverland and knew all of its
stories.

Thornton told Morton that the first ghost at Cloverland had arrived after one man
murdered another over a card game in one of the upstairs rooms. Thornton reported that
the ghost and its murderers replayed the night of the killing over and over again in the
house. He explained that on certain nights, he could hear distinctive “moaning” sounds
coming from the upstairs. He said the murdered man’s pained sighs lingered in the house
long after he had bled to death. Thornton said that the man’s blood left a stain in the wood
floor that remained there “in spite of much scouring” year after year.292 After the
moaning, a careful ear could pick up the sounds of water running, the slapping of wet
hands, and “vigorous scrubbing.”293 Thornton said this was the sound of the murderer
trying to wash the dead man’s blood off his hands, to no avail of course.294 If the sounds

292 Morton, “The Ghost of Cloverland,” 31, October 1941. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection. The
capitalization is original to the document.
were not strange enough, Thornton added that the murdered ghost made the home’s
electric lights flicker on and off “at certain times of the year.”

The Carters understood their home as especially historical and attractive to ghosts.
They could not explain all the ghosts who haunted their home, but they insisted the home
had many stories to tell and gained new wraiths from time to time. “The nocturnal visitor”
was the most mysterious Cloverland ghost. Thornton said that one night the young John
Hill Carter answered a knock at the front door and went downstairs to answer it. When he
opened the door, he saw a very tall man with his own head tucked neatly under his arm like
a package, not unlike Washington Irving’s headless horseman. Thornton said the boy did
not do much else but stare, so the phantom let himself in the house—paying no attention to
the shocked young boy who blurted out, “I am not afraid.” But, Thornton said, the
headless man did not acknowledge the boy. With head in hand, the looming specter
ascended the very steps John Hill Carter had just come down, to find a suitable room to
occupy upstairs. For the Carters, their ancestral home held many potential histories, and
the number of ghosts that haunted the home grew over time. Generations of Carters
learned about the ghost stories and did their part in adding to the home’s spectral legacy.

Morton learned a number of stories from local contacts too. She reported that to
them, “tragedy” stalked Cloverland, producing at least two possible sources of the “burglar
insurance” type wraith. The first was Edward Carter himself. Carter had died while
supervising his slaves as they made the bricks for Cloverland’s construction. The bank of

298 Morton, “The Ghost of Cloverland,” 31, October 1941. Virginia Folklore and Folk Song Collection; Morton,
the Broad Run River collapsed under him, instantly burying and killing him. After his death, his wife refused to live in Cloverland and soon lost her mind. Thornton suggested that Carter’s ghost lingered in the house, because he was still interested in seeing it to completion.

But, Thornton added, some people thought that the two unmarked graves under a magnolia tree on the property caused the Cloverland hauntings. The two unknown bodies offered two potential pasts for the “traditional Cloverland ghost.” Thornton said the graves hold the remains of two Civil War soldiers who died nearby.\(^{299}\) Having lost their lives in battle, perhaps one of them felt compelled to protect the last place they saw in life.

For the people who lived around Avenel and Cloverland, the ghost stories established the homes’ histories. They were attractive, simple, and easy to remember. They made knowing what happened on the place seem important and relevant to their contemporary lives. Hauntings placed the past in the present day and begged people to understand why and how they came to exist. For Virginia’s poor whites and African Americans, ghosts were problems that they needed to solve and understand.

It did not matter if a ghost haunted an old home down the street, a ruined mill site, or an abandoned mansion; the specters that lived in working-class or rural neighborhoods insisted that people recognize and understand the presence of the past. They posed questions that the African Americans and poor whites did their best to contextualize and understand, using their knowledge of the local community and the broader national history. The elite Virginians used their ghosts to establish a special loving connection with historical characters from the past. But for Virginia’s poor white and African Americans, the

past was not a wondrous place they longed to know more intimately. For them, the past was as difficult, violent, problematic, dangerous, and challenging as their present day.

Poor white and African American Virginians’ ghost stories defined the places that the community recognized, and sought to explain why things like murders, suicides, and abandonment happened at certain spots. They established rules that recognized how the past continued to affect how people lived their lives. For these Virginians, it was a well-known and logical conclusion that a murdered person transformed into a ghost who forever arrested a site in one singular time. Likewise, the members of Virginia’s laboring class knew that if a house did not have living residents, it was because it had dead ones. No one could live comfortably with the past. African Americans and poor whites wanted to live in the current world, unthreatened by the lingering past. Like their white elite neighbors, Virginia’s non-elites recognized and defined the past as it appeared in their daily landscapes, but they did not want to cohabitate. They had a strained relationship with the past.

None of the people who collected ghost stories from African Americans and the poor whites recognized the nuanced historical discussion in the tales of hauntings. For the Federal Writers Project and Folklore Project researchers who collected these ghost stories, the tales were simply rumors. The workers’ manuals taught them to understand the ghost stories as amusing tales that sought to entertain more than anything else. Their limited view put ghost stories solidly in the category of “folklore,” so much so that ghost stories told by elites were soon understood as “folklore,” and not history too.

As all ghosts became categorized as “folklore,” talk of historical haunts fell out of favor with the old-home-biography authors. In the mid-1920s, architects and architectural
historians began to write books that challenged Virginians’ understanding of their old homes’ value—they no longer saw ghosts as valuable at all. Influential historical architect Fisk Kimball wrote that until the early 1930s, “the great plantation homes of Virginia Tidewater” had “lacked exact study.” He explained that earlier writers “made hasty measurements, guessed heights” and “neglected to note material and colors,” and they did not see value in the things architects recognized. By the mid-twentieth century, historical architects took over the study of Virginia’s old homes and abandoned the books written by previous writers.

This same shift happened at historical house museums and sites. When Virginians began to hire professional architects and historians to help them transform their old homes and sites into more academically legitimate museums, the new professional class jettisoned the ghost stories that locals used to illustrate the sites’ value. Like the architectural historians who wrote the new old-home biographies, the new professional museum workers found primary significance in the buildings’ materials rather than the stories people told about and in them. The professional vision encouraged people to understand the homes as simply material culture and stripped them of the emotional value that connected people to the more conceptual “home” that existed within the structural limitation of the building.

But one man doggedly remembered the old books’ stories and gleefully spread their vision of haunted historical homes. That man was W. A. R. Goodwin, the founding father of Colonial Williamsburg. Goodwin was a product of the early twentieth century’s home

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biographers. Despite the turn that saw ghost stories as ignorable folklore, Goodwin held on to the belief that ghosts were culturally and historically significant. He used the stories that his neighbors and friends told him about the city to argue that Williamsburg was uniquely historical and needed protection from the onslaught of modern society. Not unlike the early folklorists, Goodwin saw the ghost stories as something worth “salvaging” and protecting for the future. But rather than collecting the stories, Goodwin sought to ensure that the places where the city’s colonial-era specters roamed looked as familiar to them as possible. He believed that the city had an unmatched historical significance and could offer all Americans the ability to experience the past like nothing before. He only needed to protect the ghosts to define the city as the past.
CHAPTER THREE
GOODWIN’S GHOSTS

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation began a marketing campaign that promised the impossible—an audience with the nation’s first president. A 1998 advertisement exclaimed that “George Washington is awake” at Colonial Williamsburg.303 “While other places are preoccupied with George’s sleeping habits,” the ad read, “we’re more interested in his waking hours.”304 If guests wanted to know what Washington did or thought during those “waking hours,” all they had to do was “ask George” or “better yet, ask Martha,” his wife.305 The advertisement promised that Colonial Williamsburg was a place where the past “breathes, walks, and talks.”306

Advertisements, pamphlets, schedules, and on-the-ground interpreters encouraged guests to believe that Colonial Williamsburg was filled with actual eighteenth-century people—not actors. Interactions between these people and guests were limited to the eighteenth-century person’s knowledge of the world. If a guest were to ask them the location of the nearest gas station, the eighteenth-century person would respond, “What is a gas station?”

Guests at Colonial Williamsburg, on the other hand, were not expected to adopt an eighteenth-century persona. They could know the gas station’s location, the current president’s name, and that the capital of Virginia was Richmond, not Williamsburg. Similar to the unspoken contract between theatrical actors and their audience, guests to the museum were expected to suspend their disbelief and play along. However, unlike a theatrical play where the program details that George Washington—as played by actor Christopher Jackson—will appear in Act One in Broadway’s *Hamilton*, the pamphlets at Colonial Williamsburg detailed that George Washington himself was scheduled to appear on its main street, Duke of Gloucester, at around noon, despite being dead for 199 years.307

Far from being a mere marketing ploy, ghosts and the insistence that colonial people were in some way still alive in Williamsburg was at the very core of the Colonial Williamsburg project. In 1926, the museum’s founding father, Rev. W. A. R. Goodwin, used ghost stories to sell the city and his vision to benefactor John D. Rockefeller. He knew that Williamsburg’s days of colonial politics and revolutionary fervor were over. He knew that Washington and his friends were all dead. But he also knew Williamsburg was the home to a multitude of “glad and gallant” ghosts.308 Goodwin’s desire to restore Williamsburg came from the idea that twentieth-century people could more easily hold audience with “the ghosts of the past” if the city looked as it did in the eighteenth century.309

Ghosts and hauntings were central to Goodwin’s efforts to restore the city to its colonial-era glory, and even though no one would have said it in as many words, they have

309 Elizabeth Hayes, *Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia*. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department, (1933), 11.
remained central to Colonial Williamsburg’s interpretation since the 1980s. The museum’s professional curators and directors held on to the metaphysical idea that Williamsburg was haunted even as they jettisoned the old ghost stories. They held the professional historical narrative of sources and scholarship in the highest regard, but nevertheless, still dabbled in a curious form of historical metaphysics that promised time travel and living, breathing Colonial Virginians. When Goodwin and his peers referred to the ghosts of the past, they meant in fact literal ghosts—the incorporeal spirits of dead past people. The museum professionals who followed did not share that belief, but they nevertheless asserted again and again that patrons could “spend the night in the eighteenth century” or could “rub shoulders” with Revolutionary-era figures or, indeed, shake hands with a long-dead George Washington.310 Both claimed ghosts—but only Goodwin was straightforward and referenced actual ghost stories.

Goodwin and the professional museum workers both relied, albeit differently, on the presence of the city’s uncanny past. Though proponents would have emphatically denied it, the museum’s restoration and first-person interpreters made Williamsburg’s intangible value observable. Whether through the promise of a night in an eighteenth-century ordinary, a chat with a member of the House of Burgesses, or a ghost sighting, the museum defined itself by providing a past that was in some way still present, attainable, and even material in the present. In this way, Williamsburg has indeed been haunted for some time.

In the 1920s, Goodwin used ghosts to illustrate the city’s value and explain to friends, investors, and supporters what restoration sought to protect. From the 1930s to

the late 1970s, the city’s narrative shifted far away from historical hauntings. Professional curators and directors preferred to craft the city’s historical authority from their unquestionably substantive and high-quality historical research and restoration efforts. But they held on to the underlying metaphysical elements that allowed them to claim that the city offered a truly eighteenth-century experience. In 1957, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation created a motion picture, Williamsburg: Story of a Patriot to further illustrate the eighteenth-century world they’d created. The film situated historical characters within the restored city and showed guests what the present-day city looked like with eighteenth-century occupants. In the late 1970s, the museum made a hard turn. The last Rockefeller heir to lead the museum passed away and left Colonial Williamsburg in the care of people with local ties to Virginia. He left Colonial Williamsburg’s interpretation to Virginians, who implemented a new program of first-person interpretation. The Foundation began to hire people to play the roles of Revolutionary-era heroes. The new interpretation brought the film’s images to life in the museum’s streets and buildings and made long-dead colonials accessible to present-day guests. In an important way, old Williamsburg’s “glad and gallant” ghosts had returned in a new form.311

Colonial Williamsburg’s experience with ghosts and historical interpretation offers a look at how ghostlore and hauntings were used to establish historical sites and how they continued to shape understandings of Virginia’s historically significant landscapes. Directors, workers, and on-the-ground interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg took their role as educators seriously. They believed that they were upholding the most rigorous and

311 Letter from Goodwin to Barclay, 15, March 1931, in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department, (1933), 13.
accurate portrayal of the past. By the 1940s, the museum was renowned among historical sites in Virginia and across the United States as a beacon of public history. Colonial Williamsburg was the place against which other historical sites measured themselves.

Colonial Williamsburg’s long relationship with ghosts and historical interpretation illustrates the central role that ghostlore plays in the creation of historical place. This chapter uses Colonial Williamsburg as a case study to illustrate how early museum founders, guests, and locals used ghostlore and hauntings to establish historical sites and to shape their presentation’s place-based historical significance.

Though set in Colonial Williamsburg, this story is common among all historical sites. It is the history of balancing the putatively rational and irrational. Historical sites throughout Virginia depended first and foremost on the uncanny idea that certain places where things happened in the past needed to be preserved to a single moment in the past. Every historical site, today and in the past, needs to find a balance between embracing the emotional and quasi-religious feelings their guests have for specific sites with the need to present authoritative and well-researched historical truth. Colonial Williamsburg, once the leader of historical Virginia, drew criticism for considering, it is argued too much, its guests’ interests in their curation. This chapter does not take part in that discussion; rather, I seek to help the museum, and all museums, understand that ghosts are central to the fabric of museums and that a few ghosts do not challenge a museum’s perfectly rational mission.

This exploration of Colonial Williamsburg’s ghostly roots adds a new consideration to the discussion of the formation of all historical sites. Historians of public history and restoration have long used Williamsburg as a broadly applicable case study. The earliest study was Charles Hosmer’s *Preservation Comes of Age*. He saw the creation of Colonial
Williamsburg as sitting at the juncture of two impulses in historical preservation. On the one hand was the "romantic": a time of gentleman and lady amateurs infused with a dewy-eyed love of the past and its lore. Beginning in the 1920s, university-trained professionals, often lacking the local connection and commitments, began to supplant the previous wave of restorationists. Hosmer's "romantics" accepted and reveled in mythic narratives—what many scholars would now call memory. But what Hosmer and others have overlooked is the large degree to which hauntings and ghostlore were as much a part of these restorationists' worldview as was their romantic view of the past.

There have been many retellings of Colonial Williamsburg's founding narrative, and critical evaluations of its work, in the eighty years since it opened. In most cases, the histories are celebrations of Rockefeller and Goodwin's patriotic and transformative project. One author proclaimed the project a "crusade" to protect the nation's "principles." Another called the restoration Williamsburg's "renaissance." No sooner had the restoration begun than authors focused on Goodwin's good nature and dedication to bringing historical education to America's diverse populace. One writer said that Goodwin had "energy, eloquence, and taste" and wanted to save Williamsburg "for all of future time." Charles Hosmer said Goodwin was "zealous" and had "an active imagination." He called the project a "dream." After Rockefeller took up Goodwin's

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cause in 1926, writers shifted their focus to the billionaire as the hero of the project.
Rockefeller became “daring,” confident, and a “wise” father type who knew what to do and
had funds and the “good will” to do it.319

Later historians tended to understand Colonial Williamsburg by looking at its political mission. Satisfied that the historical city was the first of its kind, and that the work done there was truly innovative and inspirational, scholars began to look at what kind of little world the museum created. In 1996, Mike Wallace explained that like the house museums that opened before it, Colonial Williamsburg celebrated elite white narratives and ignored African Americans’ role in history.320 He argued that during the 1930s, wealthy sponsors like Rockefeller and Ford promoted historical narratives that celebrated the wealthy and disregarded everyone else.

Though Rockefeller might not have been seeking to ignore oppressed people’s voices, Colonial Williamsburg spent the bulk of its existence focusing on elite males. For the majority of the park’s life, the museum’s curators were largely unaware of contemporary historians’ narratives relating to slavery, labor, and gendered oppression. The eighteenth century looked like a wonderfully simpler time, a dreamland free of the modern day’s complications. By the end of the twentieth century, historians and then interpreters began to recognize gaping holes in this interpretation and began to dig deeper into the historical city’s social world.

Anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable’s controversial and highly critical 1994 study of the museum’s culture and interpretation argued that Colonial Williamsburg’s

318 Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age. (1981), 12.
dedication to “historical accuracy” was a mask for more commercially concerned practices—a claim that stung deeply in the offices of the museum’s planners and experts. The anthropologists’ findings struck at the museum’s sense of self and challenged the two-eras model that Hosmer had invented nearly a decade earlier. If Colonial Williamsburg was more interested in collecting guests’ money than in creating an “accurate” portrayal of Williamsburg in colonial times, was it truly a professional as opposed to “romantic” restoration? Was it as important to the creation of museums in the United States as people once thought? Was it a respectable institution for the study of history, or simply an amusement park?

Anders Greenspan provided a historical approach to understanding Colonial Williamsburg’s significance for other historical sites, with his 2002 book. Greenspan’s institutional history argued that like American culture, Colonial Williamsburg changed over time.321 In Greenspan’s narrative, the original division between the romantic and professional eras still worked if one could accept that the site’s goals changed over time. He argued that Colonial Williamsburg did not start out as a living history museum, but rather adopted the interpretive style over time to meet its guests’ needs.322 Rather than seeking to blame Colonial Williamsburg for failing to create an “authentic” historical town, he argued that city was a dynamic space that listened and responded to guests’ wants, needs, and tastes.

This chapter does not seek to retell Colonial Williamsburg’s founding narrative once again in full. Instead, I challenge the prevailing narrative of how the museum has created its historical significance, by showing how ghostlore inspired the creation of the United States’

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most prominent historical town and is the underlying logic behind first-person interpretation. All of this highlights the irrational and uncanny roots of something too often analyzed only through the lens of accuracy and interest-based historical preservation. This is especially important when looking at Colonial Williamsburg.

The institution pushed back hard against the historical sources that could not stand up to their academic scrutiny. This often made them completely blind to newer historical narratives. Like many museums in the United States, Colonial Williamsburg’s staff did not recognize African American history and characters until the early 1990s. At the time, they felt that they could not find sufficient evidence of black voices in primary sources. In the early 1990s, the museum pushed back against ghost tours, citing the same thing—there was not sufficient evidence to prove that ghosts existed. They added that ghosts were irrational and did not reflect the institution’s serious historical work. But in their insistence on grounded and substantiated research and topics, the museum made its curators unable to see that ghost stories, and for that matter African Americans, were central to the creation of the museum. The limited definition of legitimate document-based research, and rationality, made ghost stories a nonentity in Williamsburg. But despite the strict limitation and focus on rationality, curators and docents continued to employ the irrational idea that the city held onto the past.

Like all Colonial Williamsburg histories, this chapter will start with W. A. R. Goodwin. He was the pastor at the Bruton Parish Church, the eighteenth-century structure at the heart of Williamsburg’s old downtown. In the early 1900s, Goodwin directed and oversaw his parishioners as they endeavored to restore the old church—a process he fell deeply in love with and used to inspire his larger restoration of the city. Notably, his ideas
of why the city ought to be restored were quickly becoming outdated by the late 1920s. He was an old-fashioned man—photos of him wearing his starched-firm detachable shirt collar well into the 1930s highlighted his preference and appreciation for the antique. Goodwin was a student of the old-home biographers as well, and like them, he believed that the city's ghosts presented strong evidence in favor of the town's historical character and made a good argument for restoration. Goodwin shared the old-home owners' stories and their emotional and spiritual vision of old homes.

Williamsburg had already been one of the home biographers' favorite cities to profile. Typically, colonial-era homes in Virginia were a good distances apart from one another, having been the anchor buildings for large plantations. The researchers and writers who documented the homes had to drive far and wide to visit only one or two homes. Williamsburg, though, offered a fine collection of colonial buildings, all compressed into one tight area.

Goodwin recognized the value of the city's numerous old homes and buildings. But rather than seeing them as a research advantage, he saw them as a draw for the ghosts of the Revolution. The old-home biographies he read and the homeowners in Williamsburg he spoke with all assured him that the ghosts he witnessed stuck around because the old homes existed on an unchanged landscape.

The then-current residents believed that they and the ghosts liked the city for all the same reasons. The old homes made the colonial period feel accessible. The large homes and well-tended flower gardens signified a domestic comfort and lifestyle that allowed for lavishness and beauty. The ghosts that haunted the city, he would argue, did so because the town still felt so much like home hundreds of years after the Revolution.
The nineteenth century had largely passed Williamsburg by. Apart from an 1863 Civil War battle, leaving some trenches and fresh graves in the Bruton Parish cemetery, and a few new buildings here and there, the old colonial homes still looked much as they had, surrounded by lots and gardens as much colonial in tone as “modern.” This timeless town was the one Goodwin and the city’s elders still loved and knew, as the age of the automobile dawned.

When Goodwin returned to Williamsburg after a short stint working in New York during World War I, the unchanged haunted city had “modernized” dramatically. The war effort demanded ships and munitions and a work force to make them. Virginia’s Tidewater region was more than happy to provide them. By the war’s end, Williamsburg had become a bustling central city in the area. Much to Goodwin and the old residents’ dismay, this meant new buildings and a new population of African Americans and Italian immigrant workers.

Goodwin argued that the war had changed Williamsburg’s “tone” and fundamentally altered its landscape. He said the city was rapidly becoming little more than a mixture of “negro shacks and tumbled down modern buildings.” He was especially concerned about “The Powder Horn,” the octagonal brick armory in the center of town, which figured prominently in Virginia’s 1775 moves toward independence. Its celebrity as a Revolutionary War icon made its preservation by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities a point of pride for all historically minded Virginians. Goodwin lamented that the Powder Horn’s context was lost, as it was “environed by negro shacks.

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323 Hayes, Background and Beginnings. (1933), 9.
and a tin garage."³²⁴ Adding insult to injury, he explained, the garage featured a roughly painted sign that read “TOOT-AN-CUM-IN”—a clear reference to what Goodwin and others of his class derided as the ignorant speech of black folks.³²⁵ Goodwin warned that visitors to Williamsburg who sought out the city’s history “had need for large and active imaginations” in order to “recall the past.”³²⁶

Goodwin, and the old residents, were not alone in the observation. Other white people who came to Williamsburg, old-house biographers’ books in hand, looking for the old city’s buildings found that, as Hildegarde Hawthorne described it, “the war had murdered the town.”³²⁷ The city’s pleasant quaintness gave way to paved roads, new buildings, and a working-class population. Hawthorne wrote that to Williamsburg’s “great sorrow and outrage,” the city was “the center and heart of the peninsula” once again.³²⁸ She explained that a city grew up around old Williamsburg and drove the housing prices in the old part of town up too high, “so that many a lot was sold” and “the old house on it pulled down.”³²⁹ In their places, builders put “the worst type of cheap structure,” along with “cheap amusement places and eating houses.”³³⁰ The already unsightly structures were made of “corrugated iron” and other twentieth-century materials that made the eighteenth century feel as far off as it was.³³¹ The war had not only brought a whole new group of people to Williamsburg; it thrust the city’s unwilling and aged population into a twentieth century for which it was not eager.

