

PRISON MUSEUM POST

The Official Newsletter of the Burlington County Prison Museum Association
Incorporated in 1966

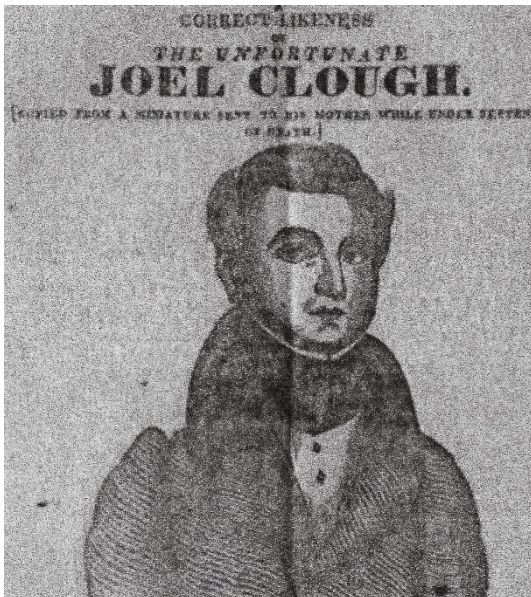
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WHO'S BURIED IN GRANT'S TOMB?

Our older members will remember the brilliant comedian Groucho Marx, whose game show, *You Bet Your Life*, was a television staple in the 1950s. Many of us grew up watching the reruns in the 1960s. Groucho would interview the contestants, and if during the interview they said a pre-determined "magic word", a rubber duck that looked like Groucho would be lowered from the ceiling and they would win \$100.



Not wanting anyone to go away empty-handed, Groucho would give those hapless contestants who failed to utter the word a chance to win a small prize if they could answer an easy question - *Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?**

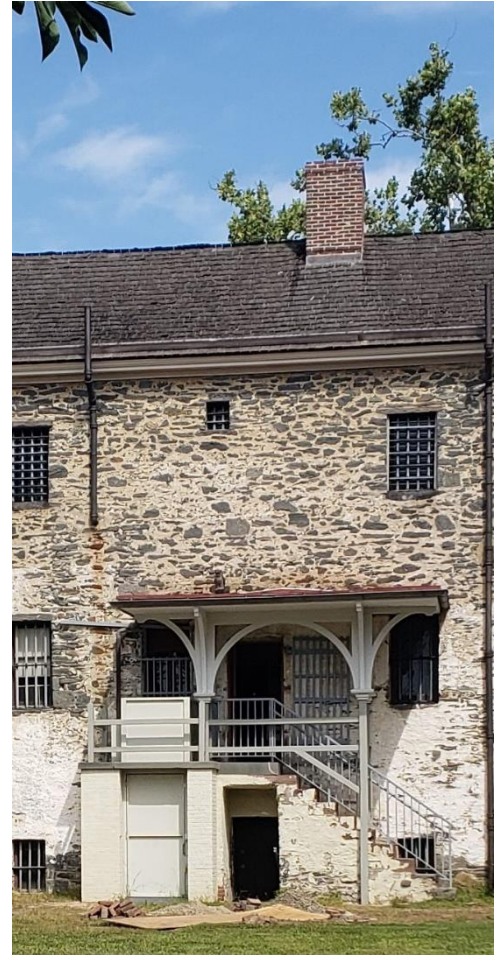


Prison Museum enthusiasts, especially those interested in all things paranormal, also spend a lot of time thinking about where people are buried, especially those who were executed. None are discussed more than Joel Clough, hanged for the murder of Mary Hamilton.

Clough had been a boarder in her mother's boarding house in Bordentown. He stabbed her to death there on April 6, 1833 when she spurned his advances.

*Sticklers like to point out that Grant's Tomb in Manhattan, the final resting place of President Ulysses Grant and his wife, Julia, is actually a mausoleum. Since their bodies are placed in above-ground sarcophagi, no one is actually "buried" in Grant's Tomb.

