

With either method you use be sure to clean the stone before you leave. It's a good idea to carry a couple gallons of water in the car with you to have on hand for this purpose. Be sure to pick up any trash you may have dropped and leave the cemetery is as good a shape as you found it if not better.

Remember, searching old cemeteries can be fun with the proper precautions and equipment. It can also be a valuable source of information not found anywhere else.

Face Lifting Won't Hide Mass Lynching

By RALPH KRAMER
Staff Reporter **1970**

VERSAILLES, Ind. — They're redoing the old Ripley County Courthouse here, tearing out the innards, sandblasting the brick and painting the clock tower.

But face lifting or not, the building that echoed to the hoofbeats of Morgan's Raiders more than 100 years ago and later reflected the sights and sounds of this town's most horrifying night still will haunt folks hereabouts.

The county is spending almost \$400,000 to remodel the austere structure it built in 1860 for \$16,250. While county business is carried on in an office a block away and Judge William D. Schroder holds circuit court in the American Legion hall, local folks still wonder what the old walls would say if they could talk about the night of Sept. 15, 1897.

That's when five men were hanged from the branches of a nearby elm tree.

Boldest Ever

It was the biggest, boldest mass vigilante execution in Indiana history, and months later, after several investigations, one of the dead men got the blame.

While the courthouse stood silent that night, its tall windows gleaming, dozens of men converged on the jail a block away, beat and shot five prisoners, dragged them 200 yards to the tree and strung them up.

Does anybody still talk about the lynching?

"Not much," said Judge Schroder.

Nobody ever admitted to being part of the mob. And after 74 years, nobody is expected to pop up now.

Families of some of the victims still live here, however, and if the wounds have healed, the scars are still there.

What may rankle most is the report to Gov. James A. Mount by then state Atty. Gen. William A. Ketchum, who personally investigated the lynching, which placed the blame on one Lyle

stolen a revolver from a pawn shop, returned, broke back into jail and shot and killed Henry Schuter and William Jenkins.

All this while five armed guards slept.

The official report says Levi then must have dragged the men to the tree, hanged them, returned to jail for James B. Andrews and Clifford Gordon, took them out and strung them up.

"And then, in order that suspicion might be directed against innocent men, he finally hung himself," the report said.

"His nefarious conduct in attempting to distract attention from himself and divert suspicion to the good citizens of Osgood, Napoleon, Milan and Versailles is the more reprehensible as apparently nothing in his life so became him as the leaving of it."

Four of the victims were charged with burglarizing a general store southwest of Versailles.

The fifth was accused of breaking into an Osgood barber shop.

The old jail and the hanging tree are both gone, and now they're putting a new face on the courthouse.

Historical markers noting that Morgan's Raiders looted the county treasury and a Masonic hall on the second floor of the courthouse the afternoon of July 12, 1863, will remain on the sleepy square here, but there's nothing to remind folks of the lynching.

"Some things you'd just as soon forget," said Judge Schroder.

