

An aerial, black and white photograph of a town, likely Port Jervis, New York. The town is built on a hillside, with numerous houses and buildings. A river flows through the town, and a large, open field is visible in the foreground. The overall scene is a historical view of a small town.

# HOMETOWN TERROR!

The 1892 Lynching of Robert Lewis in Port Jervis, New York

**MICHAEL J. WORDEN**

Deerpark Town Historian

Author of the award winning *Lynched by a Mob!*

An aerial, black and white photograph of a town, likely Deerpark, New York. The town is densely packed with small, multi-story buildings, mostly with gabled roofs. A central square or open area is visible, surrounded by more buildings. The town is situated on a hillside, with the terrain sloping upwards towards the top of the image. The overall appearance is that of a small, established community from the late 19th or early 20th century.

# **MICHAEL J. WORDEN**

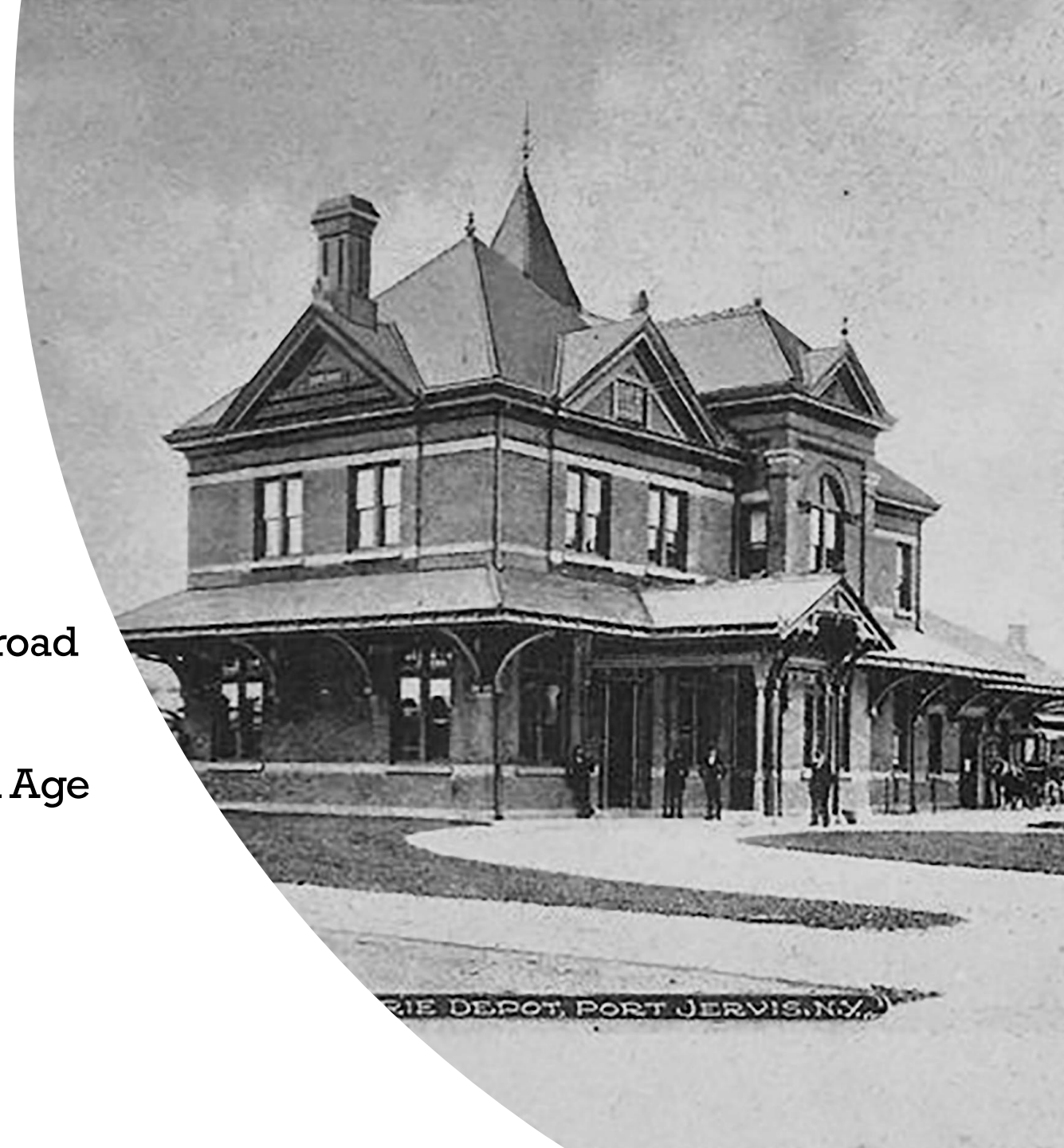
**Retired Police Officer – Port Jervis City Police Department  
Deerpark Town Historian  
Justice for the Deerpark Town Justice Court**

