

2014 Ghost Walk

Henry Clum – played by Steven Hovis

Nowadays, if you want to know what the weather is going to be, you watch your television while a meteorologist uses their fancy radar to predict precipitation and temperature. Well, in my time, we didn't have any such computers and we had little warning about nature's whims. In fact, when I was alive, claiming to predict the weather was such a radical notion that it could get you locked up! I, Professor Henry Clum, know this all too well, because I was one of the first meteorologists.

I was born on August 17, 1821 and spent a good portion of my early life moving around Western New York. From a young age, I was interested in science. In fact, that sometimes got me in trouble. I was put in an insane asylum in Le Roy, NY in the 1830s for claiming I could predict the weather. Fortunately, the doctors declared me sane just one week later. I relished telling that story for the rest of my life.

As a mechanical scientist, I created and patented barometers. Barometers measure atmospheric pressure and are still used today. However, my crowning achievement was my aelloscope, or storm finder. The aelloscope was essentially a very advanced barometer. The machine was 10 feet tall and weighed 1 ton. When in full working order, the aellograph could detect changes in atmospheric pressure as far away as the Rocky Mountains. After I moved to Elmira in the 1860s, I dedicated the rest of my life to this machine.

The first great storm indicated by the aelloscope occurred in October 1862. The first unusual movement in the machine appeared in the form of agitations, the hand oscillating over spaces varying from ten to eight-thousandths of an inch. Other barometers, even those of great delicacy, could not detect these minute shifts. Six days after these premonitory vibrations were observed, a storm of great violence passed the meridian of Washington, D.C., moving through Eastern Pennsylvania, deluging and prostrating everything in its path. Villages suffered terribly from its ravages. Given the accuracy of its predication, many began to realize that if widely distributed, the aelloscope could be an invaluable tool for saving life and property.

Despite its life-saving potential and although some people joked that I would be able to make a fortune predicting the weather for bridal parties and women with new bonnets, as it turned out, my machine was difficult to sell and I spent much of my life destitute. I did have a few high-profile customers, including Queen Victoria of England, Napoleon III of France, and the Russian government. Perhaps most people thought the price to be too much, but I knew the machine's true worth. I was once offered \$10,000 for my patent, but I refused because I knew it was worth no less than \$100,000.

I also sold an aelloscope to the United States government, but that ended poorly. You see, the machine needed to be taken apart and cleaned every year, and by the second year, the government thought that they could do it themselves without my assistance. Well, they succeeded in getting the machine apart, but could not put it back together. When they finally asked me for help, I refused because I didn't take secondhand jobs.



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My aelloscope was even with me at my death. I was preparing for a lecture in Binghamton on July 6, 1884 when a great explosion rocked the hall. I'm not sure what happened, but iron shrapnel from my equipment flew hitting me and blowing out all of the windows in the room. It was a terrible accident. Yet, the one bright spot in this grim tale is that my aelloscope, which was onstage during the explosion, was completely unharmed. So while I lost my life that day, my prized invention able to live on.

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George Waters – played by Robert Lavarney

When I was 29-years-old, I fell in love. Not with my wife - I had done that years earlier- but with a river. My name is George Waters and, from 1861 until my death in 1912, the Chemung River was my inspiration, my muse. I made my career painting its hills and valleys and was proud to call Elmira home.

I was born in Coventry, New York, and from a young age I knew two things: God's majesty was best seen in nature and I wanted to paint it. As a boy, I would wander the woods and fields around my home and try to sketch them. When I was a teenager, I left my schooling to study painting one-on-one with Tompkins H. Matteson, who was famous for his patriotic scenes. He taught me about technique and introduced me to the New York City art world.

I studied, worked and painted in New York City for a time, but found it very unsatisfying. It was an excellent place to see the work of others and attract wealthy patrons, but there was little there to truly inspire. A plant will not thrive without the sunbeam; much less a man and there was little sun to be had in the city. For a time, I thought about traveling south through Appalachia to the Mississippi, but the Civil War interfered with my plans. Instead, I toured New York State and ended up falling in love with the Chemung River.

