

Timeline of Attempted Lynching in Anoka September 5, 1931

Information researched and written by Ed Wehling

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On Saturday, September 5, 1931 an attempt was made to lynch Ernest McDuffey, an African American prisoner at the Anoka city jail. It is an event that has had very little public discussion and that few people know about.

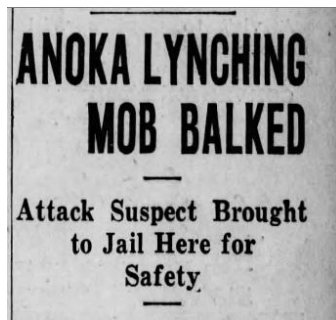
This timeline attempts to describe the events of that Saturday in 1931. The descriptions are compiled from newspaper articles in the Anoka Union, Anoka Herald, Minneapolis Star, Minneapolis Tribune, St. Cloud Times, the Twin City Herald, the Sauk Centre Herald, and the Le Sueur News-Herald.

This timeline recounts the information in the newspaper articles at the time. The events and descriptions have not been verified or investigated beyond the scope of the newspaper articles. The descriptions are not intended to suggest guilt or innocence, but to convey the atmosphere for what occurred on that Saturday.

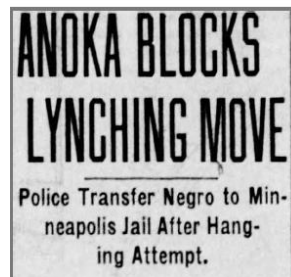
Newspaper Headlines of the Events



Anoka Union



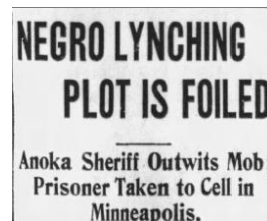
Minneapolis Star



Minneapolis Tribune



Anoka Herald

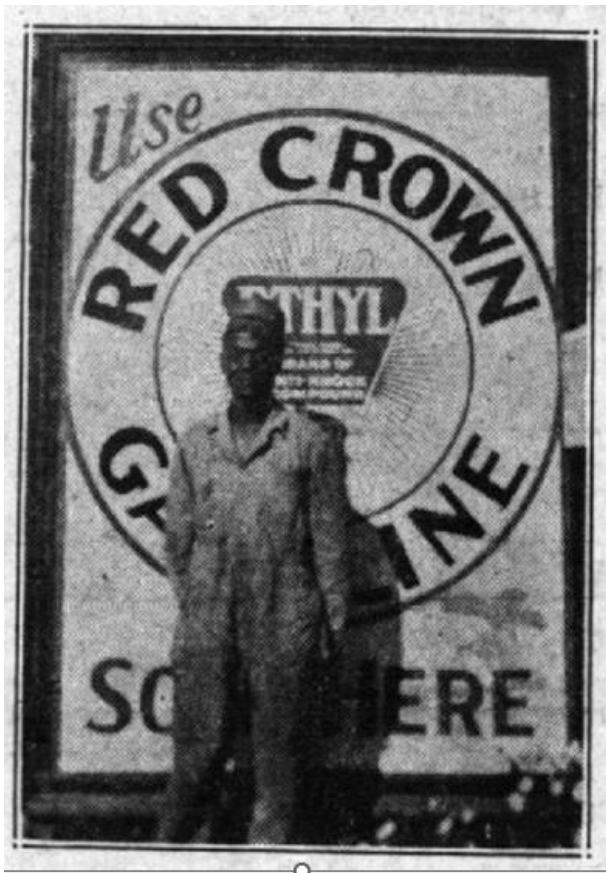


St. Cloud Times

Arrest Saturday Afternoon September 5, 1931

On Saturday afternoon September 5, 1931 Chief of Police John Melberg went to the garage where Ernest McDuffey worked and arrested him. Chief Melberg then took McDuffey to the city jail. The reported charges concerned mistreating or assaulting an 8-year-old girl.

There are various, and often conflicting, records and accounts of what happened and what didn't happen at that garage on that day. We are never going to know that truth.



Ernest McDuffey

A Crowd Gathers

There are different descriptions of what happened in the several hours following the arrest.

The Anoka Union wrote "As news of the arrest spread, there was some talk, but no fear of any violence was felt."

The Anoka Herald wrote "When news of his arrest circulated around the city, groups of men were said to have gathered in various sections, making threats to 'get the Negro'."

The Minneapolis Tribune wrote "The lynching party is said to have formed shortly after news of the Negro's arrest had spread."

The St. Cloud Times wrote "Small groups of citizens began gathering across the street from the jail when word spread that the negro was captured. Several attempted attacks on young women lately had resulted in wild goose chases by posses and sheriff's deputies."

The Jailer Is Lured Away from City Hall Saturday Night

The time given for the remaining events varies. The St. Cloud Times reports these events started "shortly afterward" of the small groups of citizens forming. The Minneapolis Tribune called it "Saturday evening". The Anoka Herald reported it was "shortly after dusk" and the Anoka Union called it "midnight".

Here's what happened:

Jailer John Larson was approached by two men who said there was a bad accident at the Mississippi bridge and that Larson was needed there. Larson took the patrol car and started for the bridge.

In the photo below taken several years later Chief John Melberg is on the left and Jailer John Larson is on the right.



The Jailer Returns and Finds a Lynching Crowd at City Hall

Jailer Larson was suspicious and after driving only a couple of blocks returned to City Hall. One report states that he drove down an alley behind City Hall and another report states that he drove down Jackson Street.

The Anoka Union reported that Larson "saw a score of men, armed with shot guns and ropes. Ladders were handy and the men shouted 'Let's shoot through the window at the ____'. Others wanted to hang him."

The Minneapolis Tribune stated that "Larson returned to find the lynching party placing ladders against the walls of the jail to get at windows where an entry could be made."

The St. Cloud Times reported that Larson found "the rapidly forming mob trying to scale a rear wall of the jail".

The photo below shows a mockup of the city of Anoka in the past from the Anoka County Historical Society. Anoka City Hall is near the center of the photo on Main Street. Anoka City Hall was built in 1874 and torn down in 1960.



The photo below shows the Anoka City Hall soon after City Hall was built.



Law Enforcement Disperses the Crowd

Jailer Larson called Sheriff Oscar Olson and several policemen who finally succeeded in dispersing the crowd. It is reported that Chief Melberg ordered the men to disperse, which they did.

The Suspect is Moved to Minneapolis

The Minneapolis Tribune reported that "Sheriff Oscar Olson and police decided to bring the Negro to Minneapolis for arraignment. He will not be returned to Anoka for several days if at all." The suspect was taken to Hennepin County jail.