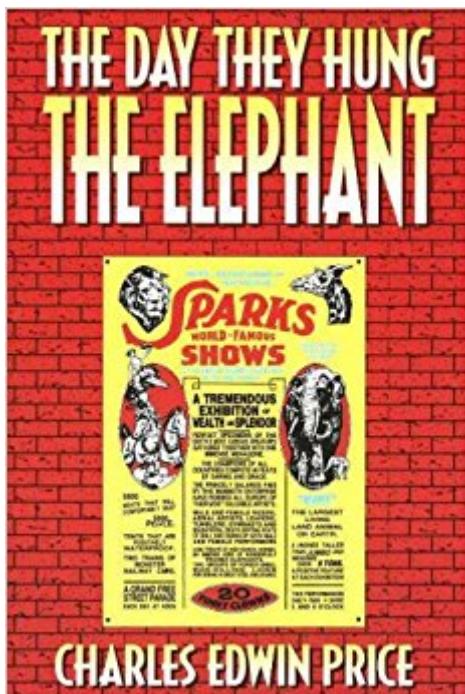


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The Day They Hung The Elephant



Synopsis

There is no doubt that in 1916 a five-ton circus elephant was lynched from a 100-ton Clinchfield railroad crane car in the little town of Erwin, Tennessee. The details of the execution and the tragic events leading up to it, however, are clouded in nearly a century of oral tradition. From one retelling to the next, facts are distorted and embellished; legend, instead of truth, is often accepted as fact. This book is an attempt to bring together all the known facts about the hanging and to fill in with educated guesses the missing parts of the puzzle.

Book Information

Paperback: 44 pages

Publisher: Overmountain Press (January 1, 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0932807755

ISBN-13: 978-0932807755

Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 6 x 0.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 0.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,909,862 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #76 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Social Science > Folklore & Mythology #1100 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales > Folklore #4537 in Books > Law > Administrative Law

Customer Reviews

Charles Edwin Price is the author of numerous books of tall tales and folklore, including Demon in the Woods, Diggin' Up Bones, and The Infamous Bell Witch of Tennessee.

Naturally there is some violence, the good people of Kingsport, TN sentenced an Elephant to hang. Well...Nope, you need to get a copy and read this to believe it. The fact of the matter is that story is 100% TRUE and it even made its way into the old Trivia Pursuit Game. Ed, as we knew him at ETSU, was a great friend and story teller extraordinaire. His love of the stories of Upper East Tennessee was well known and we all rejoiced when his first book was published. His passing has left a large hole in the telling of the hundreds of tales left in that area and in the Appalachian Mountain region in general. Ed is sorely missed by all of us who knew him; his unwritten work is a hole in America's history, although some might not consider folks' tales as "history."

What a moving story about a tragic event that happened 100 yrs ago in a small East Tennessee community! An errant moment leads to a man's untimely death. A man's death leads to the death of a doomed animal. I was already passingly familiar with this bit of historic Tennessee lore, but this book brought it home for me. I feel for the loss of human life, but I also mourn the loss of an animal in a situation that could have been avoided. I wanted to cry reading this narrative. I wanted to reach back in time and talk to the people who did this, and beg them to retire the elephant from circus life and spare her life. It's unfortunate that, with hindsight, we can see alternatives to a situation and grieve at the hasty vigilantism act as people panicked and called for Mary's death. It truly was a dark moment, but I hope that others can read this book and appreciate the history and folkloric retelling of this event and learn from it.

When I first heard this tale I found it hard to believe. Without knowing the story, and the time when the hanging took place, it would be impossible to think that an elephant hanging could take place in the U.S., but it did. Charles Price does an excellent job of telling this story using the very few details that exist regarding the hanging. By tracking down the last known living eye-witness Mr. Price was able to recreate the scene of the hanging in his book using first-person testimony. Through his research and interviews Mr. Price has successfully documented this strange moment of history thereby taking a piece of Southern folklore and creating a fact-based document before all witnesses to the execution had passed away. The book is illustrated with ink drawings in several places and the famous photo of elephant Mary hanging from the gallows is included as well.

The book got to my house within a few days. Very happy

A horrifying yet life changing experience. Makes one question the goodness of man. If I ever met anyone that would react to the "event" like the hundreds of people that wanted to see the hanging I am so delighted I did not realize the sick, twisted mind that was near. It broke my heart

I once spent about two weeks in Erwin, Tennessee, while hiking on the Appalachian Trail, which passes right through Erwin. I was with a group of charity hikers, and we were forced to stop in Erwin because one of our hikers got severe tendonitis in both feet and had to see a series of doctors there. While we were in Erwin, everything that could go wrong did. Our hiker's feet, for one. A friend of ours broke her knee and had to go home. Another friend got a call that both his parents had been killed in a car wreck. It made us all suspicious about the town, and when we asked around, we

discovered that back in 1916 a circus passed through town, and had a parade through the town's main street. During that parade, the elephant's "caretaker" prodded the elephant too severely, and the elephant reacted by trampling the man to death. Members of the town formed a jury, had a trial, and sentenced the elephant to death. First they shot it repeatedly. That didn't work. Then they hung it. They hung the elephant from a crane mounted on a railroad car. The chains it hung by snapped, the elephant fell, and it broke its hip. Then they hung it again. Then they buried it. Then they dug it up to cut off its tusks. Then they buried it again. Then, years later, they built an Ace Hardware on top of it. It's still there, as is "The Hanging Elephant" antique store where you can buy photos suitable for framing and copies of this book. Most of the town's ashamed of the incident, though one slightly malevolent town resident told me: "We used to hang elephants. Now we hang queers." A bad feeling lies over the town still, and whether it's from traffic, nearby experiments with radiation, modern day hate crimes, or the 1916 incident, I don't know. But the feeling is there. It's almost tangible, and if I ever hike the Appalachian Trail again, I won't be going into Erwin. This book is concise, clear, and contains several good photos of the incident, the place it happened, and the people who were there. It also contains good information on the history of the town itself. I read it while hiking, and then gave it away, but I still have the photo of the hanging elephant above my desk. It's an unbelievable story, worth looking into.

A very detailed description of what happened that day. It's a strange story, but it fascinated me from beginning to end.

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