I just had to be near it. I brought my wife and family to Elmira and opened a studio on Water Street. My passion was painting the valley but my bread and butter was painting the people. I painted portraits of local notables like Rev. Beecher and Dr. Cowles and even national figures like Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, famous Broadway actors and the governors of New York and Wisconsin. I painted people of more modest means as well. Many a local merchant wanted to immortalize themselves or their families with all the color and character they could never get from a cold, black and white photograph.

Of course, I was best known for my landscapes. One of them was even part of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. My loving views of the Chemung River Valley were quite popular with locals who had moved elsewhere and wanted a bit of home to hang on the wall. Most of my patrons were middle class, but I did have a small following among the nation's elite. Andrew Carnegie himself had two of my paintings hanging in his home. As with my portraits, I would work by commission. The strangest request I ever got came from Mark Twain. He wanted a painting of a ship burning at sea. After seeing it, he wrote to me "Now this picture is just what I wanted. You have faithfully reproduced the splendid horror I had in mind; and to me there is a satisfaction in these leaping flames and these ruddy waves, and the awful distress of the shipwrecked poor devils." Twain was a bit of an odd duck, I suppose.

I took a position as the director of the Elmira College Art Department in 1869 and it set the rhythm of my life for the next 34 years. In the autumn, I would teach and in the winter I would go to New York City to sell paintings and cultivate wealthier patrons. When the weather turned fair, I would return to nature, wandering and painting the Chemung River Valley in the spring. In the summer I would visit Maine to paint the sea and the Adirondacks to paint the mountains. In 1880, I was finally able to fulfill my life-long dream of touring Europe and studying the works of the old masters.



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I retired from my work at the College in 1903 and even closed my studio. For the first time in my adult life I had the time to experiment with technique and paint what I truly wanted. I spent the nine glorious years of my retirement with my muse, painting it in all seasons and all sorts of weather. Those paintings weren't for commission and they weren't for sale: they were for me.

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Phebe Foster – played by Kayla Nash

Good evening everyone. I am Phebe Foster. Perhaps some of you know the Foster name? How about Foster's Pond? Unfortunately, since the Civil War, the name Foster has become permanently associated with that stagnant pool of disease at the center of Elmira's confederate prisoner of war camp.

In 1861, Elmira became a mustering point for Union soldiers and supplies. It was the perfect spot because of the railroads that linked us to most of the major cities in the northeast. I was in my thirties at the time. My husband Jesse and I were living on the edge of town on West Water Street just past Hoffman Street. Members of the Foster family held well over a hundred acres of farmland there. My father-in-law, William Foster, made a deal with the government to lease some of his land. He got \$375 a year (about \$9,000 today) for a field that extended from the river up to Water Street. The lease included the use of Foster's Pond.

That became the location of Camp No. 3 or Camp Rathbun, one of four camps in Elmira where nearly 21,000 Union soldiers were trained before being sent south. By 1864, though, two of the four training camps were closed and the others were mostly empty. Northern prisons had become very overcrowded by then so the solution was to convert Camp Rathbun into a prisoner of war camp. The government extended their lease on William's land for another year and Jesse and I rented them an additional 40 acres for \$840 a year or about \$13,000 today.

On July 6, 1864, the first 400 confederate prisoners arrived in Elmira. The prison camp was somewhat of a spectacle in town. Shortly after it opened, a man named Mr. Nichols opened an observation tower where you could look over the stockade wall at the prisoners. Weeks later another tower went up. Around the towers there were booths that sold refreshments and souvenir cards. It was like a carnival. But to see those poor men imprisoned in the camp, it was heartbreaking.