³²⁴ Hayes, Background and Beginnings, (1933), 9.
³²⁵ Hayes, Background and Beginnings, (1933), 9.
³²⁶ Hayes, Background and Beginnings, (1933), 9.
³²⁷ Hawthorne, Williamsburg, (1941), 121.
³²⁸ Hawthorne, Williamsburg, (1941), 121.
³²⁹ Hawthorne, Williamsburg, (1941), 121.
³³⁰ Hawthorne, Williamsburg, (1941), 121.
³³¹ Hawthorne, Williamsburg, (1941), 121.
It would seem that the din and development of war-inspired modernity had driven away the ghosts so vital to the character of the old town. Goodwin would walk through the city at night after his return and find it difficult, but not impossible, to “commune with” the specters. The streetlights, modern buildings, and busy road sounds ruined the quiet, contemplative evenings that allowed him to tap into some kind of otherworldly experience. Goodwin said that the city he used to walk through on “moonlight nights” was nothing but “an incongruous mixture of the Colonial and the modern” and stepping over the deep ruts left by countless automobile tires. The newer buildings on Duke of Gloucester Street “held no lure for ghosts” and needed to be removed. The town’s possible future lay in the few older buildings that held onto their colonial-era charm and their “glad and gallant” ghosts.

Goodwin pined for a “fairy godmother” whose magic “golden wand” could “obliterate the modern and restore” the city’s colonial buildings and gardens. Transforming Williamsburg back to the way it was seemed impossible. The new needed to go, though. An army of newly built workers’ shanties, twentieth-century store fronts, gas stations, and endless lines of telephone poles with their five and six tiers of wires and cross beams all would have to vanish. The glorious old buildings would need to be cleaned, painted, and have their nineteenth-century additions of screened-in porches, federal-style porticoes, and garages pulled down and their bright paint scrubbed away. Most importantly, though, a whole imported population of black and immigrant workers would

332 Hayes, Background and Beginnings, (1933), 7.
333 Letter from Goodwin to Barclay, 15, March 1931, in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department, (1933), 14.
334 Letter from Goodwin to Barclay, 15, March 1931.
335 Hayes, Background and Beginnings, (1933), 11. 9.
have to be moved away as their homes and amenities were cleared off in favor of the ghosts’ original landscape.

There were no fairy godmothers in Williamsburg, though. Goodwin understood that the work that needed to be done was not going to be easy and that funds were not going to simply raise themselves. He had experience restoring the Bruton Parish Church, where he had been the rector before and after the war, and knew how to raise money. But he found himself with an aged and fading base of local contributors. He could not depend on the people of Williamsburg to restore the city. He had to use what magic the city had—its ghosts—to get outsiders invested in the city and its history. He believed that if people simply came to Williamsburg and could experience the ghosts, they too would recognize its value and know the importance of its restorations.

But for all if his confidence in the town’s ghosts, Goodwin’s first efforts at wooing a wealthy investor avoided the topic of ghosts all together. His initial letters instead relied on a mixture of guilt and a more objectively historical sales pitch.

One of his first contacts was with the very man he blamed for the city’s change: Henry Ford. In the 1920s, Ford was making headlines by buying up old buildings across the United States and transporting them to his historical park in Michigan, Greenfield Village. Goodwin saw Ford’s interest in American history and old buildings as making him a natural investor for Williamsburg. It could have been a second Ford park, but one that was more complete and more authentic than the curated hodgepodge at Greenfield Village.336

But in toning down his own personal confidence in the role of ghosts, Goodwin found himself at a loss to make the best case for his project. In a letter to Ford’s son, Edsel,

Goodwin flatly blamed the company for the town’s demise. He began the letter with an accusatory and impatient tone, stating, “Seriously, I want your father to buy Williamsburg.”

He went on to tell Ford that buying and preserving the city “would be the most unique and spectacular gift of American history” and “traditions” that anyone could give. He stressed that the Ford family, specifically, were “the chief contributors to” Williamsburg’s “destruction.”

Ford cars, he wrote, were “fast spoiling the whole appearance of the old city.” To Goodwin, the family had an obligation to restore Williamsburg and give it back to the American people. Blaming Ford for all of Williamsburg’s problems may have been a bit much, but the advent of the car had certainly dramatically changed what life felt, smelled, looked, and sounded like in the old city.

Despite a shared concern to “save” a jeopardized past, the Ford family wrote back saying that Mr. Ford was simply “unable to interest himself in the matter mentioned.”

Undaunted, Goodwin sent a second letter. In it he tried to interest the Fords with Williamsburg’s potential for tourists. Dropping the idea of a historical town for the betterment of all Americans, Goodwin tried to argue that the town would attract automotive tourists. The sales prices of Ford’s automobiles made domestic travel accessible for an unprecedented number of Americans. A whole new world of middle class vacations was on the rise. Motels, roadside attractions, car camping, and the great American family road trip became staples of the middle class in the 1920s. Goodwin

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337 Letter from Goodwin to Edsel Ford, 13, June1924, in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department (1933), 117
338 Letter from Goodwin to Edsel Ford, 13, June 1924.
339 Letter from Goodwin to Edsel Ford, 13, June 1924.
340 Letter from Goodwin to Edsel Ford, 13, June 1924.
341 Letter from Ford Company to Goodwin, 1, July 1924. in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department (1933), 118.
pointed out to Ford that Williamsburg, being a well-known old town, was “becoming increasingly the mecca of tourists.” He added that the travelers were coming from “all over America” as well as “England and elsewhere” to see the town. Goodwin realized that guilt did not work for Ford, but he hoped that marketing Williamsburg as a travelers’ hub would stoke Ford’s ego and perhaps seem more economically attractive.

This was a smarter sell. If Ford did not respond to restoring Williamsburg to protect the past, perhaps he would be more interested in the future. Much to Goodwin’s dismay, cars were forever in Williamsburg’s future. Cars would soon bring guests in droves to the city. As more people wanted to take road trips to Williamsburg, more people would buy cars—this should have enticed Ford. Once they arrived, drivers would need places to park and service their automobiles. The people in the cars would need places to sleep and eat and so on.

Ford’s rejection was a speed bump in Goodwin’s plans—but not an end to them. He needed to reevaluate the way he sold the city, and he needed to tap more fully into the passion he himself had for the city and its ghosts. It did not take long for Goodwin to realize that the magic he needed to employ to restore Williamsburg was not a “fairy godmother” but ghosts. The ghost stories that he read and those that residents told him created a language through which the city gained its value. Ghosts were what made Williamsburg special, and all he needed to do was use them.

And so he did. Goodwin reversed course and now spoke about ghosts all the time in private conversations with his secretary Elizabeth Hayes, with his parishioners, and with

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343 Second Letter from Goodwin to Ford. Undated.
anyone who would listen. He wrote about them to friends, and he invoked them in public speeches. When he realized what he had known all along—that ghosts were the language of value—he knew how to sell the city.

One of his first public statements on ghosts was a suggestive challenge to a writer at the *Baltimore Sun*. The writer had penned a stinging criticism of Goodwin’s efforts to have Ford fund a restoration of Williamsburg. The author wrote, “Dollars can not bring back the grace and power of a day that is dead.” The writer did not understand that Goodwin and the white residents of Williamsburg understood the “grace and power” of the past to simply be weakened but not dead or lost. The writer surmised that Goodwin would try to bring the past back to life by filling the colonial halls with “wax figures”—a concept he found unbecoming of the old city.” Goodwin had not suggested that wax figures be made to illustrate how the buildings and rooms were used. The idea of a full-city restoration seemed so outrageous that the *Baltimore Sun* writer assumed Goodwin was out to do something as hokey and uncreative as replace the homes’ residents with costumed mannequins. Goodwin shot back with a letter that eagerly invited the author, and any other readers, to come see what he was up to in Williamsburg. He recognized that the discussion around the restoration, while not quite on its feet yet, could stimulate interest and perhaps more funding. He wrote that from the author’s “tone and spirit,” a visit to Williamsburg “would be tremendously interesting” for him. Goodwin proposed that if they “prowled around the old town” together, especially if they were able to walk around in the

344 Hayes, *Background and Beginnings* (1933), 22.
345 Hayes, *Background and Beginnings* (1933), 22.
346 Letter from Goodwin to The Editor of the *Baltimore Sun* 11, November 1924, in Elizabeth Hayes, *Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia*. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department (1933), 22.
“moonlight,” the author would come around to Goodwin’s “point of view.” Goodwin explained that the author would feel compelled to correct “certain erroneous statements” and understand the project of restoring Williamsburg as neither “crass” nor “materialistic.” The “hallowed spot,” he said, was to be a tool to teach Americans the “story of the nation’s past.” Goodwin’s belief that what can only be seen by “moonlight” would bring the author to a better understanding was a careful reference to ghosts. Furthermore, by explaining that in order to understand the restoration efforts, the author needed to experience Williamsburg firsthand, Goodwin ginned up interest and intrigue in the city. It was a clever act of promotion.

The Baltimore Sun writer was not the only one Goodwin wanted to walk with him at night. Part of the reason he wanted to restore the city was to give everyone the opportunity to experience Williamsburg’s ghosts. While the common man or woman could not provide the funding needed to thoroughly fix the city, their opinions on the city mattered. The more support Goodwin could muster, the easier it was to argue that Americans needed and wanted Williamsburg to be restored to its eighteenth-century look and feel.

One of these important people was a schoolgirl named Margaret Blacknall who wrote to Goodwin in 1926. Goodwin told Blacknall that Williamsburg was definitely haunted. He wrote to her that if she walked around Williamsburg late at night, she would feel “the presence and companionship of the people who” lived in the city “in the long ago years.” During that moment, Goodwin promised, she would realize that Williamsburg is

347 Letter from Goodwin to The Editor of the Baltimore Sun. 11, November 1924.
348 Letter from Goodwin to The Editor of the Baltimore Sun. 11, November 1924.
349 Letter from Goodwin to The Editor of the Baltimore Sun. 11, November 1924.
350 Letter from Goodwin to Miss Margaret Blacknall. 27, January 1926. in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department (1933), 26.
“the most interesting place in America.”\textsuperscript{351} He explained that at night, when the city is free of car and pedestrian traffic, and the lights in homes and business fall dim, she could see the old residents of the town “coming out of” the “old houses” where “they once lived.”\textsuperscript{352} She would see Native Americans and the English colonists standing on “the Court Green,” making “their treaties of peace with the Colonial Government.” At the Powder Horn, she would see Lord Dunmore’s “agents” sneaking around, stealing powder. If she listened close and blocked out the far-off road sounds, she would hear purposeful clapping and clomping of horses’ hooves against the old road. And as the horses appeared to get closer, she would realize it was none other than Patrick Henry and his “Hanover Volunteers,” riding into Williamsburg ready to demand that Dunmore’s men “restore” the powder that they had taken.\textsuperscript{353}

Goodwin did not suggest that all the colonial-era people were imaginary or made up. He assured Blacknall in no uncertain terms that if she walked around Williamsburg at night, carefully listening and looking, she would see specters from the past emerge all around the city and continue to perform the roles they had in life as if no time had passed at all.

Winning the support of school children and writers helped Goodwin make his case for restoration. But what he really needed to do was “persuade one of the wealthiest men in the world to invest a fortune in phantasms.”\textsuperscript{354} That man was John D. Rockefeller Jr. Rockefeller had his father’s money, an eye for charity, and good intentions. Goodwin met

\textsuperscript{351} Letter from Goodwin to Miss Margaret Blacknall. 27, January 1926.  
\textsuperscript{352} Letter from Goodwin to Miss Margaret Blacknall. 27, January 1926.  
\textsuperscript{353} Letter from Goodwin to Miss Margaret Blacknall. 27, January 1926.  
Rockefeller a month after he wrote his letter to Blacknall, at the Phi Beta Kappa banquet in New York. There, Goodwin no doubt shared with Rockefeller a story similar to the one he wrote to Blacknall. Unlike any other potential investor, Rockefeller was the only one that Goodwin openly wrote to about the city’s ghosts. If Rockefeller did not share Goodwin’s haunted vision of Williamsburg, he was certainly not bothered by it, or at least found it interesting.

On November 27 of that same year, Rockefeller sent word and money to Goodwin to begin researching what exactly a restoration of the city would involve. Goodwin sent a letter back a few days later to update Rockefeller on his progress. He wrote that though he was grateful for Rockefeller’s funding, he could not help but feel “like one who treads alone” or like “some banquet hall” now “deserted” after a long party. The restoration was going to be stressful and require a great deal of dedication and work on Goodwin’s part. This did not deter him, and he emphasized to Rockefeller that though he felt alone in Williamsburg, he and his crew “always have ghosts which abide, even when the distinguished men of the present” leave. Goodwin went on to say that he pitied those who came to Williamsburg and were “incapable of holding companionship with the ghosts.” He believed that everyone should have the pleasure and comfort of feeling the presences of ghosts “hallowing” the city’s “ancient haunts.” He ended the letter saying

355 Letter from Goodwin to Rockefeller. 29, November 1926. in Elizabeth Hayes, Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department (1933), 43.  
356 Letter from Goodwin to Rockefeller. 29, November 1926.  
357 Letter from Goodwin to Rockefeller. 29, November 1926.  
358 Letter from Goodwin to Rockefeller. 29, November 1926.
that it was a “great pleasure” to introduce Rockefeller to the “haunts and homes of these departed spirits.”359

In December 1926, Rockefeller sent Goodwin a telegram authorizing him to purchase the first Williamsburg property, the Ludwell-Paradise house. Philip Ludwell III, a wealthy planter and Virginia politician, built the house in 1775 as his city home. The house was in relatively good shape and retained some structural elements from buildings that stood on the plot in the late seventeenth century. Goodwin purchased the Ludwell-Paradise for $8,000, or around $100,000 calculated today. From there, Goodwin was approved to use Rockefeller’s money, under an assumed name, to purchase any house that appeared on the market. Over the next few years, Goodwin bought up most of the houses on Duke of Gloucester street and began the process of research and restoration. In 1928, Rockefeller revealed to the people of Williamsburg that he was behind all of the recent purchases. By the 1930s, Rockefeller and Goodwin officially named their project Colonial Williamsburg, and opened their doors to the public. For the first few years, it was clear to visitors, locals, and observers alike that the restoration of Williamsburg intended to bring the old homes back to old looks and to “take pains to restore the ghosts also.”360

With a Rockefeller footing the bill and the project rolling ahead, Goodwin stopped publicly emphasizing the town’s ghosts as much as he had before funding. But the ghosts did not disappear entirely; people simply spoke in coded language about “spirit” and the authenticity of the past. They suggested and implied that the city was haunted but did not say it directly. Instead of talking about ghost workers, the advertisements, newspapers, 

359 Letter from Goodwin to Rockefeller. 29, November 1926.
360 William Oliver Stevens, Old Williamsburg and Her Neighbors (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1938), 58.
reports, and guidebooks spoke of Colonial Williamsburg’s special power to bring the past and present closer together. Colonial Williamsburg became a place where guests could step “back in time.” Advertisements implied hauntings with vague promises of unique experiences, emotional rejuvenation, and a real eighteenth century in the present day. Though the museum promised the impossible and relied on irrational understandings of the city’s value, curators and docents coated their talk of miraculous time travel with tales of careful research. The museum understood that it could invoke the irrational metaphysical value, the historical hauntings, but needed to couch it in hard methodical study. In this way, Colonial Williamsburg could harness the emotional and attractive power that ghosts had in Virginia without ascribing to the irrationality they carried—implying hauntings and time travel, while stressing that research made it possible for the museum to have their ho-cakes and eat them too.

From the 1940s to the late 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg faced many changes and new developments. During World War II, Colonial Williamsburg became a veritable rite of passage for GIs heading off to war. The museum took on a patriotic tone, stressing the need to topple dangerous and tyrannical leaders and likening the Virginia colonials’ fight against the British to the United States’ fight against the Axis powers. During the Cold War, the museum took on a similar tone but this time against Communism. The allied dignitaries who visited the United States during these years were regularly whisked down to Williamsburg from Washington for carriage tours of the old city. Colonial Williamsburg was the place to learn and see the roots of the democracy and the importance of beating the

361 Baltimore Evening Star, (7, November 1940); Ads in locations 25-4A-E-4a, 25-20-B-3e, 25-4A-D-4c. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department.
Soviet Union. The museum also eventually felt the push from the growing anti-Vietnam-War sentiment and began to question the values of unwavering patriotism and the exclusively white narrative it presented. All the while, the museum redeveloped and redefined its understanding of authenticity and design: Were the old buildings white or red? Should the Duke of Gloucester Street be closed to car traffic and for how long? How much information do guests need before they enter the city?

No matter the political climate, the popularity of patriotism, or the historical issues the museum tackled, it managed to present the same metaphysical value that Goodwin had maintained during the early restoration. But instead of ghosts, mid-century Colonial Williamsburg talked about emotional, spiritual, or uncanny experiences and time travel. This may seem counterintuitive to the museum’s dedication to rationality, but the Foundation’s researchers, curators, and guides made these deeply uncanny and impossible ideas real by invoking the thorough, rational, and scientific research that made the past present.

Brochures, tour scripts, and published material insisted that the city was, indeed, the past incarnate and that careful research and the “remarkable restoration” turned the “pages of history” back “two centuries.” The foundation spoke with an unwavering voice that proclaimed that magic did not make Williamsburg an important “hallowed spot,” but

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364 *New York Times*, (7, September 1941); *House and Garden*, (September 1944); *Baltimore Eye Star*, (7, November 1940); Ads in locations 25-4A-E-4a, 25-2B-3e,25-4A-D-4c. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Corporate Archives and Records Department.
rather, rational and scientific research did that work.\textsuperscript{365} A “pilgrimage” to a real tactile “Old Virginia” was made possible not by magic, but thanks to careful research.\textsuperscript{366}

It was not simply the work of researchers that made Williamsburg a special place. The Foundation argued that the city had an intangible special quality; Goodwin located it in his ghosts, but the museum had a harder time capturing the source of that quality. The museum stressed that the city was the setting for important historical developments that gave Colonial Williamsburg a uniquely emotional value. The Foundation’s public documents argued that Williamsburg was the “most significant” area of a “historic and important” colonial-era city because it was preserved.\textsuperscript{367} Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt called it “the most historic avenue in all America.”\textsuperscript{368} Williamsburg was just “as important” to the United States’ “national development” as New York or Boston or Philadelphia but offered a more visceral experience.\textsuperscript{369} The Foundation wanted people to know that Virginia was the “birthplace of the Nation” and Williamsburg was the epicenter of the “most dramatic scenes” of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{370} They wanted guests to understand that people’s persistent excitement and human emotion during the Revolution lingered and made the city significant. But what was most important for present-day guests was that Colonial Williamsburg retained the spiritual element, perhaps more so than New York, Boston, and Philadelphia because it was not burdened by nineteenth- and twentieth-

\textsuperscript{365} \textit{Baltimore Eve Star}, (7, November 1940).
\textsuperscript{369} Bath, “America’s Williamsburg,” (1949).
century lives. The eighteenth-century city was unadulterated and made pure by the restoration. It was the only place where guests could experience “the ideals of liberty and democracy” that built the nation in an environment freed from present-day issues.371 Williamsburg’s “accuracy” and historical purity promised a real “journey into the glorious past.”372 Guests would see how the nation’s “forebears lived” and “seek inspiration and guidance” from them at the nation’s “very roots.”373 The Foundation argued that a visit would be an “experience” guests would “never forget” because it was unlike anything they experienced in the present day.374 The museum offered them the opportunity to witness the nation’s birth and “rediscover America” firsthand.375 Their “faith in the future” would “rekindle” as they bore witness to the intrepid past.376

The museum’s objects and buildings were key to eighteenth-century Williamsburg’s metaphysical power. The buildings and the city were “witnesses” to the past. The structures, objects, and vista that Colonial Williamsburg recreated and restored “saw the pageant of Virginia colonial life at its best” and reflected it on to the present day.377 The Foundation avoided calling the buildings haunted, but they suggested that the original objects they pulled from the earth housed some kind of spirits of long-dead revolutionaries. It would have been too irrational and silly for the mid-century museum to claim that the buildings housed phantoms, but they could claim that the objects “witnessed” events—something similar, but not quite the same. Nonliving things were certainly present, but the

377 “The Governor’s Palace” Published by Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, MCMXXXVI (Richmond, VA: Whittett & Shepperson, Printers, April 1936), 3.
value of simply being present was left perhaps intentionally unclear. Objects cannot speak; their power to recall is purely metaphysical, emotional, nontactile, and uncanny.

The Foundation claimed that the Governor’s Palace was important for guests to visit because it had an “intimate and dramatic connection” to the Revolution. Docents and guidebooks explained how an archeologist or historical architect scientifically read the home for good measure, but they knew that guests understood the building’s value to be emotional and uncanny. Every original object in Williamsburg was a potential conduit of the past.

The strength and vitality of the past depended on the city’s historical old objects. The best way to ensure that the objects were truly old and historical and witnesses to the past was through careful and rational research, restoration, and curation. The uncanny, irrational, and impossible “living and authentic” Williamsburg was created by rational research. The Foundation explained to the guests that researchers used inventories of tavern furnishings, papers from local auction houses, appraisals, creditors, heirs, and intimate family letters that described the old buildings and what they held, to ensure that the “historic buildings” had “authentic interiors and furnishings.” The Foundation had to prove that “documentary and archaeological evidence” made it possible for workers to recreate the furniture, “fabrics, glass, china,” and carefully placed small objects throughout the museum. Maps and “faded insurance policy” showed where buildings sat in relation to structures that still existed. The archaeologists who screened “almost every foot of

378 “The Governor’s Palace” (1936), 3.
ground” uncovered numerous “old foundations” that found the exact location of long-lost structures.383 They knew how exactly “charming 18th century gardens” grew because researchers did soil samples and found receipts of seed purchases.384 They knew what work the “craftsmen” did “at their benches” because the yellowed pages of old journals told them.385 Where Goodwin once used his ghost stories to illustrate the city’s historical authenticity, the Foundation had to use rational research.

