


Today in Columbus History: On July 7, 1858, an ad appeared in the *Daily Sun* that could provide an aspiring writer with some good short story material. It's pretty straight forward : "Lost Dog;" a man wants his dog back; he's offering a reward. However, there's a lot more to this story. The dog's owner, Charles Cleghorn (1805 – 1863) was part-owner of the Perry House, a popular Columbus Hotel. He was also a slave owner; in 1860 he had 12 slaves, ranging in age from 8 to 60. Apparently, some of his slaves went to town on Friday, July 2, with Cleghorn's dog in tow. That was the day that a young man named James Thompson was hung at the gallows near the city jail. In Dec. 1857, Thompson had stabbed John Calhoun, a house painter. Thompson fled the scene; Calhoun died. Thompson was arrested; tried and found guilty. He was hanged on July 2, 1858, and his execution was described by the local news as almost a circus. The newspaper immediately suggested that the state legislature ban public hangings, and in 1859 they did – but only partially. They gave judges the authority to make the execution private if they thought it was appropriate. It wasn't until Dec. 1893 that public executions in Georgia were outlawed.

Compiled by Callie McGinnis, Muscogee Genealogical Society

*Our snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu>

**STRAYED OR STOLEN,**  
**F**ROM the subscriber, a brown Scotch Terrier Slut, with long wirey hair,  short ears and long tail. She came to town with my negroes on the day of the hanging, and has not been seen since. A reward of five dollars will be paid for her delivery to me at the Oglethorpe House.  
**CHARLES CLEGHORN.**  
Columbus, Ga., July 7, 1858-tf



The Columbus Stockade was built in the late 1850s -- maybe not the location of Thompson's execution, which was held near the Columbus jail. (1858). From [usgarchives.com](http://usgarchives.com) -- taken by Christine Thacker.

Prior to 1859, Georgia executions were public. When hangings were scheduled, people commonly traveled many miles to witness them. Large, sometimes unruly crowds of spectators would gather to watch executions, which were often carried out in or near the courthouse square. Then, in 1859, the General Assembly enacted a statute giving judges authority to direct that an execution be in private if the judges

thought it appropriate. The statute's preamble explains the legislature's motives: public execution was "believed by many to be demoralizing in its tendency and disgraceful to the character of our people for refinement and good taste, and not so well calculated to accomplish the object for which it was instituted: the prevention of crime ..."

From: "Sentenced to Death." <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/>



Mob voyeurism. More 20,000 people traveled to Owensboro, KY to witness the last public execution in the U.S., Aug. 14, 1936. <https://timeline.com/rainy-bethea-last-public-execution...>