**Author of the two time ward winning book *Lynched by a Mob!*  
& *The Murder of Richard Jennings. The True Story of New York's  
First Murder for Hire***

**MWORDEN@SISUBOOKS.COM**

# VILLAGE OF PORT JERVIS IN THE GILDED AGE

- Prosperous community
- D&H Canal
- The Erie Railroad
- Port Jervis, Monticello & New York Railroad
- Modern – electric lights, telephones
- Wealth inequality typical of the Gilded Age



# VILLAGE OF PORT JERVIS 1890s

- Total pop. 9327
- 126 African Americans
- 1.35% of the population
- 1880 - total pop. 8678
- 1880 - 208 African Americans
- 1880 – 99 resided at “Reservoir View” of the  
estimated 130-150 who resided there

## PORT JERVIS.

ORANGE CO., N. Y.

The village of Port Jervis is situated on the north  
of Orange County, at the junction of the Sta  
York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and the juncti  
aware and Neversink Rivers. It is the western ter  
Eastern division of the New York, Lake Erie and W  
, distant 88 miles from New York. The company  
ated here give employment to a large number of  
Jervis, Monticello and New York Railroad has it  
The village is beautifully situated and the v  
ding scenery renders it a favorite Summer B  
population of about 10,000 inhabitants and  
ess center for a large scope of surrou  
elivery system has been established an  
ets are uniformly numbered. The b  
od fire department, economic villag  
public schools and churches, man  
desirable condition.

# RESERVOIR VIEW THE HOLLOW

- Squatter's community
- Initially along the reservoir
- Derogatory names
- Both African Americans and Caucasians
- 1883 evicted to nearby property
- Farnumville (with the derogatory names)

ino

Gazette

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1883.

## THE EXODUS COMMENCED.

THE CHILDREN OF HAM SEEKING  
THE PROMISED LAND.

WEEPING AND WAILING AND GNASHING OF  
TEETH AND MUCH PROFANITY AMONG  
THE RESIDENTS OF "NIGGER HOLLOW."  
INGRATITUDE OF THE REPUPLICANS.

There is weeping and wailing in  
the Hollow to-day. Evacuation  
has arrived and the colored people  
of the past twenty years have  
left the Hollow are to-day moving  
with their household effects; their elegant  
carriages, dogs and cats, chick-  
ens, etc., across the prairie  
hollow known as  
the Hollow. Some of  
the town, in  
in all di-  
for so  
son

## GAME IN THE WEST.

WHAT A FORMER PORT JERVIS B  
THOUGHT OF O. D. WICKHAM'S HUNT.

A friend in Port Jervis received  
letter from A. M. Haines, son of Hen  
Haines of Matamoras, Pa., who h  
been located at Rawlins, Wyom  
Territory, for a year or more. M

Haines is well pleased with the west  
and the farther he goes towards th  
setting sun the more he is impress  
with the grandeur and immensity o  
the country. He has not seen a Po  
Jervis man since he removed fro  
Denver. In the course of his letter h

refers to Mail Agent O. D. Wickham  
trip to Dakota as follows: "I read i  
THE WEEKLY GAZETTE of last wee

about a Mr. Wickham from Port Je  
vis shooting 13 prairie chickens in thre  
hours out in Dakota. Why, bless yo  
that's considered nothing here. If M  
Wickham should tell that story to a



# INTEGRATED SOCIETY

- Primary schools
- The Academy
- Land ownership
- Living & Working in the village

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR 1881.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it hereby known that the colored society in Port Jervis, known as the Separate American Methodist Church, have purchased a lot of Mrs. Martha Scott, situated along the Delaware and Hudson Canal, a few rods above the Glass House, for the purpose of erecting thereon, a House of Worship, to be known and used as The Separate American Methodist Church. A respectable building (28x18) has been erected, although, not yet, entirely completed, when finished it will be of sufficient size to accommodate all the colored people who choose to worship therein. We make these statements in order that the Public may not be deceived in thinking that the Separate American Methodist Church is in the Hills, (or Hollow, as it is commonly called) as none of the colored people of the Hollow with one or two exceptions, have any connection with this society. We, therefore, the Ministers, Members and Trustees of the S. A. M. Church having the building enclosed but not yet completed, humbly beg the charitable citizens of Port Jervis to aid us in our efforts. The S. A. M. Church was organized in Port Jervis in 1852 and has therefore been in existence 17 years.

