Do Ghosts Prowl Destrehan Manor?

DESTREHAN, La. (AP) — Three women who don’t believe in ghosts say that a tall, thin man dressed in black has been mysteriously appearing and disappearing at 193-year-old Destrehan Manor.

“This isn’t a hoax,” insisted Ann Little, administrator for the past five years at the elegant plantation about 15 miles up the Mississippi River from New Orleans.

Carol Schenxnyder, assistant administrator, and Maxine Roberts, manager of the gift house, said they recently saw the apparition.

“I was walking from the gift shop to my office,” said Mrs. Schenxnyder. “As I passed a window, I saw he wanted to come in, but when I opened the door to invite him in, he had disappeared.”

The two-story manor house has broad galleries and stately columns and is the centerpiece of an old plantation surrounded by a wrought iron fence — the sort of place you’d expect to see a ghost, particularly around Halloween.

Mrs. Schenxnyder said she saw the man about two hours later.

“Again, I was walking back from the gift shop,” she recalled. “I saw the same man again, through the window at the front door. This time I ran and looked out the door. There wasn’t anyone there. He was the same man wearing those black clothes.”

“She came into the office trembling,” said Mrs. Little.

Mrs. Roberts said her experience was equally disturbing.

“I saw him late in the afternoon, at closing time,” she said. “I peeked out of the window of the gift shop to see if the gates were locked, and they were. So I came across to the office and I saw a man in dark clothes outside the window. When I got to the door, no one was there.”

“It gave me goose bumps,” said Mrs. Roberts.

“What we must understand is that all of these things have been seen by peope who don’t really believe in ghosts,” said Mrs. Little.

“Sure, we have a lot of reports of ghosts and eerie presences, but most of them come from people who come here with the idea that ghosts do really exist. I don’t put a lot of faith in those kind of sightings. But the people who work here don’t generally believe in ghosts, so their sightings have us puzzled.”

Mrs. Little said, however, that other experiences reported by workmen and tourists are often fascinating.

She recalled once that painters were working, late and alone, some years ago in an upstairs room and clearly heard footsteps in an adjoining room. When they investigated, no one was there.

And years after that, Mrs. Little recalled, a woman visitor interested in Jean Lafitte legends looked up a fireplace and dared the legendary pirate to come out. A friend photographed the visitor and, when the film was developed, the ghostly face of a man looked out from a nearby mirror.

Then, she said, there was the movie crew that recently shot scenes at Destrehan Manor for a film about the life of voodoo queen Marie Laveau. The crew left behind a black cat.

“The cat was acting rather strangely all day a couple of weeks ago,” said Mrs. Little. “She was prowling around the house, hissing at something. She wouldn’t keep still.”

“Later that afternoon, I saw the darkly clothed man on the front porch. It was after closing time and the gates had already been locked, so I went to the door to investigate. When I opened the door, no one was there.”

And the cat has never been seen since.