But knowing was only half the battle. The researchers went the extra step. Objects that they could not find in Williamsburg were bought, salvaged, and recreated to perfectly mirror the objects that eighteenth-century people would have seen in the city. Buildings “reconstructed on the original foundations” had eighteenth-century hardwood floors that workers carefully salvaged from abandoned buildings elsewhere in the South.386 From the glassware featured in the tavern to the “flower arrangements” in the homes, everything was result of research and was assuredly correct.387 The Foundation made sure “everything” guests saw “was actually used during the period” because to do otherwise would be inaccurate.388

Colonial Williamsburg did not suggest that the restoration was so well done that a visit was “like” traveling back in time; they insisted that the restoration was so well done that a visit to the museum was in fact a trip back in time. The Foundation promised much

387 “Raleigh Tavern” (1941), 3.
388 “Raleigh Tavern” (1941), 3, 4.
more than a simple expansion of imagination; they made it very clear that guests could expect to travel back in time—an experience that was as uncanny as it was impossible.

But the uncanny is hard to see if you don’t know it is there. The human eye cannot see the spiritual value, and the implied presence of a human past does not put colonial heroes in Williamsburg. Guests saw old homes and objects set into period rooms and streets, but without a preexisting knowledge of how colonial-era people lived in and moved about the city, the setting lacked heart. The city’s pleasant, colonial-era vistas created a “refreshing holiday” free from ringing phones, cars, and daily drudgery, but they did not explain the city’s value as a historical experience. The Foundation knew there was something beyond the typical “points of interest,” but without stories about ghosts walking the streets, it was hard to see.

To fix this oversight, the Foundation built a forty-acre “information center” a short distance from the historical core of town. Rockefeller said the center was “a bridge of understanding over which Americans” could walk “from the twentieth century into the past.” The center included sleeping accommodations, a pool, classrooms for school groups, and “twin theaters.” The Foundation hoped that the center would “recreate a serene eighteenth-century atmosphere” and “condition” the “emotions and mood” of visitors before they toured the city. The pleasantly air-conditioned theaters were key in

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the orientation—there guests would enjoy the historically themed film Williamsburg: The Story of a Patriot.\(^{395}\)

In 1957, the center was completed, and the movie premiered for the first time. The thirty-minute film was created by Colonial Williamsburg in conjunction with Hollywood megapower Paramount Pictures. It was directed by Oscar-winning director George Seaton and written by celebrity writer Emmet Lavery. It had the same qualities as a film that an American family would go to the local theater to see. It was not a dry museum film—it aspired to be more like a Hollywood film than a newsreel. It has had its fans; in fact, today it is the world’s longest-running film.

But more important that the film’s credentials is what it accomplished for the museum. The film populated the city with human figures from the past that guests could recall as they walked a twentieth-century landscape. It inspired guests to envision ghosts and imagine the city as haunted by using the actual buildings, rooms, and objects they saw in the film and on their tours. One review of the film said that it “establishes a mood and perspective” that guests recall during their “entire stay.”\(^{396}\) The review added, “the personalities” of Williamsburg’s “inhabitants of bygone years come to life through the film” and make guests “ready to tour the village.”\(^{397}\)

The film follows the fictional colonial Virginian John Fry—played by Jack Lord, later of *Hawaii Five-O* fame—as he takes his seat in the House of Burgesses, Virginia’s colonial

governing body, in Williamsburg. Fry’s experience of Williamsburg shapes how guests are to understand and envision the city’s past as they walk through it on their tours.

Fry's first vision of Williamsburg is of a busy city full of people, noise, shops, and animals. This establishes for the viewers what a colonial city street looked like, and gives them a reference point to think back to when they walk the nearly empty streets alongside other twentieth-century people. Viewers later learn that Fry is lodging at the Raleigh Tavern and has to share his bed with three other men. This detail offers a little taste of the eighteenth century’s roughness to contrast with the elite refinement the guests will see in the colonial homes. In this first scene, the film establishes Williamsburg as a place of important social and economic gathering and offers clear images of how people used the city streets.

A scene inside of the tavern depicts Fry in a room crowded with the heroes of the Revolution. He meets William Byrd III, who, as the film notes, was a notorious gambler and member of the House of Burgesses. He spies George Washington from across the room and marvels at the general’s ability to break a walnut between his two mighty fingers. The scene fills the room, which guests will later visit, with living representations of the nation’s colonial characters. It gives context to the room and establishes a vision for guests to recall later.

The film gave guests a set of scenes that they could recall when they were in the city. They could visit the chambers and taverns they saw in the film and sit in the same seats

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and benches that the heroes of the film sat in. The ability to see and connect through the film was only a more elaborate version of Goodwin’s claims for his ghost tours.

The film, though, was just the beginning of the late-twentieth-century push toward first-person experience of the past and a rekindling of ghosts. The movie gave guests full-color and almost living images of the eighteenth-century city. It helped established Williamsburg’s historical significance and encouraged visitors to experience the city as the family appeared to do in the film, while recalling the images of people and places as they walked about the area.

In the 1970s, Williamsburg was beginning to look and feel a lot different from the way it had years before. The museum had cut off access to car travel a decade before, and by 1974, they had cut off access to some buildings.³⁹⁹ People could still tour them, but they had to pay a small entrance fee to go inside the restored buildings or watch interpretive craft demonstrations.⁴⁰⁰ But that was not all; in the 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg began to adopt a more diverse interpretative narrative—including not ghosts but, perhaps more controversially, slaves. The museum had long taken criticism for portraying a colonial world largely free of slavery, but by the 1970s, the Foundation was ready to make a change.

Vice president of interpretation, Edward P. Alexander, led the charge. He had worked for Colonial Williamsburg since the 1940s and had always kept his ear to the ground, trying to make subtle changes in interpretation to better serve and educate guests. In 1970, just before he left to pioneer a museum studies program at the University of Delaware, he gave Colonial Williamsburg a new interpretive framework that stressed the

need to continue the “historical mood,” which the film attempted to establish, in the downtown.401

Alexander was inspired by the nation’s oncoming bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution. Colonial Williamsburg was perfectly placed to attract and serve large crowds looking for a Revolutionary-era experience. Long touted as the nation’s “birthplace,” Williamsburg had made a big commitment that was about to be tested by thousands of Americans eager to experience the past. In response, Alexander began pushing for a more experience-based interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg.402

Alexander recognized that Williamsburg’s value was metaphysical. He knew that during the bicentennial year, Americans would be looking for something more emotional, and more personal, than lectures and craft demonstrations. The restoration, for many guests, was a pleasant backdrop that added realness to an invisible expressive value. Alexander recognized this draw and sought out the writings of W. A. R. Goodwin. When the restoration process began, Goodwin had made it known that he believed the city’s value lay in the ghosts that roamed the old city. Goodwin explain that the ghosts authenticated the historical environment. He explained that if people could see the ghosts of colonial people coming and going in the old city, they would know that Williamsburg was “an interesting place.”403 Alexander employed Goodwin’s “If you have ever walked around Williamsburg

late on a moonlight night” description that he sent to Blacknall in the 1920s, but he purposefully edited out any mention of ghosts, spirits, or haunts. What was left was a theory that Williamsburg’s “authentic environment” could create a “sense of historical perspective” and inspire twentieth-century guests “to become better citizens.”

Alexander’s adoption of Goodwin’s historical awareness ignored the ghosts that the reverend talked about and replaced them with an emotional sense of historical importance. He knew that Goodwin’s ghost stories were important metaphysical elements that Americans were attracted to, but he was not comfortable with talking about hauntings. Historical specters were still too irrational to address.

Rather, Alexander worked around ghosts by describing how the museum would accelerate the visceral experience in the old city. He argued that “sensory perception” was important to stimulate guests’ emotions. Smelling, tasting, and feeling the eighteenth century would enable guests “to experience the historical environment.” He wanted them to understand Williamsburg as a foreign, though generally comfortable, place. The smells, taste, and feels of the eighteenth century would be strong and distinctive enough to denote a change in time but not to dissuade guests. Going further from there, Alexander envisioned guests seeing “the flame of a candle flirting with its mirrored self in a crystal chandelier,” smelling “acrid gunpowder smoke” drifting over the “field at the military drill,” or tasting “horehound drops in the odoriferous Apothecary Shop.” He wrote that “these and other sensations” would “stir the imagination” and give guests a better understanding

of the past. Sensory experience would convince present-day people that they shared something with past people. To share a smell, sight, and taste brought the past and present, so long divided by technology and time, back together.

Alexander also advocated “special activities” that “emphasized visitor participation.” He suggested “organ concerts” at Bruton Parish Church, “rolling eighteenth-century plays” that would introduce guests to the participatory theater traditions, and “music at the taverns.” He called this “the mood approach” and argued that it made visitors “wish to know more about the period.” Rather than having them come to Williamsburg to learn everything, Alexander wanted to inspire guests to know more. He wanted them to leave Williamsburg with a better understanding of the past and a healthy appetite for more.

But just as Alexander rolled out his sensory interpretive experience, Colonial Williamsburg underwent a major change. The head of Colonial Williamsburg, Winthrop Rockefeller, who was John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s son, passed away. Winthrop was the last Rockefeller to run Colonial Williamsburg, and when he died, so did the family’s control of the museum. This made way for something unique at the museum: for the first time, control was given to “those with ties to the region.”

Some six years after Alexander left, the museum’s new education director began to implement first-person interpretation. Other outdoor museums had already embraced the

\[410\] Alexander “The Interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg” (1970), 26. Alexander includes “lanthorn tours” in his list of guest participation events. This, I would argue it a precursor or at least hints at ghost tours, but I cannot find evidence of what the tours involved or what the interpreters said on these tours and am unable to fully make that argument.
first-person interpretation long before Colonial Williamsburg, but Williamsburg’s development was unique for two reasons. First, this kind of interpretation was inherently irrational, uncanny, and ghostly. This made the museum responsible for asserting the careful research, time, and effort each of its interpreters put into a character. This opened Williamsburg up as a center of theatrical training and historical research. Second, it was no coincidence that Colonial Williamsburg adopted first-person interpretation when the museum fell under the control of Virginians. The first-person interpreters performed the role of ghosts in the city—Virginians understood ghosts.

Beginning in 1977 and lasting into the present day, Colonial Williamsburg featured interpreters who dressed, spoke, and acted as if they were eighteenth-century people.413 These docents were different from earlier ones in that they stayed in character at all times. They did not know where the restrooms were and did not understand cars, cameras, or sunscreen. The Foundation called them “people of the past.”414

The idea held that first-person interpreters made the city even more authentic and real. But everyone, or most adults, knew that Colonial Williamsburg was not really eighteenth-century Williamsburg. It simply could not be, and the present day was very much alive. Guests wore late twentieth-century fashions, took photographs, greeted other twentieth-century people, and spoke in terms of the date and time they knew. The first-person interpreters, and their insistence on it being the eighteenth century, were ghosts. Cary Carson, Colonial Williamsburg’s vice president of research and champion of the

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museum’s rational research and presentation of the past, accurately called the interpreters “visual phantasmagoria.”

While the city looked much as it had in the eighteenth century, the few people from that era who roamed the city were largely out of place. Alexander’s sensory experiences were intended to be odd so guests would notice the differences between the past and present and pay more attention to the carefully crafted town. The first-person interpreters did the same work. They were weird, their actions were out of place, and in many cases, they made people uncomfortable. They were uncanny; they made people pay more attention to their surroundings and second-guess their comfort in the museum and what they knew about the past.

At Colonial Williamsburg, the first-person interpreters created an experience that was “reality, not virtual reality.” Everything they did was supposed to be real. Set in the carefully restored city, the living ghosts were the final element needed to recreate the eighteenth century. Interpreters across the museum insisted that George Washington was “awake” at Colonial Williamsburg. If someone wanted to know about Washington’s life or what he did in Williamsburg, docents and other eighteenth-century people would direct guests to ask George himself. If they managed to find Washington, he would speak to them as if he was unaware that it was the twentieth century or that the guests were dressed differently from how he was dressed. He would find their non-eighteenth-century-

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416 Ayers, “Colonial Williamsburg’s Choosing” (Summer 1998), 79.
related questions odd and would take any chance to poke fun at their twentieth-century flaws and oddities.

But he was just one person. The Foundation claimed that many of the “1,880 people living” in Williamsburg “in 1775” were “still alive” in 1998 and living in the city. The interpreters did not simply walk around the museum and provide a visual for guests to take photographs of; they interacted and talked with guests. The Foundation promised that Thomas Jefferson would “not only speak to you” but that he would “also listen.”

Interaction was very important to testing the authenticity of Williamsburg’s first-person interpreters. Like the buildings and objects, first-person interpreters’ authority, no matter how uncanny, came from research. The guests were able to test the interpreters’ historical authenticity and accuracy by asking them questions about themselves or the eighteenth century. Guests were allowed to touch or closely examine some objects and buildings in Colonial Williamsburg to know that they were real, but they could not dig a hole in the ground to make sure that the old and recreated foundations matched up. Guests were supposed to trust that the museum was creating an authentic experience. The things they could test were all subjective; they could taste food, smell scents, and see sights. When the first-person interpreters entered the scene, guests were given unprecedented ability to test Colonial Williamsburg’s claim to historical authenticity and rationality, by talking to the ghosts.

The interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg had to do extensive research on their characters. They needed to know “as much factual information as possible,” and they had to

limit their search to the “historical record.”\textsuperscript{422} Their authority rested on their research in court records, letters, family records, binaries, newspapers, bills, and anything else original from the time period. Interpreters had to learn to pay close attention to historical documents to weed out the “objective” and “subjective” facts. They needed to know their person’s opinions, but they needed to recognize them as such. After the historical record, interpreters could consult the secondary sources. They needed to know how eighteenth-century people of certain ages, genders, races, and classes understood the world. If they were still unsure about their characters, interpreters needed to draw out what information they knew. An interpreter who needed to find out their person’s age would need to assess the things he or she already knew about the character, apply the information, and make an educated conclusion based on “statistical probabilities.”\textsuperscript{423} Portraying people as accurately as possible would help them bring to life Alexander’s historical experience.

“Guess work,” just as in the original restoration, was not allowed. All the information the interpreters gathered had to be backed up either by the historical record or the statistical or cultural research done by historians. Research was key to providing an authentic portrayal. The more an interpreter knew, the more “real” a character became.\textsuperscript{424} Just like the buildings and objects, the people were uncanny and their existence was irrational, but the careful research and attention to detail preserved the museum’s respect of rational thought.

\textsuperscript{423} Weldon, “Living History: A Character Study.”
\textsuperscript{424} Weldon, “Living History: A Character Study.”
Guests needed to know how to behave around the restored buildings, or in this case, restored ghosts. The interpreters were very strange creatures in the twentieth century. Colonial Williamsburg suggests that guests approach the museum like “another country.”

Guests should bring their “natural curiosity” and prepare to “enlarge” their thinking. The Foundation reminded guests not to gawk but to talk with the interpreters. They only needed to “exchange some small talk,” or say “good day” and comment on the weather. The first-person interpreters were so uncanny and strange that guests often did not know what to make of them. Guests often treated the first-person interpreters the same way that the poor whites and African Americans interviewed by the FWP workers treated ghosts— with suspicion. They were not sure what the interpreters were doing, what their motives were, if they could talk to them, or how they should interact. The interpreters gave guests the same unsure feelings that the American folk felt around the ghosts who haunted their neighborhoods. It took time and instruction for people to understand and communicate with the interpreters as the white elites did with the ghosts in their old plantations.

As ghostly as the first-person interpreters were, Colonial Williamsburg was still not talking about hauntings at the museum—in fact, the topic was off-limits. Throughout the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s, those interpreters who were not eighteenth-century people were barred outright from engaging with guests on discussions about ghosts. Colonial Williamsburg hosted walking, talking eighteenth-century people who had the same sincere tone they used to talk about the city’s restored homes and objects, but still found the topic

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of hauntings inappropriate. The Foundation’s acceptance of first-person interpretation and not ghost stories illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding of how Virginians used ghost stories, and an inability to see the rational in the uncanny. Goodwin knew that Virginians used ghost stories to talk about the past and to assert the value of historical places. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation still saw ghost stories as sensational folklore—something foolish, and compromising of their historical mission.

But things changed fast. At the end of the millennium, the museum was faced with low guest numbers and an aging fan base. The museum noticed that after the daytime interpretation ended, the streets were crowed with people taking ghost tours through the restored city. Private companies had come to fill the void that the Foundation had let develop. It did not take long before docents and first-person interpreters got tired of guests approaching them with false historical information they’d picked up on the tours. The Foundation’s managers got tired too. They also deeply resented these “parasite tours,” as they called them, making their money using the restored city that Colonial Williamsburg maintained without returning a solitary penny to the resource, and all in a cause derided by museum managers and researchers.

Resistance to the ghostlore and ghost talk collapsed when Cary Carson retired from his vice presidency. The allure of the lines of paying visitors proved too much to ignore, and by 2004, Colonial Williamsburg was offering its own “official” ghost tours. The new tours boldly asserted Colonial Williamsburg’s institutional authority on all matters in town dealing with both history and ghost stories.

Tavern program manager Bruce Luongo created the first iteration of the tour in 2004 and dubbed it the “Tavern Ghost Walk.” After noticing the popularity of Williamsburg’s private ghost tours, he’d thought, “this is something we can do too.”

Colonial Williamsburg already had a ghost-like tour called “Legends,” but it featured eighteenth-century “versions of folklore” and lacked the place-based ghost stories that made the other tours attractive. Because Luongo was a part of the hospitality end of Colonial Williamsburg, his tour did not have to speak strictly about the eighteenth-century person or speak exclusively about eighteenth-century experiences. This enabled him to tell “modern and contemporary tales” that situated modern people and historical ghosts side by side in the old city.

Despite the tours’ popularity, Colonial Williamsburg’s mission of historical accuracy and academic integrity made ghost tours a difficult thing for some people to accept. The irrationally of ghosts challenged the historical and academic tone that the Foundation used to build a trusting rapport with its visitors. Luongo understood this and strove to make his tour as historically accurate as the daytime tours. He did not take false histories seriously. People frequently came to him with stories, and he saw it as his job to “debunk the obvious.”

The stories he collected still had to stand up to scrutiny and a kind of historical logic that would not place the ghost of Simone Bolivar and Cleopatra dining together at Chowning Tavern—all the ghosts had to be actual people who’d lived in Williamsburg in the eighteenth century or general characters, like bartenders and shopkeepers, who would

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432 Luongo interviewed by Lloyd Dobyn, October 30, 2006.
have been in town at the time. This was exceedingly important for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The museum identified itself as a champion of historical accuracy and integrity. If ghosts were to be permissible, they had to be truthful. They had to be better than the other ghost tours.

The impulse for providing historical integrity was deeply rooted within “front line” workers as well. Many of the daytime interpreters eagerly signed on to give the ghost tours because they were tired of dealing with guests becoming disgruntled after finding out that the information provided on the private ghost tour was inaccurate.434 The guides took special care to add historical context and accurate information to all the hauntings they spoke about on the tours. They wanted to give the “Tavern Ghost Tours” the same high standard as the non-ghost tours.

It did not take long before the tour guides realized that the guests responded very well to the ghost tours. Presenting historical information in a way that was recognized as fun, and was intended to be entertaining, allowed guests to enjoy themselves. More importantly, the relaxed atmosphere encouraged guests to ask more questions and engage in the kind of skepticism that fostered critical thinking. Carolyn Wilson, a former interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, said that tour guides found the ghost stories extraordinarily useful tools for teaching history.435

This inspired the educational arm of Colonial Williamsburg. They had previously given a tour called Legends, but by the second decade of the new millennium, they were ready to incorporate more ghosts into their offering. They eventually developed the Ghost Amongst Us (GAU) tour, which runs today. Colonial Williamsburg advertises the GAU tour

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434 Interview with Carolyn Wilson, a former hostess/tour guide at Colonial Williamsburg (October 28, 2016).
435 Interview with Carolyn Wilson, a former hostess/tour guide at Colonial Williamsburg (October 28, 2016).
saying, “After sundown, Williamsburg’s haunted history comes out!” Unlike the original Tavern Tours, or any of the other ghost tours in the city, GAU brings guests inside the restored buildings. Colonial Williamsburg makes its educational ghost tours stand out by letting guests inside of the restored homes at night—something the private ghost tours could not offer. The advertisement promises that in the buildings guests will “meet people who lived to tell” of their supernatural experiences.

But Colonial Williamsburg had been, and still is, wary of ghost tours and their association with ghost hunting and nonfactual history. For this reason, the GAU does not present twenty-first century ghost tours, like the Tavern Tour. The tour is a series of guides performing eighteenth-century people reporting on their very eighteenth-century supernatural experiences. This tour does not repeat what ghost story collector L. B. Taylor included in his books. Instead, it tells stories that would have been frightening or worrisome to colonial people, and above all else, it is a performance that separates the guests from place rather than a storytelling that speaks about things that happened in the space present people now inhabit.

On the GAU tour, a lantern-toting guide collects guests and brings them into one of the Foundation’s buildings. The room they enter is starkly decorated and furnished with enough chairs for everyone on the tour. All the chairs face an empty part of the room, and for the first few minutes, people new to the tour are unsure of the situation. A costumed actor enters the room to tell the crowd a tale about demons, vampires, cannibalism, pirates, or a number of other supernatural and worrisome things. After the actor finishes, the

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guests are instructed to leave the building and meet their walking guide, who ushers them into another sparsely decorated room in another building, and a new performer emerges from the darkened room to tell a different tale.

Most positive reviews of the tours comment on the performers’ acting skills.\textsuperscript{438} The drama and terror they project is palpable for guests in the small dark rooms. However, for some, the acting does not resonate. One guest said that her party was “looking for something scary and spooky” but what they got was a “few actors acting as ghosts.”\textsuperscript{439}

The GAU tour divorces the stories from a sense of place. Part of what makes ghost stories attractive is the idea that the living and dead share a common landscape. The theatrical setting and performance offered in GAU transforms the otherwise real historical home into a theater, a place where audience and actors suspend disbelief. Audience members have to accept that Romeo and Juliet are in Verona, Italy, and not get hung up on the fact that they are actually two high school kids in a gymnasium stage in Hoboken, New Jersey. Invoking traditional formal theater takes away the sense that anything being presented is real, and disregards the significance of place. Rather than using the ghost tours to reassert the town’s historical narrative, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation uses the ghost stories to assert their adherence to a strict and limiting presentation of the past.