The case was sensationalized in all the papers up and down the eastern seaboard (all of the country at that time). There was plenty to write about. Only 28 years old, Clough was already well-known as a flamboyant dandy. He had a good job and was well-liked. He and the victim had been on friendly terms, and they had even exchanged Christmas gifts -- she had given him her late husband's dagger (which proved to be a big mistake). Several people were home when the murder occurred. The victim was autopsied in the living room before her body was removed. Clough attempted suicide while being held in the house awaiting the arrival of the sheriff. Hundreds attended the trial and wept when the victim's bloody corset was displayed. Clough appeared in court in a velvet outfit and white gloves. The trial was long, with many witnesses and arguments over hearsay testimony and the insanity defense. The summations took six hours. While awaiting execution, he escaped from the jail (allegedly from the tiny window pictured on the right) and was captured and returned. *



Public interest was still great at the time of his hanging on July 26, 1833. Thousands came to view the execution, which took place in a Hainesport meadow. The spectacle led to a Pennsylvania law passed in 1834 outlawing public execution. A similar law followed in New Jersey in 1835.

Not surprisingly, Clough became legendary. Within 50 years, stories circulated that his remains had been buried in the Exercise Yard in the rear of the jail, and that his ghost haunted the dungeon (the holding cell on the top floor, with the tiny window pictured above).

*We have written extensively about the case in past issues, which are archived on our website - www.prisonmuseum.net -- under "Resources". You can type "Clough" into the search box. The trial is discussed in Issues 070214 and 110314. Issue 101518 deals with the escape.

THE STORY OF EDWARD GROOM

Over the last 30 years, we have tried to find out whether or not Clough was actually buried in the Exercise Yard. We have combed through every account of the execution available, finding only one reference to the burial. In that account, it was briefly mentioned that the body was buried "near the Court House wall". Nowhere is a burial in the prison yard reported.

We have always had mixed feelings about discovering Clough's actual resting place. We feared that if we found that it isn't in the Exercise Yard, many paranormal enthusiasts who detect activity there might be disappointed. Prison Museum attendant Kyle Stickles recently found some evidence indicating that the body is not in fact there, but this same evidence also shows that if there was ever a restless, active spirit, it would be Clough's.



The evidence, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article dated April 20, 1902, features the man pictured on the left.

Mount Holly resident Edward Groom became a local legend in his own time. During his long life of 95 years, he was known for a number of things, not the least of which was the fact that he witnessed five of the seven executions that occurred in Burlington County during his lifetime, and as a carpenter assisted in the construction of a few of the gallows.

The article quotes him as saying that he did not attend Clough's hanging because he had "too much sympathy" for the condemned man. Born in 1808, Groom would have been 25 years old at the time of the execution in 1833. Clough was about the same age (28), and was friends with Joshua Hollingshead, who was the Jail's warden. It's not unreasonable to

assume that Groom, a Mount Holly resident, was also acquainted with

Hollingshead, and probably also with Clough. Perhaps the two young men were even friends.

The 1902 *Inquirer* article featuring Groom appeared exactly a year before he died on April 19, 1903 at age 95. In it he also said that although he did not witness the execution, he was involved in the disposition of Clough's remains. The story is fantastic by today's standards, but not unbelievable given the times and other events in Groom's life:

"Mr. Groom relates this incident concerning the disposition of Clough's body, which he said was buried in the rear of the Court House: He and a party kept vigil over the remains because it became known that certain physicians wanted it. He led a crowd, who exhumed the body and reinterred it at Bunker Hill. Their movements were observed by some hunters, and hearing that the remains had been removed by ghouls four weeks later, he went to the spot. After digging away the earth, the coffin lid was unscrewed, and finding the body intact, it was again removed to another resting place in St. Andrew's Cemetery, where it was deposited directly in the centre of the main pathway, this being deemed sufficient for its absolute protection. Becoming suspicious again the party, which consisted of Mr. Groom, John McHenry, Joshua Borton and James Coppuck, once more exhumed the coffin, only to find that someone had discovered its hiding place and removed the remains."

Philadelphia Inquirer, April 20, 1902

St. Andrews Cemetery is in Mount Holly. We know that Bunker Hill was in the Mount Holly area, although we are not sure of the exact location. We think it might have been in the woods near where the Westampton Municipal Building is currently located. We would appreciate any information our readers may have on this.

