

The Month of Terror

Pioneer High School

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Disappearance	3
3. The Ransom	5
4. The Confession	7
5. The Search For the Body	9
6. The Lynching	11
7. Conclusion	14
8. Bibliography	15

Introduction

On November 9, 1933, Brooke Hart, the son of a prominent San Jose merchant, was kidnapped near his father's department store. The kidnappers were two unemployed men named Thomas Harold Thurmond and John M. Holmes. They drove Brooke to the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge and wrapped him with baling wires attached to cement blocks. Then, Brooke was thrown into the bay and shot a few times by Holmes to make sure he was dead.

Afterward, Thurmond made several phone calls to the Hart family demanding \$40,000 of ransom. The police rigged the calls and one of them led to the capture of Thurmond on November 15, 1933. After six hours of interrogation, Thurmond confessed and named his accomplice. When Holmes was arrested, the search for Brooke Hart's body began.

On the morning of November 26, 1933, two duck hunters found the remains of Brooke's body in the mudflats south of the San Francisco Bay Bridge. The news spread throughout the Santa Clara County very rapidly. That evening a mob of approximately 10,000 men and women gathered in front of the Santa Clara County Jail for several hours demanding for Thurmond and Holmes. By 10:00 P.M., they broke through the jail door and capture the two prisoners. The two were carried to St. James Park and lynched.

This is the story about the heinous crime of lynching two men in the park. This act of violence was recorded into the history book and will never be forgotten by those who witnessed

history book and will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. It also put the city of San Jose in shame for many years.

The Disappearance

The Hart family was a very prominent, wealthy, and well respected family in San Jose. They live on The Alameda. The father, Alexander J. Hart, Sr., was the owner of the Hart's department store. The store was found by Alex's father in 1880.

Alex's joy and pride was his 22-years old son, Brooke Hart. Brooke had just graduated from the University of Santa Clara School of Business in the summer of 1933. His father bought him a green Buick roadster. On September 17, 1933, during a banquet dinner at the newly built De Anza Hotel, Alex Hart proudly announced to other businessmen that he had just made Brooke the Vice-President of his business. Alex also renamed the store L. Hart & Son Co.

On November 9, 1933 around 6:00 P.M., Brooke Hart left the Hart's department store and went to get his car. He was to pick up his father in front of the store on Santa Clara Street. Two parking attendants saw him leave the lot. Before he got to the front of the store, he was approached by a man with a revolver. The man ordered Brooke to drive east on Post Street and then north on First Street where a car was waiting. The man in the second car drove in front followed by Brooke and the man with a revolver in the green roadster. The two cars were driven to Milpitas where Brooke's car was abandoned with its headlights on.

Meanwhile, Brooke's father, Alex, was waiting in front of the store. He began to feel a little uneasy because he wondered

what could be taking Brooke so long. He knew his son was a responsible and dependable person so he soon pushed the uneasiness away. Brooke was to give his father a ride to a banquet dinner where Alex was to be honored for his leaderships and devotions to the community. At first, Alex thought Brooke must had a little car trouble. After awhile, afraid of being late, Alex phoned a friend and got a ride from him.

The Ransom

When Alex Hart got home that night from the banquet dinner, he found out that Brooke was not home and hadn't called. He became very concerned and worried. At around 10:30 P.M., the Hart family received a phone call from a man saying he had kidnapped Brooke and demanded a \$40,000 ransom. He also warned them not to inform the police if they wished to see Brooke alive.

At about the same time, in Milpitas, a farmer had just come home and he noticed an abandoned car with its headlights on parked right next to his property. He immediately phoned the police. After inspecting the car, the police was convinced that the car belonged to Brooke Hart. By midnight, the Hart family was informed by the police about the discovery of Brooke's car.