The museum’s ghost tours were far different from the private tours—and for good reason. Colonial Williamsburg does not need ghost tours to suggest that ghosts of the past


\textsuperscript{439} Hillary S. “Not Scary At All....” Tripadvisor (June 12, 2013) page 2. \url{https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g58313-d4262113-r234952857-Colonial_Williamsburg_Pirates_Amongst_Us_Tour-Williamsburg_Virginia.html#REVIEWS} (accessed December 28, 2016).
walk the streets at night, because ghosts of the past have been walking the streets during the day since 1977.

Colonial Williamsburg’s first-person interpretation fills the light hours of the day with people performing the roles of eighteenth-century ghosts. The interpreters speak, dress, act, and identify as eighteenth-century people. They perform the daily roles and duties eighteenth-century people did two hundred years ago. They do the same things that the spirits are said to do in the ghost tours. If Colonial Williamsburg were to put on a regular ghost tour, the guests would begin to understand the uncanny nature that is inherent in the daytime interpretation.

For Colonial Williamsburg and many other historical sites in Virginia, ghostlore was the core of what originally gave them significance. The ghost stories created the sense of place-based history and invited guests to come experience their historical heroes. Once historical sites abandoned ghostlore, the attempts to interpret the sites without them did not inspire the same loyalty or weight. Williamsburg tried to invoke the uncanny without talking about hauntings but found that nothing was more attractive to guests than a personal experience of the past.

The next chapter explains how, with the help of writer L. B. Taylor, ghostlore transitioned back into the historical discussion and back into historical sites.
CHAPTER FOUR
OLD HAUNTS, NEW MEDIUMS

In the mid-1980s, a retired Virginia reporter named L. B. Taylor went to Colonial Williamsburg in search of historical ghosts. He had just finished writing a book on haunted houses across the United States for Simon & Schuster Publishing and wanted to know more about the ghosts around his own neighborhood. Having heard ghost stories his whole life, Taylor understood that hauntings were part of “Virginian heritage.”\(^{440}\) He spent a number of days walking up and down Williamsburg’s Duke of Gloucester Street, attempting to charm a few ghost stories out of the museum’s interpreters. Despite his best efforts, the costumed interpreters “flatly wouldn’t discuss the subject of ghosts.”\(^{441}\) The docents reasoned that because ghosts could not be proven to exist in the historical record, the managers at Colonial Williamsburg, and their own sense of historical integrity, would not allow them to engage with false notions of the past.\(^{442}\)

Colonial Williamsburg staff members were not the only people who buttoned up their lips when Taylor came around. The owners and caretakers at the numerous historical house museums that dotted the commonwealth were put off by Taylor’s inquiries about ghosts. Taylor noted that the owners of Berkeley Plantation, the eighteenth-century home


on the James River, were distinctly resistant to ghostly stories. Like those in charge of Colonial Williamsburg, the owners of smaller house museums feared that the ghost stories would demean their historical sites and turn them into something less serious, less authentic, and less dignified than the places of education and heritage they sought to be.

Twenty years and thirteen books later, everything changed. In 2002, Taylor gleefully declared that ghosts were “an in subject.”\textsuperscript{443} Much to his surprise, he found himself “cordially invited” to speak at historical sites across the commonwealth—some of the same ones that had shunned him. The people who once looked askance at Taylor realized that his ghost stories could lure paying visitors to their museums.\textsuperscript{444} The owners of Berkeley Plantation, somehow forgetting their recent past, called Taylor directly to ask why he had not included their ghosts in his popular books.\textsuperscript{445} As the new millennium dawned, people and institutions that had once “scoffed at the supernatural” were using Taylor’s popular ghost stories to establish their own special relationship to the past, just as their predecessors had done in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{446}

To be sure, the desire to bring in new streams of tourist dollars during hard times played a huge role in this change of heart. Many Virginia museum professionals saw the long lines of customers on Williamsburg’s “parasite tours” and took away their own conclusions. But why exactly had the audience itself changed—what was it that made ghosts suddenly big business? Answering that question means understanding how curators and docents at sites in Virginia reversed course on their long-standing perception of ghosts as bad. This change of heart had many reasons, but at its base, it was the product of a

\textsuperscript{444} Taylor, The Ghosts of Virginia VIII. (Williamsburg, VA: L.B. Taylor Jr., 2001), VIII.
\textsuperscript{446} Taylor, The Ghosts of Virginia VIII. (2001), VIII.
broader cultural trend in the United States. At the turn of the century, Americans were rethinking their relationship with the rational and observable reality and what defined certain historical narratives as legitimate. Part of this change came from the New Social History that many academic historians embraced. The new method of researching and writing history used statistics as data and alternative reading methods to give records to the recordless and voice to the voiceless. It expanded the nation’s historical narrative to include African Americans, women, immigrants, and ordinary laborers. Popular religious trends like far-right Protestant Evangelicalism and New Age Spiritualism were the other force behind the major rethinking of definitions of historical knowledge. These ideologies promoted personal knowledge and individual truth. They allowed people to reject the long-standing modern rational consensus in favor of emotional knowledge. This reawakened the possibilities once deemed mere foolishness—specifically, that emotion and preference carried similar weight to science.

In the span of twenty years, 1989 to around 2009, ghostlore in the United States transformed from an actively avoided topic at historical sites to an innovative and commercially successful interpretive offering. The change had many authors, but Taylor’s skillful writing and broad audience placed him at the center of this reorientation.

This chapter looks at how L. B. Taylor’s work recategorized ghost stories as again being historical. It illustrates how he capitalized on the late twentieth century’s rethinking

of long-held ideas on knowledge and fact by weaving together previously accepted
historical information with rumors of hauntings, much as the old-home biographers’ and
teldorists’ documents had done some forty years earlier. Due in large part to the late
twentieth century’s intellectual environment, Taylor made ghosts historical again, brought
hauntings back to Virginia historical sites, and inspired a whole field of Virginia ghost-story
authors that make up the foundation of today’s popular ghostlore and what scholars have
called Thanatourism.

Viewed in one way, ghostlore’s return to being historical was a pragmatic re-
embracing of a popular form of storytelling. But many historical sites saw ghost tours as a
calamity. They saw the uncanny stories as a threat to the rational thought that they rested
their institutional missions on.

Historical sites—especially the commonwealth’s leader, Colonial Williamsburg—
saw Taylor as a nightmare come to life. Colonial Williamsburg was the first place Taylor
went in search of historical ghost stories. He, like so many other Americans, saw that
museum as the center of public historical education. But Taylor’s ghost stories represented
all the irrational, nonacademic historical fantasy that then Vice President of Interpretation
Carry Carson and others fought hard to keep at bay.

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the museum, like museums across the United
States, was suffering from low visitation.448 Newspaper writers and scholars alike blamed

448 Cary Carson, “The End of the History Museums: What’s Plan B?” The Public Historian.30. no.4. (Fall
2008), 9-27; Bruce Courson, “Why Rural Museums Are Becoming Ancient History,” Wall Street Journal, 27,
(December 2005); David A. Fahrenthold, “Living-History Museums Struggle to Draw Visitors,” Washington
Post, (25, December 2005); Linda Wheeler, “Tourists Stay Away in Droves; Theories Abound on Fewer
Cite Soft Economy, Poor Image as Factors in Declines,” The Washington Post, (13, April 1990); Mark Potts,
“Williamsburg Builds a Foundation: Turning an 18th Century Worlds Into a 20th-Century Business,” The
the 1990s dip in attendance on the economy and the loss of federal museum funds. In the 2000s, writers argued that the terrorist attacks in New York on 9/11 made Americans think twice about traveling or visiting major social centers. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, Colonial Williamsburg was selling off its property at the Carter’s Grove Plantation. Making matters worse, a series of stinging publications by anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable had accused the museum of trading its high-minded educational ideals for capital gain, and one too many people compared the museum with Disney World. The museum’s employees were feeling their authority challenged in what seemed like absurd and uncontrollable ways. All the while, the museum was trying to roll out an interpretation narrative rooted in New Social History that included African American, Native American, and immigrant voices.

The museum’s main bloc of visitors and funders took issue with the inclusion of new stories in what had had been a fairly traditional story of Revolutionary-era heroism and sacrifice. Replacing Colonial Revival finery with more historically grounded eighteenth-century material austerity, allowing the piling up of period-style trash near work area doorways, and replacing Victorian flower gardens with historically and archaeologically supported crops like cabbages also tweaked the sensibilities of long-standing visitors charmed by crisp white paint and manicured gardens. But it was the inclusion of African American, Native American, and immigrant voices.


Americans that ruffled the most feathers and caused the highest-profile discussions. The creation of the African American Interpretation Program sought to address long-overlooked silences in the museum’s historical fare.\footnote{452 James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton, Editors. \textit{Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).} Opposition to the new interpretation was twofold. The first was rooted in simple American racism—white people invested in white supremacy did not like that African Americans’ lives were spoken of in the same museum as the white founding fathers.\footnote{453 A good contemporary example of this kind of discussion took place between Suzanne Sherman, “Will History Only Remember the Founders as Slave-owners: A Visit to the historic Homes of Jefferson and Madison was Spoiled by a Progressive Agenda.” \textit{The American Conservative} (18, April 2016), http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/will-history-only-remember-the-founders-as-saleowners/ and “An Open Letter to White people Who Tire of Hearing About Slavery When They Visit Slave Plantations: Especially Suzanne Sherman,” \textit{The Negro Subversive} (23, Spring 2016), https://thenegrosubversive.com/2016/04/23/an-open-letter-to-white-people-who-tire-of-hearing-about-slavery-when-they-visit-slave-plantations-especially-suzanne-sherman/} The other was an issue of source material. The written record—journals, newspapers, court documents, and the like—did not give the same level of information about African slaves’ lives as they did for white elites. The museum had to embrace the New Social History in order to incorporate African American experiences. The New Social History depended on statistical data to draw conclusions about what was typical of slave life. Some guests and pundits took issue with the sort of history that was arrived at by analogy and statistical data rather than the traditional first-person historical records. The words of Patrick Henry could easily be read and shared—the thoughts and actions of slaves were harder to find. To many traditionalists, the latter simply did not amount to being history the way the former did. To them, the information on African slaves looked simply made-up and dismissible.
In fact, one docent explained not talking about slaves at all by saying, “I don’t talk about that,” adding, “and I don’t talk about ghosts.” The docent explained that they did not talk about “things” that were not “documented.” Many people both within and outside the museum felt that African American history was just “as fanciful” as the ghost stories that people told about “Virginia’s historic houses.” The museum’s official response to such critiques was to stress the museum’s authoritative, professional, and scientific work—what the museum had to say about African Americans was as solid and scientific as any work could be.

As the leading light in this interpretive change, Vice President Carson asserted that the museum presented nothing but the highest-quality rational history. He outlined that the “team” of scholars at the museum used their expert knowledge to provide their guests “coherent wholeness,” which included all early Virginians. He pointed out that even docents were “professional educators.” The museum, he argued, brought “knowledgeable people” together to plan educational programs for the betterment of their guests. Carson asserted that the museum was neither a “Disney World”—a frequently invoked nemesis—nor a theme park, but rather a center of public education that was created by a collective of authoritative and trustworthy professionals who performed scientific-minded research and upheld rational thought. In this tense climate, Carson and his team saw the ghost stories in Williamsburg as threatening the museum’s integrity and claim to authority.

The threat to intellectual research developed out of a popular religious movement in the late twentieth century that circulated around a larger renaissance of American Evangelical Protestantism and what was broadly described as New Age Spiritualism. Both the Evangelical movement in the United States and the emergence of New Age Spiritualism popularized the idea of unquestionable personal belief.

The emerging far-right Evangelical Protestantism promoted a personal connection with God through text and experience. They supported the idea that one could have an intimate relationship with the divine in ways that others could not challenge. Being “born again” into the faith granted adherents the ability to claim an unwavering and infallible authority on their personal spiritual lives. Scholars like Leonard J. Moore explained that the Christian Evangelical right promoted an understanding of the world that depended less on science and rationality and more on the individual’s right to believe or not believe.


461 Loenard J. Moore offers a clear description of the post-modern concept of facts as exposed by the Political and Religious Right in the 1990s; Loenard J. Moore, “Good Old-Fashioned New Social History and the Twentieth-Century American Right.” *Reviews in American History* 24. No.4. (December 1996), 555-573. Scholars have developed this point is discussion on post-structuralism; Christopher H. Partridge, “Truth, Authority, and Epistemological Individualism in New Age Thought,” in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14.no.1. (1999), 77-99. The New Age Spiritualists' focus on personal experiences with ghosts is precisely this, as well as Christian Evangelicals' focus on rebirth and personal relationship with god. Other scholars who have looked at the relationship between the post-modern and New Age religion include Wayne Spencer, “To Absent Friends: Classical Spiritualist Mediumship and New Age Channeling Compared and Contrasted” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16.no.3. (2001), 343-360. Scholars also have looked at the New Age religions
The New Age Spiritualist movement matched the late twentieth century’s Evangelicalism’s resolute individualism. This new Spiritualist movement severed its assumptive ties with the nineteenth century’s Spiritualist movement in the late twentieth century. While nineteenth-century Spiritualists depended on manifestation, or producing observable evidence of the afterlife, and ghosts to both small and large audiences, New Age Spiritualists, like their Evangelical neighbors, relied on convincing private portrayals of “spirits” and personal experience.462 Spiritualists in the nineteenth century sought to bring evidence of the spirit that would be tested through observational scientific study. Following the popular science of the day, these nineteenth-century practitioners encouraged viewers to refute Spiritualism after witnessing its power with their own eyes. New Age Spiritualism did not open itself up to scrutiny in this way. Wayne Spencer explains that the twentieth-century Spiritualists believed that the experience of contacting a spirit was a personal event, something that could not be made plausible to nonbelievers.463 They believed, above all else, that only the person who contacted the spirits needed to believe in the practice. When confronted, however, New Age Spiritualists often use a combination of scientific methodology, pseudo-science, and fervent subjectivity to argue their cases.464 This

difference in practice has protected New Age Spiritualists from the kind of performance-based “debunking” that competed with nineteenth-century Spiritualists’ séances and swept the movement into oblivion.465

Both groups privileged personal choices in constructing beliefs from a mixture of spiritual, religious, and quasi-scientific rationales and traditions, and insisted they could do so with impunity.

Christopher Partridge saw this all as a product of postmodernism and explained that the movement was “critical of Enlightenment values, truth claims, and forsakes foundationalism and seeks to break down hierarchies of knowledge.”466 It questioned the hierarchy of knowledge that gave more authority to information and facts created by scientific research and expert analysis, and it insisted that authority came from belief and not peer review or critique.467 Spiritualists in the late twentieth century argued that their personal expertise on ideas of spirits and the afterlife enabled them to create truths and facts that were just as authoritative and respectable to them as those created by scientists, historians, and other professionals.

For ghosts and ghostlore, this new understanding made it possible for people who believed in or experienced ghosts to claim a unique authority that those who had not had such an experience would not understand and could not substantively challenge. Likewise, one did not have to believe in ghosts to enjoy the concept or to trust that other people

465 Spencer, “To Absent Friends (2001), 343-360.;
believed that ghosts were real. Those who claimed no interactions with ghosts were given a pass to enjoy ghostlore as *lore* and could avoid being labeled irrational. Those who claimed to believe in or to have seen ghosts did not entirely escape the traditional critique of irrationality, but sheer confidence, a claim to personal knowledge, and freedom of opinion helped them ignore any objections.

The gap between believers and nonbelievers created a space where the idea of enjoying ghost stories for secular reasons blossomed. Books like *Beloved*, *The Shining*, and *The House on Haunted Hill*, and films like *The Poltergeist* and *The Sixth Sense*, which were released throughout the late twentieth century, created a foundation that reinforced the idea that hauntings were debatably true firsthand accounts by focusing on incidental hauntings that happened once to singular people or a group of people. For nonbelievers, ghosts in the horror, romance, and suspense genres appeared either as incidental stories or as clever metaphors that functioned to move plots and inspire characters. These genres allowed people to know, enjoy, and temporarily buy into a belief in ghosts without committing full-time to believing in ghosts.

Considering these developments, L. B. Taylor wrote his books at the most perfect time. His research and publications sought to celebrate national and local histories that

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471 W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).
took place in Virginia and acknowledge the unique culture of historical understanding that saw ghosts as appropriate and accessible narratives. His research sought to recognize Virginians as an identity group who not only had a distinct place-based history but had a unique way of understanding their relationship to the past as well. He used that idea to contextualize his research and legitimize ghostlore as a part of historical heritage. He wrote in 1998 that Virginia had a “rich history” of “inexplicable occurrences.” All ghost stories, whether they came from folklore or “direct reports” from living people, were a part of Virginia’s “heritage” because they all shared an acknowledgment of the state's history.

As popular and well intentioned as Taylor’s efforts were, thanks to Carson’s efforts, Taylor’s books did not bring ghosts back to historical sites overnight, and he had a hard time getting museums on board with the idea that ghosts were historical. On his initial research trip, Taylor learned that public history professionals did not share his understanding of ghostlore and that people had reservations about talking about ghost stories on record. This all seemed strange to him because ghost stories were everywhere. Movies, books, and television shows about ghosts and hauntings, along with renewed interest in things like séances, made ghostlore a part of normal conversation. Even newspapers and broadcasts reported the odd habits of New Age Spiritualists, houses

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that were reputed to be haunted, and unexplainable incidences. But for historical sites and museums, talk of ghosts was too trendy, or tacky, and lacked the dignified authority of academic research.

Off the record and in their private homes, Virginians did not go out of their way to suppress ghost stories. The state's landscape is dotted with old decayed homes, overgrown woods, abandoned schools, and strange places set back from the road that local people call “haunted.” Some of the sites were labeled “haunted” simply because they were uncanny, while others had stories associated with them. The places with stories were well-known by locals. In many cases, a unique story in one town might sound similar to stories told a few towns over. But like the story of the “Haunted Swimming Hole,” from chapter three, few people outside of the community fully understood the story or the sites’ significance. Authors like Marguerite DuPont Lee and various folklorists collected the ghost stories associated with the old homes, but without access to the old books or the archives, few Virginians had any kind of expansive knowledge of the state’s ghostlore. Isolation ensured that ghost stories stayed local and gave residents little reason to talk about their hauntings outside of the context of place. L. B. Taylor changed this. He made the state’s ghostlore accessible to the masses and something people began to look for as they traveled throughout the state.

479 Chapter 2 features many good examples of these writers. Harland, Some Colonial, (1897), Lee, Virginia Ghosts, (1930); Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses, (1927); Rothery, Houses Virginians Have Loved (1954).
But that took time. Taylor had humble beginnings. He was a journalist by training who retired right outside of Williamsburg in the early 1980s. From the comfort of his basement office, he began writing short books for Aladdin Paperbacks in his spare time. His books took on a number of seemingly unrelated topics and had titles like *Shoplifting, Chemical and Biological Warfare, Emergency Squads*, and *The Commercialization of Space*. Ghostlore found Taylor. His first effort filled a request made by his publisher for a piece in their Chiller series. The result was *Haunted Houses*, a thin book profiling a few American haunted houses, paying special attention to the homes in Taylor’s native Virginia. The book did not gain a lot of attention, but it inspired Taylor to begin looking at the ghost stories from around his home.

Virginia’s Tidewater area, where Williamsburg is located, is home to numerous old plantation homes. The area’s historical tourist attractions, Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown, a number of historical homes and structures along with resorts and theme parks gave the Tidewater a distinct historical identity. For this reason, it made sense that Taylor sought to find ghosts nearby.

Taylor began his research at Colonial Williamsburg. He first sought to gain information from the docents who roamed the old city. He struck up conversations with many workers and found that they, officially, had a “general reluctance” and nothing to say about ghosts. Trying to pry ghost tales out of the tour guides at the famous Payton-
Randolph House in Williamsburg was like “virtually” running “into a stone wall.” The interpreters “flatly wouldn’t discuss the subject of ghosts.”

On the few occasions that Taylor got docents to entertain his topic, they only spoke to him in “hushed tones” and reassured him that they did not want to be labeled crazy for talking about ghosts. Taylor understood the worry but did not share their concern. He saw nothing inherently “crazy” about the ghost stories or his inquiry about them.

For Taylor, the ghost stories were another avenue Virginians could travel down to learn about history. They were valuable “cultural heirlooms,” not necessarily evidence of the other side. He argued that because the tales were “handed down, generation to generation, by families of The Commonwealth,” they represented a unique way that Virginians taught each other history and came together as a society. This was something Taylor experienced firsthand. The process of collecting the tales inspired him to think of the stories as historical. He wrote that hunting for stories taught him “considerably more about the extraordinary history” in Virginia than he knew having lived in the commonwealth for decades.

Armed with his new wisdom, Taylor transformed his mission from collecting and sharing stories to saving the culture that kept the stories alive over the years. He believed that the stories were in danger of being overshadowed by modern technology. Taylor often wrote that “the glare of modern-day television and the computer-electronic age” were

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threatening to make ghostlore and traditional storytelling obsolete.\textsuperscript{488} He saw the digital world as at odds with the oral tradition that created the ghost stories that gave Virginia its unique historical identity.

Despite his enthusiasm and heroic goals, Taylor found that Virginians at historical sites were still not willing to share ghost stories. After traveling across the state to historical homes and sites, Taylor was perhaps the most qualified person to declare that ghost stories were not a part of the “normal discourse espoused by guides” and were “taboo” at historical sites.\textsuperscript{489} He explained that workers were “reluctant to discuss” ghosts because the evidence for the hauntings was not found in historical documents.\textsuperscript{490} Though he believed the stories were historical, because they had been told throughout the commonwealth’s history, he postulated that because the ghost stories were “classified as folklorian” and not historical by archivists and scholars, the stories appeared to lack “historical integrity.”\textsuperscript{491}

Repeated rejections from historical homes and sites encouraged Taylor to take a new approach. Rather than leaning on his journalistic training and seeking out first-person accounts, Taylor dove into archives across the state. He went to small historical societies and major university libraries as well as antique shops and trade shows, looking for rare books. There, among the “yellow handwritten and typed” pages, he found the traditional Virginia ghost stories.\textsuperscript{492} There was no center for ghostlore in the Old Dominion, and just as they are today, few of the stories were labeled or organized as ghost stories. Taylor took on

\textsuperscript{489} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 4.
\textsuperscript{490} Taylor, \textit{The Ghosts of Virginia Volume III} (1993), 384.
\textsuperscript{492} Taylor, \textit{The Ghosts of Virginia Volume II} (1994), VII.
the large task of auditing Virginia’s many historical archives for their hidden ghosts. 

