

# ANNE ARUNDEL

EXTRA

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2001

The Washington  
WASHINGTON: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1906.—SIXTY  
STAND

## STUDENT LYNCHERS

Mob of College Boys Hanged Davis at Annapolis.

ARRESTS EXPECTED SOON

Authorities Declare that They Have Positive Evidence.

St. John's College Students, Candidates for Naval Academy, and Annapolis Youths Composed Mob, According to Witnesses of Attack on Jail—Rope from College Used for Hanging Confessed Assailant of Mrs. John Reed.

Special to The Washington Post.  
Annapolis, Md., Dec. 22.—It is the firm conviction of the authorities of Anne Arundel County that the lynching Friday morning of Henry Davis, the confessed assailant of Mrs. John Reid, was a ghastly lark of St. John's College students, the candidates awaiting examination for the Naval Academy and Annapolis youths. Evidence is accumulating to the effect that the mob that battered down the jail doors, awed the jailers, hanged the pleading negro, and afterward riddled his body with bullets was composed of about forty schoolboys. The evidence, it is said, is more than circumstantial, and witnesses the jail say they can

# A Lynching Forgotten

*After 95 Years  
Of Amnesia,  
Annapolis Confronts  
The Ugly Death  
Of Henry Davis*

STORY BY NELSON HERNANDEZ

Page 8

Newspapers, including The Washington Post, at first incorrectly reported that St. John's College students led the mob that lynched Henry Davis.



# When the Area's White Lynch Mob Acted

## By Recalling Victims, Black Activists Hope Lessons Touch Home

By NELSON HERNANDEZ  
Washington Post Staff Writer

**T**he bones of Henry Davis rest somewhere among the rolling earth and moldering tombstones of Brewer Hill Cemetery in Annapolis, not far from the bluff where he was lynched.

His grave has no marker, so it is impossible to know exactly where he is buried. The details of his life—and violent death—are just as shrouded in mystery.

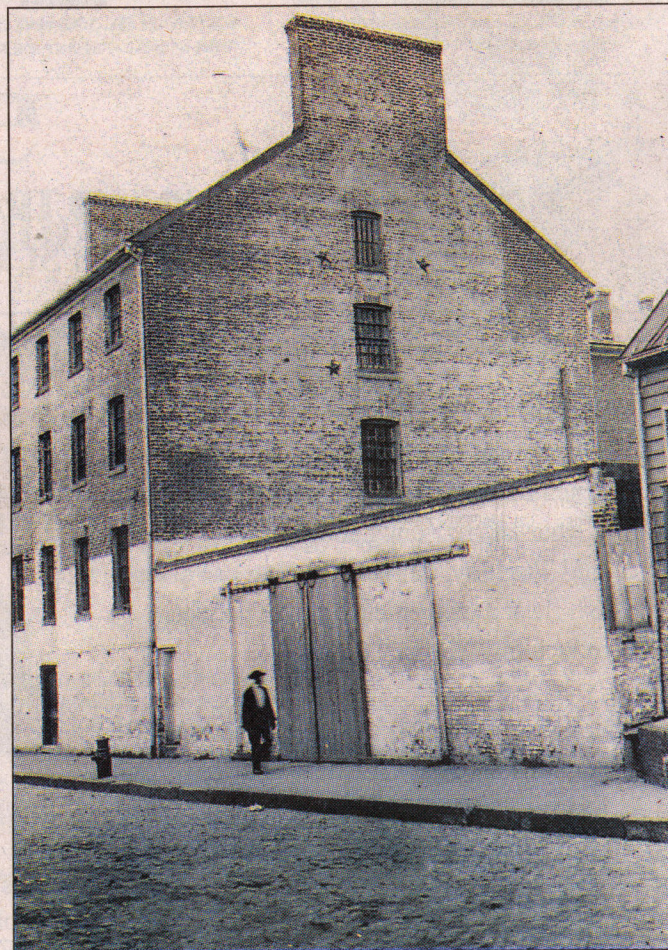
Davis appears on no census record. His relatives are unknown. His age is uncertain. His last name could have been Chambers or Lee. His first name could have been William. He had no known home. His lynchers were never found.

The official remains of his life are two certificates kept at the State Archives in Annapolis: one from 1900 admitting Prisoner 15521 to the Maryland Penitentiary at age 17 for assaulting a black woman, and one recording his death by gunshot wound on Dec. 21, 1906, at age 30.

For much of the last 95 years, Davis has been a forgotten man. Tourists being led along the city's centuries-old streets by guides in Colonial garb never hear a word about the lynching. And most residents have no idea who Davis was or what happened to him the night an angry white mob descended on the Annapolis jail and dragged the accused rapist of a white Crownsville woman to a bluff along College Creek.