Rev. JOHN W. GREEN, Pastor.

CHARLES WEST,  
MOSES O. BRINSON. } Trustees.

## RICH v POOR

- Socioeconomic status
- Poor Caucasians viewed the same as poor African Americans
- Derogatory slurs for the poor
- Public shaming for receipt of public assistance
- Perception of the Hollow by the white population
- Perception of the Hollow by the black population

**JUNE 2, 1892**



**THURSDAY EVENING JUNE 2D, IS A DATE THAT WILL GO  
DOWN IN LOCAL HISTORY AS MARKING THE MOST  
DISAGREEABLE SCENES THAT WERE EVER ENACTED IN  
THE VILLAGE OF PORT JERVIS IF NOT ORANGE COUNTY.**

*Port Jervis Union, June 6, 1892*

# ROBERT LEWIS

- Not his real name
- Born Robert Murray around 1863
- Henry C. Jackson and Anna McBride
- Lived most of his life in Port Jervis
- Bus driver for the Delaware House
- What was his life like before June 2, 1892?
- What were his final hours like?
- Presumption of innocence



# LENA MCMAHON

- Born in New York City around 1868
- Came to live with McMahons around 1875-1876
- John McMahon and Theresa Reddy
- Pretty and smart young woman
- Graduate of the PJ Academy
- Operated a confectionary on Kingston Avenue
- What was her life like in the years after that fateful night?



# P.J. FOLEY

- The man of mystery
- Phillip? Peter?
- From Massachusetts
- Insurance salesman
- At the center of a 130-year-old mystery
- Relationship with Lena
- Just who was P.J. Foley?
- Was he a scoundrel or a scapegoat?





## **ASSAULTED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT**

- Less primary source material
- Witnesses
- Lewis identified
- Misinformation & rumors
- PJ Foley seen lurking
- Lewis flees on foot



## **SEARCH AND APPREHENSION**

- Role of the police
- Sol Carley and Seward Horton
- Track to the canal
- Overtaken at Huguenot
- Foreshadowing of events to come



## **MOB AT PORT JERVIS**

- Waiting for a suspect
- Innocent man saved
- No advance notice or warning
- Being driven to his death



## **SHOCKING CONFESSION**

- Return to Port Jervis
- Lewis confesses
- PJ Foley set it up!
- Legit confession?
- Voluntary?





## **SEIZED BY THE MOB**

- Outside the local jail
- Officers powerless
- Vicious physical assaults
- Desperate interventions



