

SAN JOSE

NOVEMBER, 1933

THE HART CASE

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

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Presentation H.S.
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April 30, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

In November, 1933, the small town of San Jose in Santa Clara County experienced a tragic incident that would bring national attention. Brooke L. Hart, son of popular Hart's Department Store owner, was kidnapped for ransom on November 9, 1933. Ten days later, his body was found by duck hunters in the waters of the bay near San Mateo Bridge.

His murderers, John Holmes and Thomas Harold Thurmond, had previously been apprehended on the fifteenth and sixteenth of the month. They were rushed by officials to San Francisco jail for fear of lynching. Then they returned to San Jose and were placed in jail. The day Brooke L. Hart's corpse was recovered, the murderers met their own deaths. An angry and wild crowd gathered around the jail, forced entrance, and siezed the two men. They then were hung from two large trees in St. James park.

BODY OF HART RECOVERED FROM WATERS OF BAY

Discovered Near San Mateo Bridge by Duck Hunters Ending 10-Day Search.

A ten-day search for the body of Brooke L. Hart, 22-year-old local youth kidnaped and slain on November 9, ended yesterday.

The remains were found by two duck hunters about a mile west of the Alameda county shore and a half-mile south of the San Francisco bay bridge.

It was taken in charge by Coroner Grant D. Miller and Sheriff William J. Emig notified.

Positive identification of the body was made by Dr. W. H. Heuschele, local physician; Dr. J. R. Conner, local dentist; A. H. Gossling, superintendent of the Hart store, and Louis A. Rossi, manager of the men's department in Hart's store.

As soon as the identification was completed, Sheriff M. B. Driver and Coroner Miller announced that a murder warrant would be issued in Alameda county against both Harold Thurmond and Jack Holmes, who confessed to the kidnaping, and who are held here on kidnaping charges.

FUNERAL TODAY.

The body was turned over to Amos O. Williams company, local undertakers, who will conduct private funeral services for the popular youth today. Hart's store will be closed all day today.

H. E. Stephens, 174 Jeter street, Redwood City, and L. L. Dalve, 628 Maple street, Redwood City, found the body in five feet of water as they moved their boat in search of ducks.

They saw the floating corpse, thought at once it must be Hart's body, and wrapped it with canvas and towed it behind the boat to near the Alameda county end of the bay bridge. There Stephens trudged through the mud flats to a telephone and notified authorities of his find.

All flesh was gone from the upper part of the body, flesh remaining on the lower limbs. Realizing that identification might be difficult, Sheriff Emig summoned Hart's physician, dentist, the two store managers, and Hart's closest friend, Charles M. O'Brien, Jr.

IDENTIFICATION POSITIVE.

Dr. J. R. Connor, dentist, declared after inspecting the teeth:

"My chart and the teeth in the body checked absolutely. There is no doubt of the identification. I have done Brooke Hart's dental work since he was eight years old.

Tragic Death Confirmed



Brooke L. Hart, whose tragic death at the hands of Harold Thurman and Jack Holmes was confirmed yesterday when two duck hunters recovered the body, floating in shallow water a half mile south of the east end of the San Mateo bay bridge.

the body as garments he had himself helped young Hart in selecting. A pocketknife in the trousers pocket was identified as one given Brooke by his father on the latter's return from an European trip.

not made by a brick or building block."

The body was carefully examined by Dr. E. V. Tiffany, Alameda county autopsy surgeon, and Dr. W. M. Theobald. It was viewed by offi-

WYNEKOOP EFFORT TO SHIELD MOTHER IN KILLING, FOILED

Alibi Which He Attempted to Destroy, Re-established By New Evidence.

By Associated Press

CHICAGO, Nov. 26. — Assistant State's Attorney Charles S. Dougherty tonight said the alibi Earl Wynkeoop sought to destroy, that he might "confess" the slaying of his 23-year-old wife, Rheta, to shield his mother, apparently had been established by evidence.

Dougherty disclosed the rebuilding of officers of the alibi as he denied a "new" confession had been made by Earle's 62-year-old mother, Alice Wynkeoop, who previously tested a statement before the coroner's jury that she had shot Rheta after an accidental overdosage of chloroform during a physical examination Tuesday.

