

## **Attempted Lynching in Anoka**

On Saturday, September 5, 1931 an attempt was made to lynch 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.

I believe it is important for us to know and acknowledge our past. I hope this article stimulates attention and discussion to these events. I hope that readers can look at the events of that day and try to understand how violence and hatred could have grown into action. I also hope that readers can reflect on how these events would have impacted African-Americans and other groups.

I hope we can reflect on how events of the past affect lives today. Possibly discussions may result in some type of remembrance or physical marker about what happened.

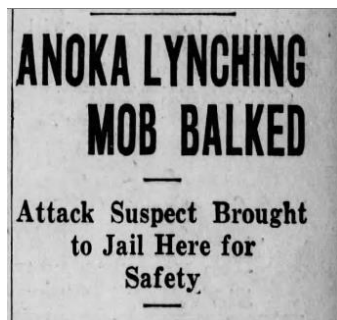
This article attempts to describe the events of that Saturday in 1931. The descriptions are compiled from newspaper articles in the Anoka Union, Anoka Herald, Minneapolis Star, Minneapolis Tribune, and St. Cloud Times. The descriptions are not intended to indicate guilt or innocence, but to provide a feel for what occurred on that Saturday.

## Newspaper Headlines

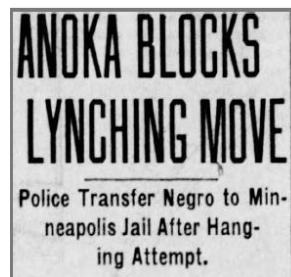
Here are some of the headlines of the articles in the indicated papers. The headlines provide a window into how these events were interpreted at that time. How do you think these headlines were received by yesterday's readers—white, African-American, and people of other groups?



Anoka Union



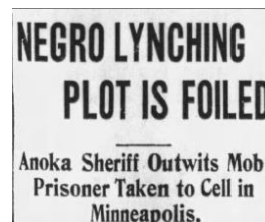
Minneapolis Star



Minneapolis Tribune



Anoka Herald



St. Cloud Times

## **Incident Saturday Afternoon September 5, 1931**

Three kids were playing near a warehouse and commercial garage on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North in Anoka on Saturday afternoon. They were two boys ages 9 and 6 and a girl age 8. Ernest McGuire, age 22, an African-American, who was employed as a mechanic and attendant at the garage, drove a tractor to the garage.

There was a car in the garage with a flat tire and McGuire started working on the car. He asked the girl to put a jack under the car. The older boy said he should because he was stronger and he would put the jack in place. McGuire told him to get out and both of the boys left.

McGuire closed the doors to the garage. He then removed some of the girl's clothing. The boys heard the girl crying and ran to the girl's mother, who notified police.

Chief of Police John Melberg interviewed the girl and she told her story. A physician examined the girl and found she had not been hurt in any way. "She was given a nickel to buy candy and was not much frightened."

## **Arrest Saturday afternoon**

Chief Melberg went to the garage and found McGuire, who protested his innocence. Chief Melberg arrested McGuire and took him to the city jail. The reports say he was arrested for mistreating or molesting an 8-year-old girl.

## **A Crowd Gathers**

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

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

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

The St. Cloud Times said "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 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 rear of 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.

## **Court Appearance**

The Anoka papers reported a week later on what happened in court.

The Anoka Union reported "Ernest McGuire, the negro garage mechanic charged with mistreating a little girl of eight, and who had quite a scare when a crowd besieged the jail late Saturday night, bent on vengeance, was taken before judge Mathias Baldwin in Minneapolis where he pled guilty and was sentenced to one to seven years at St. Cloud, and was at once removed to the Granite City. McGuire didn't want to be brought to Anoka and told the officers he would plead guilty."

The Anoka Herald reported "The case of Ernest McDuffy, negro, charged with indecent assault on an 8-year-old girl, was held in municipal court Wednesday. His attorney waived preliminary hearing and he was bound over to district court. In district court he pled guilty to the crime and was sentenced to the St. Cloud Reformatory to be discharged by due process of the law."

## **The Past and Today**

How do we recognize the experience of African-Americans throughout our history? How do we recognize that events of the past impact lives today? How do we make these ideas part of an ongoing reflection of our community? What events might happen today to create violence and hatred?