The Parade Day Hanging Tree

La Crosse

On October 16, 1884, Frank Burton, a prominent La Crosse citizen, was marching at the head of a political parade in that city. Along both sides of the parade route hundreds of onlookers stood and watched. Suddenly, as the parade passed the intersection of Fourth and Main Streets, a man in the crowd, Scotty Mitchell, raised a gun, fired and shot Burton down.

The assassin was immediately seized, taken into custody and placed in the county jail a block away at Fourth and State Streets. Within hours, a mob began to form, became increasingly unruly and forced their way into the jail. They dragged the assassin Mitchell outside and hung him from an oak tree on the south side of the Court House.

The tree, of course, was promptly dubbed the Hanging Tree, but the appellation was short-lived because the tree was ordered cut down almost at once. The city officials did not want the public to remember that mob rule had taken precedence over due legal process. Old-timers who heard the story from their elders, however, still describe the incident.

Source: Myer Katz, La Crosse