

CROWD SCARES
A NEGRO WITH
DIRE THREATS!

Man Jailed for Serious Offense Re-
moved to Hennepin County
for Safe Keeping

SCORE OF MEN BESIEGE
ANOKA CITY JAIL

Officer Larson Called on Fictitious
Case Foils Plans of
Crowd

ANOKA BLOCKS
LYNCHING MOVE

Police Transfer Negro to Min-
neapolis Jail After Hang-
ing Attempt.

NEGRO LYNCHING
PLOT IS FOILED

Anoka Sheriff Outwits Mob;
Prisoner Taken to Cell in
Minneapolis.

Newspaper headlines from left to right:
ANOKA UNION, MINNEAPOLIS STAR, & ST. CLOUD TIMES

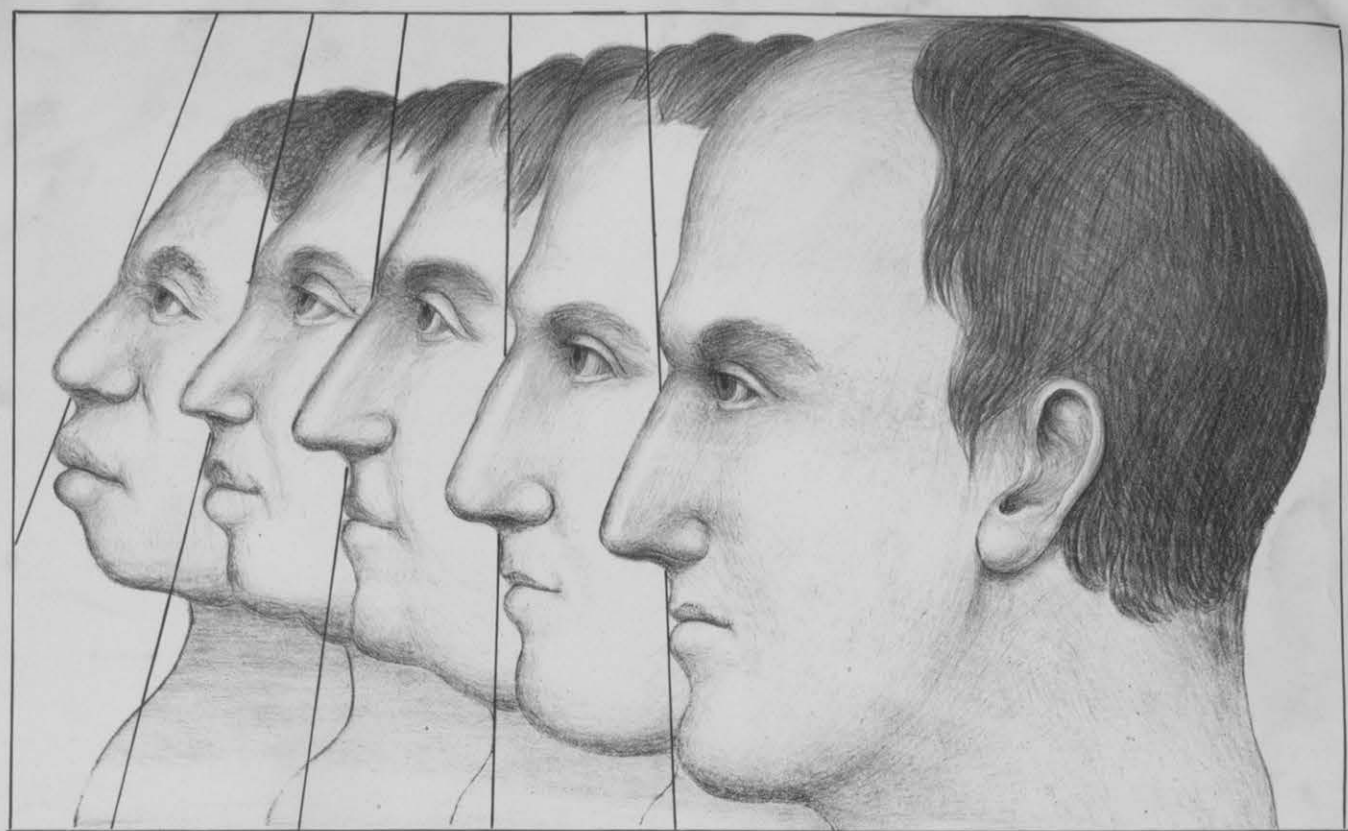
ATTEMPTED LYNCHING IN ANOKA

JANUARY 1931

A SYSTEM THAT
ENCOURAGED
VIOLENCE

By 1931, Minnesota had already witnessed
deadly mob violence and the effects of KKK
activity. In 1920, Duluth residents lynched
three Black circus workers—Elias Clayton,
Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie—after
accusing them of assaulting a white woman. The
event happened with no trial or presentation of
evidence, only a mob mentality of justice. That
lynching led to the passage of Minnesota's 1921
anti-lynching law, one of the earliest of its kind
in the U.S. The law aimed to hold
enforcement officers accountable for
preventing mob killings.

