



2018 Ghost Walk

Rufus Stanley – played by Michael Lavarnway
also featuring Charlotte Rose Stanley played by Gail Lewis

What a beautiful day it's been for a reunion. It's almost like old times isn't it, boys? Everyone pitching in, getting the fire going, making coffee, cutting sticks to roast hotdogs, all without anyone having to be told what to do. I must have taught you boys well.

Boys. You haven't been boys for years now have you? Why, we haven't rambled since 1898 and here it is 1926 and I still remember you all as young men. Bo and Freddie, Albert and Brocks, and, you too, Swift. But I do see some unfamiliar faces here. Well, the more the merrier!

My name is Rufus Stanley and I have spent my life working with young men and women, teaching them practical skills to improve their lives. Over the course of forty years, young folks have learned how to chop firewood, build furniture, sew, bake bread, grow vegetables, and raise livestock as members of the half dozen clubs I created. My work even inspired, in part, the national 4-H Club.

When I first came to Elmira back in 1886 to work as the Secretary of the Boys Department of the Y.M.C.A., I had no idea that I was starting my life's work. It all began my first Saturday here. I borrowed a camera and took a hike up East Hill with a group of boys from the Y. We explored Water Cure Glen and took some pictures of Mark Twain's summer home. That next Saturday, we hiked up East Hill again and this time met Mark Twain himself as he was eating mulberries off the big tree by the house.

I grew up in rural Michigan and hiking and camping were natural for me. On those first few hikes with my young charges here, however, I realized two things. One, you city boys did not know anything of the world about them, and two, you could not do anything. You had never learned how to start a fire or climb a tree or any of the things I grew up doing. From then on, I devoted myself to teaching these useful skills.

Our casual weekly hikes became the Foto Rambling Club. We hiked all year round, winter and summer, in sunshine or in rain, as I'm sure you boys well remember. I taught you how to track rabbits and build shelters. You learned not to mind the mud and that yelling in the wilderness helped release pent-up energy. We toured factories and railyards along our hikes and sailed on Keuka Lake. Once, we even took a train to Pittston, Pennsylvania and hiked 90 miles back to Elmira.

The Rambling Club ended when you boys finished school and started jobs and no longer had time to ramble but I continued my efforts to educate the area's youths. Over the years I formed other clubs, the Omega Club, the Rural School Club, the Corn Club, the Achievement Club, for both boys and girls, but there has always been a special place in my heart for the 100 boys I hiked with over the course of twelve years. And here we are enjoying this wonderful reunion of the Rambling Club and celebrating my forty years of service.



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Even now, my work continues as Club Agent for Chemung County. Just earlier today I was at a picnic in Van Etten promoting new opportunities for young men and women and I'll be speaking at several other picnics this summer. You can see that I am going to be busy.

Rufus places his hands on his head as if thinking of something more to say. He sinks slowly backwards and falls to the ground.

Enter Charlotte Rose Stanley

As soon as I heard that Rufus had collapsed, I rushed to be with him but my husband had passed away by the time I arrived. His boys covered him with a blanket and I found him laying with his feet to the dead embers of the camp fire, like he was peacefully sleeping, as he had done so many times before on club outings. After his long life of service and dedication to the children of this community, it was a beautiful way for him to go, among the members of the old Rambling Club, who loved him, and whom he loved so much.



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David and Lucy Billings – played by David and Cathleen Wiggs

David Billings: *[turns his lantern on]*

January 10, 1862
Camp Scott, York, PA

My Dear Wife Lucy,

This is my first night in the camp and I have been at work all day. I never saw such bad getting around, all mud. Oh, how my legs ache. The mud here is just like putty and my big boots carry about 30 pounds of the vile stuff.

Tell the boys that as soon as we get settled that I will write to them. In the meantime I am in hopes that they will conduct themselves in such a way that the first and every letter I get from you will give a good account of them. I think it strange that no letters have come for me perhaps you have not given them the right direction. Please address to

D.T. Billings
38th Regiment
Washington DC
NY Volunteers

Let me hear from you often.

Yours,
David

[turns his lantern off]

Lucy Billings *[turns her lantern on]:*

June 14, 1862
Elmira, NY

My dearest David,

It has been so long since I have had news from you. I try to keep my mind from worry, but it seems a natural affliction in these times. I have written to you all this week and await your response. The boys are well, even if they make the mischief of children on the cusp of adulthood. Our sweet little Myra fares well, too.

I remain active at the church as a balm for my weary soul. I say a special prayer for your safe return and the swift end of this terrible conflict. Please stay safe, my love. We need you home.

Your devoted wife,

Lucy



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[turns her lantern off]
[long pause]
[Turns her lantern back on]

August 16, 1862
Elmira, NY

My dearest David,

Why will you not write me back? It has been so very long since I have last received a letter from you. I cannot help but to fear the worst. I must hear from you. Perhaps, you are well and are just unable to get a letter in the post. Or maybe your letters have become lost somewhere in the oppressive distance between us. Please, please write me.

