

'Judge Rope'

THE DENVER POST—FIRST IN EVERYTHII

F IS CLEARED IN KANSAS LYN

'Judge Rope' Did a Good Job in western Kansas early Monday when an avenging mob lynched Richard Read, confessed attacker and killer of Dorothy Hunter, 8-year-old schoolgirl. He was hanged from a tree on the Ed Lyman ranch, after being taken by force from the St. Francis, Kan., county jail. The tree from which he was hanged is shown in left picture. At the right is Sheriff G. C. Jennings of Rawlins county, Kansas, where the assault took place. He is holding the rope used.

SLANT OF THE TIMES: The Denver Post in 1932 ran this caption for the picture of Rawlins County Sheriff G.C. Jennings holding the rope with which Richard Read was lynched. The photo appears with the start of the story on Page 1A.

Lynching was last in state's history

JUDGE ROPE, from Page 1

was confused, and not sure where the body was, William McGinley wrote.

The body wasn't found until the following day. There are two stories about how it was found. Mr. Read remembered and told where she was, William McGinley wrote later, but newspaper and personal accounts say she was found by a search party and they called officers.

Mr. Zodrow said he thinks the body was found by Albert Hays and his father, Leo Zodrow. The two men had gone to move the haystack, he said. Dorothy had a hole in her head, he said, and she apparently was killed with a subsoiler of a lister which Mr. Read had in his car. That was confirmed by an article in the *Saint Francis Herald*. The murder weapon was actually a planter and tillage attachment. A lister was a planter and the subsoiler actually breaks the soil.

In 1990, Elmer Carlson donated the murder weapon, which was still on his family's farm, to the Atwood Museum.

There is some discrepancy as to where the body was found. Articles in the *McCook Gazette* and *The Oberlin Herald* said the body was found on Victor Carlson's farm, southwest of Herndon near Achilles. Mr. Zodrow thought the body was found on or near his family's farm.

Authorities were called to the site, said Mr. Zodrow, and it was confirmed that it was her body. There were quite a few sheriff's deputies and lots of other people who came to check the body, he recalls.

Wesley and Eulaine Benda, both 12 at the time, grew up in the area where Dorothy was found. They said they remember a little about that day.

Mr. Benda said it was the last day of school and the students went on an outing to Atwood Lake. On the way back to the school house, the truck stopped because they saw a blanket and child's clothes on the side of the road. He said an adult picked up the clothes and took them back to the school. That morning, he said, they had heard a little girl was missing from Selden. Mr. Benda said he didn't know if the clothes had any connection to the case.

Mrs. Benda said she can remember her father was so excited to see a car just a quarter mile north of the house. There wasn't much traffic then. Dorothy was found just a little over a mile from where Mrs. Benda grew up.

One time, Mr. Benda said, he asked his father who would take a man out of jail and hang him. His father told him it was better not to ask.

Mr. Zodrow said after Dorothy was found, people from Selden and Rexford were mad and they wanted to go get Mr. Read out of jail that day. The defendant was sent to the Thomas County jail until his trial, then moved quietly to St. Francis. As it turned out, people didn't want to wait.

The *Saint Francis Herald* reported



AT THE CHEYENNE COUNTY JAIL, Sheriff Eddie Dankenbring opened the cell where Richard Read was held. An original, it still has the combination lock that newspaper accounts said had to be opened to get Read out of the jail. Photo by Karen Krien/The Saint Francis Herald

that authorities had hoped to keep the prisoner's whereabouts secret because they feared mob violence from the start.

Mr. Read was moved to the jail in Cheyenne County for protection after people found out that he was in Colby. About 8:45 p.m. that day, the Rawlins County sheriff called Cheyenne County Sheriff A.A. Bacon to warn him that a mob was looking for Mr. Read and heading toward his jail.