Even as Annapolis began coming to grips with its troubled racial history—erecting a monument at the City Dock to Kunta Kinte, the slave made famous by "Roots" author Alex Haley, and winning a gubernatorial pardon for John Snowden, a black ice-wagon worker convicted and hanged for killing a pregnant white woman—the story of Davis has remained largely untold.

That could finally begin to change at 1 p.m. today when a group of black activists gather at Brewer Hill to erect a memorial to Davis and the state's other lynching victims. "May those who visit this site be reminded that mob rule must never become the law of the land," the plaque reads. It will sit beside a similar memorial to Snowden, the last man to die on the gallows in



COURTESY OF THE MARYLAND STATE ARCHIVES

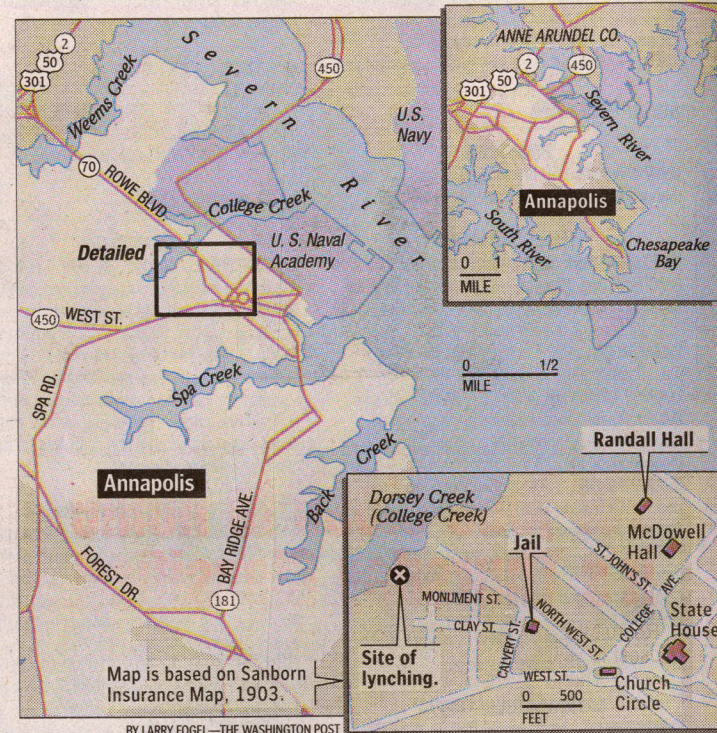
**In 1906, lynchers dragged Henry Davis from the Annapolis jail, pictured above around 1900, to a bluff overlooking College Creek. He was hoisted up a tree. The rope broke, and the mob shot him to death.**

Annapolis in 1919 despite serious doubts about his guilt.

There were fewer doubts about the guilt of Davis, who was accused of sexually assaulting a storekeeper's wife. But his guilt or innocence is beside the point, said Carl O. Snowden (no relation to John Snowden), a special assistant to Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens (D).

"The point is Henry Davis was the victim of a racially motivated lynching," said Snowden, who has spent the last few years researching the incident. "He has the dubious distinction of being the last man lynched in Annapolis."

The city's collective amnesia about the lynch-



Map is based on Sanborn Insurance Map, 1903.

BY LARRY FOGEL—THE WASHINGTON POST

ing runs deep, said Janice Hayes-Williams, an interpretive historian whose roots in Annapolis's black community date to the 19th century.

"Little towns like this are made of secrets," Hayes-Williams said. "You draw the shades" and let the memories fade away.

For decades, that's how Annapolitans, both black and white, treated the fate of Davis. But now Hayes-Williams and Snowden think Annapolis is ready to confront the lynching and embrace its lessons.

"I think a lot of people want to see the history and hear the history," Hayes-Williams said. "We just can't hide it anymore."

### A Dastardly Assault

It was after midnight when 50 people, some wearing balaclavas and others coloring their faces black with burnt cork, gathered inside what is now Randall Hall at St. John's College. The target of their rage: Davis, under arrest in the sexual assault of Annie Reid, 48-year-old wife of Crownsville storekeeper John Reid.

The attack occurred shortly before 4 p.m. Dec. 14, 1906, as Reid was on her way into Annapolis. She was dragged from her buggy by a black man limping along the road near Best's Gate train station. Reid fought tenaciously, screaming and beating her assailant with a horse whip before being knocked to the ground.

