

Version 2 (Short version)

The Dark Crimes of Jean de Baptiste, Grave Robber

In January of 1862 Moroni Clawson was arrested for participating in the robbery and assault of Governor John W. Dawson.¹¹ Shortly thereafter he was shot down by police officers while attempting to escape jail. Local policeman Henry Heath paid for Clawson's burial clothes and had him buried in a small part of the Salt Lake City cemetery. Shortly after hearing of his death, Clawson's family requested to have his body exhumed and relocated to Draper. Upon exhumation, the family discovered Clawson's body naked and face down in his coffin. Officer Heath, who had paid for Clawson's burial clothes and witnessed his burial, knew something was awry and soon began an investigation at the home of local gravedigger, Jean de Baptiste.¹²

Upon entering Baptiste's home, located in the Avenues on 3rd Avenue between P and R streets, Heath and his team of officers found a stockpile of burial clothes in the dozens, including 60 pairs of children's shoes.¹³ Heath and his team left Baptiste's home and found him at the cemetery, where he confessed to the robbery of what turned out to be over 300 graves. After a few months in county jail, Baptiste was finally banished to Fremont Island, a sizeable plot of land owned by the Miller brothers, Henry and Dan.¹⁴ However, a few short weeks later, the brothers went to check on Baptiste and reported back that he had escaped, having dismantled a small shanty to fashion a makeshift raft. What happened to Baptiste thereafter is left to speculation.

Baptiste's motive for violating 300 graves is also left to speculation. Although he claimed his only intention was to sell the burial clothing for money, Baptiste had amassed burial clothes from over several years, most of which had no re-sale value, which suggests that Baptiste may have had other, more perplexing reasons for robbing the graves.¹⁵ Baptiste was not buried in the Salt Lake City cemetery, but the impact of his story still looms over the grounds, and the unclaimed burial clothing which Baptiste stole is still buried on the grounds in undisclosed locations.

¹¹ Devitry-Smith, John, "The Saint and the Grave Robber," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 24, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol33/iss1/2>

¹² Devitry-Smith, John, "The Saint and the Grave Robber," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 24, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol33/iss1/2>

¹³ Tom Wharton, and Gayen Wharton, *It Happened in Utah: Stories of Events and People That Shaped Beehive State History* (Guilford, Connecticut: Globe Pequot, 2018), 39.

¹⁴ Devitry-Smith, John, "The Saint and the Grave Robber," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 28, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol33/iss1/2>

¹⁵ Devitry-Smith, John, "The Saint and the Grave Robber," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 26, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol33/iss1/2>

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¹⁶ Cruikshank, *The Ghost and the Grave Robber*, 1830.

¹⁶ Cruikshank, *The Ghost and the Grave Robber*, 1830, <https://warped-perspective.com/index.php/2017/06/08/horror-in-art-the-devil-sin-and-the-bottle-artwork-by-george-cruikshank/>