NEW CONFESSION DENIED

While the Herald and State authorities to further investigate the mysterious operation of the death, officers in charge of the investigation denied new developments of this character.

Police Captain John Stege, however, asserted that far from all of the story the doctor told authorities had been made public. He said at least two statements, both lengthy, had been taken. The only public statement from the woman recommended held by the coroner's jury on a charge of murder was given out Friday. In it Dr. Wynkeoop said that after the girl was dead she fired a revolver bullet into Rheta's back because she was in a panic and feared the death would ruin her professional reputation.

ALIBI CONFIRMED.

The youthful husband was taken today by police to Lockport, Ill., with his friend, Stanley Young, who has affirmed that at the time of the death Tuesday afternoon they were en route to Kansas City.

At Lockport employees of a gas line filling station identified a pair as having been there—35 miles from Chicago—at 11:55 a. m. Tuesday. The filling station attendant said the men had two tires and told they were headed for west. A restaurant employee partially identified the two as being eaten dinner there shortly noon.

CONVINCED STORY TOLD

Dougherty said that the identification did not positively establish the name of the

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Act I

THE HART KIDNAPPING & MURDER

The Setting

San Jose, California 1933

The scene opens on the small, but growing, town of San Jose. Despite the Depression, San Jose, the bustling fruit canning center of Santa Clara County, is surviving well. In fact, many local businesses are prospering. The Hart's Department Store is one of the most notable.

For historical context, it must be noted that the town's normally sedate atmosphere is somewhat constrained. The grueling trial of David Lamson for the murder of his wife has left the county divided as to his guilt or innocence.¹ Nevertheless, the citizens have confidence in the well-instilled judicial system. Prohibition is still law, but speakeasies and gambling dens flourish. Kidnapping has been made the fashionable crime by the Lindbergh case of 1932.

The stage is set for drama. San Jose is about to be plunged into the national spotlight. This year will live in infamy in the minds of San Joseans.

The date is Thursday, November 9. It is 5:55 p.m., five minutes before the Hart's Department Store closes. Brooke L. Hart, junior partner and vice-president of his father's store, is leaving his office. As he strolls to get his green Studebaker from a nearby parking lot, the popular and handsome 22 year-old is bidding goodnight to a few employees.

HART: Goodnight!

ROSSI: Hurry up there, don't keep your father waiting!²

As Brooke Hart left the parking lot that evening, John "Jack" Holmes yanked open the car door. He jumped in, and with a gun to Hart's ribs, instructed him to follow Thomas Harold Thurmond. Thurmond, his accomplice, was driving an old sedan. Later, in Milpitas, they transferred Hart into Thurmond's automobile. They drove out to the toll bridge across the southern part of San Francisco Bay. Using 55 cents worth of wire, they bound Hart at the wrists, hitting him on the head to stop his struggles. Holmes and Thurmond attached 20-pound cement blocks to Hart's arms and legs. They then lifted him over the bridge railing and tossed him into the bay. Hart thrashed in the water, trying to free himself.

Holmes fired two or three shots into Hart's body, remarking, "Well I guess he won't be coming up again!"³

The murderers parted to carry out the next step of their plan. While Holmes took a bus back to San Jose, Thurmond drove to San Francisco. At 9:30 p.m., he placed his first ransom call to the Hart residence. He said that Hart had been kidnapped, but was fine. Hart would be returned alive for \$40,000.

Thurmond continued to make subsequent calls to the family and wrote the demand letters. He made his contacts from various locations. A couple calls were made from phones located in the front of a local drugstore. Emma Voshall Bubb, my grandmother, was working at the Owl Drug Store. The day that Thurmond was finally apprehended making a phone call from a local public garage, he had made an earlier call from the drugstore. Emma recalls Thurmond.

