

# Vigilantes Rode Once In Santa Cruz, Hanged Pair

(Editor's Note: This is another in a series of stories about famous crimes and crime cases in the Santa Cruz area.)

By Don Becker

It has been many years since they have lynched a man in Santa Cruz. Not since 1877 when two half-breeds were hung from the Water street bridge has mob violence reigned above the natural course of the law.

Even in the days when the west was wild, Santa Cruz was a peaceful town. Unlike many other settlements that sprang up overnight in the great western expansion, men in Santa Cruz did not wear guns slung low from their waists or talk in caustic whispers from the side of their mouths.

In 1877 the local citizenry scratched its living from the sea or from the rich forests surrounding the land of the morning fog. In the routine of toil, a murder was just as uncommon as it is today. The city showed no resemblance to the movie version of the western town.

There were no guns blazing in the streets. Men did not rise up nightly and shoot another across a poker table. The weekly Sentinel carried almost as much poetry as news. The climate of the times was mild.

But there came a time in 1877 that men strapped on their gun belts. There was a time when Santa Cruz was like the television version of the west. And there was a time when they strung a pair of highwaymen up for the brutal slaying of a man.

The spring of 1877 was half-passed and the time was evening when Henry DeForrest, 62, a native of Maine and a respected member of the Masons and community, left his carpenter's job at the old powder mill.

Henry DeForrest was a happy man as he walked from the mill. The feeling of satisfaction that comes to all men when completing a day's work was inside him. The circus was in town and he might just go. It would not cost much money and he could afford it.

In his boot was his life's savings. It would not be long before he could send for his wife and family. If things went according to schedule he would have enough money to send for them by mid-summer. In the new land of the west he had cut for himself a new life. The dreary shores of Maine yawning out into the old Atlantic were behind him. In the land where the sun sets he felt young and strong at 62. Very much did he want to establish his family in the vibrant, going-places west. He never did.

Henry DeForrest was not more than 100 feet from the mill when he saw two men approaching.

DeForrest paid no attention to the strangers. He walked from

the mill past a house where inside children were lighting candles before retiring.

"Stop where you are," cried one of the men. DeForrest walked on. Behind him he did not know one of the men had pulled a gun. He took aim and fired. The shot missed. DeForrest started to run. Another shot crackled through the air. The ball tore into DeForrest's back. He fell.

"I'm shot, I'm shot," he screamed. The two men stood at a distance and watched him die. They did not move until he had been still for five minutes.

When they were sure he was dead, the two men moved in and dragged his body across the ground to a clump of bushes. They left a pool of blood behind.

They searched him and when they took off his boots they found his savings. Just as they got their hands on it they heard the approach of men. They fled with as much of the money as they could greedily stuff into their pockets.

The approaching men had paid little heed to the shot if they heard them and they made no search for foul play. It was not until the next morning that Michael Lynch happened upon the scene of the crime, found DeForrest dead with a pocket diary and \$40 in greenbacks lying at his side. The tracks where the body had been dragged were still visible.

In the days before scientific crime detection there were few clues at the scene of the crime. An examination of the round slug disclosed the fact the man had been killed by an Improved Russian six-shooter, but there was little else.

Officer Liddel of the sheriff's office the next night observed a pair of suspicious half-breeds at the circus. Afterward, at a local tavern they flashed a wad of greenbacks, got drunk, began to brag. Officer Liddel thought he heard one of the half-breeds mention something about a murder. He did not ask them where they got their money.

Liddel told Undershriff Hunt of the incident. Together, they went to the Indian reservation located a mile above town. There they learned from a squaw that an Indian, on his way to the circus, had been stopped by two men named Francisco Arias and Jose Chamala.

The two men tried to hold up the Indian, but when they found they knew him, let him go. They knew he had no money. The officers lost no time in hunting up the informant. Talking to the Indian, the squaw's story was confirmed. Indeed Arias and Chamala had tried to rob him, then changed their minds.

The Indian told the officers that soon after he had left the pair he heard two shots ring through the gray dusk. The officers decided Arias and Chamala were their men. The trouble came in finding them.

On horses and in true western style the two officers sought to flush out the wanted men. They missed them at an Aptos picnic where they heard word the pair were arguing whether the "man" was young or old.

For two days the officers pressed on. In Green Valley, near the

Corralitos river, they found Arias in a hut with two women. Chamala was nearby. Both were brought into Santa Cruz. Finally the pair confessed to the murder-robbbery. They had no idea what was in store for them.

When the townspeople learned the pair had been taken into custody they gathered about the jail, but made no effort to try to get their hands on the prisoners. All was peaceful. The men were wearing guns.

Five days after the murder, a large number of strange men were in town. As the day neared passing, the crowd in front of the jail grew larger. No one was sure where all the strangers were from. Just before nightfall, they gathered enmasse and marched upon the jail. Without using physical force they took Arias and Chamala from the jail.

The mob was 150 strong. Its aim was to see justice done. What happened is best explained by the men who did it. In a note shoved under the door of The Sentinel, the wrote:

"The people of Santa Cruz, finding that their lives and property were in danger from the number of robberies and murders having been committed in this county within the past eight years (this is an exaggeration—there were only four murders)—no legal execution having followed; that the night-watchman refuses to make an arrest when the robbers are pointed out; that new trials are granted on technicalities; that Arias and Chamala are guilty of the murder; that after due deliberation we resolved that Arias and Chamala should pay the penalty of their crime of the night of April 28, and that they be hanged . . . that the tax payers be free from the expense of a trial and judicial execution."

These were the reasons for the hanging.

The mob broke down the door of the wooden jail, took the prisoners away from the officers on duty, put them on a wagon which was hauled to the Water street bridge. Ropes were tossed over the overhanging beams. The prisoners asked for a drink of whiskey. They confessed the crime to the mob. The horses were whipped and they ran off with the wagon leaving the two half-breeds hanging with their feet only inches from the ground.

The pair were found dead the next day. None of the local officers knew who did the hanging. No one seemed to know any of the 150-man mob. Justice, wild west or semi-modern south style, had been served. There's been nothing like it since.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### NOTICE OF SITE SALE

Pursuant to the instructions of the City Council of the City of Santa Cruz, notice is hereby given that a site sale will be held on the 17th day of September, 1957 at the hour of 2:00 p.m. for certain improvements more fully described below:

**PARCEL NO. 1.** Modern stucco two-story, three-bedroom home. The first floor has a large living room with fire place, a large kitchen with dining space and loads of cupboards. One bedroom and a complete bath with tub. The second floor has two large

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### NOTICE INVITING BIDS

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of Trustees of the San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District of Santa Cruz County will receive bids up to and including 7:30 P.M. on September 17th, 1957, at the office of said district located in the high school building, Felton, California, at which time said bids will be opened and read for the following types of fuel oil:

P.S. 100      P.S. 200      P.S. 300

The Board of Trustees reserves the right to reject any and all bids and to waive any irregularity therein.

Dated this 24th day of August, 1957.

SAN LORENZO VALLEY  
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
E. H. Schoening, Clerk  
Board of Trustees.  
Sept. 1 and 8