

## The Lynching Of Star Daley

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2000

The first time I ever heard the story about the lynching of Star Daley was from George "Brownie" Holmes. Holmes was a pioneer Arizonian born during the territorial days. His father was born at Fort Whipple in 1865 and his grand father traveled the Gila Trail in the late 1840's.

One day Brownie told me he was an eyewitness to the hanging of Star Daley at 4 a.m. on Sunday morning, May 6, 1917. The hanging occurred along the old Superior Road near Buchanan Well, just off the Apache Trail and four miles north of Dan Kleinman's ranch in Pinal County.

Brownie explained that Star Daley, alias Van Ashmore, was 26 years old at the time, and he was lynched by a large group of citizen vigilantes. The story fascinated me so I continued to research it for several years off and on.

I pieced together the following information from both Brownies' account and the information I was able to acquire from Bill Roberts.

James Roy Gibson and his wife Florence were returning home to Tucson on May 3, 1917, after visiting family in Globe. They were driving along the Apache Trail about 23 miles east of Mesa when they decided to camp for the night. They pulled over onto the old Superior highway and drove for a few more miles before stopping.

Florence set about preparing supper while James set up camp. Just at dark, a stranger rode in on a lathered-up horse. He was tired, and Gibson offered him water. In return for Gibson's hospitality, Star Daley shot Gibson in the back three or four times with a rifle. Daley then ordered Florence Gibson to take off her clothing, telling her that if she didn't obey, he would kill her.

Star Daley raped Florence repeatedly throughout the night. On Friday morning, May 4, Daley ordered Florence to feed him breakfast and load the car. Florence refused to load the car unless Daley would take her husband to a funeral home for burial. Daley finally agreed.

While driving toward Mesa, the car ran out of gas. Daley decided to walk to the nearest service station, leaving Florence in the car with her dead husband. Florence flagged down the first person she saw and told him what happened. The man, known only as Phelps, reported the incident to Mesa Town Marshal Peyton. Peyton arrested Daley before he was able to return to the stalled car. Daley offered no resistance and was booked into jail on a charge of murder and rape.

Six jurors found Daley responsible for Gibson's death that day. That evening, Daley wanted to talk. He told authorities how he had acquired a rifle and murdered James Roy Gibson and raped his wife. Florence Gibson was spared testifying about Daley's assault on her. After the hearing, Maricopa County Sheriff Wilkey returned Daley to his cell.

On Saturday, May 5, 1917, an angry crowd formed in front of the Maricopa County Jail. By 10 p.m., the mob had grown to several hundred citizens. Sheriff Wilkey decided to transfer his prisoner to another jail. The sheriff loaded Daley into a car and started for Florence. A mob of three hundred to four hundred citizens rushed to their automobiles and pursued the Sheriff and Daley. The vigilantes were able to trap the sheriff and take his prisoner at about 2 a.m. Sunday morning, May 6.

The crowd hauled Daley back to the scene of his crime to hang him. The exact location has been somewhat controversial. Brownie Holmes always said the scene was on County Line Road south of the Apache Trail. I have not found any information as to the exact spot.

Star Daley swung into oblivion from the back of a car at 4 a.m. Sunday morning, May 6, 1917. At daybreak, Daley's body still hung from the telephone pole of justice in the desert just west of Superstition Mountain. Several photographs were taken.

A coroner's jury held an inquest in Florence and ruled that Daley's death was "justifiable homicide, by hanging at the hands of unknown parties."

Brownie Holmes told me he drove one of Wes Hill's stage line vehicles out to the lynching of Daley. I remember Brownie telling me he was warned by one of the deputies that if they were to see the stage out there that Brownie would be called to testify. "Brownie" Holmes was never called in to testify.

***Photo credit to the Kim Chatterly Collection. Historical information courtesy of Bill Roberts.***



The lynching of Star Daley, alias Van Ashmore, age 26. The lynching occurred near Apache Junction at 4 a.m. on Sunday morning, May 6, 1917, after Daley killed James Roy Gibson and raped his wife, Florence.