Harold Thurmond did not belong. He was not in the gang. He did not really pal around. Although he had some friends, he didn't date anyone I know of. I'm sure I would have dated him. I'm sure if he did, he would have dated me because he used to come in the drugstore and pass the time of day with me quite often.⁴

Finally, the authorities did catch him. Violet Voshall Ehler tells, "And, then, Harold, you know, phoned across from City Hall, and they got caught as all the [phone] lines were tapped."⁵ After several hours of questioning, he finally admitted to kidnapping Hart and killing him. He also implicated Holmes as the mastermind of the affair. Thurmond said that he merely went along with it in a moment of insanity. Evidence certainly supports this claim. While Holmes had a record of small crimes, Thurmond had never been

involved in anything publicly suspicious. He was a faithful Baptist. His mother taught Sunday school and his sister played the church organ. He attended where the Voshalls, Bubbs, and Ehlers went to the church on Second street and was in the same Sunday school class. He is described as being "sweet, gentle, and quiet."⁶ However, it is also said that he was a follower and just got involved with the wrong crowd.⁷

After Holmes was picked up at 3 a.m. in a San Jose hotel room, he, too, confessed. Both alleged murderers were taken to San Francisco while the crime was further investigated. Police collected evidence locally. One day, they called on Frank Ehler, an acquaintance of Holmes, who had serviced the old sedan only two days after the kidnapping. Looking at the records, they saw that an inordinate amount of miles had recently been acquired on the tachometer. Looking back, Frank Ehler, my uncle, ironically remembers that he talked to Holmes that day about the kidnapping. Kiddingly he said, "Hey, Jack, where are ya holding the Hart boy?"⁸ Little did he know.

ACT II

THE LYNCHINGS

The mutilated body of Brooke Hart has been found by two duck hunters. Photographs of the skeleton have been circling the local pubs. Citizens are outraged by what they see. Some mutter that the only justice would be to lynch Holmes and Thurmond.

Meanwhile, the kidnappers have been brought back to San Jose. They are now being held in the city jail.

About fifty close friends of the Hart family are standing outside the prison. Some of the crowd have been drinking. The loiterers say that they are there only in protest. While currently the situation does not seem to be dangerous, it soon will get out of hand. It will end in a double lynching.

ROSSI: Bill, I want to tell you something. They are going to break into your jail tonight, and they're going to capture the kidnappers, and they're going to hang them across the street in St. James Park.

SHERIFF: Louis, that's impossible. They can never break in.

ROSSI: I'm going to ask you to do me a favor, Bill. Believe me for once.⁹

What was anticipated did happen. The crowd grew larger. About 2,000 people milled around the jail, throwing bricks and rocks. They shouted for justice to be done. "It took the lynch mob...several hours to work up the proper rage, however, and homeward-bound theatergoers were able to catch a second show."¹⁰ Frank Ehler and his fiancée, Violet Voshall, were among the theater crowd. As they walked along Third Street, they heard the noise swelling. Stopping in at the bakery, they found out that Holmes and Thurmond were to be lynched.

The crowd, which consisted of men, women, and children, became angrier by the minute. The mob surged against the jail doors.

The deputies retaliated with tear gas, making the crowd even more unruly. After a two hour battle, 40 men rushed forward towards the door with a 8-inch steel pipe.¹¹ "Others seized a second similar length of pipe and followed suit."¹² The doors broke down. Both Thurmond and Holmes were found. A noose was thrust around each person's neck as they were dragged out to St. James Park. Another prisoner jailed nearby notes that he was deathly afraid of being mistaken for one of the kidnapers.¹³

Thurmond was hung first from an old mulberry tree. Then, Holmes' naked body was raised. The rope was supported on the limb of an elm. The crowd, which had now grown to about 6,000 people, went wild. The police finally forced their way through the riot and cut the disfigured bodies down. They were taken to the morgue where they lay on slabs next to Hart's body.

The next day the trees were gone. They had been cut down. Pieces of wood were kept as morbid souvenirs of this night, November 26.

The lynching brought national attention. Surprisingly, the reaction was positive. California Governor Rolph condoned what had happened. The general sentiment around town was that it was "a horrible thing, but also the feeling was that they got what they deserved."¹⁴

Rumors abounded. Various groups were publicly blamed for the lynching. However, most felt that the lynching was instigated by the close friends and employees of the well-liked Hart family.¹⁵ As to the motive of the kidnapers for abducting Brooke Hart, the history books tell us that it was financial, due to the hardship of the Depression. In contrast, general speculation is that Brooke Hart had been gambling up in Alviso and owed Holmes \$1,000 in gambling debts.¹⁶ His kidnapping, with a ransom of \$40,000, was revenge. The murder of Brooke Hart, and the double lynching, were the consequences.

Even today the memory of this horror is still with San Jose. Periodically, stories are printed in the newspaper about this gruesome happening. Controversy is still alive as to who to blame for the lynchings. Recently, the file of clippings from the newspaper was stolen from the San Jose Library. It is suspected that it was pilfered by people close to the Hart family. The memory of this tragic event in November 1933 still haunts San Josean old-timers. Today, Emma Bubb maintains, "It was the most awful thing that ever happened to me in my entire life."¹⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Royce Brier, "Justice in San Jose," San Francisco Sunday Examiner, 26 Nov 1969, p. 20.
2. Edward S. Sullivan, "The Brooke Hart Kidnap Murder and the California Lynch Mob." Master Detective, May 1962, p. 60.
3. Sullivan, p. 88.
4. Interview with Emma Bubb by Melissa Wilson, 7 May, 1989.
5. Interview with Violet Ehler by Melissa Wilson, 18 April 1989.
6. Emma Bubb, 7 May 1989.
7. Interview with Arthur Bubb by Melissa Wilson, 7 May 1989.
8. Interview with Frank Ehler by Melissa Wilson, 18 April 1989.
9. Harry Farrell, "Hart Kidnapping Set the Stage for Lynching," San Jose Mercury, 29 Nov. 1983, Sec 1, p. 1.
10. Frank C. Nelson, "The Last Lynching," West Magazine, 26 Nov, 1978, p. 7.
11. "Mob Lynches Hart Kidnapers," San Jose Herald, 27 Nov. 1933, Sec 1, p. 1.
12. "Mob...", Sec. 1, p. 1.
13. Frank Ehler, 18 April 1989.
14. Arthur Bubb, 7 May 1989.
15. Violet Ehler, 18 April 1989.
16. Frank Ehler, 18 April 1989.
17. Emma Bubb, 7 May 1989.

S.J. Merc. Herald
MONDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 27, 1933.

Hart Kidnapping

page 2

Day to Day Developments In Hart Kidnaping Case

Here is a synopsis of the principal developments in the Hart case:

November 9—Hart's parents report his disappearance and receipt of a \$40,000 ransom demand by telephone from San Francisco.

November 10—Kidnapers phone: "Brooke is safe, but we mean business."

November 11—Hart's wallet found lodged on the guard rail of the oil tanker Midway at San Francisco.

November 12—Steamship Lurline, berthed by Midway, searched on arrival in Los Angeles.

November 13—Hart family issues direct appeal to kidnapers.

November 15—Thomas H. Thurmond captured at Plaza garage, 7:20 p. m., while phoning to Hart home.

November 16—John M. Holmes captured in bed at the California hotel at 3 a. m. on the basis of Thurmond's confession. Holmes confesses.

Kidnapers rushed to San Francisco jail for fear of lynching.

November 17—Officers start dragging bay near point on San Mateo bridge where kidnapers say Hart's body was thrown in. Cement blocks found.

November 18—Hat worn by Hart found 124 feet from Alameda shore and 900 feet north of bridge.

November 22—Kidnapers spirited back to jail here. Sheriff Emig signs kidnap complaint before Justice Moore. Federal grand jury indicts kidnapers on using mails to extort, with bail at \$50,000 each.

November 23—Hart Sr. offers \$500 reward for recovery of son's body. Navy's airship J-4 joins search over bay.

November 24—Dr. Frederick Poescher and Dr. J. M. Scanland on behalf of state test kidnapers for sanity in preparation against such a defense move.

November 25—Hart's body found in bay by duck hunters at 9 a. m. Crowd gathering at jail about noon grows throughout afternoon; storms jail at 9 p. m., repelled with tear gas, returns to batter down doors. Lynch Thurmond and Holmes in St. James park near midnight. At 11:25 p. m. Thurmond and Holmes were hanged to trees in St. James park by a mob which stormed the county jail and seized the prisoners.

Much Damage Is Done in Lynch

Attack on Jail

S.J. Merc. Herald 11-27-33, page 3

Barraged for nearly two hours in a hail of stones, clods, bricks, and pieces of pipe and then attacked with a 25 foot length of six-inch pipe, the entrance of the county jail was only a mass of debris after the mob had taken Jack Holmes and Harold Thurmond from the jail last night.

Windows on the ground floor were shattered, doors were smashed and broken from their hinges, and the outer office was littered with broken boards, papers, records, and smashed glass.

Here and there a scantling was resting against a counter, lying on the floor, or leaning against a wall. They were used in smashing windows and shattering the wooden doors.

LYNCHERS USE RAM.

When the pipe, used for battering ram, was brought in play, the heavy steel door at the entrance gave way under a furious attack. The officers then retreated behind the barred screen leading into the office where prisoners are booked. Renewing the attack with the pipe, the mob members smashed through this third barrier to come into conflict with the officers who could no longer defend the prison. The mob then took possession of the jail and seized the two victims.

officers were forced to give keys to the raiders so that the jail could be taken from the jail.

COURTYARD LITTERED.

It only was the entrance to the jail destroyed, but the sidewalk in front was littered with the mischief that had been hurled at the ows, lights, and those officers, at first were hardy enough to back the crowds at first. A new county auto, parked in the way from the back of the jail, badly damaged by flying stones, windshield was snapped, and top ruined, while huge dents were made on the hood.

2 Duck Hunters Who Found Body Relate De

Discovered Floating Near East End of Mateo Bay Bridge

"We thought at first that it was a seal."

That was the impression of E. Stephens and Lester Dalve, Redwood City duck hunters when they sighted the body of Brooke L. Hart about 9 o'clock yesterday morning near mid-

half mile south of Hartwood. Their discovery was a find that had baffled the constabulary of scores of officials of counties and hundreds of privateers during the ten days.

Thomas H. Thurmond and John M. Holmes were captured and hanged to kidnaping young Hart, crossing his weighted body in the bay.

HUNTING SINCE DAWN

"We had been duck hunting since 5:30 a. m.," Stephens said. "The body was floating in five feet of water. We got close, we both realized it was a body. I had found the body of Brooke Hart."

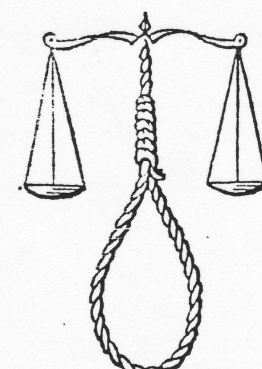
"Its condition was so bad that we had to wrap a piece of cloth around it. We used it to tow and towed it to a mud flat near the Alameda shore."

NOTIFIED OFFICERS

"I made my way through the brush and found a traffic officer. I phoned immediately to county officials."

"We are very glad if our aided justice and if it gives measure of comfort to the family."

Stephens, who has hunted on the bay since his boyhood for several years with Dalve, they had been keeping it open for the body. They crossed the bay before dawn toward the bridge where it appeared to be thicker.



Justice

YOUR CAR IS O.K. AND TREATED WELL.
ONE MORE PEOP TO PRICE WILL BE HIS -
FINISH. YOU HAVE MADE - I SQUAWK
ANOTHER WILL BE TOO BAD. WE WILL HAVE
\$40,000 YOU GET \$500 - 2000 - 1000 - 2000 - 500
(UNMARKED)
PUT IT IN A SATCHEL (BLACK) BE READY
TO TAKE A WEEK'S TRIP ON A HOUR NOTICE
GET THE STUD. RIDG. HAVE RADIO INST.
CALLED WHEN TOLD TO GO YOU WILL
TAKE ORDERS FROM K.P.O. YOU GET
TER BO AS TOLD.



THIS IS ONLY GOOD FOR A COPY

A. J. HART

MARINET ST

SAN JOSE

7 WITNESS GIVES VIVID OUTLINE OF DEATH SCENE

Thurmond in Faint When Mangled Holmes Battles to Last for His Life.

The following account of the murder of Harold Thurmond and Jack Holmes last night, as given by seven witnesses who were present at the attack on the jail, shows a scene of horror and chaos. The mob, which numbered in the hundreds, gathered in front of the jail and, after a struggle with the police, succeeded in forcing open the door. The crowd rushed in, and the two men were taken to the jail. Holmes, who was badly injured, was taken to the hospital, but died there. Thurmond, who was also injured, was taken to the hospital, but died there. The scene was a chaotic one, with many people being injured and property being damaged. The police were unable to control the mob, and the attack was a complete success.

OVERPOWER JAILOR

The heavy double doors of the jail were battered down by the mob, and the two men were taken to the jail. Holmes, who was badly injured, was taken to the hospital, but died there. Thurmond, who was also injured, was taken to the hospital, but died there. The scene was a chaotic one, with many people being injured and property being damaged. The police were unable to control the mob, and the attack was a complete success.

THURMOND HUNG FIRST

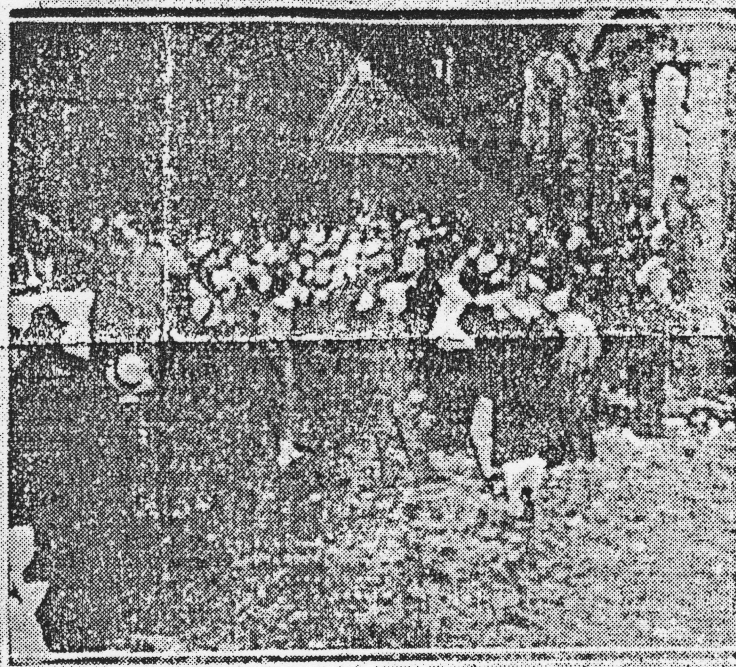
Thurmond, who was hung first, was taken to the gallows. Holmes, who was also injured, was taken to the hospital, but died there. The scene was a chaotic one, with many people being injured and property being damaged. The police were unable to control the mob, and the attack was a complete success.

The scene was a chaotic one, with many people being injured and property being damaged. The police were unable to control the mob, and the attack was a complete success.

DOCTOR KILLED IN SUICIDE LEAP

The doctor, who was killed in a suicide leap, was taken to the hospital, but died there. The scene was a chaotic one, with many people being injured and property being damaged. The police were unable to control the mob, and the attack was a complete success.

Angry Mob Batters Jail Door For Kidnap Pair



The furious mob that battered down the doors of the county jail to seize Harold Thurmond and Jack Holmes and lynch them is shown above, using the heavy iron battering rams on the jail doors. The man in the top left is tear gas used by the officers in a fruitless attempt to break up the mob. Below, the crowd gathers about the entrance to the jail as the leaders pushed to the second and third floors for Thurmond and Holmes. At the top, Harold Thurmond is shown above, and Jack Holmes is shown below. The two men were kidnapers of Brooke Hart, 22-year-old local girl.