The paper said that Sheriff Bacon and his deputy decided to take Mr. Read out of jail into the country and hide him until the mob left, then return him to the cell, but they were too late. They went for gasoline, and when they got back, the mob was already at the courthouse. The men detained the sheriff and searched him for his keys, then opened the courthouse.

The jail on the fourth floor was open, but the cell had a combination lock on it, the paper said. The mob commanded the sheriff to open the lock.

"When he resisted, he was poked in the back with a couple of cold and hard instruments, which he states were revolvers, and after studying the proposition over he decided that under the circumstances there was nothing to do but to comply with their orders," said the article.

Mr. Read was placed in an unplated car as County Attorney Fred Rueb arrived to plead with the crowd to let the law take its course. In no mood to listen, the mob took the sheriff, deputy and county attorney with them, although they were later set free near McDonald.

Mr. Zodrow said that on their way back east, the mob stopped, tied Mr. Read with barbwire and dragged him up and down Main Street in Atwood. None of the papers reported this, however, and the lynching site is between St. Francis and Atwood.

East of McDonald about three miles, the papers said, the mob turned south, driving down to the Beaver Creek. They hanged Mr. Read on a tree at the Ed Lyman ranch along the creek. The paper said the mob took the highway to about three miles east of McDonald, near the ranch. That is where the Rawlins County sheriff, coroner and others found him.

An article in the *Atwood Citizen Patriot*, a paper which formerly served Rawlins County, said the mob intended to take Mr. Read to where Dorothy was found, but there was no tree. That site is miles east of where the lynching took place, however.

A few years ago, the Atwood Historical Society received a letter from Wil-

liam Thomas, who was 86 at the time and living in Delta, Colo. The man wrote that what newspapers printed about the lynching was true and he knew that because he was there.

Mr. Thomas said he was one of the men who helped carry Mr. Read out of the Cheyenne County Jail and put him in his car. The mob didn't use any guns to get the prisoner, he claimed. A large Russian man pinned the sheriff's arms and took his keys and gun from him and they unlocked the cell. However, the cell today still has the combination lock, though it isn't used anymore.

He said Mr. Read was taken to a cottonwood tree six miles east and two miles south of McDonald on the middle Beaver Creek on what was known as the Ed Lyman Ranch and now is owned by Bob Binning.

The mob tied Mr. Read's hands and feet with wire, dropped the noose over his neck and threw the other end of the tree limb and tied it to a fence post, he said. They left him hanging on the tree.

The *Hoxie Sentinel* gave another account, however, saying that Mr. Read was taken to a spot near Achilles, southeast of Atwood on Sappa Creek, near where Dorothy had been found, had a heavy noose put over his head and was asked if he had anything to say. "Boys," said Mr. Read, "you have the right man. I did it, but I was drunk at the time."

Witnesses said that just before he was lynched, he added, "I knew you were going to hang me."

All the articles agree that his hands and feet were bound with rope or wire when he was found.

Mr. Read had spent some time in a prison in Colorado, according to the stories, for kidnapping and raping a young girl there, although he didn't kill her. When Mr. Read was first found in Burlington after attacking and raping a young girl, he barely escaped being lynched. Around 150 people, according to *The Denver Post*, wanted to lynch the man but some of the calmer people convinced the others to let the sheriff arrest him and he was sent to prison. He pleaded guilty to a trial and was sentenced to 15 to 20 years in prison, but because of Colorado's good time law he was paroled after serving only six years. He shortly moved in with his parents outside of Rexford.

Mr. Zodrow said he knew Mr. Read when he was a kid. As a child, he said, he didn't talk about the whole ordeal much, but as he got older he gave a current events talk on it at school and that started some talk about it again.

Dorothy's parents later left the Selden area, but he said he isn't sure where they went.

A conspiracy of silence kept state authorities from ever punishing any of the hangmen. Even today, Mr. Zodrow won't talk about who was in the mob, though most of them are long gone. He says some of them were neighbors and he didn't want to cause any problems for their families.

Silence protected members of lynch mob

Despite embarrassed governor, no one was ever brought to justice

The last lynching in Kansas drew the ire of state officials, who vowed to prosecute and jail members of the mob. Gov. Harry Woodring had been in Atwood the day of the lynching, according to *The Saint Francis Herald*, although Elmer Zodrow, who remembers the event, thought the governor arrived the next day. The paper reported that Gov. Woodring had been attending a gathering at the American Legion Post in Atwood and staying at the home of Mayor Homer Bastian.

The day after the lynching, Attorney General Roland Boynton was called to the area to open an investigation. There is no file today at the attorney general's office or in the Rawlins County court clerk's office to show what transpired.

Once a somewhat common part of frontier justice, lynching had all but disappeared in Kansas. There had not been a case of mob justice like this since 1920, when Albert Evans was hanged in Mulberry after he was identified as the attacker of a 15-year-old girl. Report identified him as a Negro.

Nineteen lynchings were recorded in Kansas history, almost as many as the two dozen men the state hanged legally over the course of a century.

retary of war under President Franklin Roosevelt, apparently was embarrassed by the lawlessness right under his nose. He vowed that the leaders of the mob and those involved would be "punished if evidence can be secured finding them."

While in the area, Gov. Woodring reinstated Cheyenne County Sheriff A.A. Bacon, who under state law had forfeited his office due to the lynching. According to the law, a sheriff had to be removed from office if a mob took

a prisoner from his custody and lynched the prisoner.

The law also said that if the sheriff petitioned the governor within 10 days and evidence was produced to show he was not at fault, he could be reinstated.

An article in *The Saint Francis Herald* said that "a petition was hurriedly circulated in Cheyenne County and liberally signed asking the governor to make this reinstatement and witnesses were called to substantiate the claim of the sheriff that he was powerless before the onslaught of the mob."

He was reinstated by the governor. Although the attorney general and governor looked for people in the mob, no one ever talked. To this day, there have been no arrests.



IN THE OLDER PART of the Hoxie Cemetery is Dorothy Hunter's headstone. She was kidnapped and killed at age 8. Her parents are buried next to her, although they died years later.

Thousands mourned an innocent little girl

The following obituary was printed in *The Hoxie Sentinel* in 1932 after Dorothy Hunter was raped and murdered by a man who was later lynched by a mob:

Dorothy Eileen Hunter was born March 11, 1924, and was called home to God April 15, 1932, at the age of eight years, one month, and four days.

She met her death at the hands of a cruel fiend who had no thought of little Dorothy or the broken hearted mother and father. But, thanks to God, she is far from pain, fear, or harm of cruel hands.

She leaves to mourn her death, her loving mother and father, her sister, Alice, and two brothers, Doyle, 6 and Dale, 4; two grandparents, 11 uncles and 14 aunts, all of this community, except Mr. and Mrs. William R. Hunter of California, and many cousins and a host of friends.

Little Dorothy enjoyed the Sunday school and was a faithful attendant, always taking part in programs and class. She attended the third

grade in the Selden school and was last seen at school Thursday afternoon. She was a loving daughter and sister and her little voice shall be missed at home, school and church.

A bud of beauty nipped by death; Oh no, but upward borne,

Where no rude wind nor poisoned breath

Can blast a flower of paradise.

Articles in area papers say that the Selden school was packed with as many as 4,000 mourners for Dorothy's funeral, with 2,000 or so people outside.

Pallbearers for Dorothy were her 12 classmates, six boys and six girls. She was laid to rest in the cemetery just north of Hoxie.

Delores Zodrow said she remembers going to the funeral as a child and thought there was a plaque dedicated to the young girl in the old Selden school.

If so, it isn't hanging today. The original school burned down and there is no sign of a plaque at the one which replaced it.



DOROTHY HUNTER IS third from right in a picture taken shortly before she was killed with sister Alice, 9; brother Doyle, 6; and her youngest brother, Dale, 4. Denver Post photo/Rawlins County Museum

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