

# JUDGE LYNCH IN MINNESOTA

At least 20 people have met Judge Lynch in Minnesota. Sources to document these extralegal events, however, are widely scattered and far from official. Furthermore, some lynchings surely went unrecorded, especially if victims were dispatched before being turned over to the authorities.

In 1848, before Minnesota became a territory, a mob in the St. Croix Valley illegally tried and then hanged Paunais, an Ojibway accused of murdering a white trader (see pages 56–57). Just before statehood, a group of armed men near Little Falls hanged two Indians and a mixed-blood man—Charles Gebabish, “Jimmy,” and Joe Shambeau—for suspected murder. Lone white men in the villages of Lexington and Monticello received the same treatment for alleged murders in the two following years.<sup>1</sup>

In 1865 John L. Campbell, of mixed ancestry, was hanged after an irregular citizens’ court trial for murder in Mankato, and the next year two Yankee trappers wearing native and woodsman clothing were strung up by Germans in New Ulm after drunken interchanges. In Brainerd in 1872, after preliminary courtroom investigations about a woman presumed to be dead, Gegoonce (Albert Smith) was hanged and his brother Tebekokechickwabe shot after he crawled up the hangman’s rope. The event, which brought more than 100 angry Ojibway to town the next day, led to an incident facetiously labeled the Blueberry War.<sup>2</sup>

Ten years later, a large crowd of Minneapolitans hanged a white tramp accused of molesting and murdering a young girl. Otter Tail County citizens similarly dispatched 15-year-old John Trivitt, who allegedly borrowed a double-barreled shotgun to rob and murder two visitors to Perham. In 1886 a mob hanged John W. Kelliher, also known as Reddy or Big Red, in Detroit (Lakes), and in 1893 mobs lynched a white man accused of rape near Duluth and an Indian accused of murder at Cass Lake. Three years later two white tramps believed to be murderers were



Lynching victim hanging from a burr oak at Fourth and Grant Street, Minneapolis, 1882

hanged in Glencoe.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1889 and 1918, the nation suffered at least 3,224 deaths by lynching, more than three-quarters of them of African Americans (but none in Minnesota). About 7 percent occurred in northern states, 88 percent in southern states, and 5 percent in western states.<sup>4</sup>

By 1920 almost a quarter-century had passed since Minnesotans had resorted to violence under the pretense of administering justice, and the number of lynchings nationwide by five-year periods had been declining steadily since the 1890s. Then, the nighttime hangings in Duluth of three young African-American circus workers horrified the state and the nation. This incident led to the passage in 1921 of a strong state anti-lynching law that compensated relatives of victims and suspended police officials who

failed to protect prisoners from mobs. No lynchings have been reported to have occurred in Minnesota since that time.<sup>5</sup>

—MARILYN ZIEBARTH

<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Pomeroy, “Morrison County’s Only Lynching,” typescript, 1966, p. 1, 6, MHS; Walter N. Trenerry, *Murder in Minnesota: A Collection of True Cases* (St. Paul: MHS, 1985), 8–10, 18–19.

<sup>2</sup> Trenerry, *Murder in Minnesota*, 43, 45–47, 76–84.

<sup>3</sup> *The Minneapolis Tragedy: A Full Account of the Crime of the Fiend, Frank McManus, and the Swift Retribution of an Outraged Community* (Minneapolis: Haywood and Kruckeberg, 1882), 3–8; Elmer E. Adams, “Comment,” photocopied undated clippings, *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, 1922, MHS; photo and photo identification, June 23, 1886, MHS; *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1918* (1919; reprint ed. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Thirty Years of Lynching*, 29, 31n.

<sup>5</sup> *Thirty Years of Lynching*, 30; Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1938), 262–63. While lynchings have almost vanished, racially



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