Unsurprisingly, he found troves upon troves of ghost stories scattered across the state. He found sources in old WPA files, hidden among family papers, in journals, and in the boxes from old folklore research projects long forgotten by the rest of the world. The presence of the stories in the archives affirmed Taylor’s argument that, despite people’s silence, Virginians had a long history with ghost stories.

What he created was something new and unique to the eyes of his contemporary readers. After learning firsthand that historical ghostlore was “taboo,” Taylor set out to change the culture in Virginia to one more open and welcoming to the traditional storytelling that people did in private. His books normalized discussions of ghosts by contextualizing the stories within historical narratives and respecting true believers’ ideas as personal choices. The double approach made his book extremely popular to both casual ghost-story fans and those seeking psychic or metaphysical experiences. His broad popularity and attentiveness to historical narrative caught the attention of curators and directors and eventually built a bridge that brought ghostlore back to historical sites.

Taylor’s books were unlike anything his readers had seen before. The ghost stories and Taylor’s personal understanding of their significance encouraged people to talk about ghosts in terms of place-based historical context. Taylor taught people to explain the strange things they experienced personally in terms of historical events, people, and places rather than label them as complete mysteries. The books taught readers to think critically about the world around them, however they might experience it.

Taylor’s books also seemed like a solution for the early 1990s’ teachers and public historians who struggled to spark Americans’ interest in the past. The prevailing idea was
that children and adults were no longer interested in learning history because it was boring or they had been lied to. The assumption easily slipped off Americans’ tongues and was eagerly applied to historical sites to explain dwindling admissions. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen addressed the idea in their book *The Presence of the Past*, and reported that Americans would enjoy history more if they could make personal connections to the past. Taylor’s books offered just that. They encouraged readers to shape the significance of their personal experiences of places or stories through historical narratives.

Taylor did this by blending history and ghostlore. Each of his entries was roughly 75 percent history, 25 percent haunting. Taylor stuck to this model for most of the entries in his eleven-plus books. A home or site’s historical narrative always came first, then a description of the ghost or the haunting story, and if he had the information, Taylor ended the story with report of a recent sighting of the spirit. The first part spoke to the history buffs and those who fancied old historical homes, the middle was for the ghostlore fans, and the last bit was to satisfy the true believers. His formulated stories had something for everyone. Within this model, Taylor wrote two kinds of stories that established the historical tie to ghosts: those that were related to a home or site’s history, and those that asserted the presence of a past.

Shirley Plantation, in Charles City, fit into the first category. Taylor began the entry on Shirley by setting the scene and asserting that the property was itself lovely and antique. He called the home “one of the most magnificent original colonial mansions” in the United

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495 Taylor always intended to provide factually information, but he often fell short of this goal and included a few historical errors throughout his books.
States.\textsuperscript{496} He said it was located on a “point overlooking a scenic bend in the James River” between Richmond and Williamsburg.\textsuperscript{497} He then moved on to the home’s history, detailing that “it was originally owned” by the Hill family and that “the present house” was built in 1723.\textsuperscript{498} Taylor pointed out that Edward Hill built the house for his daughter Elizabeth, who married John Carter, the son of the “Legendary King” Carter.\textsuperscript{499} He noted the plantation’s “handsome brick” and fine construction materials.\textsuperscript{500} The “huge brick chimney” got a mention, as did the “delicate” carvings on the “elegant” walnut staircase and “superb paneling.”\textsuperscript{501} The long descriptions lead up to a discussion of the home’s legacy of owners with “well-known” hospitality, a few anecdotes about Robert E. Lee spending some time at the home, and a young soldier who hid in the house during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{502} All of this information supported that the home was indeed old and had a connection to Virginian history.

The ghost did not historicize the house; rather, it simply added another story to a multistoried house and asserted the continued presence of the past. The ghost who haunted Shirley was “Aunt Pratt.” The Carters shared the story of Aunt Pratt, much as they had done years earlier when the old-home biographers came calling, and Taylor recorded the story similarly to the way the biographers had done years before. They told Taylor that she appeared in the home when her portrait was not hung in a place of distinction. On various occasions, the owners put the portrait in the attic only to be reminded by Pratt’s

\textsuperscript{496} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 7.
“mighty disturbance” that its proper place was on the main floor. Taylor said that “little” was known about Pratt but that she had an “air of mystery about” her. Her lack of detail and explanation was of little consequence. Taylor had so much information on the home’s general history that Pratt’s presence was by default assuring evidence that the house was indeed haunted.

The second type of story that Taylor included in his books were those about ghosts who were directly related in some way to famous characters or events. The story of Evelyn Byrd is an excellent, and now familiar, example. Every time Taylor used the story of Evelyn Byrd’s ghost in one of his books, he included a quick review of the Byrd family history, their James River plantation—Westover—and Evelyn’s life. The relationship between the information and story in this story was ideal. In order for readers to understand Evelyn Byrd’s ghost, they had to understand who she was, why her choice in marriage was important, and why her heart was broken. This encouraged readers to understand ghost stories as being the product of historical events and human emotions. It taught them to think historically about the present day, whether or not the issue included ghosts.

Taylor began his entry on Evelyn Byrd of Westover by describing the scenery at the plantation home and praising the “two large metallic eagles” that “adorn the gateposts leaning into” the property. He went on to explain that Westover was the ancestral home to the Byrd family, “one of the most powerful and influential clans in the colonies.” The Byrds built the home to be “the scene of lavish social entertainment” for the eighteenth century.

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century’s most “affluent colonists,” but he added that it was “filled with a history of sadness and tragedy” and, of course, ghosts.508

Taylor called Evelyn Byrd’s ghost a “benevolent” and “fragile spirit.”509 Her ghost “occasionally” appeared as a “wraith-like figure” dressed in white, looking sad, and “haunting as if still seeking the happiness” that “eluded her in life.”510 Unlike the story of Aunt Pratt, Taylor had plenty of information on Evelyn Byrd’s life and character and was able to paint a vivid image of Byrd’s wraith. He wrote that she was born in 1707, was a “bright child, a bit spoiled, precocious and high spirited.”511 Her father was William Byrd II, the owner of Westover and “one of the most prominent statesmen of his time.”512 He was secretary of the Virginia colony, an advisor for the governor, founder of Richmond, a wealthy landowner, and a “country squire,” which was like a judge.513 Evelyn Byrd’s father and his life were of great importance to the story.

Taylor explained that William Byrd’s identity and status in the colonies and in England were the reason he left for England when Evelyn was ten, taking the young girl with him to be “properly schooled.”514 All of this historical information was important for Taylor’s readers to be able to understand the significance of the Byrd family, their trip to England, and their ghost.

In England, Taylor wrote, she “flowered into a beautiful young woman,” complete with “porcelain-white skin, shining chestnut hair,” and a “Mona-Lisa-like smile.”515 At the

508 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
509 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
510 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
511 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
512 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
513 Taylor, Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I (1983), 76.
age of sixteen years, she met the King of England, who commented she was what young English men were looking for when they traveled to Virginia.\textsuperscript{516} All of this went to illustrate that Evelyn Byrd was a very marketable bride; she had enough beauty and family money to be picky. Taylor used her reported beauty to make the story all the more tragic. Of course, the tragedy of her good looks was her inability to marry the man of her dreams. In London, she fell in love with Charles Mordant, “the grandson of Lord Peterborough.”\textsuperscript{517} To most, those names mean nothing, but Mordant’s grandfather’s title suggests high birth. Much to Evelyn’s dismay, William Byrd II rejected the match, telling Evelyn that if she went through with the marriage he would cut her off entirely, saying, “I will avoid the sight of you as of a creature detested.”\textsuperscript{518}

Choosing her father and family over her lover, Evelyn Byrd returned to Virginia in 1726. Taylor described her return as tragic, explaining, “the spark of her personality was diminished.”\textsuperscript{519} Evelyn Byrd became a recluse and “spurned all potential suitors for years after her return, to the point that her father began to cruelly refer to her as the “antique virgin.”\textsuperscript{520} Taylor, far more than the old-home biographers, intentionally highlighted the most dramatic elements of each story, all of which culminated in the ghostly sighting. Taylor wrote that Evelyn did not speak to many people beyond her friend Anne Carter Harrison, who, he added, lived just down the river at another famous and haunted plantation, Berkeley. The two young women lived isolated lives on the James River and made a pact to “return to visit in such a fashion not to frighten anyone” after their

\textsuperscript{516} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 77.
\textsuperscript{517} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 77.
\textsuperscript{518} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 77.
\textsuperscript{519} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 77.
\textsuperscript{520} Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983), 78.
deaths. True to their promise, after Evelyn Byrd passed away of a broken heart, her ghost returned in a “dazzling” white dress to greet her beloved friend.

Taylor’s 75 percent history, 25 percent haunting offered interesting information for most readers. Importantly, the book could be read as a historical work that included ghost stories and fun anecdotes, or as a book that used historical information to provide evidence for the existence of ghosts.

This dual vision was attractive to those who truly believed in ghosts—mediums, parapsychologists, paranormal experts, ghost hunters, and the like. Taylor understood the draw his books had for “true believers” and welcomed their accounts of historically themed ghosts into his later books. The people who reached out to Taylor with tales of ghost sightings were largely a part of the wildly ambiguous “New Age” movement. It began in the 1970s and blossomed into a “self-conscious social movement” that among many things believed that practitioners could communicate with spirits—worldly, otherworldly, and extraterrestrial. Believers adopted ideas, practices, and beliefs from a broad range of Western and Eastern Religions, at times asserting their Christian identity, or a general Spiritualism. While it is difficult to pinpoint the typical “New Age” Spiritualist, scholars generally agree that the practitioners staunchly believe in individual freedom, self-authority, the sense of a “higher-self,” ancient wisdoms, and privatization.

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521 Taylor, *Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I* (1983), 78. Today Westover and Berkeley share a driveway of sorts; the two plantations were always very close.
523 Spencer, “To Absent Friends,” (2001), 343-360
The individuality of knowledge that the New Age Spiritualist movement revolved around made hauntings into something that could not be argued against. People could claim to believe in ghosts based on an experience that only other witnesses could speak to. People who did not believe in ghosts were no longer considered in the discussion on ghosts’ existence. This hardened the resolve of Spiritualists in the United States. People who believed or those willing to believe were accepted, and nonbelievers were simply ignored.

Taylor understood this and wanted the people who believed in ghosts to find use in his collection of historical stories. He was careful to identify himself as a skeptic, to save face for his unconvinced readers, but wrote in each of his books that he trusted that those who believed in ghosts deserved to do so uninhibited. This simple assertion made Taylor very popular among parapsychologists, psychics, mediums, and the like. As the years went on, many of the new stories that Taylor included in his books came from letters, phone calls, and interviews with true believers who had experienced ghosts in Virginia. To Taylor, any talk of ghosts was acceptable as long as it was Virginia-specific and reflected some sense of historical understanding.

He began including stories from psychics, mediums, and parapsychologists, and his seventh book acknowledged the role they played in the creation and protection of Virginia’s ghostlore. In this volume, Taylor introduced Virginia Beach’s “Sleeping Prophet,” Edgar Cayce. Taylor wrote in the very last chapter of his second large tome that “it would seem almost sacrilegious to write a book on Virginia ghosts and not include” a chapter on

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Edgar Cayce.\textsuperscript{527} Taylor called him “the greatest psychic of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.”\textsuperscript{528} Cayce’s claim to fame was his ability to diagnose and recommend treatment to people who traditional doctors thought were untreatable. He would enter into a trancelike state and wake up knowing what was ailing someone and how to cure it. Taylor reported that 85 percent of his diagnoses were accurate.

Cayce found great success with his assessments and cures. In 1931, Cayce founded the Association for Research and Enlightenment in Virginia Beach. The area was significant. Virginian Beach’s access to the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay, Cayce argued, produced the energy that paranormal forces needed to survive. In 1993, the foundation had one hundred thousand members worldwide. As a group, they sought to find fulfillment and improvement through psychic study.

Medical healing was not Cayce’s only gift; he spoke with ghosts as well. His biographer, Vada F. Carlson, wrote that Cayce played with a number of “ghostly playmates” as a child and experienced ghosts throughout his life.\textsuperscript{529} Most notably, he began talking to his grandfather after his death—almost immediately after witnessing his grandfather’s horse trample and drown him. Later in life, Cayce reported that the ghost of a woman who died of a “toxic throat infection” followed him from Alabama back to Virginia because she did not believe that she was dead.\textsuperscript{530}

After this publication, other lesser-known psychics came to Taylor, looking to share their stories. People would come up to him “invariably” after his talks to tell him “yet

another interesting or historic encounter.” He dedicated an entire chapter in one book to the psychic Vaught family. Mary Vaught of Lafayette came to speak with Taylor one evening concerning her Chesapeake family’s history with psychic powers and ghostly experiences. She claimed that nearly everyone in her family had experienced some kind of psychic power. Her mother predicted her own death twice. It happened the first time more than a decade before and again on the morning before she passed. On top of that, the family lived for many years in a house that was known as haunted, the Mary Surratt House. Vaught claimed that Mary Surratt was the first woman hanged to death in the United States, and was said to haunt the house. Vaught and her sister felt the eerie presence of Mary Surratt’s ghost looming in the home and heard the lingering sounds of their long-dead brother’s polio braces clicking at night. Later in life, Mary Vaught moved into a home in Roanoke, Virginia with her own family and continued to hear footsteps from unseen people. Her family members complained of being pushed into closets, seeing doorknobs turning on their own, and hiding from an old farmer who would watch them as they slept. In every one of her reports, there was some link to the past owners or person who’d lived in the house. Vaught was very aware of her homes’ histories and used them to explain the strange occurrences she witnessed.

Though often hidden under a layer of psychic sensationalism, the stories L. B. Taylor chose to include in his books all worked to illustrate more about the lives and history of Virginians than about the existence of ghosts. Though psychic powers were arguably

available to all people, it was Virginians, in his eyes, who used their powers to contextualize the present day through the commonwealth’s past.

Taylor understood the connection between history and those who claimed to be psychic, and reportedly mentioned them in his books to illustrate his point. In his subsequent book, Taylor profiled a woman from Kenbridge named Karen Lynch who knew “about all sorts of ghosts.” Taylor reached out to Lynch, who told him about living on an old plantation property as a young girl and seeing the ghost of a woman who’d died in a notorious nineteenth-century snowstorm. Lynch explained that the woman froze to death in a six-foot snowdrift. As a young girl, Lynch came down to her parents’ kitchen one night and saw the woman sitting at their dining table. The woman slowly turned toward Lynch, revealing to the frightened girl that “there was nothing where the face was supposed to be!” She said her mother and grandmother saw the ghost too, usually when one of the three was in trouble. After so many years living with the ghost, Lynch said the figure was “no longer scary” but rather “comforting.” “Perhaps,” Lynch suggested the ghost “just enjoys the comfort of a warm house.”

Lynch’s story illustrated one way that ghostlore developed in Virginia. The ghost she saw as a girl was frightening as first, but once Lynch accepted that she lived with the past, she began to find comfort in its presence. The past is all over Virginia—in the old homes, in the landscape, in the names of streets and towns. History is filled with stories of abuse, death, and human suffering. The past is as frightening, and appalling, as a ghost. But Lynch’s story illustrates that it is far worse to ignore the past and let it sneak up on you in

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the kitchen than it is to recognize that past and find comfort in how it defines place and time.

Like most Virginians who spoke with Taylor, Lynch recognized ghosts all across the Old Dominion and had plenty of stories to tell. Conveniently, Lynch attended Sweet Briar College, an all-women's college in Virginia that is famous for its ghosts. Like many students before her, she reported that a certain statue on campus turns its marble head and screams on the anniversary of a student’s murder. She also told Taylor about her dog, Muffin, acting strangely in their previous home. She was surprised that the old doctor who’d owned and worked out of the home still lingered in the building. All of Lynch’s photographs of the dog included a “mist-like form hanging around Muffin.” Lynch, knowing the history of the house, surmised that one of the doctor’s old patients must have liked Muffin.

The psychics, like Virginia’s history, kept rolling in. In Volume VI, Taylor profiled famous Virginia psychic, John Reiley of Roanoke. Like Taylor, Reiley had a reputation in the world of ghostlore. Taylor wrote that “people all across southwestern Virginia” wrote letters “imploring” Reiley to investigate their home and “bust” their ghosts. Reiley, though well into his seventies, traveled throughout the mountains making house calls and occasionally visiting Longwood College, Virginia Tech, and the University of Virginia to consult the experts on campus. He too had a large collection of ghost stories, but unlike

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Taylor, he never put pen to paper. Instead, Reiley was a storyteller in the grand tradition that Taylor so much admired.

Like Taylor, Reiley understood Virginia’s ghosts to be historical and tried to impart that idea to the people who called him. In some cases, rather than “busting” ghosts, he helped people appreciate the history their ghosts held. A woman contacted Reiley complaining that the ghost of the home’s previous owner, Julia, was still taking up residence in the house. The homeowner explained that Julia was a women-in-white type of ghost who lingered sadly about the home. As a young woman, Julia had fallen in love with a sailor who left and never returned. She lived to be eighty years old, but her ghost was stuck in her youth, longing for her sailor and morosely walking about the house. To get rid of this ghost, Reiley planned to dress up as a nineteenth-century sailor and sing old sea shanties. If it was as sailor she was looking for, Reiley was happy and willing to supply one. But at the last minute, the homeowner realized that Julia added character to the home and that it was nice to have some history hanging around.

Reiley’s, Lynch’s, and Cayce’s stories were more historical than they might appear. The stories, they knew, helped support the idea that Virginia had a special and ongoing relationship with the past. They asserted that Virginians were spiritually sensitive and lived with the past as neighbors and roommates. They all used their knowledge of the past to explain the haunt and give a name to the ghosts they saw.

Additionally, contemporary accounts of ghosts helped to affirm the older ghost stories and make sense of how they functioned so commonly in people’s daily lives. Rather than leaving readers to assume that the older tales were simply the products of irrational old-time people, the contemporary accounts created the possibility that twentieth- and
twenty-first-century people had ghostly experiences as well. Taylor always made sure to offer ample evidence to suggest that ghosts were real but left the question open for his readers to decide.

His openness and broad appeal paid off. Fredericksburg’s Free Lance-Star reported that his first statewide book, *Ghosts of Virginia*, sold one hundred thousand copies between 1993 and 1998.\textsuperscript{543} That averages out to about forty copies of the same book being sold every day for six years. Considering that Taylor was self-published, this is pretty impressive. His subsequent volumes and Virginia regionally themed books enjoyed similar success, putting L. B. Taylor’s vision of Virginia’s history and ghosts in nearly every library in Virginia and thousands of private homes.

Out of those thousands of homes came letters and phone calls celebrating Taylor’s innovative vision of ghosts and captivating reads. Taylor got letters and telephone calls “from all over the nation,” from “Washington State to Miami, Florida.”\textsuperscript{544} Letters came from people “who just want to talk about some strange event” they had witnessed and those looking for advice on how to rid their homes of ghosts. Taylor made no claim to being psychic or an exorcist, but he said that he liked to think that thanks to his books, people were “no longer afraid to talk about their ghosts.”\textsuperscript{545}

His fans were not limited to those who believed in ghosts and sought his advice on their paranormal experiences. Many of the letters and calls Taylor received were from readers who simply wanted to thank him for writing enjoyable books that got them interested in studying history. After Taylor wrote *The Ghosts of Richmond...And Nearby*

\textsuperscript{544} Taylor, *The Ghosts of Virginia Volume I* (1993), VIII.
\textsuperscript{545} Taylor, *The Ghosts of Virginia Volume I* (1993), VIII.
*Environ*, he received an especially notable phone call from a nurse at the Medical College of Virginia who requested that he send her a copy. The nurse explained that one of their patients was a young boy from New Mexico who suffered from a rare illness and traveled to Virginia a few times a year for treatment. In preparation for his next visit, the nurse had asked the boy what he would like to do in Virginia, and the boy told her that what he wanted “the most” was a copy of Taylor’s book *The Ghosts of Richmond.*

On other occasions, Taylor received letters from parents who thanked him for creating books that their children wanted to read. “Thank you for giving our son, Tim, many hours of enjoyment from reading your books. You really sparked his imagination,” wrote one pleased parent. Another wrote, “I’m very happy because my 11-year-old son, Federico, is reading a lot more.” A preteen from Virginia wrote Taylor in the same fashion, saying, “I can enjoy and respect each story. Your books let me look at history in a way that gets me interested.” Another wrote, “I bought your book and read it cover to cover many times,” adding “*Ghosts of Williamsburg* is honestly the best book I have ever read.” A woman in California wrote to Taylor that *The Ghosts of Williamsburg* was one of only two books she’d read “all the way through.” A Maryland woman wrote Taylor that her husband avoided filing their “income tax report,” to read his newest book. A librarian in Richmond wrote Taylor asking for six more copies because the library’s copies were

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completely worn out. The librarians in Richmond and people across the United States recognized that learning history through ghost stories had a strong draw.

Even more so than letters, the people who reached out to Taylor at his public appearances illustrated that the prohibition on unashamed talk of historical ghosts was disappearing. At book fairs and conferences, Taylor was “pleasantly overwhelmed” with “the response” he received. Sitting at his booth, Taylor met “hundreds of people” who wanted to “chat,” to share “their psychic experiences,” to compliment Taylor on his “writings,” and to buy his book. The same thing, he said, happened at “autograph signings, and at speaking engagements.” Taylor became the spark that relit ghostlore culture and inspired people to talk.

The popularity of his book, and live events, caught the attention of curators, directors, and entrepreneurs across the state who were looking to stay competitive in the historical tourist market. In the late 1990s, historical sites in Virginia were suffering from low attendance and new antagonism to intellectualism. Much of the public was bored with historical sites and did not seem to like history, and the small number who still enjoyed the sites divided themselves among more and more sites. That, coupled with the Reagan-era cuts that terminated crucial funds and future prospects, gave historical sites reason enough to panic and start reevaluating themselves.