Just two months after the observation towers opened the government ordered them closed. We couldn't see what was going on inside the prison after that. Even the newspapermen were kept out. We didn't know how bad it really was, though we could have guessed by the number of wagons that came out of the prison loaded with coffins. Of the 12,147 prisoners held at the camp in the year that it operated, 2,961 died. Many of those deaths were caused by Foster's Pond. It was a stinking cesspool in the center of the prison. Officials knew from the beginning that the pond would become a problem but it took them until January to fix it. By then it was too late. Smallpox, dysentery and scurvy were rampant in the camp. Combined with the lack of sufficient food, shelter, and medical care, it's not surprising that so many died.

The lease contract for our land stated that it would be returned in its original state except for the expected wear to the soil and vegetation. That's exactly what happened when the prison closed in July 1865. Everything that the military did not take away was sold at a public auction. The stockade fence and all remaining building were torn down. It was like the camp had never been there. Over the years the land was sold and houses were built. Today there's a stone memorial marking the spot where so many men died. I hate that the name Foster now carries such a terrible legacy, but it's an important part of our history that we must never forget.

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William and Josephine Welsh – aka DeHollis and Valora – played by Casey and Steven Winston

DeHollis: Gather around for you are about to hear tales of death-defying stunts and humorous adventures in foreign lands. You will be amazed and thoroughly entertained. I am William Welsh, but you might know me better as the famous contortionist and juggler, DeHollis.

Valora: And I am Josephine Welsh, his wife and performing partner. But you can call me by my stage name, Valora. DeHollis and I were from here in Elmira and performed together after marrying in 1890.

D: As DeHollis and Valora, we travelled the world. For nearly 25 years, we worked with different touring vaudeville companies and were billed as “eccentric jugglers.” Now what is an eccentric juggler, you ask? A wonderful question! It means that we had many tricks designed to amaze, shock, and leave you wondering how two seemingly normal people could achieve such impressive feats.

V: Would you like to hear about some of our acts? One particularly impressive and dangerous stunt had DeHollis juggling cannon balls. And then, he would catch one on the back of his neck! We had other acts where we would balance outrageously large umbrellas or keep plates spinning in the air. I also sang, and am told I had a voice like a bird! We had another act where we used live rabbits, but they met an unfortunate end thanks to an Elmira neighbor’s dog.

D: Let’s tell them about some of our travels. Once we began performing as a duo, we were hardly ever back home in Elmira. We did performances in Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America, as well as from coast to coast in the United States.

V: Naturally, on our travels we had many adventures and experienced new and sometimes startling cultures. Once we performed for the Sultan of Sulu, Java. The Palace Hall was magnificent. There were no doors and it was hung on all sides with great silken curtains, but the audience appeared to consist of one- a gentleman with coal black, brilliant eyes, a red fez, and a beautifully trimmed beard. But soon, the walls started whispering. Behind every curtain there were women hidden! They included the sultan’s entire harem of 300 women! Tell them about the princess, De Hollis.

D: Ah yes. It was in Peking that I received a request from a big Chinese potentate that a performance should be given. The potentate had a favorite daughter called Kee Nan. It was she who was anxious to see the “Red Devil,” as the Chinese called me, make some jugglery. I was brought into a private parlor where Miss Kee Nan sat at her father’s feet. The show must have been a success because a few hours later an interpreter brought a very important message for me. The princess had decided to marry me, the “Red Devil,” and wanted to know when I would be ready!

V: Unfortunately for her, you had to tell her that you already had a wife.



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D: You know it's not every day that a United States citizen has a formal proposal from a Chinese princess and has to reject it for family reasons!

V: Our adventures continued like this until I fell ill in 1911. I returned to Elmira and was no longer able to go on tour with DeHollis.

D: My beloved Valora died in 1915 and though heartbroken, I carried on with our act. In 1919, I died in Buenos Aires, Argentina while on a South American tour.

V: It is here we now rest together. And, so that the world never forgets our humble performing duo, our stage names are etched into our headstones.