

## Ghosts of Christmas past- Ghost Hunters visits Christmas Farm Inn in Jackson for TV show to air Dec. 8

from the Conway Daily Sun by Tom Eastman

Being a veteran bartender, you could say that Bruce Campbell of Jackson knows a thing or two about spirits — but there was no way he could have been prepared for the ghostly apparition that he saw one night while working at the Christmas Farm Inn.

"It was back in 1994 or 1995," relates Campbell, a local carpenter and a former fixture at the recently purchased landmark inn, "and although other people had said they had seen or heard things over the years, until that night, I never had."

He said it was about 11 p.m., and all was quiet when he looked over toward the kitchen. "I looked to my right," said Campbell, a low-key, mustachioed, lanky, look-alike of a young Albert Einstein, "and I saw a ghostly looking female going up some non-existent stairs. Strangely enough, it did not ruffle my feathers at all. Sure, it was weird, but I remember thinking, 'Oh. Look. There's a ghost.' But that was about it."

Now, Campbell's story and other scary tales told by such former Christmas Farm Inn employees as Barbara Theriault and former owner Sydna Zelif will be shared Dec. 8 at 9 p.m. with over 3 million viewers of the hit TV program "Ghost Hunters."



In a "Ghosts of Christmas Past," Dickensian tale for the holiday season, the show will air as the six-year-old program's first-ever Christmas special, according to new Christmas Farm Inn innkeepers Gary and Sandra Plourdes, who earlier this month hosted producer Jim Dugan and his team of "celebrity" investigators (Jason Hawes, Grant Wilson, Steve Gonzalves and Dave Tango).

The investigative and technical team, which includes members of the Atlantic Paranormal Society, known as TAPS, investigated customer and staff reports of paranormal activity on the 15-acre Christmas Farm Inn estate in Jackson. The team interviewed nine current and former employees, and a Jackson historian for their upcoming show.



Using night vision infra red cameras and high tech monitoring equipment, the Ghost Hunters worked to either confirm or debunk stories of ghostly visits at the historic Christmas Farm Inn and Spa. Their investigation covered "hot spots" of activity in the front lounge, restaurant, kitchen and second floor of the Main Inn building, as well as the spa, fireplace lounge and a bedroom suite situated in the Carriage House.

The episode will also be syndicated globally on cable and satellite TV channels in 171 countries. Dugan, the program's producer, said it will make for a "great show," based on their findings and their research.

"We were looking for a Christmas story," said Dugan, "and although I am not sure how our producers in Los Angeles first heard of it, when we were given the go, we acted quickly. This has all the history — whenever you can be in a place that has hundreds of years of history, there's a good chance that you are going to have hundreds of years of activity, so it's a good place to start. There are all sorts of stories at the Christmas Farm Inn, as there appear to be some real stubborn ghosts here, and this will make for an interesting episode, for sure." The crew also filmed extensively in nearby surroundings, Dugan said.

"New England is good, because of its history. We shot in Jackson as well as Conway," said Dugan, who would not say whether his crew got anything on film of the paranormal kind.

"You'll have to watch the show!" he teased.

The Christmas Farm Inn and Spa is a 41-room resort that is comprised of the Main Inn (circa. 1786), the Salt Box (circa. 1778), function barn (circa. 1786), seven hand-crafted cottages and 12 Carriage House suites, a spa, indoor heated pool and fitness center and outdoor pool.

The inn also comprises the old Freewill Baptist Church that was moved from Wilson Road to the site. Campbell says the inn has undergone many renovations over the years, and that there may have once been a stairwell leading up where the bar is now located — hence his vision of the lady in old-fashioned clothing heading up a now non-existent stairwell.

"They built an addition between the farmhouse and the meeting house, and that's where the lounge is now located," said Campbell. The inn has been recognized in the Select Registry of Distinguished Inns of North America and listed in the Top 100 Inns of America and Historic Inns of America. It has operated as an inn since the 1880s and as the Christmas Farm Inn since 1946.

Dugan said the crew brought along a researcher, who interviewed people at the old Town Hall in Jackson. Among those interviewed in addition to Campbell, Theriault, and Zelif was housekeeper Tammy Ouellette and Jackson historian Alice Pepper.



Whether he is himself a believer, Dugan said it doesn't really matter: his job is to make every show entertaining. "I am probably the biggest skeptic you ever met in your life — a ghost would probably have to slap me in the face!" said Dugan. "I am in charge of making every show entertaining." Dugan noted that all of the "Ghost Hunters" shows have a similar format of investigating, debunking what can be explained, and then leaving the story of what cannot be explained up to the viewers.

"What works for a show versus telling ghost stories around a campfire is a different type of thing," said Dugan. "We like to have really good evidence, and we look for good visuals and good audio. There are also intelligent sightings, say, of interacting with a ghost, and then there are residual sightings, when you see or hear a ghost of a horse galloping down a street every night at 10. So, that is what our team looks for." It all makes for a lot of fun.

"They check for electromagnetic fields, loose floorboards, drafts ... They really look at rational explanations, rather than saying it's all paranormal activity," said Dugan. Likewise, innkeepers Gary and Sandra remain not exactly skeptical, but have not seen anything themselves.

"I've never seen a ghost," said Gary, "and I suspect I never will in my lifetime but I remain open to the idea. Bruce [Campbell] and Barbara [Theriault] are both not silly people, and their experiences are similar in what they say they saw, so I don't discount any of it."

He and Sandra are waiting to see what kind of an impact the show's airing will have on the inn's business.



"I think it's important to note that none of the people who have experienced something at the inn say it's not sinister; people feel comfortable with what they have experienced," said Gary. "We await seeing the show Dec. 8 to see what they have found, and what they have debunked, as we have no idea. But it was exciting having them here. They sought us out, and hopefully it will be good publicity for the inn." Dugan says the show has its devotees of wanna-be "Ghost Hunters," and that the broadcast no doubt will boost business.

"There are people who are diehard ghost enthusiasts, and they plan their vacations around going to places that have had sightings. They are a strong cult, and the show has a huge following," said Dugan.

Whether ghost enthusiasts will see "Ghosts of Christmas Past," or other apparitions at the inn or on the television show, remains to be seen. But Grant Wilson of TAPS says it ought to be a boon.

"This is the first time that 'Ghost Hunters' will air a Christmas special. We are excited by what we have found at the Christmas Farm Inn and know it will be an excellent show." Tune in on Dec. 8 for all the exciting action on "Ghosts of Christmas Past."

Who you gonna call? Ghost Hunters! Or, maybe, Ebenezer Scrooge and Jacob Marley .....