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Tour companies embraced Taylor's ghost stories once as they saw his popularity. Though only one company claimed to be the official tour based on Taylor's books, it proved immensely useful for other tours. As part of Taylor's massive undertaking to catalogue all the ghostlore in Virginia, he traveled to numerous archives across the state, looking for ghost stories hidden in unlabeled papers. Though he did not use traditional citations, he enjoyed writing about his research trips and left clear and accessible paths back the archives. The tour companies across Virginia were not allowed to claim Taylor's books, but they certainly used them to find stories, and attracted similar audiences.

They may have not been ready to see the ghosts as historically significant, but they realized that "there is gold in them thar ghosts." It took a time, but as more and more independent tour companies began leading paying customers through historical districts and streets, directors and curators began to realize that in order to survive in an increasingly crowded and consumer focused historical-tourism market, they needed to embrace the ghost tours.

"The Original Ghost Tour of Williamsburg" was the first ghost tour offered in Williamsburg. The tour company ran independently of Colonial Williamsburg and shared no ties with the corporation. They identified themselves through L. B. Taylor’s books. Guides led guests through Williamsburg at night, telling them about the stories Taylor collected in his books and offering some firsthand ghost experiences. Taylor approved of the tours and would join in on them now and then. Other tour companies, such as Colonial Ghost Tours of Williamsburg and Spooks and Legends of Williamsburg, soon joined The

Original Ghost Tour of Williamsburg and made the darkened city a profitable and attractive place. The competing companies lead hundreds of guests on nighttime tours, avoiding horse droppings and each other. By the early 2000s, Williamsburg after dark was just as crowded with guests and tour groups as daytime Williamsburg.

The popularity of the Williamsburg tours, and the publication of Taylor’s city-themed “Ghosts of” books, inspired tour companies in other cities to offer their own nighttime ghost walks. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Taylor published The Ghosts of Fredericksburg; The Ghosts of Richmond; The Ghosts of The Tidewater, and others. By the early 2000s, Fredericksburg, Richmond, Alexandria, Lexington, Staunton and others began to advertise nightly or seasonal ghost tours. By the 2010s, nearly every city that Taylor profiled featured at least one profitable ghost tour.

But for many institutions, telling ghost stories was simply out of the question. Most historical sites, following Colonial Williamsburg, dug in their heels and asserted the authority of professionals and rational scientific research. When museum staffs transitioned over from volunteers to professional, university-trained curators, directors, and docents in the 1930s and 1940s, they adopted an identity as trustworthy historical authorities. They based this on their ability to use research, science, and reason to produce the most authentic historical settings, objects, and experiences. As uncanny as their creations were, the museum professionals contextualized their work through research and rationality. The museum’s ability to teach was based on guests trusting that the information they saw was accurate.562

Ghosts did not jibe with museum’s professional and academic identities. If historical sites wanted to uphold truth, professionalism, and knowledge, they could not be seen fraternizing with irrationality, no matter how long it had been a part of Virginian culture. Taylor’s popularity was more of an annoyance than a threat. Guests who read his books would ask questions about the hauntings that curators and docents did not want to answer—they did not want to legitimize the ghosts and embrace the irrational turn.

After the tours caught on and became popular moneymakers, museums started to take serious note of the ghost stories. Those that had ignored Taylor’s requests for research began to invite him to come talk at their events, asking him to find their ghost stories and help them set up ghost events. In 1998, Taylor remarked that he was “pleased and somewhat pleasantly surprised by what seems to be the fast-growing popularity” of ghost stories. He reminded his readers “it was a much different scene” when he began his “venture into tracking the haunting legends of Virginia in 1983.” He said, in 2002, that “after the publication of” his books ghosts had become “an in subject,” and places that had rebuffed his research now featured ghost tours based on his research. He was shocked to see hotel owners advertise, “Guests may encounter a ghost or two during their stay.” But the most surprising encounter came from historical sites. Taylor remarked that when he previously went to investigate ghost stories at Berkeley Plantation in Charles City, he was met with distinctive resistance. But, he added, after his books were published, the owner of

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Berkeley called him directly and scolded him for “not including their spirits” in his popular books.\(^566\)

It was clear by the early 2000s that Taylor’s books had become the source for historical sites, museums, and owners of old homes to get recognition. In 2002, he wrote that he was “cordially invited” to “the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries; Cobb’s Hall near Kilmarnock; Warner Hall and Auburn in the Gloucester-Mathews Country area; Rosemont on Bent Mountain outside of Roanoke”; and “the Cork Street Tavern in Winchester.”\(^567\)

Taylor soon found himself on the road again, but this time, the historical sites he visited happily greeted him and welcomed his ghost stories. A writer at Fredericksburg’s Free Lance-Star claimed, “people running historic sites have become much more cooperative since” Taylor “began researching his series of ghost books in the early 1980s.”\(^568\)

It was not only Halloween events that brought out the ghost tours. People’s understanding of Virginia as distinctly old encouraged and allowed historical sites to feature ghost tours year round. Taylor once said, “Virginia is so rich in these stories,” because it is old and has “seen more tragedy and trauma than most,” adding that “Sixty to 70 (sic) percent of all the battles of the Civil War took place here.”\(^569\) And Virginians generally agreed. A writer at the Reading Eagle wrote, “the notion of haunted houses and ghost tours in a place as old and historic as Colonial Williamsburg seems only natural.”\(^570\) Even the state’s tourism board hopped on the bandwagon and put out advertisements in various newspapers in the US and Canada that read, “Virginia is for ghosts. But you don’t

\(^{566}\) Taylor, The Ghosts of Virginia Volume V (2000), VIII, IX,
\(^{567}\) Taylor, The Ghosts of Virginia VIII (2001), page VIII.
have to believe in them to take a ghost tour.”  Virginians, and visitors from across the
nation, signed up for ghost tours in droves. As Adams noted, the ghost tours “are here,
there and everywhere these days.” He added that every “city or town with scary places”
offers at least a “Hallowed-season stroll among its haunted sites.” Many were offering
more.

In the 1980s, Taylor was nearly the only person writing about Virginia ghostlore. In
the 1990s, he published eleven books and only saw competition from one other author,
Jackie Eileen Behrend. Her book *The Hauntings of Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Jamestown*
offered readers a different kind of experience of Virginian hauntings. Behrend, like
Taylor, focused her first book on Williamsburg, but her work rested not on research but
instead on her having given tours in the downtown for years. This ensured that the stories
she shared were shorter than Taylor’s and written specifically for being read aloud.
Taylor’s entries tended to be long and descriptive, like the work of the old-home
biographers themselves, and did not lend themselves to oration. Taylor’s books were
tomes; Behrend’s book was a collection of tour scripts.

As a tour guide, it was natural for Behrend to establish the importance of visiting the
places mentioned in her book. Thus, she gave readers ample information about how to find
her featured sites. Visiting was key because it enabled her readers to test the stories for
themselves. More so than Taylor’s books, Behrend’s work depended on people’s ability to
test her arguments and gain first-person experiences of the ghosts. Some of the places

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571 There are many examples of this type of advertisement this one from Ohio is a good example Virginia
574 Jackie Eileen Behrend, *The Hauntings of Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Jamestown* (Winston-Salem, NC: John
F. Blair Publisher, 1998).
Taylor included in his books were located in thickly forested areas or had no easily discernable location. Behrend provided the addresses of the haunted locations and phone numbers of people who could let her readers into the homes.

She even provided her readers a logic that explained why the old cites were more haunted than other sites. She explained that parapsychologists who witnessed and knew about the ghosts in Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown argued that the “flurry of activity and sounds” created by the archaeology and restoration awoke the cities’ long-sleeping ghosts. According to Behrend and the parapsychologists, the same archaeology and restoration that made Williamsburg into Colonial Williamsburg brought the eighteenth-century people back from the dead. This implication tied the work of restoration to ghosts. The residents who spoke with the last century's home biographers depended on the existence of original architecture to claim their ghosts. Their logic held that the people who lived in these places stayed long after they died because they loved their homes and cherished their memories. Behrend’s book established the idea that ghosts could be tricked into thinking that the reconstructions and restorations were truly their eighteenth-century homes, and that the reconstructions were therefore just as good as the originals.

In the first decade of the 2000s, Taylor published eleven more books. Most of them were part of the Haunted America series by The History Press, the popular press that produces the local history books that adorn museum store shelves. Among them were *Haunted Virginia Beach, Historic Haunts of Winchester: A Ghostly Trip Through the Past,* and

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575 Behrend, *The Hauntings of Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Jamestown* (1998), IX.
Haunted Richmond: The Shadows of Shockoe. Schaffer Publishing and Stockpole books offered a few more. By the end of the decade, it was clear that independent presses had found a niche in publishing ghostlore in small, easy-to-carry and easy-to-read books. Taylor was even contracted by Stockpole to transform some of his ghost stories into a collection for the press.

At the same time that the ghostlore books became popular, so too did books on ghost hunting. Hunting grew up alongside the New Age Spiritualist movement and the pop-culture ghostlore. It allowed regular people, those who did not claim a special gift for seeing or communicating with the dead, access to ghosts through Electro Magnetic Field (EMF) machines, voice recorders, and other modern-day electronics. Ghost-hunting books provided readers with a few stories, detailed explanations as to why ghosts haunted a certain place, and walking tours through battlefields and cities that ensured ghostly sightings.

Mark Nesbitt, a well-known ghost hunter from Gettysburg, PA, entered the arena of Virginia ghostlore in the 2000s. Nesbitt made his name in the ghost-tourism business in Gettysburg and chose to write a hunting guide for Fredericksburg in 2007. According to Nesbitt, Fredericksburg offered a unique opportunity to find ghosts. He explained that it was a “rich tapestry of history,” just as “vibrant” as Williamsburg and “nearly as old” as Jamestown. The city differed significantly from his base in Gettysburg because it had

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“more history, more battles,” and “more haunted sites” than the Pennsylvania town.\textsuperscript{578} He further explained that the Rappahannock River and the near-constant flow of tourists with cameras gave off the energy ghosts needed to materialize. According to his calculations, “twenty-five percent of all the stories” in Fredericksburg were “visual in nature,” whereas in Gettysburg the ghosts were mainly auditory.\textsuperscript{579} Nesbitt said that “paranormal investigators,” like himself, had known “for decades” that “the spirit world needs energy” to produce visual ghosts.\textsuperscript{580} And Fredericksburg simply had more to offer.\textsuperscript{581}

Like Behrend, Nesbitt worked from the idea that ghosts existed in Virginia for reasons other than heritage. Readers, tourists, and Virginians had few reasons to understand ghost stories outside of the parapsychological framework. This hid ghosts’ historical significance in Virginia and obscured the role that hauntings played in the creation of historical sites.

Taylor’s books stood alone in a field that was getting more and more crowded. All the ghost-story and ghost-hunt writers recognized small elements of the past in their work, but Taylor’s books constantly reminded his readers about the connection between ghostlore and Virginia heritage. His insistence that ghost stories were a part of Virginia’s heritage and history, and his willingness to see both the older stories and the contemporary accounts as acknowledgments of Virginia’s unique historical culture, helped end the prohibition against ghost stories at historical sites.

L. B. Taylor’s \textit{Ghosts Of Williamsburg} and subsequent \textit{Ghosts of Virginia} books made Virginia’s ghostlore seem larger and more important, and not just tall tales. His books

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helped to normalize the idea that ghostlore is a way of talking about the past. Of course, his books did not do all the work. They came at a time when Americans were questioning the legitimacy of rational thought. Things that had seemed hard facts—like the exclusively white male historical narrative—had fallen aside, and that gave Americans reason enough to rethink what had previously been understood as fact. For some Americans, this meant embracing new voices in the historical narrative, such as those of women, African Americans, laborers, and immigrants. For others, the new voices were a burden that fundamentally challenged their way of life and led them to aggressively cling to older, at times nonfactual, narratives. For a smaller group of Americans, this change inspired them to rethink things they had previously thought were irrational and begin to understand ghosts as a possible reality and a possible narrative.

Ghosts became more and more a center point at Virginia’s historical sites and cities during the twenty-first century. By the second decade of the new millennium, many historical sites had adopted at least yearly ghost events—even Colonial Williamsburg.
In the 1970s, Julian and Dot Boulware bought a tumbledown old Victorian home named Edgewood right near the James River in Charles City. Boulware had driven past the house a few times and simply fell in love with the old home—she did not know why, but she knew it was special. In a few years’ time, the Boulware had fixed up the old house and began taking in guests and renting out the property for weddings and photo shoots. On one of these occasions, a bride came to Dot with photos her photographer had taken during the ceremony and pointed to a white mist coming out of one of the upstairs rooms: she had captured an image of Edgewood’s ghost. Dot excitedly cried out that she did not know she had a ghost.

For some homeowners, news of a ghost would have been disturbing, but not for Dot. She recognized that where there were ghost stories, there was history. Dot began researching all she could about the house. She found that her house was mentioned in Marguerite DuPont Lee’s famed ghost book, and instantly knew her house had a lot more to say. She learned that the ghost was supposed to be Lizzie Rowland, one of the home’s Civil War-era residents. Like so many other women during the war, Rowland waited for a man who never returned. One day, while staring longingly through the upstairs window, Lizzie scratched her name in the glass—the very same window that the bride’s photo had
captured issuing the white mist. Dot wasted no time getting to the room. She searched the
glass panels until she found “Lizzie Rowland” written in the most perfect script on the
window facing the street.

Dot also discovered that Confederate soldiers stayed at the house during the Civil
War. No less a light than General J. E. B. Stuart had even stopped by the home on his way to
speak with Robert E. Lee. She learned that Benjamin Harris, the fifth of his name and the
fifth governor of Virginia, owned her property in the 1720s. Harris also owned Berkeley
Plantation just down the road and had built a mill near where Dot’s home, Edgewood, was
built years later. By 1984, Dot had enough information and research to have her house
and property placed on both the Virginia Landmark Register and the US National Register
of Historic Places.

Since then, Dot has transformed her home into a successful bed-and-breakfast—a
common, low-impact fate for many of Virginia’s old houses. She offers tours of her home
and will gladly regale anyone with the story of how ghosts helped get her home on the
national register.

Dot is not alone in this experience—contemporary Virginia is awash with Dots who
see ghost stories as a way to connect to history and to advertise their businesses. Their
newly easy melding of history and ghosts helps create value for their homes, control and
shape historical narrative and, for some, assert the existence of an authentic past. That

582 “Mill Quarter/ Richard S. Rowland House and Mill and Harrison’s Mill” and “Edgewood,” National Register
of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, United States Department of Interior, National Park Service,
value can be historical, but it can also be commercial. Ghosts have become moneymakers, and even homes that never had them before want them and find them.

As the interest has grown nationally, the scholarship of tourism and historical sites has struggled to explain the boom. Thanatourism, the study of ghost-related tourism, has offered one lens that relates haunted histories to Western practices like memento mori and saint-relic worship. But this conversation is often overshadowed by the popular “dark tourism” discussion that seeks to label all tourism and interpretation related to death, dying, and the afterlife as “dark,” macabre, and seditious.

This chapter pushes back against “Dark Tourism” and argues that contemporary Virginians are employing ghost stories for historical, marketable, and preservation ends—not for “dark” purposes. The ghost stories and tourism at Virginia’s historical sites and house museums perform three tasks: they give sites a usable and marketable past, helping gain support and continued preservation of old sites; they allow historical home owners and museum directors to control historical narratives, either limiting or expanding how guests understand the home; and they provide evidence of historical authenticity at recently recreated sites. Key to this is the difference between ghost tours and ghost hunts. Lacking a hard-and-fast taxonomy, guests and museum staff are often left confused about what to expect from ghost stories and tours. This lack of understanding is perhaps what is holding more historical sites back from embracing the new turn. I see the concept of “Thanatourism” as having more utility for public history and tourism history than the rather one-dimensional assertions of “dark tourism.” This chapter, therefore, reviews both concepts in light of Virginia’s uncanny landscape. Using online responses to Virginia ghost
tours as well as my own visits and reviews of scripts, I argue that the experience of history in these tours is quite at odds with dark-tourism framing.

For the past three decades, scholars of heritage tourism have associated ghost tours with “dark tourism.” In the 1990s and early 2000s, the field was overwhelmingly concerned with concepts of “authenticity”—how guests defined it and how they understood their experiences at various sites. Out of this exploration grew a discussion about sites of historical violence, like battlefields, prisons, and Southern plantations. Scholars in England called the macabre experiences that these sites offered “dark tourism.” Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon coined the term in the early 1990s to describe their research at sites of “heritage and atrocity.” They pointed to sites such as the US Holocaust Memorial; the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas from where Lee Harvey Oswald shot President John F. Kennedy; the Lorraine Motel where James Earl Ray shot Martin Luther King; and battlefields like the Somme or Thiepval; and they questioned these sites’ interpretive offerings and guests’ expectations.

After coining the phrase, they were surprised to find that it became popular even before they were able to give it a proper definition. A. V. Seaton argued that “dark tourism” was not a useful description for the variety of sites potentially under that category or people’s attraction to places of death. Like Foley and Lennon, Seaton explained that dark

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584 “Heritage Tourism,” and “Public History” share many qualities. Both study the use and presentation of the past to a public audience. “Heritage Tourism” is the title given to studies conducted by anthropologists and tourism scholars, usually but not limited to those done in the U.K. “Public history” is what historians call similar research, usually but not limited to the United States. The one element unique to “public history” that “heritage tourism” can lack, is the historians impulse to look at the past, rather than the present day. To put the two categories’ relationship in familial terms they are cousins who were raised by very close siblings.


tourism represented a kind of “heritage tourism” that was preoccupied with death.\textsuperscript{587} Ghosts, of course were dark by definition. Seaton explained that guests to dark sites were motivated by a desire to encounter nonthreatening representations of death. He tied this seemingly modern impulse to “thanatopsis,” or a kind of obsession with death that has cropped up in the Western world at various times in history since the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{588} He described “thanatopsis” as actions like collecting death masks, saint relics, and other memento mori objects like hair or teeth.\textsuperscript{589} Seaton argued that what had been called “dark tourism” had roots in the “thanatopic tradition.”\textsuperscript{590} He asserted that things previously understood as dark tourism needed to be rebranded as “thanatourism” to promote a better understanding of guests’ impulses and historical tradition. However, the name “thanatourism” did not become as popular a “dark tourism,” and scholars, as well as the public, continued to use both terms interchangeably.

By the early 2000s, the idea of “dark tourism” had become very popular. Philip R. Stone brought the term and the study to the public through an innovative internet-based community.\textsuperscript{591} In 2006, he argued for the creation of a “dark tourism spectrum” to better understand the types and severity of darkness that historical or heritage sites presented. He suggested titles such as “Dark Fun Factories,” which are better known in the United States as “haunted houses” or “spooky fun-houses,” where guests wind through disorienting rooms to see frightening visions. Sites in this category usually lack the historical elements that differentiate heritage sites from amusement parks. He also

\textsuperscript{588} Seaton “Guided by the dark,” (1996). 234–244. \\
\textsuperscript{589} Seaton “Guided by the dark,” (1996). 234–244. \\
\textsuperscript{590} Seaton “Guided By The Dark,” (1996). 234–244. \\
suggested the title “Dark Exhibitions” for programs, like the international traveling exhibit *Body Works*, that present dead bodies in the name of medical education. Other categories included “Dark Dungeons,” like prisons, and “Dark Shrines,” which are more like roadside memorials for the recently dead. “Dark Camps of Genocide” and “Dark Conflict Sites” finish off the list and establish that the spectrum of things scholars can consider “dark tourism” ranges from commercial amusements focused on make-believe death to actual sites of genocide. These categories’ broad range obscured the meaning of “dark” by arguing that Holocaust sites and fun houses share a category. His “dark tour spectrum” brings into question what makes a place “dark,” who gets to define sites as “dark,” and how that label changes guests’ experiences.

Michael Bowman and Phaedra Pezzullo addressed those concerns in 2010. Like many others, they felt that Stone’s spectrum was too large, and too subjective to be helpful. They argued that death is not inherently “dark.” They showed that guests’ reasoning for visiting sites of death are diverse and are not limited to objectionable desires. Recognizing that “tourists” are seen in a rather bad light, they pointed out that labeling the sites or their actions as “dark” contributes to a long-standing stigma and discourages research and understanding. Furthermore, they explained that labeling sites of death and suffering as “dark” and other sites as “heritage” further marginalizes those, like African American slaves, who suffered violence and whose narratives are already silenced. They said, “every document of barbarism is a document of civilization” and that sites of death are valuable because they “illuminate” cultural and political elements of human culture. Like Seaton,

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Bowman and Pezzullo concluded, to no avail, that scholars needed to stop labeling things and places “dark tourism.”

Scholars have not stopped calling sites “dark,” but many have endeavored to explain away the term’s power to demean. Stephan Miles conducted much-needed guest research that looked into how sightseers to English battlefields perceived and made meaning of their visits. For the first twenty years or so, the discussion on “dark tourism” was theoretical and had not produced a substantive work that asked guests if they perceived their visitations to be macabre or “dark.” Miles found that the people who visited the English battlefields saw their trips as decidedly “light.” He argued that Thanatourism was a rare element of the battlefields. Guests did not describe the battlefields using dark descriptions like “horrific, ghostly, suffering, eerie, gory,” or “terrible”; rather, they used words like “amazing,” “evocative,” “sad,” “interesting,” “informative,” or “nice.” They used words that have been associated with “dark tourism,” like “spiritual,” and that connoted an eerie or mysterious “intangible sense of place.” But they do not necessarily illustrate an attraction to death as much as they signified a sense of a religious-like spiritualism.

Religious devotion is the forgotten element of historically themed ghost tours and ghostlore. Scholars who look at ghostlore more often than not assume the stories are terrifying or frightening like the ghosts presented in film and popular literature. They are not viewing the historically themed ghost stories on their own terms. A quick look at the haunted histories reveals that they are created upon empathetic emotions, not terror.

598 Miles, “Battlefield Sites As Dark Tourism Attractions,” (2014), 134-147.
Ghost tourism’s popularity and people’s eagerness to employ “dark tourism” as a category have limited heritage-tourism studies and have created a formula in which scholars who talk about contemporary ghost tourism or anything having to do with ghosts always do so in terms of how they share basic qualities with what Stone called, “Dark Fun Houses.” To move past this, we need to adopt Judith Richardson’s vision and see ghosts as reminders of the multiple narratives of the past, or Julia King’s view, and see ghosts as tools for controlling narratives.599

A careful examination of how Virginia historical sites use ghost stories reveals that today’s Thanatourism is far from “dark.” Virginia ghost tours and events are not scary at all. They are, in fact, purposely historical. They share more characteristics with the stories collected by old-home biographers and folklorists than with the “dark” places that Stone described. Just like the old stories, the tours establish the presence of the past, maintain historical narratives, and affirm the accuracy of restoration-and-recreation efforts.