A decade later, similar events unfolded in
Anoka, which resulted in the near-lynching of
Earnest McDuffey. Did the 1921 law influence
police intervention here? The officers' choice to
move McDuffey to safety suggests they
understood the situation and recognized the
rising potential for violence.



Phrenology poster owned by L.D. Gates, Osseo. From the
ACHS collections

EUGENICS &
RACIAL VIOLENCE
IN MINNESOTA

Eugenics, the practice of improving the genetic
quality of the human population, played a role
in shaping racial and social policies in
Minnesota and across the North. In the early
20th century, eugenicists sought to control the
population through forced sterilization and
restrictive immigration laws. The idea that
certain races and social classes were “inferior”
became widespread—taught in universities,
promoted in newspapers, and codified into law.

Research has determined that people targeted
by the eugenics movement were deemed “unfit”
for society. Generally, this meant the poor,
disabled, mentally ill, or people of color, which
translated into racialized fear. Accusations
against Black men, especially those involving
white women and children, were often used to
justify extreme measures. It's possible that
McDuffey's case reflected this ideology. Would
the crowd have reacted similarly if the accused
had been white? If the child was Black?

HOW JOURNALISM SHAPES
PERCEPTION & MEMORY

The media's framing of this event shaped its
legacy. The headlines provide a window into
how people saw these events in 1931. How do
you think readers of these headlines (above)
reacted to the news? Would their reaction
change if the humans involved were white,
African-American, Asian, or Native American?

ANOKA LYNCHING
MOB BALKED

Attack Suspect Brought
to Jail Here for
Safety.

MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE,

SETTING THE
SCENE

On Saturday afternoon, September 5, 1931,
two boys and one girl aged six, eight, and nine
played near a warehouse and commercial
garage on 2nd Avenue North in Anoka. Soon
Ernest McDuffey, age 22, who worked as a
mechanic and attendant, drove a tractor to the
garage.

McDuffey began working on a car with a flat
tire in the garage. He asked the girl to put a jack
under the car. The older boy said he should do
it instead because he was stronger. McDuffey
told him to get out, and both of the boys left.

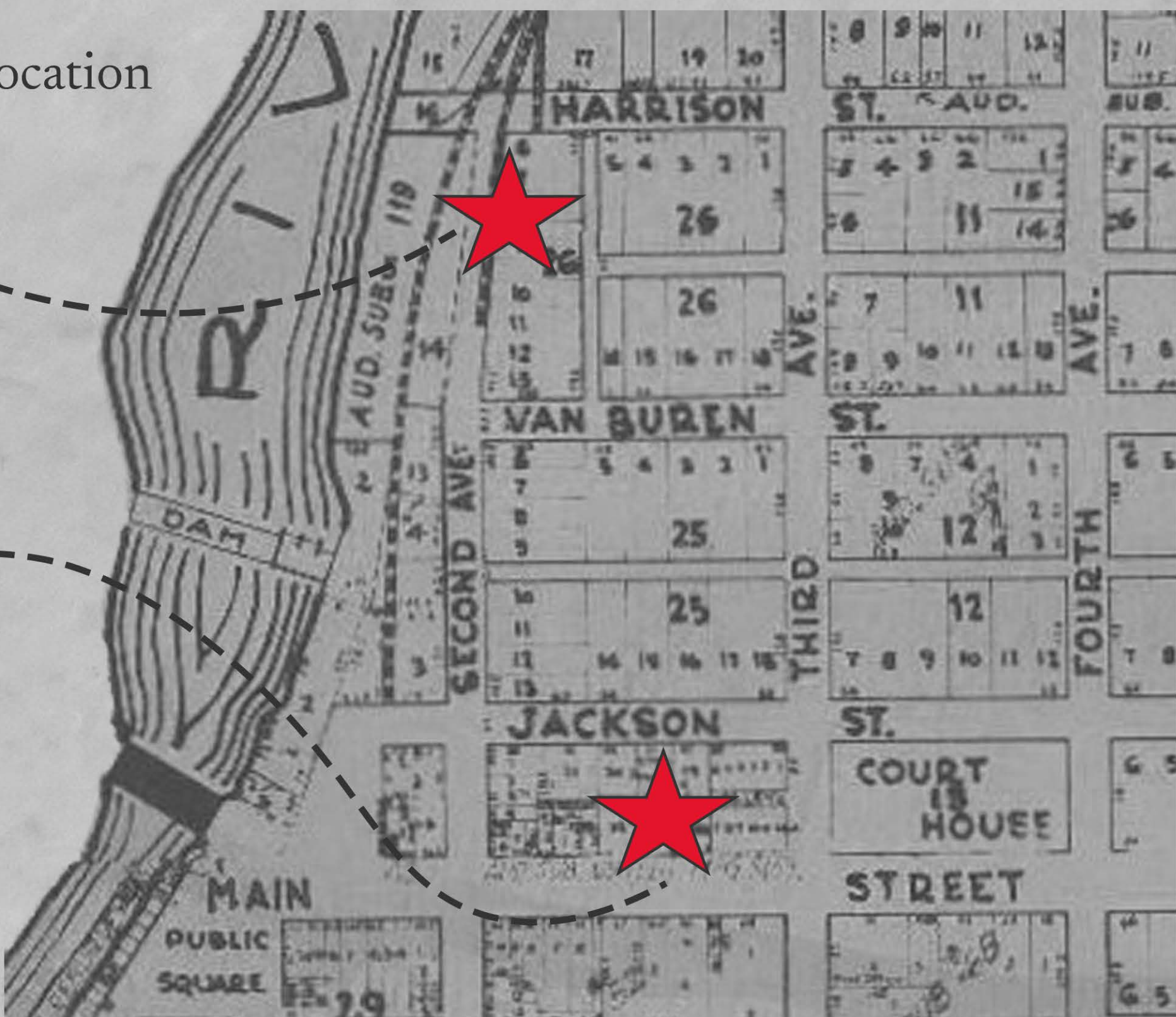
McDuffey closed the garage doors. When the
boys heard the girl crying inside, they ran to
her mother, who notified the police.