Chief of Police of San Jose, J. N. Black, and Sheriff William J. Emig were to investigate about Brooke's disappearance. The police in the whole Bay Area were also alerted about the case. This case was brought to the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but they were ordered not to get involved directly; instead, they were to standby as observers. Around this time, radio which became one of the most popular devices in American life, broadcasted the news of Brooke's disappearance. Soon the whole County of Santa Clara knew about Brooke being kidnapped. Many people were shocked and became very concern.

For the next few days, the Hart family continued to receive phone calls demanding for the ransom. They also received a ransom letter sent from Sacramento. The kidnappers ordered Alex Hart to post numbers in the show window of the Hart's department store as a signal of his cooperation and he did. Alex was ready to do anything they wished just as long as he could have Brooke back.

On November 11, 1933, Brooke's wallet was found on the guard rail of a tanker. This discovery did not provide any clue to help find Brooke. The phone calls were rigged by the police. The first two almost led to the capture of one of the kidnappers, but the police got there too late. On November 15, 1933, the third rigged phone call led to a garage on South Market Street and the police got there as the kidnapper hung up the phone. He was immediately placed under arrest.

The Confession

The kidnapper was identified to be Thomas Harold Thurmond, a twenty-three years old unemployed man. After six hours of interrogation, Thurmond finally confessed and named his accomplice, John Maurice Holmes, a twenty-nine years old who was also unemployed. The police immediately traced Holmes to a hotel and arrested him. The two kidnappers blamed each other for the crime. Finally, they related the whole story.

Holmes was the one who approached Brooke near the Hart's department store with a revolver. Thurmond was the man in the second car. After they abandoned Brooke's car in Milpitas, Thurmond drove them to the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge. In the trunk of the car were some baling wires and cement blocks purchased at a building store. They wrapped Brooke up with the baling wires and attached him to the cement blocks. Holmes took Brooke's wallet out of his pocket. Brooke struggled and Holmes crushed his skull with a brick. The hit knocked Brooke unconscious. Holmes threw Brooke's wallet into the bay (and it probably landed on the tanker). Afterward, Thurmond and Holmes threw Brooke over the bridge and into the shallow mudflats of San Francisco Bay. When Brooke hit the water, he gained consciousness and tried to get free. Finally he got free and swam to the bridge. He grasped on one of the bridge's pillars and cried for help. Holmes leaned over the bridge and shot

several times into the spot where he thought Brooke was to make sure that Brooke would not survive.

Holmes took the public transportation back to San Jose while Thurmond drove to San Francisco to make the phone calls demanding for a \$40,000 ransom. He also drove to Sacramento once to send the ransom letter. Thurmond was caught on November 16 while making one of those calls. They confessed to the police, "We thought it would be easier with him out of the way . . . So we just bumped him off."

The Search For the Body

Thurmond and Holmes were put in the San Francisco city jail while the search for Brooke's body began. On November 17, Brooke's torn shirt, the baling wires, and the cement blocks were found in the San Francisco Bay mudflats, but the body was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, news about Brooke's death spread throughout Santa Clara County. On November 22, Thurmond and Holmes were sent back to the Santa Clara County Jail which was behind the courthouse in downtown San Jose. Holmes was put in a cell on the second floor while Thurmond was put on the third floor. On November 23, Alex Hart put up a reward of \$500 to the person who could recover Brooke's body.

On the morning of November 26, two Redwood City duck hunters, Harold E. Stephens and Leonard L. Dalve, found the remains of a dead body about one mile west of the Alameda county shore and a half-mile south of the San Francisco Bay Bridge. At first, they thought it was a seal, but as they got closer, they realized it was a dead body. All flesh was gone from the upper part of the body. A local physician and a local dentist studied the body and then identified it to be Brooke Hart. Later, a pathologist examined the body and found indentations in the front and rear of the skull. Later, Emig stated,

This indicated that they struck Hart on the forehead and back of the head with the butt of their revolver. The injuries were not made by a brick or building block.

The news of the discovery of Brooke's body was not announced to the public until later that day. Brooke's mother was recuperating from a surgery. The news of Brooke's death placed her into a coma.