The historical sites and homes that offer ghost tours in Virginia use the stories to do three things: to assert the presence of the past, to control their historical narratives, and to authenticate their restorations. Unsurprisingly, these present-day functions reflect Virginians’ historical use of ghostlore. The tours that draw attention to an otherwise overlooked past work a lot like the tales that the folk told about their local historical sites. The tours that control historical narratives, leaving some information out and highlighting others, are the same stories that homeowners told about their plantation homes to highlight the staying power of the past. The tradition created by all those ghost stories has inspired the tales that present-day people have circulated about recreated structures and

599 Richardson, Possessions, (2003); King, Archaeology, Narrative and the Politics of the Past, (2012).
landscapes. Overall, the three groups illustrate that Virginians tell ghost stories to talk about the past, not necessarily to scare one another or even to recall themes of death and dying. Virginians’ historically themed ghost stories are most certainly more than “dark” tourism.

Virginia’s tradition of historical ghostlore continues today in private homes like Dot’s Edgewood and in museums like Ferry Plantation. Located in Virginia Beach, Ferry Plantation is a Federal-style home built by George McIntosh between 1830 and 1850. It sits on the Lynnhaven River, completely surrounded by massive new homes.

Originally, the home asserted its significance through the “Witch of Pungo,” Grace Sherwood, who was tried in the home and “ducked” in the nearby Lynnhaven River. But more recently, it has shaped its interpretation with ghosts. For good reason too—Ferry Plantation is surrounded by housing developments. The road to the museum winds through a neighborhood of twentieth-century homes, which grow larger and larger as one approaches the river, and the old plantation. The home sits diagonally and far back from the street on a strip of land framed by “McMansion” backyards. Rather than building the newer homes to fit the direction of the plantation, the housing developers created their own sense of how the landscape works and superimposed the new homes on top of the nineteenth century. Adding insult to injury, developers built a tennis court in what was once the plantation’s backyard, functionally destroying the home’s archeological record, and firmly asserting that the home and its history are unwelcomed burdens to the late-twentieth-century development.600

600Heather Moore, (Director of Ferry Plantation) in discussion with author on phone call, March 28, 2016.
The newer homes erased Ferry Plantation’s world and made it difficult for the home’s history to find a voice. The home’s struggle to assert its existence and significance in a sea of ticky-tacky facades makes its development of ghosts all the more appropriate.

Local volunteers began to notice strange things in the early 1990s while they were busy restoring the home. Beyond the creaky floorboards and strange smells, Ferry Plantation seemed to have a life of its own. Many of the interns reported having strange feelings and seeing ghosts in the house. Before the house museum opened, word was buzzing around the inner workings of the museum that Ferry Plantation was haunted. After it opened, the stories did not stop—even the most skeptical guests reported seeing paranormal figures and sounds. Just as W. A. R. Goodwin used ghosts to assert Williamsburg’s value and historical character, directors and volunteers at Ferry Plantation used ghosts to assert the presence of the past in an otherwise modern neighborhood.

The ghosts at Ferry Plantation are numerous and diverse. An African American freedman named Henry haunts an upstairs room. Charles F. McIntosh’s pregnant widow mournfully walks the house. A brokenhearted Civil War-era woman named Sally Walke despairingly looms near the windows. The ghost of one General Thomas H. Williamson paints landscapes in a spectral studio on the second floor. The home has a few ghost children too. There is a boy named Eric who fell to his death from a window, and the

601 Another plantation called Ferry Plantation, in South Carolina, faced a similar issue. The owner of the property had an easement put on the land to insure that suburban development would not destroy the historical landscape. See Kimberly Stevens, “Keeping Development from Devouring Plantations,” New York Times, (02, January 2005).
602 Mary Reid Barrow, “An Historical Revival After Years of Neglect,” The Virginia Beach Beacon (26, July 1996).
603 Heather Moore, (Director of Ferry Plantation) in discussion with author on phone call, March 28, 2016.
McIntosh sisters who lived and died in the home. Each of the ghosts represents a person who lived in the house and a narrative of the building’s use. The freedman highlights post–Civil War life in the home, the women and children speak to the time when the building was a family home, and McIntosh’s pregnant wife represents the home’s earliest days and the feeling of possibility that filled the Lynnhaven River home. Each ghost introduces a different narrative that docents can recall to engage guests and help them understand the home’s many histories.

The docents at the house museum make sure to associate each of the ghosts discovered at Ferry Plantation with a person who once lived at or visited the home. Each ghost’s historical context helps to legitimate the museum’s embrace of ghost hunting and reinforces the existence of a notable past at the house. To the outside observer, the area around the home looks very modern. The homes are all new, and there is very little left to remind anyone of the area’s long past. But the ghosts establish a presence of the past that exists even as the neighborhood changes.

No matter how many new homes are built around Ferry Plantation, the historical site continues to assert its presence by drawing in guests from outside of the community. Ferry Plantation battles with suburbia by hosting a weekly event called Friday Night Frights, a yearly event called The Stroll of Lost Souls, and occasional paranormal conferences. The events make the past hard to ignore. Friday Night Frights, in particular, infuses the nighttime neighborhood with scores of unfamiliar cars rumbling through the sleepy streets. The light from the museum projects visitors’ shadows on the high wooden

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605 Heather Moore, (Director of Ferry Plantation) in discussion with author on phone call, March 28, 2016.
fences that block the past from entering into the present day. People strolling around the plantation’s property, looking for evidence of the past and peeking eerily into the adjoining twentieth-century backyards and windows, make for tense evenings at home. The guests force homeowners to acknowledge the history lying under their backyards, swing sets, and suburban grills and just beyond their property lines.

The ghosts that haunt Ferry Plantation are both metaphorical and metaphysical. For skeptics, it is difficult to assert that Ferry Plantation is truly haunted or that ghosts are real, but what is real is the disruptive presence of people traveling to the plantation in search of a past that has been developed over and nearly erased.

To be sure, the metaphorical ghosts do not take away from the plantation’s uncanny feel. The home’s location is odd, and its neighbors’ darkened homes make it difficult to get a sense of bearing. The passionate testimonies from the museum’s volunteers and friends make the home seem special, like a secret key to the past. The museum’s staff and volunteers, not the ghosts, give the building its historical connection. Their knowledge of the home’s history, and their deeply personal and lovingly familiar accounts of hauntings, attest to the home’s power. The ghostly tales, creepy voice recordings, and unexplainable photos assert that it is the continued presence of the layered past that makes the plantation a truly unique place.

Belle Grove’s ghost stories do similar work but in a different environment. This plantation is not threatened by encroaching suburban sprawl, and it is not a museum. Rather, it is a plantation turned bed-and-breakfast in King George County. Belle Grove is distinctive for many reasons, the first being that there are two “Belle Grove” plantations in

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606 Heather Moore, (Director of Ferry Plantation) in discussion with author on phone call, March 28, 2016.
607 Heather Moore, (Director of Ferry Plantation) in discussion with author on phone call, March 28, 2016.
Virginia. One is a historical site and museum in Middletown and has no ghosts—even though it sits on a Civil War battlefield.\textsuperscript{608} The other, though, is a privately owned museum and bed-and-breakfast, and it is haunted.

For Belle Grove the house museum, ghosts are still a taboo topic. A representative affirmed that they do not “plan on adding any” ghost tours or events in the “near future.”\textsuperscript{609} Belle Grove the museum does not need ghosts to draw attention to their history. It was home of James Madison’s sister, Nelly Conway Madison, and it boasts wide recognition as a National Historic Landmark, a Virginia Historical Landmark, and a National Trust of Historic Preservation property.\textsuperscript{610} Highlighting the past is Belle Grove the museum’s main focus, and ghosts don’t offer much.

But Belle Grove the bed-and-breakfast needs its ghosts. Like its museum sister, Belle Grove Plantation in King George, it is a National Register and Virginia Landmark property. It was the birthplace of James Madison and his mother, and her father. As one of the Madison family properties, it is also the namesake of the Middletown property. During the Civil War, the old 1790s plantation home was a Union headquarters. After the war, the property was implicated in the hunt for John Wilkes Booth. It is safe to say that Belle Grove has plenty of history, but it is simply not well-known.

Today, the historical building and grounds are a bed-and-breakfast and events venue. The business is first, and history is second. But the history is still important. The owners recognize the home’s past through historically themed room names, special tours,

\textsuperscript{608} Phone call between author and representative at Belle Grove Plantation, March 28 2016.
\textsuperscript{609} Phone call between author and representative at Belle Grove Plantation, March 28 2016.
\textsuperscript{610} “Belle Grove History,” (2017), (accessed January 11, 2017) \url{http://bellegrove.org/about/history}. The historical site is in fact named after the King George plantation.
and community events. But as a business and not a museum, the house misses out on the kind of fawning attachment that historical house museums often receive.

Ghosts fill that gap; they help draw history fans to the site by reminding them that the past is alive and well. The owner of Belle Grove, Michelle Darnell, reasoned that because the plantation was “342 years old” and the home was over two hundred years old, she expected the property had “a few ghosts.” She sought to prove it by hosting a ghost-hunting event in 2013. Darnell invited psychic Lanie Crosby to come lead herself and a few groups of guests on a paranormal investigation of the property. Afterwards, Darnell was happy to announce that just as she suspected, none of the ghosts were “evil or malevolent.” She pointed out that the ghosts were “just people from Belle Grove Plantation’s past” who “loved” the plantation “so much” that they “chose not to leave.” For Darnell and the people who joined her that evening, the presence of spirits made sense and added a more permanent historical feel to the home. For later guests, the ghosts asserted that the property was truly as old as Darnell said it was and, most importantly, that its historical residents were still around.

Julia King pointed out that her Maryland historical sites used ghosts to shape their historical narratives. In many cases, this meant silencing narratives about race that made some people uncomfortable. For historical sites that have well-known pasts and historical

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613 Darnell, “Update on the Paranormal Ghost Hunts” (11, March 2013).
614 Darnell, “Update on the Paranormal Ghost Hunts” (11, March 2013).
615 Darnell, “Update on the Paranormal Ghost Hunts” (11, March 2013).
narratives, ghost stories and rumors of hauntings work well to shape a site’s identity and focus guests’ attention on a given story or event and away from others.

The neighboring plantations Sherwood Forest, Shirley, and Berkeley all use ghost stories to introduce their unique place-based histories to eager audiences. They present hauntings the same way that old-home biographers and folklorists had at the beginning of the century. But they differ in significant ways. Sherwood Forest and Shirley’s stories mirror the old-home biographers perfectly. Their ghosts highlight the homes’ deep family roots. Sherwood Forest’s ghost establishes the presence of a long, uncomplicated, loving past. Shirley’s wraith represents the original Hill-Carter family’s continued residence in the home. Berkeley’s ghost stories are different. They more mirror the folklore that layered history on top of history to showcase a diverse residence. The ghosts there illustrate the home’s long and varied history—the ghosts are as diverse as the narratives the museum claims.

Most of the plantation homes in Charles City claim a ghost or two. The James River area was a popular place for genteel Virginians to build their grand homes. The river made transportation easy and allowed other people to get a good view of the stately homes. The richness of plantations made the area an ideal spot to visit for the old-home biographers who collected the ghost stories from the homeowners. The numerous books ensured that the old traditions and ghost stories were preserved for years to come. As homeowners turned their private homes into semiprivate historical sites, they looked back at these reports and readopted the ghost stories to maintain their homes’ preferred historical narratives in a fun an attractive way.
In many of the old plantation homes, ghost stories speak to the longevity of a home’s human occupation. The “Grey Lady” at Sherwood Forest does that work and more.\footnote{“About Sherwood Forest,” \url{http://www.sherwoodforest.org/About_SF.html} (accessed January 2017).} Rather than just establishing the home as old, the ghosts there give the home a loving tone, which obscures the lingering plantation narrative of slavery by focusing on the dedicated work of a beloved white domestic servant.

Sherwood Forest was the birthplace of President John Tyler and was a Union camp during the Civil War. The house has had many owners for over two hundred years, and they have all come in contact with the “Grey Lady.” Her name is lost to time, but her ghost has been very much a part of people’s experience of the home. According to residents, she has haunted the home since the eighteenth century. Rather than representing one detailed narrative or event, she represents the emotional connection to the home that the multiple families who resided in Sherwood Forest shared.

Payne Tyler, a resident of the home, claimed that the ghost was a “governess” at Sherwood in the eighteenth century.\footnote{“Ghosts at Sherwood Forest Plantation” \url{http://www.sherwoodforest.org/Ghosts.html} (Accessed February 2017); Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983).} She said the specter would carry ghostly children up a service staircase to the second-story nursery and “rock the child back and forth” on an unseen rocking chair.\footnote{“Ghosts at Sherwood Forest Plantation”; Taylor, \textit{Ghosts of Williamsburg, Volume I} (1983).} To get more details about the ghost, Tyler invited a psychic to the house, and who observed that the “grey lady” stands at the top of the second-story staircase wearing a bland dress, an apron, and black shoes. The psychic followed the ghost as she moved through the house, and found her sorting clothes in front of a ghostly wardrobe.
“The grey lady” has no name and not much of a history. But there is some information hiding in the report. The homeowner chose to call the specter a “governess” and not a nanny or nurse. *Governess* suggests that the wraith was not only the children’s caretaker but their teacher as well. The distinctive title assumes the ghost was literate and indicates that the woman was white and not an African slave. This allows the homeowners to avoid talking about slavery and race. The specter’s clothing was not especially notable or grand because the governess was a domestic laborer, meant to blend into the home setting like a sturdy table. Her actions suggest a careful, attentive nature; she folds clothes and goes about her chores because she was a good worker. These subtle clues paint the image of someone dedicated to the family and the upkeep of the domestic space, so much so that after death she continued on at her post. Her unearthly love for the home spoke to the home’s emotional value—if even a person who labored in the house had great love for the place, then it must be special.

Shirley’s ghosts do similar work, but are much more familial. Rather than being servants, the ghosts who haunt Shirley are all related to the current residents. The ghosts don’t need to do much work in the way of controlling for a time period. The plantation is a beautiful Georgian-style mansion with redbrick walls and cream-colored two-story porticos on both sides of the house. The grey hipped roof features twelve dormers wrapped around the entire structure and a little pineapple on the very center of the roof, like the delicate handle to a sugar dish. Situated on a perfectly manicured lawn surrounded by equally lovely brick outbuildings, the home easily overshadows the new farm equipment and storage buildings to its right. Shirley grabs one’s attention and asserts that the
eighteenth century, and only the eighteenth century, is to be read from the landscape. The ghosts insist that the past is family.

The current residents of Shirley are descendants from the original Hill-Carter family who built the home. The family resides in the home's upper levels and basement. The ghosts and tourists have the run of the first floor. The ghost tours at Shirley are very similar to their regular tour. On the days that the home offers ghost tours, the guides give a rundown of the home’s history, its owners, and a who’s who of famous guests. The only difference is that the regular tour lacks ghosts.

The ghosts at Shirley assert the family’s long ownership of the home and their continued occupation of the home. The first and perhaps most famous wraith is, of course, Aunt Pratt. Marguerite DuPont Lee and L. B. Taylor wrote about Aunt Pratt in their books, and the story is still told today.620 Having been in the family for generations, the story has gained numerous new stories. In the contemporary iteration of the tale, the Hill-Carters, knowing their portrait is haunted, send it to New York to be a part of an exhibit on paranormal objects of the Old Dominion. When it was in New York, guests to the gallery reported that the portrait swung on the wall. One night, it swung so hard that Aunt Pratt knocked herself down off the wall. Unsurprisingly to the Hill-Carters, when the portrait fell it was pointed towards the door, as if Aunt Pratt had declared herself ready to leave.

Aunt Pratt did not have a remarkable life, but as a ghost, she drew her family’s name and their property back into the public eye. Her ghostly life far outstripped her living one and the lives of the numerous ghostly children that haunted Shirley Plantation. The vast majority of Shirley’s haunts are children. The house has been in the Carter family since the

seventeenth century, so many children have lived and died in it. Guests reported seeing children dressed in old-fashioned clothes peering over the stair rails, running out of sight, and generally sneaking about. Most people guess who the children are by their clothes. Some claim that past residents return to the home as children, even if they lived to old age, because it was in their youth that they enjoyed the home the most.

The tales of friendly family haunts illustrate the continued existence of not only the past but, specifically, past Hill-Carters. So many of the early founders lost family ties to their old land long ago, but not the Hill-Carters. Their ghosts demonstrate the same mixture of historical narrative and familial history that attracted generations of Virginians to plantations, and inspired their historical imaginations.

Finally, Berkeley uses its ghost stories a little differently. Rather than controlling their historical narrative to a select story or period of time, the ghosts at Berkeley show how diverse the home and land’s residents have been throughout the years. Berkeley’s curators recognized that they could use ghost stories to illustrate how multiple narratives of the past coexist. This helps them create a complex place-based identity, which is not limited to traditional family narratives or slavery but strives to recognize those narratives and more.

Originally called the Berkeley Hundred, the plantation on the James is one of the oldest in the nation.\(^{621}\) Benjamin Harrison IV built the home in 1726. It is a three-story Georgian brick home set on a hill overlooking the river. Throughout the years, Berkeley plantation was home to a number of firsts that make up a rather long list of curiosities for relatively unknown house. It was the site of the first Thanksgiving, in 1619, and the home

\(^{621}\) A “hundred” is an English division of land that was smaller than a “shire,” and can be compared to a “district.” In the colonies it was commonly added to the name of singular plantation or ownership of land.
of two nonconsecutive presidents—William Henry Harrison, the ninth president, and Benjamin Harrison, the twenty-third president. It was the site where Oliver W. Norton wrote the song “Taps” in 1862, and it was where bourbon was first distilled in the United States.

Berkeley’s ghost stories are much newer in style than Shirley’s or Sherwood Forest’s tales. The Harrison property boasts hauntings that fashionably focus on social history. Unlike some plantations sites in the United States, Berkeley’s tours, both ghost and not, include African American and Native American narratives. The home defines itself as a place with many narratives—including those of Native Americans. The oldest ghost tale the house claims came from a group identified as “Algonquians” who inhabited some parts of Virginia. This particular ghost story is the legend of the Wendigo. The Algonquians described the wraith as a demon spirit with a seemingly endless appetite who traveled around consuming people. Each person that the creature ate made it stronger and hungrier, and it threatened to wipe out whole civilizations. The Wendigo story became a popular metaphor for the voracious and greedy English who gobbled up land and murdered Native Americans.

The Wendigo story is a surprising twist in Virginia ghostlore. From the late nineteenth century up into the present day, Virginian ghostlore has usually focused on the white or African American characters. The Shirley and Sherwood Forest stories stuck to the traditional model that was presented in the old-home biographers’ books. But Berkeley brought the old-home biographers’ and folklorists’ work together. By incorporating the

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622 “Algonquian” describes a language group of Native Americans, it is possible that the docent wanted to imply the Powhatans, a Virginia Native American group.
Native American tale into its cache of ghostlore, Berkeley Plantation embraced Native American history as Virginian history.

Furthermore, Berkeley resisted the impulse to feature American ghostlore about Native American graveyards and curses and rather chose to embrace Native stories and understandings of the past. In recent years, ghost tours have been criticized for rehashing racist and bigoted narratives and denying oppressed people's agency. Tiya Miles pointed out that ghost stories often transform the abused African American slaves into demons. Likewise, Emilie Cameron and Renee Bergland pointed out that white ghostlore frequently silences Native voices by seeing the actual Native Americans, and their ghosts, as magical creatures. Berkeley plantation's Wendigo story distances the ghost tour from this critique. Sharing the Native story that was critical of European expansion into North America highlights the inhuman treatment Native Americans faced and their efforts to resist the oppression.

The stories don’t stop at Native Americans. Berkeley claims stories just as traditional as Shirley and Sherwood Forest too. Strange sounds and ghost sightings are common in the old home. A Confederate soldier emerged from the basement door once, asking for directions to Robert E. Lee’s encampment. The ghost of a small girl sits on a settee in the main hall. People had reported that the girl produced a small physical imprint on the fabric and eagerly asked the living if they wanted to play. In the sitting room, a mysterious force moved a candle on the mantel. The early-twentieth-century owner, Grace

Jamison, haunts the dining room. She was responsible for the home’s initial restoration. Like so many other owners, Jamison loved her old plantation house. After she died, guests began to see the ghost of an older woman in her housecoat and curlers walking through the dining room. The home security alarm would begin to wail when the tour guide spoke Grace’s name, and objects would move ever so slightly. It did not take long before the staff surmised that Grace Jamison had returned to the home to keep an eye on the continued restoration and curation.

Berkeley represents itself as a place with many narratives. From the first Thanksgiving to “Taps,” the home has a lot to say, and its ghost stories agree. They reflect the multiple narrative streams that the museum regularly curates. The ghosts provide evidence, albeit metaphysical, of the numerous stories. Rather than sounding contrived, as though the museum is trying to do too much, the ghost stories argue that the landscape is simply teeming with ghosts and to ignore one narrative would be a disservice to the home’s history.

One element uniting these tales and places is their relative innocence—the stories are not scary or meaningfully dark. Even the Windego lacks a spooky quality. Instead, it imagines Native Americans’ perception of European encroachment in the area. The ghost stories are not scary, in part, because the homeowners do not want their homes to appear uninviting. They want people to enjoy their visit and understand that the homes are special historical places. Hauntings illustrate the unique nature of old Virginia homes by insisting that the past continues to exist in the present day. That past is groomed and cleaned of any frightening element that might have existed in the past. The plantations use their ghost stories to assert a pleasant, not a sordid, past.
Finally, historical sites use ghost stories to assert the historical authenticity of their recreated structures. For newly reconstructed buildings, a ghost is the ultimate mark of authenticity and a job well done. If a ghost can’t tell the difference between its old no-longer-extant residence and the new recreation, then the restoration was truly a success. These stories blend together historical information and ghostlore to create an authority that is both rational and irrational and confirms the accuracy of recreations.