Chief of Police John Melberg interviewed the
girl, who related the story. A physician
examined her and determined no physical
harm had occurred.

“She was given a nickel to buy candy and was
not much frightened,” said the *Anoka Union*.

Approximate location
of incident

Anoka City Hall
and Jail



SCORE OF MEN BESIEGE
ANOKA CITY JAIL

Chief Melberg went to the garage and found McDuffey, who protested his innocence. According to reports, Melberg arrested McDuffey for mistreating or molesting an 8-year-old girl and took him to the Anoka city jail, located between Jackson and Main Streets.

The *Anoka Union* reported that “no fear of any violence was felt” while the *Anoka Herald* claimed, “men were...making threats to ‘get the Negro.’” The publications agree that two men approached Jailer John Larson and said a bad accident had occurred at the Mississippi bridge and that he was needed on the scene. Larson took the patrol car and started for the bridge. He became suspicious and returned to City Hall after traveling a few blocks.

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 (racial slur).’ Others wanted to hang him.” The *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that Larson found “the rapidly forming mob trying to scale a rear wall of the jail.”

Larson called Sheriff Oscar Olson and several police officers who helped Chief Melberg disperse the crowd and transport McDuffey to the Hennepin County Jail. McDuffey pled guilty and received a sentence of one to seven years to be served at the St. Cloud Reformatory.

WHAT’S IN A NAME
EARNEST MCDUFFEY

The newspapers used “Earnest McDuffey” and “Earnest McGuire” in their reporting. Spellings also differ between “McDuffey,” “McDuffie,” and “McDuffy,” and “Ernest.” However, the records at the St. Cloud State Reformatory use “Earnest McDuffey.”

Further research concluded that none of those names existed in the 1930 Anoka census or in Ancestry records. Since McDuffey’s sentence was discharged in 1938, he wouldn’t appear in the St. Cloud census records. McDuffey doesn’t appear in any online grave listings. Without more concrete information, including his middle name, where he went after his sentence, or his birthplace, Earnest McDuffey will remain a vital yet transient part of Anoka County history.



BY THE NUMBERS

Only .003% of Anoka’s
population was
non-white in the 1930
census.



QUESTIONS TO ASK

Few in Anoka today know that a lynching nearly happened here. Why have we not discussed this story before now?

The social structures and laws of the past shape how we experience our world today. What could happen if we do not recognize events in history? How do these stories help us understand the world we live in now?

History calls us to not only research, but to reflect and remember.

VISIT US ONLINE

ANOKACOUNTYHISTORY.ORG



THESE EVENTS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT THE PAST
THEY ARE ABOUT OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SHAPE THE FUTURE.