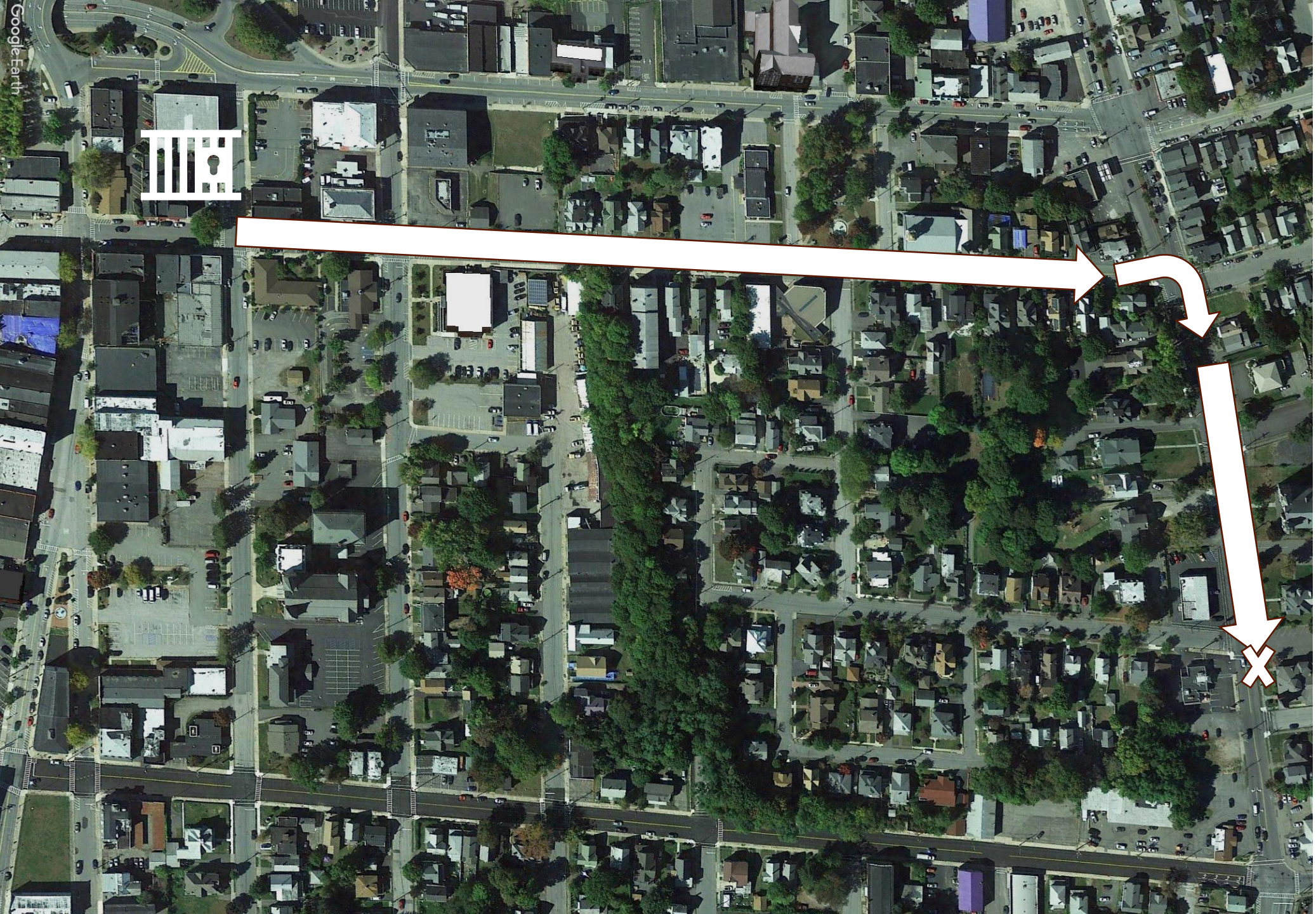
## **MARCH TO THE TREE**

- Attempted lynching
- Saved by the Village President
- Please by police
- Reprieve for identification
- March to the death begins



## **MARCH TO THE TREE**

- Nearly a half mile
- Beaten entire route
- Rope around the neck
- Police threatened
- Dragged by his neck
- Attempts to save Lewis





## **LYNCHED!**

- Lena has died!
- Hastily hanged
- Judge Crane
- Temporary reprieve
- A word either way
- Hanged again
- Left in the gutter





## **AFTERMATH AND FALLOUT**

- Relic hunters
- National news
- Southern mockery
- Officials outraged
- Condemnation with a caveat
- Vows to hold people accountable

# CORONER'S INQUEST



- **Problematic & flawed**
- **Public spectacle**
- **Foundations of a community coverup**



# CORONER'S INQUEST

A black and white photograph of the Lady Justice statue, blindfolded and holding scales of justice. The statue is the central focus, with its right arm raised holding a sword and its left arm holding a scale. The background is a plain, light color.

- **Witnesses over 5 days**
- **Devolves into a farce**
- **First failure of the legal system**

**WE FIND THAT ROBERT LEWIS CAME TO HIS DEATH IN  
THE VILLAGE OF PORT JERVIS ON JUNE 2D, 1892, BY  
BEING HANGED BY HIS NECK BY A PERSON OR PERSONS  
UNKNOWN TO THIS JURY.**

Coroner's Jury Verdict

# GRAND JURY EVALUATION



- **Goshen Court House**
- **Hon. Edgar M. Cullen**
- **DA Michael H. Hirschberg**
- **June 22, 1892**

# GRAND JURY EVALUATION



- More than 20 witnesses
- Over two days of testimony
- June 24, 1989 Grand Jury Report

The Grand Jury would report that they are unable from the evidence that they have received to indict any particular person or persons for the lynching of Robert Lewis in Port Jervis, June 2, 1892.

It was the result of the violent efforts of a large mob, which has been variously estimated at from several hundreds to two thousand persons. The transaction was all done in the night time: the mob was constantly shifting and surging, and the witnesses who have been examined have failed to establish definitely or distinctly the actual guilty participation in the effort of persons whom they could identify to the satisfaction of the Grand Jury. It is apparent to the Grand Jury that many of the witnesses in the case show either forgetfulness or great unwillingness to give any evidence that would implicate the guilty parties.

And it is proper to add

# GRAND JURY EVALUATION



- **Ordered by the judge to hear more testimony**
- **Additional witnesses called**
- **June 29, 1989 Grand Jury hands up indictments**

# GRAND JURY EVALUATION



The People } Indicted on  
vs } Blackmail  
Phillip J. Foley

The People } