

11

THE LYNCHING OF LANCASTER

BY

ELIJAH PARSLEY

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THE EDMONSON COUNTY NEWS

OCTOBER 28th, 1930

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THOMAS LANCASTER was about twenty-eight years of age and lived in the Rocky Hill neighborhood. He had been a soldier in the Civil War; and when there was a man to be killed, he always volunteered for the firing squad. It seems that he had a mania for taking the lives of other men.

Dr. J.C.Gatewood was one of the most highly - respected citizens and physicians of Edmonson County. He lived on the old Louisville and Nashville Turn - pike about half a mile above the Rocky Hill crossing.

Lancaster had been at work for Dr. Gatewood and they had a settlement on Monday morning, September 21st, 1868. It is said that the Doctor drove his horse and buggy on down the pike to the crossing and went into Rocky Hill. Old Mrs. Shannon was in the buggy with him.

In the meantime, Gatewood got a double-barrel shot-gun and went through the fields and was in the store in Cowles and Mitchell when Dr. Gatewood arrived.

When he drove up, Lancaster stepped to the door and shot him in the breast. Then Gatewood jumped out

of the buggy and started into the store. Lancaster shot him again in the right arm, tearing off a big wad of flesh. Dr. Gatewood fell at the counter, Lancaster struck him in the mouth with the empty gun, and he died at once.

Cowles caught Lancaster and held him.

On the same morning there in the store where he had died, S.B.Reed and J.C.Bird, two Justices of the Peace, held an inquest over his body. Dr. S.A.Withers made an examination of him. The jury was composed of Ambrose Kirtley, Hugh McCombs, John Kirtley, A.C.Dickerson, W.C.Johns, Meredith Cox, and Stanford Mitchell. They found that Dr. Gatewood had been killed by Thomas Lancaster with a double-barrel shot-gun.

In the inquest it was said: "The Court laments the murder of the poor unfortunate man and sincerely desires that Almighty God may avenge himself of the wilful murder of one of the most eminent and respectable citizens and physicians in our County."

The examining trial for Lancaster was held at about the same time and place. Among the witnesses for the Commonwealth were Edwin Roberts, who had been in the store when the shooting began, and J.P.Cowles, the merchant. Another witness was Wilburn Mitchell, who saw the shooting. Lancaster had three witnesses, all women. They were. Mrs.

14

N. Gatewood, Miss Della Kirtley, and Mrs. R.E.Parker.

Lancaster was held without bail. He was delivered to J.B.Otter, a Constable, to be taken to the Warren County jail for safe-keeping; and the Constable was authorized to take along as many guards as he desired. The prisoner was kept in jail at Bowling Green until Circuit Court convened at Brownsville on the following Monday.

The Grand Jury returned an indictment against him and the Judge sent Mason Morris, the Sheriff, to Bowling Green after him.

On Tuesday Lancaster was arraigned in Court and the trial set for the following day; but at his request it was postponed until the next term of Court. The prisoner was again sent to Bowling Green for safe-keeping.

When Court met again on March 22, 1879, O.G.Moore, the new Sheriff, with three guards, returned the prisoner to Brownsville. He had no lawyers to defend him, and the Court appointed two good ones. They were R. Rodes and V.H.Jones. The name of the jurors who tried him were as follows: J.R.Rich, John Alford, Jesse Houchin, W.C. Webb, Archie Willis, Isaac Blair, George Cayton, George H. Woolsley, John H. Wilson, Alexander Higgs, James L. Lindsey and Harvey Wood. One of the jury could not be present next day on account of his wife being sick, and the trial went over until Thursday.

15

His defense was that he believed that Dr. Gatewood had plotted to kill him and it had driven him crazy. The Court instructed the jury that if they believed this to be true, they had a right to acquit him.

All day Friday the jury failed to reach a verdict, and the Judge pronounced it a hung jury and dismissed them. It is said that all of the jurors except W.C. (Clay) Webb were in favor of the death penalty.

The Judge lodged the prisoner in jail at Brownsville that night, and a guard of at least four or five men was employed to guard the jail.

About supper-time that night Milton Cox told J.E. Tibbs and James Madison that a band of eighty-two men would leave Rocky Hill that night at ten o'clock and come and get Lancaster and hang him. They reported this to the jailer about nine o'clock.

At that time the jail stood on the lot behind where M.O.Lindsey's house now stands.

Simeon Brooks was the jailer. After hiding his family away in another house, he and the guards began preparations to defend the jail. Among the guards were Thomas James, E. Burthram, Thomas Ronald, and W.H.Bush.

Presently a mob of men rode up to the jail and called for the jailer to come out. He came downstairs,

lit a candle and opened the door. Several men rushed in and demanded that he open the door where the prisoner was kept. There were so many of them that resistance was useless. He opened the door and four men entered the prisoner's cell. Two drew pistols on Lancaster, and two others tied his hands behind his back, put a rope around his neck, mounted him on a horse and the mob rode away with him.

After they had ridden about a mile, the leader of the mob commanded, "Halt!" and the sound of the horse-hoofs ceased. This was near the branch which flows between the residences of G.D.James and C.W.Lindsey.

Someone in the party called out: "Here is a limb that will do, G - d d -- n him!" Then there was a short silence. Someone groaned out, "O Lord!" five or six times; and the mob rode away.

The next morning the body of Thomas Lancaster was found swinging from the limb where they had lynched and left him.

It is said that the mob also started after Clay Webb, because he was reported to have hung the jury; but the River was up and there were no boats on this side. So they could not get across to him.

The jailer and Asel Houchin went out the next morning and brought in the body of the dead man. 'Squire M.M.Logan held an inquest over him. He was then buried in the

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graveyard at Brownsville.

It was claimed that R.A.Crump, John Kirtley, and D.Y.Malone and many other prominent citizens of the Rocky Hill section were in the mob; but none of them was ever tried for the crime.

Somebody wrote a song about the Lynching of Lancaster, which was sung throughout the County for many years afterward.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Records of the Inquest over Lancaster.
Records of the Examining Trial of Lancaster.
Records of the Trial of Lancaster in Circuit Court.
Records of the Inquest over Dr. Gatewood.
County Court Orders for Payment of Guards.
S.T.Brooks, son of Simeon Brooks, the Jailer.
W.A.Pardue.
E.B.Lindsey.
Rpy Webb.