

spikes" that were bared because planks had been removed to discourage all but railroad traffic across the bridge.

Although weakened by loss of blood, so the story goes, she stopped the train in time. Seventy-five years later, on the anniversary of her deed, the Order of Railway Conductors voted to honor the memory of Kate Shelley by placing a bronze marker on her grave at the Sacred Heart Cemetery in Boone, Iowa.

At that time, Kate Shelley was called the railroad's "most famous heroine." The lantern was presented to the Historical Building in 1913 and is currently displayed on the second floor.

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## VIGILANTES IN IOWA, PART II

*This is the continuation from the Spring, 1966, issue on the Vigilantes in Iowa, taken from the Des Moines Sunday Register, March 24, 1946.*

There were occasions when the Vigilantes turned their prisoners over to the legal authorities. More often were jails and courts invaded and men taken to be executed by mobs. An example of court invasion was the case of William (Comequick) Thomas, who lived on Camp creek in Polk county.

In September, 1856, he met a young couple near Oskaloosa. They had \$1,000 and they wanted to buy a good farm. He promised to show them where they could get one. Two weeks later their bodies were found in cornshocks in Poweshiek county.

Through continuances and a change in venue, the case was delayed and finally transferred to Montezuma. On July 14, 1857, Comequick was given another change in venue.

Some 2,000 persons gathered around the Poweshiek county courthouse. A brother of the slain woman, who had come from out of the state, cried to the crowd:

"That villain up there butchered my sister and hid her in a cornshock and his lawyer is going to get him cleared the next time because I have nothing left to pay my expenses here again.

"Will you let that murderer get cleared when I can not come here to tell the horrid story to the jury?"

"No! Never!" roared the mob. Then it rushed into the courtroom, seized the prisoner, took him to the edge of town and hanged him. A fire was built under him to make him confess. He remained silent. The body was left hanging for about four hours. Then it was taken down and buried near the scene of the hanging.

At Chariton in 1870 Hiram Wilson, a suspected thief, tried to sell a horse. The sheriff attempted to arrest him. Wilson fired and mortally wounded the officer. Wilson fled, pursued by a mob of townspeople.

He was caught and was brought back to Chariton where the dying sheriff, Gaylord Lyman, identified him.

The sheriff died at 10 o'clock that night. When word of his death was received, the mob broke into the jail, got Wilson and hanged him from a second story window of the courthouse.

Another courthouse execution was that of a Charles Howard Dec. 15, 1874, in the Polk county courthouse yard. Howard had been convicted of murdering a Scotchman named Johnson. Talk of lynching had caused the authorities to call out a home guard outfit.

The guards stayed on the job until about 2 a.m. Since all was quiet, they went home. Soon 500 men were mobilized. They rushed into the jail and dragged out the half-naked prisoner whom they hanged to a lamp post in a corner of the courthouse yard.

In his roundup of lynchings in Iowa, Paul W. Black of the State University of Iowa reported in *The Journal of History and Politics* in 1912 that mob action has had a tendency to "cluster about the years of panic and depression." The large number of cases in 1857, a depression year, tends to prove that point.

Mob action has been rare in Iowa for the last 35 years or more. In the depression of the 1930s, however, a judge was dragged off the bench in Le Mars, and there were several clashes which arose from farm picketing efforts and attempted mortgage foreclosures. No deaths resulted from this violence, however.

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