

[J. Y. tho'rnton]

Redfield, Georgia B.

5-27-38. 1320 words.

J. Y. tho'RNTON

Served in New Mexico Indian War Five Years

Pioneer Hotel Man and Cattle Man

Organized First Roswell Knights of Pythias Lodge.

J. Y. tho'rnton came to New Mexico as a soldier in the United States Army in 1870. He served five years - until 1875-with the Fifteenth Infantry stationed at Fort Stanton which was established in 1855 for the purpose of protection of the early settlers from Indian hostilities. The old fort was abandoned in 1861, was reoccupied in 1863, and the old adobe buildings were replaced by stone and brick constructions in 1858 - two years before Mr. tho'rnton was detailed for duty at the post.

Mr. tho'rnton's valiant services during tho'se dangerous times of Indian uprisings and Massacres, proved him to be a soldier whose bravery in performance of his duties entitled him to the praise and public recognition given him in later years by General Pershing, who visited Mr. tho'rnton at his home in Roswell, February 23, 1916, and by Captain D. H. Clark U. S. A. Commandant of Cadets at the University of Florida in 1903, who during that year wrote Mr. tho'rnton in praise of his valor and loyalty to duty while a soldier during the Indian War. A part of the letter which was dated September 20, 1903 is given below:

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"I remember well the Geronimo Campaign in which you served. I was Quartermaster, and Major Mock was Post Commander at Fort Stanton.

A courier came in about eleven o'clock reported an uprising and massacre by Geronimo's band of Indians at Aqua Chiquita. It was by my orders you went out after the dead and wounded.

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After the drive of 180 miles, witho'ut a change of team, you returned in thirty-six hours, thereby making one of the most remarkable drives on record.

You deserve every honor of your valor and bravery in making that hazardous drive thro'ugh the heart of a hostile Indian country, in going to the assistance of your dead and wounded comrades."

After Mr. tho'rnton received his discharge from the army on October 9, 1875, on which his conduct and character was marked "good" during his five years of service in the army, he engaged for five years in the cattle business at Fort Stanton with George Curry, who afterwards was Governor of the Territory of New Mexico, during part of which time Mr. tho'rnton served under him as oil inspector for the Territory.

In 1880 Mr. tho'rnton moved to Lincoln, New Mexico, where he and George Curry owned the hotel north of the jail in which William Bonney - Known as "Billy, the Kid," New Mexico desperado - was confined, awaiting his hanging which was to take place on May 13, 1880 for the killing of Sheriff Jim Brady.

One of Billy the Kid's guards - Ollinger - was eating dinner at Mr. tho'rnton's hotel when he heard the "Kid's" shot that killed Bell, the other guard. On running from the dining room Ollinger, at a call from Billy the Kid looked up and received a volley of shots from his own gun that he had left leaning against the wall at the jail. With both guards killed within two

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or three minutes' time Billy the Kid ordered his shackles sawed off by the jailer, mounted a horse and made his sensational escape.

Mr. thornnton owned the pioneer livery stable at Lincoln and organized the first produce establishment at that place, in which he handled hay and feed.

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General [Lee?] Wallace spent some time in Lincoln during Mr. thornnton's residence at that place. They were friends, as all men were, who were on the side of peace, law, and order and were united with a common cause of bringing to a close the days of horror of the Lincoln County War and of bringing Billy the Kid to justice.

Mr. thornnton, with a posse of nine men under leader John Hurley one day, entered a cave near White Oaks seeking the young killer and desperado. The Kid was concealed behind rocks at the farthest end and was not discovered, but he could have shot each one as they entered the cave if he had desired. He afterwards said they all had once been his friends and he couldn't shoot them down unless they had him cornered and forced him to do so.

While living at Lincoln Mr. thornnton and a Mr. White of Las Cruces came to Roswell and organized the First Knights of Pythias Lodge.

While in Roswell they stopped at the Pauly Hotel owned by Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Church. Mr. Church had remodeled the building from the original O'neal [House?] which had been conducted by a Mrs. O'neal, a widow, who by advice of Judge Granville A. Richardson, came from White Oaks for the purpose of opening Roswell's first "real hotel."

At the time of this visit of Mr. thornnton's and Mr. White's Roswell had been incorporated as a village in 1891, there were about fifteen or eighteen residence houses, Chaves County had been created from parts of Lincoln County in 1889, and Roswell had been made County Seat, a courthouse and jail had been built, 4 the Main street of the town, laid out

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in blocks in 1885, had been graded by a twenty horse grading and ditching machine, from the Hondo River as far north as North Spring River. Besides the new Pauly Hotel, there was a church of adobe built in 1887, and a new three room brick school house erected in 1889 had replaced the one room adobe built in 1885, which had become too small.

There was a weekly newspaper, the "Pecos Valley Register" established by James A Erwin and Louis O. Fullen in 1888. Besides the pioneer store on North Main Street, Jaffa Prager Company in 1886 had opened a drygoods and grocery store and Mr. Whiteman in 1889 opened a grocery store on South Main street. There was also a grist mill established by George Blashek in 1881 and a blacksmith shop opened for business by Rufus H. Dunnahoo in 1881. The first Bank of Roswell had been established by E. A. Cahoon in [1890?]. Roswell Lodge No. 18 Ancient Free and Accepted Masons had been instituted in 1889 and was chartered in 1890, and on the coming of Mr. Thornton and Mr. White the Knights of Pythias Lodge was organized by them in 1891 or 1892.

Being favorably [?] the growing town, Mr. Thornton with his family moved to Roswell in 1895, where he in 1897 built the home at what is now 209 North Pennsylvania Avenue. He lived there continuously until his death in 1919, and his wife lives there at the present time.

Mr. Thornton was born and educated in Danville, Pennsylvania which was his home until moving to New Mexico in 1870.

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His father, Captain Isiah Paul Thornton, was also a soldier having been made a Captain during the Mexican War.

After moving from Fort Stanton to Lincoln Mr. Thornton was married, at that place on February 15, 1886, to Miss Nellie Leahy of Monroe, Wisconsin. She had come to New Mexico with a friend in 1884 for the benefit of her health, after having had pneumonia.

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Mr. and Mrs. tho'rnton had four daughters Mabel and Eva, both of whom died during the same month of September with scarlet fever, and Kitty - now Mrs. Raynes V. West of Long Beach, California - and [Dola?], now Mrs. Orville B. Brookshier of Roswell, New Mexico.

Mr. tho'rnton was a charter member of Elks Lodge and of Knights of Pythias. During his long residence in Roswell he was active in important business developments and improvements for the upbuilding of the City. His death occurred at Roswell on August 19, 1919, his funeral at South Park being attended by many old friends of Fort Stanton and Lincoln as well as Comrades who lived at Roswell, and enjoyed with him peaceful days he had helped bring to New Mexico. He served five years as a soldier and guard to protect the pioneer from Indian hostilities during the first years of settlement in New Mexico.

Source of Information

Mrs. T. Y. tho'rnton (wife) and [?] and letters in her possession.