

# 1906 lynching cited in case to win pardon for Snowden



The headline on the *Evening Capital* of Dec. 21, 1906, read, "The assault on a woman avenged — Davis dragged from jail and lynched — Mob riddled Negro ravisher with bullets."

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A county official leading the effort to win posthumous clemency for John Snowden, the last man hanged in Annapolis, has turned up information about a 1906 lynching as further proof of the hostile racist atmosphere that permeated those times and this place.

Carl O. Snowden, a legislative aide to County Executive Janet S. Owens and a former alderman, has forwarded his research to the Maryland Parole Board as part of his appeal to clear Snowden.

The two men are not related.

In 1918, county officials cited the

lynching for moving to Baltimore Snowden's trial for brutally raping and killing a pregnant white woman. Snowden was African-American.

Four days before Christmas 1906, a mob had broken into the county jail, dragged out an African-American man who allegedly confessed to assaulting a white woman, then hanged him on the banks of College Creek.

"This incident is indicative of the the racial climate people had to endure," Mr. Snowden told the Almost 7:30 Friday Morning Democratic Breakfast Club in Annapolis yesterday. "This was a catalyst for what happened to John Snowden years later."

He hopes the story will not only help exonerate the man — put to death despite last-minute appeals from

clergy, witnesses recanting their testimony, and 11 of 12 jurors pleading for clemency — but be used as an educational opportunity.

"For those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it," he said.

The lynch mob on Dec. 21, 1906, rendezvoused in back of St. John's College, prepared disguises and then attacked the jailhouse door — with first a hitching rail wrenched from the building, then a sledge and pick swiped from a nearby blacksmith shop.

Once inside the Calvert Street jail, they found their victim, Henry Davis, who had confessed to assaulting a white woman, Mrs. John Reid, as she

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made her way by buggy to her Crownsville home a week earlier.

The 50-man mob carried Mr. Davis out of the jail and walked him up Calvert to West Street, in front of Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, then down Washington Street to the railway tracks.

About 200 hundreds yards up the tracks the victim was whisked across Clay Street to the bluff above present-day College Creek.

There Mr. Davis was strung up from a large chestnut tree with thin cotton rope that broke under the weight of his body.

He was also shot in the face and chest in a hail of 100 bullets. When authorities found him a few hours later a crowd had gathered around the lifeless body and the blood-soaked ground.

A list of recent lynchings ran in the *Evening Capital* the day after the incident, 10 in all, mostly on the Eastern Shore.

Mr. Snowden said 30 lynchings were reported in the state from 1882 to 1933.

Months later a grand jury still

had not found any individuals responsible for Mr. Davis' death.

His remains lay in what was once called Potters Field and now part of Brewers Hill Cemetery.

This marks the second time Mr. Snowden has made an official appeal for a pardon in the Snowden case. In 1991 he sent a similar letter to then-governor William Donald Schaefer. He passed it on to the parole board, which never made a ruling.

Gov. Parris N. Glendening is waiting on a recommendation from the parole board on Mr. Snowden's second appeal.

Two weeks ago, Mr. Snowden and several hundred other of Snowden's supporters, mostly from the local African-American community, held a ceremony placing a plaque at his gravesite up the hill at Brewers Hill Cemetery.

Snowden's last statement is carved into the plaque: "But God knows I am telling the truth," he said after being given a chance to save his life by confessing.

"I cannot leave this world with a lie in my mouth," he said