

Leading a Heritage Tour

Heritage tours led by a knowledgeable individual are popular ways to educate a select group about local history, while at the same time providing the kind of interesting, unusual and unexpected observations and insights into a community's past that make history come alive.

Popular types of tours include:

- Bus tours
- Guided walking tours
- Wagon-ride tours
- Cemetery tours

Some things to keep in mind if you develop these useful heritage engagement tools:

- You need to know your stuff, to be able to answer all kinds of questions. Read up as much as you can. Make notes and turn those notes into cue cards. Use these on the tour.
- Because tours are often about buildings, you need to be able to point out various aspects, features and details. People love the arcane terminology that often accompanies historic architectural styles. Refer to the *Glossary of Architectural Terms* on the Heritage Manitoba website (heritagemanitoba.ca) under *Tell the Story/Guides and How-tos*.
- If you are doing a cemetery tour, consider using the *Guide to Funerary Art* on the Heritage Manitoba website (heritagemanitoba.ca) under *Tell the Story/Guides and How-to*. It provides information on gravemarker types and funerary symbolism, both important aspects of historic cemeteries.
- Rehearse.
- Don't make things up – if you don't know, say so. Ask if anyone else knows the answer.
- Besides the solid facts and claims for certain subjects, you also need to brush up on some obscure or entertaining anecdotes that will make the tour more exciting – crimes, ghosts, scandal. But be careful that none of this is offensive or would reflect badly on the community, or on present members of the community.
- The types of tours are different enough that you should consider slightly different approaches. Walking tours and cemetery tours allow the most freedom in terms of engagement with an audience, and for digressions about certain issues and facts – but remember that you have a certain goals and that others on the tour may not be

so interested in these details. Bus tours are also fairly flexible in terms of interaction, but there is a certain formality about those venues, and also an expectation that the guide will be an expert and that viewers are there to listen – it is common to hold questions to a break or to the end of the tour. Wagon-ride tours allow little opportunity for interaction, and thus should be tightly controlled regarding tangential issues.

- It is also advisable to consider the needs of different types of audiences – essentially youth versus adults. Young people will have shorter attention spans and fewer questions, so adjust expectations and timing to accommodate that fact. At the same time, think of overall fun questions that can help better engage them in the subject. Adults will be more interested and likely have more questions, so be as prepared as you can – where a useful question cannot be answered, follow up to get the information so the question can be answered another time.

