

THE JESSE THORNTON LYNNING

Luverne is a typical Southern town in the heart of a farming district. There the farmers gather in the city on Saturdays in large numbers to barter and trade. The inhabitants of the little town gather in public places for one reason or the other.

On June 22, 1940, Jesse Thornton, a colored citizen of that town went down town to a Negro barbershop. As Jesse and a number of his acquaintances were standing in front of the barber shop one of the officers came along and Jesse said to the boys with whom they were all talking, "There comes Doris Rhodes, Boys." Officer Rhodes overheard the remark and turned and questioned him and said, "What did you say?" The colored citizen after learning that he had been heard hesitated to make reply and tried to recant and said, "Mr. Doris Rhodes." The officer said, "No, you didn't Nigger. You said 'Doris Rhodes'". Whereupon Jesse Thornton said, "I did say Doris Rhodes," And as quick as a flash the officer struck Jesse with his black jack and knocked him down, arrested him and walked him to the jail. As he reached the jail he somewhat relinquished his grasp to unlock the jail and Jesse attempted to break away and all but got away when he was knocked down with brick, bats and stones by by-standers and he was pelted so that he attempted to run again. As he set out to run five shots were fired at him but he kept going attempting to make good his escape from the pursuing officer and a Mr. Noland Ellis and the ever increasing mob. He ran about three-quarter of a mile into a field and became so exhausted from the loss of blood that he sat down upon a terrace and was seen by a white woman to reach into his pocket and get a handkerchief and mop the blood from his brow. The mob continued to pursue and as he looked back and made a futile attempt to continue, he gave up in sheer exhaustion as they overtook him. They brought up a small truck and put him in it and carried him to a "Dead End Street" and dragged him from the truck and went a few

passed into a swamp where shots were fired and they all, whites, returned from the woods after not more than 20 or 25 minutes. Jesse Thornton was left there.

They went to the City Hall, to the Barber Shop again to learn where Jesse lived and went to his house and asked his wife where Jesse was as if they did not know. She told them that he had gone to town. They disputed her and threatened her and told her that she had better tell where he was. She told them again that he was down town. They left but they told her they would come back and she had better tell. They went back to the city or town, to the Mayor's office where they had a conference with the Mayor, T. McKing, who undoubtedly gave instructions to go back to the Negro woman's home that night. They went back that night, the same night of the lynching, and put her in a car and kept her practically all night threatening her life and saying that she would suffer a similar fate if she told a thing. She was not injured or otherwise molested but was so intimidated that she would not open her mouth to say a word to colored people and would only admit very reluctantly to inquiring white people that she had been threatened, that she was told that they would kill her if she talked to any one. Many whites went to her after this making inquiries but the colored visitors were few as they feared and were intimidated.

On Friday, June 28th, Stephen Thompson was fishing on the bank of the Pataylagga River and scared up a drove of vultures and buzzards and other scavengers. Upon investigating he saw the spectacle of the scavengers eating a man's body. He went to the city officials and reported his findings. They had prisoners make a box and took the prisoners, Negroes, from the streets and went out to the spot and had the prisoners put the decomposed body, what remained of it, in the crude casket and carried it to the cemetery, a colored cemetery, and bury it. His wife was not notified.

Jesse Thornton, according to reports, had a reputation of honesty in his work. His employer stated last Summer that Jesse was one of the most honest Negroes in the entire county and that he was a very reliable and industrious Negro. He had charge of a chicken farm for this employer.

The colored people are afraid to talk, intimidated and will not talk to anyone and are afraid to even write or communicate with anyone. There are some very good and fine white people there but they are overrun by those in power or in office who believe in lynching.

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