The Lynching

On the morning of November 26, a small group of deputies were sent over to the jail house because Sheriff Emig was expecting a protest. They were also equipped with tear gas bombs. Early in the morning, a few people gathered in front of the jail house. They were very friendly chatted with the deputies through the window of the sheriff's office. As time elapsed, more and more people joined the "little crowd."

By afternoon, the crowd had turned into a mob of approximately 5,000 people. The radio stations broadcasted the news that a crowd had gathered at the jail house. This seemed to bring out more people. By evening, the mob consisted of 10,000 infuriated men, women, and adolescents. Then, word got out that Brooke's body had been found.

At about 9:00 P.M., the mob began to get violence. They started to throw rocks at the jail house. The deputies threw one tear gas bomb as a warning. This drove the mob wild. At First and St. John streets, a new post office building was under construction and there were plenty of tiles, cement chunks, and bricks available. The crowd used those tiles, cement chunks, and bricks to throw at the jail house. The windows of the jail house were broken. As the violence continued, the deputies threw more tear gas bombs at the mob. Many people in the crowd left the scene. Some determined boys between the age of 18 and 23 continued to throw rocks and bricks.

By 10:00 P.M., about fifteen to twenty men carried a 9-inch iron pipe, which weighed several hundred pounds, from the post office construction to use as a battering jam. They smashed the floodlight over the jail door. As the deputies were low on tear gas bombs, the crowd used the iron pipe and knocked down the jail door. They went into the jail house and looked for Thurmond and Holmes. Thurmond was trying to hid by clinging onto the plumbing pipes over the toilet closet of his cell. Unfortunately, Thurmond's legs hung down and the mob saw them. They dragged him down to the floor, but he hit his head on the toilet and became unconscious. Before the crowd took Thurmond out of his cell, they prayed for Thurmond's soul.

Holmes tried to hide himself in the washroom of his cell, but the mob caught him. The crowd did not prayed for him as they did for Thurmond. Holmes tried to fight back and shouted, "I'm not Holmes." They didn't believe him; instead, beaten him very bloodily.

The mob dragged the two kidnapper-murderers out of the jail house and to Saint James Park. The mob tore Thurmond's clothes and placed a noose around his neck. He did not resist very strongly since he was unconscious.

Holmes begged the crowd, "Don't string me up, boys . . . Don't string me up." It was no use for the mob placed a noose around his neck. Upon knowing that begging would not work, Holmes said, "Yes, I'm Holmes." The crowd pulled him up. At first, Holmes tried to climb the rope by using his hands, but the

crowd pulled at his feet. The fall broke Holmes' neck immediately. He only had his waist coat on.

Thurmond died at about 11:00 P.M. while Holmes died a few minutes after him. The mob started to scatter approximately half an hour later. Some chipped parts of the trees for souvenir. One or two even pulled their fingernails for souvenir.

Conclusion

The next day after the lynching, the city officials were ordered to tear down the two oak trees from which Thurmond and Holmes were hung. The lynching was not mentioned at all. As for Thurmond and Holmes, they were buried next to Brooke Hart's grave.

The lynching was widely criticized, but the newly elected Governor of California, James "Sunny Jim" Rolph, Jr., condoned it. He announced publicly that he would pardon anybody who will be tried or convicted for this incidence; thus, there were no prosecutions. This brought about his downfall. Millions assailed and excoriated him including President Franklin Roosevelt and ex-President Herbert Hoover. President Roosevelt rebuked on the radio to the whole nation, "We do not excuse those in high places who condone high law." The Governor was also condemned by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America and was expelled from the National War Veterans Association. The Los Angeles Lawyers Club requested an impeachment of him, but later withdrew.

The heinous crime of lynching was not forgotten by those who had witnessed it. Many regretted for taking part in it. Some even refused to discuss or mention about it. This event put the whole city into shame for many years. This event was also the last lynching in the lynching history.

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