These kinds of ghost stories are limited; they only take place at historical sites that have restorations. Like the structures, the ghosts return to the landscape after careful research and expert construction. Ghosts act like the most fragile material objects. They only survive in perfect environments. They are so delicate that they can be destroyed by new interpretation or missed understanding. Like any other historical object, ghosts need to be carefully preserved. If the structure falls to ruin, if the home changes too much or, as Goodwin would argue, if the scene becomes too modern, the ghosts might not stay. In effect, the recreation of a historical site’s material world is what maintains the metaphysical and the emotional past. Beyond the theoretical arguments, the haunting’s ability to reinforce historical information is inherent in the haunted restorations.

People tell ghost stories about restored places to highlight the structure’s emotional authenticity—an attribute quite separate from categories like architectural validity or historical significance. Historical sites can create the look of an old building; their workers can research and find out the exact materials the original building had, procure them, and fabricate a structure identical to the one that used to exist. Museums like Colonial Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, and George Washington’s Ferry Farm justifiably pride themselves on their ability to research, locate, and reconstruct buildings to the highest
possible accuracy standard. But what often matters most to guests is if a place feels authentic. Americans travel to historical sites because they are real. They are not elaborately make-believe, quasi-historically informed, but obviously out-of-place sites like renaissance fairs in Wisconsin; they are the actual sites of real historical events. High-powered research is part of the appeal, but there is an emotional side as well. Realness produces an emotional response because places are thick with meaning and symbolism that recall ideas that are deeply meaningful in American discourse—ideas like freedom, equality, and democracy. A place that is not real and lacks authenticity can trick people for a while, but it will eventually make guests feel betrayed and dumb—feelings historical sites and museums work hard to avoid.

Ghosts help to avoid the suspicion that Americans have developed over the past thirty years by making the rational and irrational agree. Research, excavations, and curation can make a project pass scholarly muster, but ghosts make a site emotionally real.

Virginia is home to a many iconic public history sites, but foremost among these are Colonial Williamsburg and Mount Vernon. Both strive to bring the past back to life physically, sensually, and metaphysically and have long track records of success and influence. Both embraced archaeologically informed restorations early on, and both are deep in the business of reconstruction.

As strained as Colonial Williamsburg’s relationship with its ghosts has been, ghosts that haunt the reconstructions have a special value. The museum rests its claim to its authority on careful and attentive research—but ghostlore works in their favor as well.

Those who tell ghost stories at Williamsburg use Colonial Williamsburg’s historical narrative to confirm and rationalize the sightings. The ghosts who haunt Williamsburg all
lived or visited the city at one point in the past. They are usually specific historical
characters associated with the town’s promoted story, like George Wythe or the Marquis de
Lafayette, or they are representations of the city’s many tavern goers or craftspeople
associated the city’s reconstructed commerce.

The museum recently acknowledged the haunting rumors at the reconstructed
Brick House Tavern. The structure was an early restoration project from the 1930s and has
been used as one of the museum’s lodgings for years. A newly popular ghost story about
the structure’s sleeping quarters situates the past snuggling in right beside the present. The
story goes that two guests were woken up by a specter pulling their covers off and pressing
firmly on their shoulders—as if using their sleeping bodies to climb into the bed. A museum
employee wrote that the ghost story, though probably not true, nevertheless made some
sense. The original building was used as an “ordinary,” or hostel, in the eighteenth century.
People who traveled to the capital on business would pay the tavern keeper for meals and a
place to sleep. As with most eighteenth-century lodgings, guests at the ordinary had to
share beds. The author argued that the ghosts who woke the present-day guests were
simply looking for a spot to sleep in. This little sleight of hand turned ghost tale into
social-history lesson.

It also suggested that the restoration was done so well that the ghosts of eighteenth-
century people still sought it out for a night’s rest. At the tavern, the ghosts themselves
were impressed by the quality and authenticity of the museum’s scholars and skilled
builders—even if these experts did not credence ghost stories. It also suggested that guests

625 Rachel West, “Ghosts and Ghouls Haunt Williamsburg’s Colonial Houses,” Making History: Inspiration for
the Modern Revolutionary. (6, October 2015). http://makinghistorynow.com/2015/10/ghosts-and-ghouls-
626 West, “Ghosts and Ghouls Haunt Williamsburg’s Colonial Houses,” (6, October 2015).
who booked a room at the Brick House Tavern could have a distinct and unique sleeping experience, complete with eighteenth-century bedfellows—something only offered at this special space.

The Brick House Tavern is far from being the only haunted reconstruction. Each of the museum’s recreated taverns has a ghost unique to the building’s history. The Raleigh Tavern—the favorite gathering place of Thomas Jefferson, George Wythe, John Tyler, George Washington, and the rest—boasts a number of ghosts. In the eighteenth century, the main room of the tavern was used as a gathering place for Virginia’s Revolutionary insurgency. Guests have reported that they can hear the sounds of a party, the kind that the Founding Fathers no doubt took part in, raging on inside the darkened building. Some have heard sounds; others claim to have seen shadows dancing inside the rooms. Others say they can smell the distinct smell of tobacco, as if someone just lit a pipe. The ghosts who abide in this tavern are subtle and represent high-cultured good times and long night debates.

The Blue Bell Tavern, the city’s bawdiest tavern, is home to “the barrel man.” It was the cheapest, least elegant of tavern in town. Eighteenth-century guests could guarantee a bad nights’ sleep with the kind of bugs and diseases that would follow them home to their own beds. Colonial Williamsburg employees have seen a specter wearing “soiled” colonial-era clothes and pushing a “hogshead,” or around seventy-nine gallons of alcohol, through the tavern at night. His soiled clothes and the large quantity of liquor confirm that the inn’s seedy reputation is alive and well.

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These tavern ghost stories are testimonies that the recreations held on to crucial characteristics and characters of their pasts and could provide guests with authentic experiences. The Brick House Tavern has its sleeping ghosts, the Raleigh has its partyers and late-night tobacco smoke, and the Blue Bell has its grubby bartender. The stories show that the reconstructions not only look exactly like the originals but that they feel exactly like they did in the eighteenth century. Feeling and smell are important for recreating the colonial world. The museum is more lenient with these types of stories because they work well to assert the buildings’ historical merit and create a more emotional sense of historical place.

These types of ghosts are not exclusive to recreated taverns. The Governor’s Palace, the city’s jewel, is a recreation, and it too is haunted. Like the taverns, the palace is the product of careful archaeological and historical research. It shows on a large scale what the Foundation’s archaeologists, historians, and architects were capable of creating. It is no surprise that a building that took so much work to recreate has earned a few authenticating ghosts.

The ghost stories about the palace are usually traced back to the Foundation’s early excavations. During the 1930s, archaeologists discovered human remains buried in the palace garden—not just any human remains, but those of Revolutionary-era soldiers and nurses from when the area served as a hospital. When people died or lost limbs, the living would bury them nearby where it was most convenient. Those who died of blood loss, infection, and other bodily traumas were buried in the garden.

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Today, guests and workers still report seeing lights flicker and figures walking by the palace windows—even when the building is locked up for the evening. Theories suggest that the figures are the ghosts of two female nurses who lost their lives and were buried among the soldiers. They keep the lights on and move around the building, hoping to comfort those still suffering.

Colonial Williamsburg once made its name on innovative archaeology and restoration efforts, but these days, the ground is thick with institutions and sites using the Williamsburg model. Mount Vernon is one of the few that is as influential and prestigious as Colonial Williamsburg. Its venerability and long history of excavations and restoration make it a standout. One of the newest and most haunted structures on the property is the Grist Mill on Doeg Creek.

In the 1930s, the Commonwealth of Virginia bought the land that Washington’s Grist Mill once occupied. The area was just outside of the Mount Vernon historical site’s property and was not marked or noted. The local government paid for an archaeological excavation to find the sites and the eventual reconstruction of a working mill on the old foundations.632 When the reconstructed mill opened to visitors, people began reporting seeing the ghost of George Washington lurking around the mill and on the landscape. A curator at the Grist Mill reported that one night after the mill was tightly locked up, the specter took a papier-mâché statue of the general up a flight of stairs. Upon further investigation, the curator said the mill showed no sign of break-in; the only explanation for the statue’s move had to be a ghost. A curator of the mill explained that Washington’s ghost haunted the recreated

building because this was where he had caught the respiratory infection that ended his life. The mill, therefore, was responsible for curtailing his unfinished work—hence, his return to the site. The curator suggested that the mill’s convincing recreation persuaded the ghost to appear. Both at Mount Vernon’s mill and in Williamsburg, hauntings were the ultimate sign of a reconstruction done right: the work was so good that even the ghosts had to come to it.

Recreating past places requires careful planning and consideration of all the human senses. A site needs to smell like the past, look like the past, and sound like the past. The senses come together to tell guests that they are someplace new—someplace that they need to pay special attention to. Ghosts work in conjunction with the other five senses. Material objects can only make a place feel historical to a certain point. To make the site emotionally compelling, guests need to believe that the recreation is the past. Ghost stories offer guests powerful emotional evidence that confirms what they perceive to be, and what curation presents as, the past.

Importantly, ghost stories do not present challenging or new historical information—they do not so much add to historical knowledge as much as they confirm a place’s legitimacy as being historical. Dark tourism, as Stone described it, depends on unknown mysteries and abrupt visions of death and dying. The ghost stories told at most Virginian plantations are conventionally historical and anecdotal. They do not leave questions hanging, and they do not present anything that fundamentally challenges their guests. They may be grim, but they are always simply confirming rather than disruptive.

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The historical information is important: it distinguishes ghost tours from ghost hunts. The tours make the past more engaging; the hunts depend on mystery to produce a sense of discovery and excitement. At the historical house museums, this distinction is pretty clear. Curators and docents at historical sites like Stratford Hall, Ferry Plantation, Shirley Plantation, Long Branch Plantation, Lynn Haven House, Endview Plantation, Berkeley Plantation, Centre Hill Museum, and Magnolia Grange will be the first to announce that their ghost stories are drawn from the reports left by their historical residents or by L. B. Taylor. The house museums have a legacy of providing historical tours that most guests, even on the ghost tours, understand.

But guests do not apply the same assumption to the ghost tours in Virginia’s historical downtowns. Like the tours at historical homes, the downtown ghost tours are overtly historically themed and seek to reinforce place-based historical character. Many, if not all, draw heavily on L. B. Taylor’s books and speak more about historical events and people than they do about the science or elements behind hauntings.

Guests on tours across the state left their assessments of the tours’ value and theme on tripadvisor.com, an online vacation review site. One guest on The Original Ghosts of Williamsburg Candlelight Tour called the expedition “interesting” and historical. He said he was relieved that the guide did not “pretend to summon ghosts.” The vast majority of downtown tours across the state do not seek to “summon ghosts,” but rather, they provide what Ali W. of Pennsylvania described as a “family friendly” opportunity to “learn a little bit

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635 Bob666, (22, July 2016).
of history” in a “fun sort of way.”636 Samantha C went on a tour in Alexandria and said the guide provided the perfect mixture of “history and folklore as well as ghostly tales.”637 Kelli O. said the tour was “step back in time.”638 “History and legend” collided when the guide recounted “facts and fiction.”639 Willis, a teacher from Brewton New York, said the tour touched on the “origin” of Alexandria, architecture, politics, the Civil War, and more.640 Page H. went to the Eerie Night Ghost Tour in Richmond and said if someone does not believe in the “paranormal,” they would surely enjoy “true, historic facts” about the city of Richmond.641 In Fredericksburg, one guest said the tour was “spooky enough for the kids” and a good opportunity to learn about “some of the history” in the city.642

But not everyone understood the distinction between ghost tours and ghost hunt. Sarah M. of Sutton, West Virginia took the Original Ghosts of Williamsburg tour and had a far different experience of the ghost tours. Sarah was initially excited about the tour “as an experienced ghost hunter,” but once she and her party arrived, she “immediately” knew that booking the tour was a “mistake.”643 Sarah found that rather than a ghost hunter, the

643 Sarah M. “Save Your Money” TripAdvisor (12, August 2015) https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g58313-d1122733-r298276144-
tour guide was “more of an actor” who was “just telling stories.” She left the tour early. Melissa F. of Williamsburg had a similarly bad time. She, her sister, and her husband found the tour “underwhelming” and “anticlimactic.” She said the Williamsburg tour guide “spent very little time talking about ghosts” and spent too much time feeding them “incredibly dry facts” about historical architecture. Another guest said she had “such high hopes for the tour” but found that it was “just a historical tour” with “some ghost stories thrown in.” Alissa L. of Raleigh, North Carolina said that the tour gave good “historical information” about Williamsburg, but she felt it was “false advertising” to claim it was a ghost tour. Jon was disappointed with his tour of Alexandria because the route “was identical to the historical tour.” A woman from Florida wrote that a lot of the information was “interesting” but would have been “better on a historical tour.” She said the tour lacked the “ghostly encounters” she was “hungry for.”


644 Sarah M. “Save Your Money” (12, August 2015)
646 Melissa F. “so boring we left before the end.” (31, July 2012)
647 Melissa F. “so boring we left before the end.” (31, July 2012)
Guests experienced the ghost tours differently. But they all acknowledged the tours’ historical theme and that the tours were not particularly scary. For some, the historical information was great and exactly what they were looking for; for others, it was horribly boring and not worth their time.

Rather than providing guests with ghostly encounters to scare or frighten them, the downtown tours reinforced the city’s historical narratives. The Williamsburg tours spoke about colonial politics and genteel ladies. The Richmond tour touched on slavery, crime, and other issues of life in a Southern colonial-era city—these more contemporary ghost tours confirm more contemporary histories. Alexandria’s tour brought together the colonial and the present day to illustrate the city’s longevity. Fredericksburg’s tours illustrated how colonial-era and Civil War histories add complexity to the still living city.

Some guests might have expected much spookier tours, but places that identify as historical tend to provide experiences that reinforce that claim. For many places, like Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom African American Grave Yard, Alexandria’s Slave Jail, or Fredericksburg’s battlefields, a ghost hunt would be in bad taste without historical context.

A lack of understanding and mystery is key to ghost hunts. Guests on those tours seek to find out information that was previously unknown—specifically the presence of ghosts. This can later produce historical research and understanding, as was the case for Dot and Edgewood. But for many guests, the tour was the beginning and end of their historical exploration. The guests’ lack of historical information perpetuates an idea of historical silences and transforms the suffering of past peoples into amusements for today.

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652 The reviews I chose to include in this dissertation represent the most typical reviews, and those with the most easily transferable language. Some of the reviews were not as clear, or well written as the ones included here.
For instance, a hunt in Alexandria’s Slave Jail, with the best intentions, must first pretend that the details of African American imprisonment are unobtainable. This would make hearing or seeing the ghosts of those who once suffered necessary for understanding the site. Without that kind of mental gymnastics, the hunt would simply allow guests to revel in the continued presence of agony and be the kind of “dark tourism” that Stone described.

Historical context keeps the tours within the realm of education and a safe distance away from insensitively suggesting an unknown past. The difference between the two gives managers of many historical sites pause when deciding to include ghost tours and events in their seasonal or general interpretive offerings. Directors, curators, and docents at many historical sites are still largely uncomfortable with ghostlore, even when their sites were featured in L. B. Taylor’s books or earlier home biographies. When reached for questioning about ghostlore events and interpretations, a spokesperson at Ash Lawn-Highland, James Monroe’s house near Charlottesville, said that they were "not sure that” ghostlore was "an interpretative direction we'd want to move in." Representatives at Belle Grove Plantation simply said they did not have ghosts and did “not plan on adding any the near future.” Andrew Berry at Kenmore in Fredericksburg said that ghosts were “not something” they “thought much about.” The potential to be seen as dilatory or foolish still keeps some historical sites nervous about ghosts.

Virginia’s ghost stories transcend the limitations that Phillip Stone’s notion of dark tourism created—there is far more here than simply reveling in the dark. They have been a part of how Virginians have understood the value of historical place for over a hundred
years. The Old Dominion’s ghosts are not frightening wraiths bent on vengeance against the world; they are visions of the past in the present. They are what makes historical places unique and valuable. Ghosts do the hard work of establishing the presence of the past, maintaining historical narratives of place, and affirming the accuracy of restoration-and-recreation efforts. There are many other elements that do the same work, but ghosts do it in a way that is attractive to the public and speaks to their need to connect with something bigger than themselves on a personal and emotional level.

Virginians cannot separate their history from their ghostlore, and they cannot fully separate their ghostlore from their history.

In October 2015, *Virginia Living* featured an article called “In the Midnight Hour,” in which author Alan Pell Crawford interviewed a series of Virginians who lived, or had lived, in the commonwealth’s aging and haunted mansions. Crawford spoke with prominent and respected Virginians like the commonwealth’s secretary of education Ann Holton, and little-known but well-connected Virginians like President John Tyler’s granddaughter-in-law, Payne Tyler. Like so many writers before him, he found that Virginians took “a certain pride in the lore of their properties.”656 Crawford clarified that the family who owned Tuckahoe were as proud of their home’s historical ghost as they were of their home having hosted illustrious guests like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Monroe. The owners reported that they heard eighteenth-century spirits having a “good time” on

656 Alan Pell Crawford, “In the Midnight Hour,” *Virginia Living* (October, 2015).
the home’s ground floor at night. Crawford suspected that ghosts occupied Virginia homes, like Tuckahoe, because the plantations still appealed to them. As “spectral visitors,” he explained, Virginia’s good and great ancestors could forever enjoy their parties in the lovely old plantations they’d built, while “someone else” paid for the “upkeep.”

In October 2016, the Virginia-Pilot’s Joanne Kimberlin had a similar announcement. Just in time for the Halloween season, Kimberlin reported that no city had “as many” ghosts as Colonial Williamsburg. She interviewed a local man and ghost-tour guide, Tim Scullion. He swore that over the past decade he’d captured numerous ghosts on film while walking Duke of Gloucester Street at night. Scullion’s photos featured blurry-faced wraiths in windows and fully formed apparitions “mingling with costumed re-enactors.” Though he could not “square” his traditional Methodist beliefs with what he’d captured on film, he assured Kimberlin that the images were real. Kimberlin added that “if any place” in Virginia was haunted, it was “probably Colonial Williamsburg.” “300 years of concentrated living and dying,” she said, ensured the area had plenty of potential haunts.

It is no coincidence that Virginians claim that the commonwealth is both haunted and historical. Both assertions acknowledge the past and seek to recognize how it functions in the present day. Both the haunted and the historical define specific places as unique.

Place is important for Americans seeking to add dimension and meaning to their lives. Rosenzweig and Thelen called this the “presence of the past” and argued it was an

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657 Crawford, “In the Midnight Hour,” (October, 2015).
658 Crawford, “In the Midnight Hour,” (October, 2015).
essential part of how Americans understood and related to the past.\textsuperscript{664} David Glassberg added that Americans depended on “environmental features” and material objects to situate themselves in relation to the past.\textsuperscript{665} He asserted that people needed the physical objects like buildings to understand the presence of the past. He wrote that materials were important because the United States was a “land without ghosts.”\textsuperscript{666}

In the past two decades of the new millennium, tour groups and Virginians alike have challenged Glassberg’s assessment. Physical structures remain an important feature of historical landscapes, but the United States is very much a land with ghosts. The stories and rumors that people tell one another supplement and add to historical structures’ significance while offering intangible, but none-the-less place-based, evidence of the past’s presence.

Three hundred years of US history have filled Virginia with ghosts. Virginians from the Appalachian Mountains to the Tidewater have asserted that past residents haunt the Old Dominion’s historical sites since the nineteenth century. Ghostlore is a part of how Virginians understand historical place. Far from being “ghostless,” the commonwealth depends on the idea that past people linger in place to create their historical identity, make sense of place, and argue for historical preservation. Their ghostlore situates historical characters and past events in present-day landscapes. The sites of shopping centers, new suburbs, or defunct farmland are rich with history because the ghosts of the Old Dominion still claim the area. The stories Virginians tell about wraiths and spirits shrink the passage

\textsuperscript{664} Rosenzweig and Thelen. The Presence of the Past. (2000).
\textsuperscript{665} Glassberg, Sense of History, (2001), 124.
\textsuperscript{666} Glassberg, Sense of History, (2001), 124.
of time and insist that the past is alive and well. These tales make old homes and sites the connective tissue that binds people across time together.

Scholars of Virginia’s many house museums, historical sites, and preservation efforts have overlooked the ghostlore’s role creating historical sites in the commonwealth. Despite scholars’ ignorance, Virginians have used hauntings to talk about the past for generations. By the time that old-home biographers came calling at old Virginia mansions, ghost stories were already a common object of discussion in historical homes. The stories that made their way into the books took on added significance by teaching a broader audience to recognize the value of historical places and inspiring readers to preserve some of the commonwealth’s most beloved and honored historical sites. Far from being a challenge to history, or completely out of line with what professional historians and public historians have studied, ghost stories have been central to creating the uniquely Virginian vision of the past. Those going on ghost tours and reading ghostlore collections today are taking part in a long tradition of historical haunts.

Virginians used ghost stories to talk about the history they knew to exist at their homes or sites as far back as the nineteenth century. The tales they shared showcased the storytellers’ personal knowledge of, and familiarity with, historical characters and events. With good humor and an eye for history, storytellers incorporated the past into their present-day lives and offered everyone who visited Virginia’s hallowed places the opportunity to experience the past firsthand.

This dissertation has shown how Virginians used ghost stories and rumors of hauntings to talk about the historical value of certain places. It has shown how writers and researchers traveled across the Old Dominion, collected these stories, and made them more
accessible through publication and formal reports. From there, founders of historical sites, most famously W. A. R. Goodwin, used the tradition of ghostlore to illustrate old sites’ intrinsic historical value. When professional university-trained museum employees were confronted with ghost stories, they saw the tales as simply incorrect and not worthy of further consideration. It was not until the mid-1990s, when L. B. Taylor wrote his *Ghosts of Virginia* volumes and the broader national culture began to embrace ghosts in entertainment and religion, that museum professionals in Virginia adopted the uncanny in the form of “first person” interpretation. Like the traditional ghost stories, the interpreters sought to use the idea that historical sites were still occupied by past residents to bring twentieth-century and twenty-first-century guests emotionally closer to the place-based past. Today, more and more historical sites and preserved downtowns are embracing formal ghost tours as a way to reach new audiences and illustrate the staying power of their historical characters and narratives. Together, the stories, books, and tours illustrate that the uncanny is common in Virginia and a central part of Virginia’s continued identity as the Old Dominion.
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