The first newspaper reports of the incident say the man failed to rape Reid; later articles say that "the brute accomplished his purpose," though Reid continued to deny it.

The man was frightened off by the approach of another buggy and ran into the woods. He left his hat and Reid, battered and with much of her clothing torn off, by the roadside.

The manhunt began immediately. Under the headline "A Dastardly Assault on a White Woman in Broad Daylight," a Dec. 15, 1906, article in the Evening Capital gave the first hint of what was to come:

"Talk of lynching is prevalent in Annapolis today, and even conservative citizens express the hope that the negro may be disposed of before he gets under the protection of the law, provided that he may be identified beyond any doubt."

### A Segregated World

In 1906, Annapolis was a much smaller city, with 8,400 residents. About one-third were black. Some were former slaves, their children or grandchildren, but others were descendants of the city's sizable and relatively prosperous population of free blacks.

Although Annapolis practiced segregation, it was by custom rather than law. Blacks lived in their own neighborhoods, shopped at their own businesses, worshiped at their own churches and attended their own schools.

Blacks could vote, though they weren't any black aldermen on the City Council in 1906. Neither was there any organized group, such as the NAACP, which was founded three years later, to represent the community's interests or protest injustices.

Even so, said Philip L. Brown, the 92-year-old historian of black Annapolis, blacks managed to build a thriving community around Clay Street in an area of the city then known as Ward 4. It was a neighborhood on the way up, said R.J. Rockefeller, director of reference services at the State Archives.

The relationship between black and whites was, for the most part, polite and distant, said Brown, who was born three years after the lynching and whose father ran a grocery store on West Street in 1906.

But blacks always knew that the peaceful relations between the races only went so far. In 1898, enraged whites were about to lynch

Wright Smith, another black man accused of assaulting a white woman, when he broke free of the mob and was shot dead on Calvert Street. The incident isn't considered a lynching by historians only because Smith wasn't hanged, but it cowed the city's black residents.

"We did what we were expected to do," Brown said. "For the most part, blacks tried to avoid getting into trouble with the police and the court. You didn't have a chance."

### The Pressure Builds

Led by Sheriff Joshua Linthicum and County Constable James Small, police combed the area around Best's Gate station. Davis was arrested Dec. 17, three days after the attack.

Davis had already served prison time for assaulting a black woman. He had a limp, caused by losing several toes to frostbite, and told police he had lost his hat. Two days after his arrest, he was taken to Annie Reid's house, where she identified him as her assailant. Davis then allegedly admitted to the assault, according to newspaper accounts.

Aware of the potential for mob violence, the sheriff pleaded for a jury to be convened immediately. But Reid had not yet recovered from her injuries and could not testify.

"I should not feel prepared to take the case to trial without Mrs. Reid's presence and testimony," State's Attorney Nicholas Green said Dec. 20.

The next day, Davis would be dead.

### An Ugly Death

The lynchers marched from St. John's to the Annapolis jail, which then sat at the corner of Calvert and Clay streets. There were four men guarding the jail that night: Deputy Sheriffs Reuben Smallwood and James Crouse, night watchman Hugh Marcellus and Warden George Taylor. The leaders of the mob rang the jailhouse bell around 1:50 a.m., claiming they were police officers with a prisoner.

Marcellus refused to open the door. He called Linthicum, who was at home but ordered the police to resist. By then, the pounding on the door had started.

One of the lynchers was rapidly tearing a hole in the door with a pick taken from a nearby blacksmith's shop. Another lyncher was beating it in with a sledgehammer. The policemen said they were surprised by how quickly the door, which had been reinforced with planks, collapsed. The door fell with a crash, and two men leaped into the doorway brandishing revolvers, yelling at the deputies to put their hands up. They did.

Smallwood and Crouse "did all they could to dissuade the mob," the Evening Capital reported, "but state frankly that they were not willing either to shoot white men . . . or lose their lives for the sake of a brute who had confessed to the most outrageous crime in the history of the county."

Taylor handed over the keys to Davis's third-floor cell. Davis was hauled from the jail down Calvert Street toward West Street. The neighborhood's black residents didn't dare venture out of their homes. But many whites, awakened by the noise, joined the crowd as it turned onto West Washington Street and headed toward a neighborhood known as Brick Yard Hill.