Your devoted wife,
Lucy

[turns her lantern off]

David Billings *[turns his lantern on]:*

July 4th, 1863
Camp Curtin, Harrisburg, PA

My dear wife and children,

We arrived here the morning of the third at about two a.m. and found our beds made up. Some of the boys thought that they were rather hard but I took the first open space with a good soft pine board, laid my head on my satchel, and was asleep in two minutes and did not wake till all were a stirring for breakfast. We have not got our cooking supplies and we eat our bacon raw. That you know suits me as my great trouble has been in having things cooked too much except the bottom crust of pies.

We are in sight of the Reb fortifications on the opposite side of the river. There appears a large force judging from the number of tents.

Some of the boys look homesick this morning with it being the glorious fourth and wet and mud and a camp rumor that General Mead had met with an awful defeat. I hope not but I am afraid there is truth in it. Tell the boys that I am expecting they will be manly.

Yours,
David

[turns his lantern off]

Lucy Billings *[turns her lantern on]*



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July 4, 1863
Elmira, NY

My dearest husband,

On this patriotic occasion, I seem unable to muster much spirit. I sent the children out, there is no need to dampen their moments of happiness with my worries. You should see how Edward and Hosmer have grown! They're not the boys you left, but instead are becoming young men.

I have found work with a group of local ladies sewing blankets, making bandages, and putting together packages filled with some of the comforts of home. I often have the hope that one of the blankets I have sewn will find its way to you. I know these are fanciful thoughts, but they bring me some comfort.

Please write me as soon as you can.
Your devoted wife,
Lucy

[turns her lantern off]

David Billings *[turns his lantern on]*

July 7th 1863
Camp Curtin

My dear wife

We have been in great commotion all day. Got marching orders this morning and have been busy drawing uniforms, arms, equipment, and such. I went to the artist's tent today to get my picture taken that you might see me with my new clothes on. But I found about a half a regiment waiting to get their picture taken and I saw there was no chance for me. Governor Curtin was in the camp this evening and made a speech and said he was anxious to get every man to the front. Our cannons have been making considerable noise for the last hour on the news of Vicksburg. I hope the news is correct and that it is taken.

[turns his lantern off]

Lucy Billings *[turns her lantern on]*

April 30, 1865
Elmira, NY

My dearest husband,

It seems like the rumors are true and that this cursed war is finally over. I am grateful to God that you have survived when so many others have perished. I pray for your speedy return so that we can once again be united.

Your devoted wife,
Lucy

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Jennie Eustace – played by Kayla Nash

Good evening. My name is Jane Eustace, but you can call me Jennie. While I found my final resting place here in Elmira, I spent much of my time out of town when I was alive. That is because I was born for the spotlight. If you had been alive around the turn of the 20th century, there was a great chance you would have seen me take to the stage in one of my many dramatic roles. I was once even in a play with Maurice Barrymore, who you might know better as the great-grandfather of a rather popular actress named Drew. One reviewer wrote this description of me: “Gentle, womanly and quiet, but intense in her exhibitions of feeling, she carries her audience with her and grows in favor with each additional scene.”

There was a hitch in my quest for stardom, however. Even as a young woman, I found myself often cast in mother roles. The first time this happened, I wasn’t old enough for the part, but I was tall and could carry off the costuming. I resented being cast for the mother of some matinee favorite whose years outnumbered my own. And later, when young girls, aspirants for the stage, asked me if I thought it wise for them to accept ‘mother’ roles I remember vehemently replying, “No! No! A thousand times, No! While you have your youth, interpret youth—act youth!”

But as the seasons went on and I began to realize what a notable progeny I was accumulating my early resentment began to weaken, and it finally vanished all together. Not only could I be a mother on stage, but I could also be a mentor to up-and-coming actors. I never had any children of my own, so through this, I left a bigger legacy on the stage and world than I could have with any starring role.

Drama followed me off the stage, as well. I was with my family in Kingston, Jamaica on January 14, 1907 when a devastating earthquake shook the island around 3:30 in the afternoon. Chaos ensued. Buildings crumbled and fires spread. Experts estimated that up to 1,000 people were killed. When those violent tremors began, I was in my room at the hotel in a suburb outside of the city proper. Plaster fell, but the walls stood, mercifully allowing for our escape.

Our lives were likely saved by a last-minute change to our plans. We disliked the first hotel we stayed at in Kingston so we switched two days before the disaster struck. The old hotel was completely destroyed. We were lucky to not only escape with our lives, but also with our luggage—the walls of the building at the docks in which our bags were stored collapsed outwards not inwards!

My brother went into town the next day and saw horrible sights, piles of bodies among the debris. At the coconut grove at the harbor, which just days before stood tall above the beach, you could now only see the tops of the trees. The beach had sunk.