Lindy Make Flight To Coast of Africa | Lube Huron Weeps | Mother, 4 Children Trapped, Die in Fire

12 Hurt in Crash

The Herald

Recovery
 The Herald
 Daily
 Published by the Herald Publishing Co.
 1234 Main St.
 Santa Clara, Cal.
 Phone 1234
 Entered as Second-Class Matter, June 15, 1911, Post Office at Santa Clara, Cal., under No. 1234.
 Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in Act of October 3, 1917, authorized on July 1, 1918.
 Copyright, 1918, by Herald Publishing Co.
 Printed and Published by the Herald Publishing Co., Santa Clara, Cal.
 Entered as Second-Class Matter, June 15, 1911, Post Office at Santa Clara, Cal., under No. 1234.
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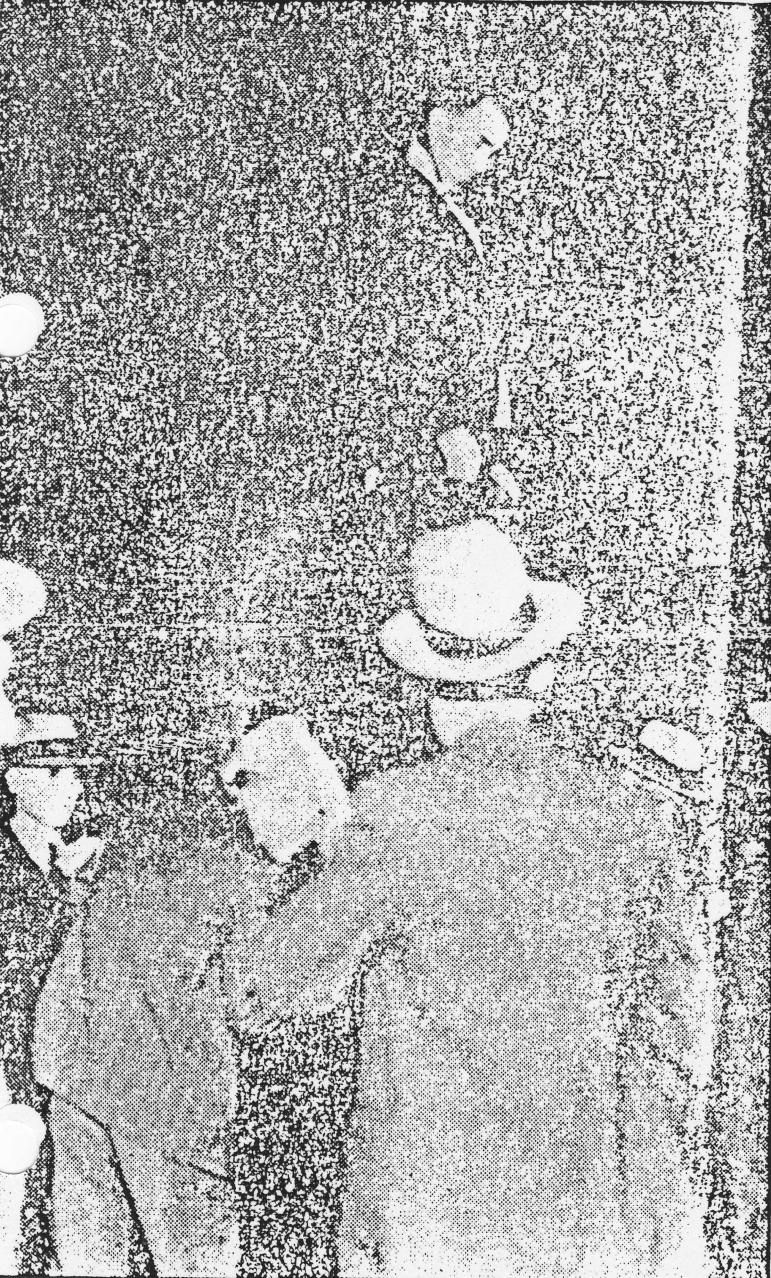
Old Mercury Herald photos show lynch mob battering in the Santa Clara County Jail door to get at Thomas Harold Thurmond, top left, and John Maurice Holmes, bottom left. Light-colored smudge at upper left of battering-ram photo is tear gas, fired by officers in an attempt to disperse the crowd.





9145

Well-dressed members
of the lynch mob
(above) used a heavy
steel pipe as a batter-
ing ram. They located
Thomas Thurmond
(left) first and strung
him up (below).





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