### Documented Lynchings in Maryland, 1891 to 1906

Asbury Green in Centerville, May 13, 1891  
James Taylor in Chestertown, May 17, 1892  
Isaac Kemp in Princess Anne, June 8, 1893  
Stephen Williams in Prince George's County, Oct. 20, 1894  
Marshall E. Price in Caroline County, March 16, 1895  
Jacob Hensen in Ellicott City, March 28, 1895  
James Brown in Frederick, Nov. 16, 1895  
William Andres in Princess Anne, June 9, 1897  
Garfield King in Salisbury, May 25, 1898  
Henry Davis in Annapolis, Dec. 21, 1906

SOURCE: John Snowden Memorial Committee





BY JAMES M. THRESHER—THE WASHINGTON POST

**Carl O. Snowden, a community leader, kneels in Brewer Hill Cemetery by the memorial and the grave of John Snowden (no relation), an innocent black man hanged by the state almost 100 years ago. Carl Snowden wants the history of lynchings to be included in Annapolis's tourism literature.**

They dragged Davis, who could not walk quickly because of his missing toes, to a bluff overlooking College Creek, raining blows upon him "like hungry wolves," in the words of the Baltimore Sun.

Davis supposedly admitted to the attack again. Then the crowd slid a thin white rope around his neck and hoisted him up a large chestnut or oak tree. Someone gave a signal to commence firing.

The rope broke, but the shooting continued. More than 100 shots were fired. Davis was struck in the right breast and in the right hand. Another bullet tore through his neck. Two rounds hit him in the face. One struck the back of his head.

## Investigators Stymied

Davis's bloody body was left on the banks of College Creek. In the hours after the lynching, hundreds of people, white and black, came to

look at the gruesome sight. Photographs were taken of the corpse and made into macabre postcards, said Snowden, who has been searching for one without success.

That afternoon, the body was examined by a coroner and buried in an unmarked grave at what is now Brewer Hill Cemetery.

The event made ripples nationwide, and many newspapers editorialized on the subject. The Evening Capital defended the lynchers, saying that the wheels of justice had moved too slowly. The Washington Post ran two conflicting editorials in the days following Davis's death, one blaming the lynching on the slowness of trials but the other calling the lynchers murderers.

"What the lynchers killed was merely a negro, who seems thoroughly to have deserved killing," declared the New York Times, "but they wounded a much more important entity, the right which the negro shared with all the rest of us to live and die under the law."

The black community was largely silent about

the episode, although the Afro-American Ledger, based in Baltimore but read by blacks throughout the country, condemned the mob's actions: "Lynching is murder and lynchers are murderers and as such should be punished as the law calls for."

Meanwhile, the city made a show of trying to find the lynchers. Initially, many newspapers, including The Post, reported that students from St. John's were the ringleaders. But St. John's President Thomas Fell strongly denied the charge, saying that all but a few students had already left the campus for Christmas break. The next day, the papers reversed their claims, saying that if any students took part, it was only because they wanted to see what was going on.

No other leads were forthcoming. A grand jury eventually met in April 1907, interviewing the guards at the jail. They insisted that the lynchers had been disguised and that they were unable to identify who had taken part. But given the small size of the city and the lurid eyewitness accounts that appeared in many newspapers, it is difficult to believe that the lynchers' identities were not common knowledge.

On April 27, 1907, the grand jury reported that "although the jury had attempted to find clues to the lynchers, it had failed to fix the lynching upon any one party or parties connected with the affair."

The Davis case was closed.

## Ready to Remember

Annapolis didn't dwell on its last lynching.

Black parents spoke of it to their children only rarely. Alderman Cynthia Carter (D-Ward 6) heard her parents talk about it once or twice. All Philip Brown can remember is Davis's nickname, "No Toes."

The newspapers moved on to other controversies, and the city's history books made no reference at all to Davis. When white historian Mame Warren stumbled upon the lynching in the 1970s while reading old newspapers, she didn't include it in a celebratory book about the city.

"I was very appalled by it," she said. "At that point I was young and very inexperienced in research, and I didn't have the nerve to talk about it in my book." After all, she said, "Who wants to remember lynchings?"

The city is ready now, said Snowden and Hayes-Williams, leaders of a community far more visible and powerful than anyone could have imagined in 1906.

In the last year, black Annapolis has successfully challenged a potentially discriminatory anti-loitering law, won a pardon for John Snowden and negotiated a redistricting plan that gave black residents three majority-black wards for the first time in the city's history. This month, three back aldermen were sworn into office, giving the community more power on the City Council than it has ever had.

But even as the community moves forward, it doesn't want to lose sight of its past. Hayes-Williams envisions bringing tour groups to Brewer Hill Cemetery, and Carl Snowden wants the history of lynchings to be included in the city's tourist literature.

It is time for everyone, black and white, to hear the story of Henry Davis, they said, and to acknowledge a lynching long forgotten.