

EYE WITNESS TO LYNCHING TELLS HOW MOB ACTED

SALISBURY, (Lynch-town) Md.—

A detailed account of the lynching of Matthew Williams here Friday night, by an eye witness, Howard A. Nelson, of South Philadelphia, as told to AFRO-AMERICAN reporters, Sunday. Mr. Nelson is fair of skin and may be colored or white as he pleases.

"I arrived at Salisbury Thursday afternoon on a business trip. Early Friday I went to Princess Anne and returned late in the afternoon. I was standing talking to an acquaintance on Main Street about the killing of that man Elliott, when I noticed a group of men milling about the front of the town paper, the Salisbury Times. When I had finished my conversation, I went over to read the bulletin.

"I read the bulletin that was posted on the front of the building. It read:

Nigger Is Dead

"The nigger who murdered Mr. Elliott, a prominent citizen, has been reported as being dead."

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EYE WITNESS TELLS

HOW MOB ACTED

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"While I was reading this, a white man who was standing by mistook me for one of them and said, 'Ain't that a damn shame that nigger died so soon. There was going to be some fun here tonight.' Just about that time another bulletin was posted. It read: 'The statement made by officials that the Negro was dead is false. A message just received says that he is improving.'

Almost a Command

"The men stood there for about five minutes. They stood talking in groups; more persons read that bulletin, and the crowd grew ever so thick. Almost like an explosion, some one yelled, 'Let's go to the hospital and get this nigger and lynch him.'

"Almost as though it was a military command, the crowd started toward the hospital. I followed along to see what was going to happen.

"The white man who was walking along side of me said: 'Its going to be good to see that nigger swing.'

Curse and Swear

"When we arrived at the hospital, there was some man who asked the mob not to bother Williams. The crowd started to curse and swear and then a man said to be 'Dr. Dix came outside and asked the men to be quiet as there were ...any dangerously ill persons in the hospital. By that time a group of men—just how many I don't know—had gotten in the hospital and seized Williams. The colored ward is on the first floor towards the rear of the building.

Thrown out Window

"Insted of carrying his body through the door, the men threw him out of the first floor window to a large group of men. Williams had on the regulation hospital gown and his head was swathed in bandages which covered his eyes and his feet were bare.

"Seemingly in a semi-conscious condition, the fellow was dragged to the court house lawn. Some one produced a long rope. After three attempts, they were able to get the rope over a tree right on the Main Street side of the court house, after a small boy was lifted up by men.

Let Him Fall

"The man who had been holding Williams let him fall to the ground while they helped to get the rope fixed properly. While he was lying on the ground, evidently unconscious, as he did not move, the rope was placed around his neck.

Jerked Up and Down

"From a prone position, the body was pulled about fifteen feet in the air near to the limb of the tree over which the rope had been placed. The body would be allowed to drop to within two feet of the ground and then suddenly be jerked back. This was done three times. The leader each time would say, 'Pull him up, boys,' and then, 'Give him the works, boys.'

Firemen Enter "Show"

"At this point, the fire department apparatus was called out. By whom I do not know. I do not know whether they were ordered to turn the hose on the mob to disperse them or not, but the members of the fire department joined the mob and watched the lynching. They seemed as happy over the lynching as the mobsters.

"The body was left hanging in the air for twenty minutes. The rope had been made fast to the trunk of another tree. While the body was swinging there, the mob yelled. On mention of the names of the mayor, sheriff, and the chief of police, the mob booed, but cheered the men who led the mob.

"There were about 2,600 persons in the mob. I had been near the rear and eased my way to the very edge of the mob, which had surrounded the court house grounds and had filled back to the street.

Burn Body

"The rope was cut and the body fell to the ground with a thud. A couple of men grabbed the part of the rope which still was around the victim's neck and started down Main Street. They went three blocks to a lot bordering the colored residential section.

"Here they forced the attendant of a garage and filling station to give them gasoline. He refused, and several men of the mob obtained five gallon cans and took 45 gallons of gasoline. They spread newspapers over the body and then poured on the gasoline. They ignited the paper and as the flames leaped into the air, they sent up a roar which was deafening. The leaders of the mob continued to add the gasoline to the body.

"The stench of the burning flesh was unbearable and I left, for fear of detection. Just as I started away, the leader of the mob hailed a passing truck and started down Main Street with the mob following. As the truck passed the Salisbury Times, a man in the office called to one of the mob leaders and yelled, 'Atta boy, Jim.'

Tie Body up

"At Lake and Main Streets, they tied the burned and charred body to an arc lamp post in front of Rosen's store. The owner of the store is called the chief of police and had the body cut down after the mob had dispersed.

"While en route to Lake Street, the mob spied two colored men, John Allison and Harold Fisher. They yelled, 'Get those niggers.' When a few of the mob started after the men, Allison jumped over the bridge into the Wicomico River and swam a quarter of a mile and went ashore. Fisher ran into a side street and disappeared.

"City officials had a truck and removed the body to the outskirts of the city, where they left it.

"The police and city officials, with others, can identify the leaders of that mob. At the hospital, the doctors, nurses and police addressed them by name. Every leader in the mob can be identified. I can identify the leader."