We lived outdoors for two days, sleeping on empty coffee sacks at the docks. When the U.S.S. Indiana, an American warship, arrived and an officer asked if there were any Americans in the crowd, we made our way to the ship and started back home.

The true irony in the matter is that we were all there for my brother’s health in the hopes that the climate would speed his recovery from an extended illness. He died later that year and I can’t imagine the shock of our ordeal helped his health.



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I carried on after this, finding comfort on the stage. I acted for as long as my health allowed and retired by the early 1930s. Life's final curtain closed for me July 10, 1936.

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Lewis Gilmore – played by Joe Edkin

Gather ‘round, get in close. I have a story to tell you that may be hard for you to believe. This is a story of the unjust prosecution of an innocent man, a scrappy small business-owner who was just trying to get by. A man who faced down a crusading megalomaniac and was punished for his stand. A man who was none other than yours truly: Lewis C. Gilmore.

In the year of our Lord 1892, I became the proprietor of a little local establishment I called the Blue Front Saloon. This was my crowning glory. Picture this—everything was blue. The outside. The inside. Even the gosh darn picture frames. To keep my customers happy, I gave free hard-boiled eggs out with the purchase of a glass of beer, a mighty fine deal if you ask me. The floor was covered in those shells which I left there as a symbol of my business fortunes.

Now this is the part of the story where I hope that none of you fine folks’ have delicate sensibilities. You look like a rough crowd, so I have a sneaking suspicion that I’m in the clear. Your ol’ pal Lew was a businessman with an artist’s soul. My creative expressions took many forms, including some naughty little poems. Let’s just say that the content of those verses was as blue as my saloon. As you can guess, these were just as popular as the beer and eggs. I even made swift sales shipping these all across the country.

So ol’ Lew was doing pretty good for himself. That is, until a terrible man came to shut it all down. [speaking satirically as Anthony Comstock] *I’m Anthony Comstock, head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and I am on a mission to destroy anything I think is immoral and fun!*

Bad Mr. Comstock didn’t like my little side business so, in September 1893, he pretended to be a customer and wrote me some letters asking for my poems. I believe you folks nowadays would call that Catfishin’. I had no reason to think there was anything wrong; I mean everyone loved ol’ Lew and his silly little poems! But that bad Mr. Comstock couldn’t mind his own business and had to come from fancy old New York City to Elmira to personally arrest me.

[Comstock voice] *I’m Anthony Comstock and by mailing your obscenities you’re violating the Comstock Law! Corrupter of the youth! Violator of basic decency! I shall see you personally go to jail!*

When bad Mr. Comstock arrested me, he found 17,400 cards with my poems on ‘em and a bill from my printer for 26,000 more. See, I told ya business was good!

But these were serious charges and could not be taken lightly even by a jokester like me. There were rumors that bad Mr. Comstock was going to let the local authorities take care of it instead of sending your ol’ pal Lew to Federal court. That is, however, until my lawyer, Colonel Joseph P. Eustace, insulted Comstock on the street. I believe you just met Mr. Eustace’s sister, Jennie, a very fine actress. That thin-skinned, good-for-nothin’ Comstock got all bent out of shape.

[Comstock voice] *I’m Anthony Comstock and I got my feelings all hurt so I’m going to make sure that Lew Gilmore pays for this deep insult to my unimpeachable character!*

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The new year turned and your ol' pal Lew found himself up the creek without a paddle before a Federal judge. Now, I was no fool and I saw no good way out. That bad Mr. Comstock must have found a little warmth in his old black heart because he said to me:

[Comstock voice] *I'm Anthony Comstock and you have got yourself into serious trouble. Plead guilty and throw yourself upon the mercy of the court and you will find that all the court officers will treat you kindly."*

So that's what your ol' pal Lew did. There I was, a helpless little lamb of a man at the slaughter waitin' to see what pain they would bring down on me. And then they said, my fate:

[Judge voice] *I'm a judge and I hereby sentence you, Lewis C. Gilmore, to a fine of \$50!*

Boy, did your ol' pal Lew get out of that scrap by the skin of his teeth! I paid my fine and went back to my regular old life at the Blue Front Saloon. In 1898, the Blue Front caught fire and burned to the ground. After that, I managed some hotels and later started my own café, a limburger cheese subway. Whatever happened to that bad Mr. Comstock, you ask? Well, I don't rightly care. He got out of my business and went right along harassing other folks, most of whom I'm sure were good, upstanding folks like your ol' pal Lew. I know he spent a lot of time bothering a nice woman from Corning named Margaret Sanger.

[Comstock voice] *I'm Anthony Comstock and I'm a bitter old man with mutton chops made of righteous rage!*

I didn't cross paths with that bad Mr. Comstock again, but your ol' pal Lew got the last laugh in a big picture kind of sense. When I finally met my maker in 1925, I had outlived my old foe by 10 years.