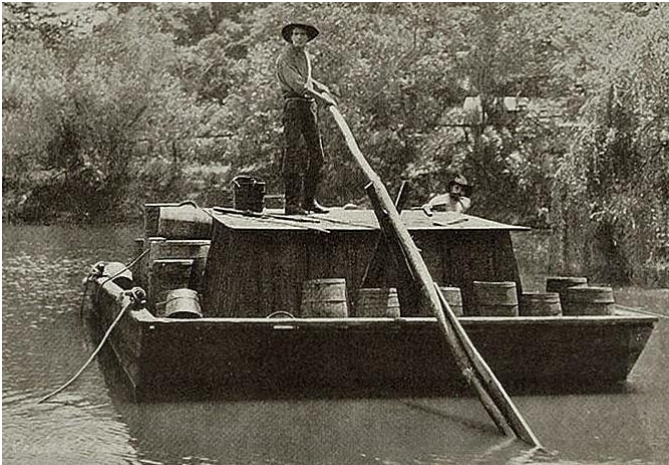
It's not out of the realm of possibility that the grave was in fact robbed. Doctors teaching anatomy in medical schools had graves robbed frequently in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, mainly targeting graves of the poor and those with no survivors. It got so bad in Black cemeteries in Philadelphia that volunteers started to guard the graves of the newly deceased.

Clough's wasn't the only body Groom exhumed: he actually exhumed the body of his own son, George, who died at the Battle of Fredericksburg during the Civil

Destroy not the ancient landmarks which the fathers have set. *Proverbs 22:28.*

War. Almost 200,000 men had converged in Virginia to fight between December 11 and 15, 1862. George was one of about 2,000 who were killed in the battle. As soon as Groom and his wife got the news, he set out for Falmouth, Virginia, where George had been buried. Another feature article about Groom which appeared shortly after his passing recounted the incident:

“The army was moving at that time and he could get no one to help him, and being determined in his mission, however, he dug up the remains himself and carried them on his shoulder for a mile, when he received assistance in their preparation and shipment to Mount Holly.” *Evening Courier (Camden), April 25, 1903*



Many men were pretty rugged in those days, but no one had anything on Edward Groom. At age 16 he took a job polling freight boats from Mount Holly to Philadelphia. He witnessed the landing of Revolutionary War hero Lafayette in 1824 in Philadelphia, the first stop on his famous 16-month tour of the country.

Groom also skinned bark from fence rails in the Pines. He would walk to this job (about 36 miles), stay a week and then walk back. He was a member of a local militia, and in this capacity attended the execution in 1832 of the Jail's first inmate to be hanged - Eliza Freeman. He constructed the gallows on which Philip Lynch was hanged in 1860, and kept the noose as a souvenir for the rest of his life. (See the website's *Prison Museum Post* archive for their stories.)

He had a philanthropic side. He loved bells, and raised the money for nearly all the church and fire bells in Mount Holly. He lobbied the Legislature for an act requiring a uniform land grading, which led to the general paving of sidewalks in Mount Holly.

He was definitely a rough-and-tumble kind of guy. In November of 1898, the *Mount Holly News* reported that he had been knocked down and trampled by a horse he was attending to. He would have been 90 at the time. In 1902 the

same paper reported that he was laid up by bee stings received while working in his garden.

At age 94 he was still going strong:

"To Edward Groom, aged 94, a citizen of the town, who walks without a cane. He is a reader but does not yet require spectacles and is able and willing to do a day's work at his trade of carpentering."

Mount Holly News, March 6, 1900

And finally, we save the best Groom story for last:

"P. Steaker Bodine died at the poor house this week, where he was taken a short time ago. He was ill upon his arrival there and never recovered. At one time he was a successful farmer near Mount Holly. A few months ago, his friend, Edward Groom, aged 94 years, died, and before his final sickness these two men fought like bull dogs, their meeting on the street being the occasion for a fistic encounter. Streaker was 85, but both men felt frisky and young, and was determined that each was the superior of the other. Before Edward died he said he would like to get out once more so as "to lick that Streaker Bodine, the honeryest white man on earth." Their differences arose over politics. Their frequent encounters caused much amusement and a vast amount of comment."

Evening Courier (Camden), October 2, 1903

MANY THANKS FOR THOSE WHO JOINED, RENEWED AND DONATED!

If your name is not on the membership list and/or if you did not receive a thank-you letter, please email us at info@pma1811.net. Please renew if you haven't done so already!

The e-version of this issue will be sent to those with email in a week or so.

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO GIVE TOURS! Contact us on our email if you are interested – info@pma1811.net. It's easy and fun and you'll meet lots of nice people. No pressure. We don't expect volunteers to commit to any set schedule. We have a great tour guide manual that tells you everything you need to know.

KEEP AN EYE ON OUR WEBSITE – www.prisonmuseum.net

Our new commitment book archive with the names of thousands of inmates between 1871 and 1952 will be up within the next month or so.

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In Memoriam

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David Kimball 1930-2021

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Janet Sozio, Esq.

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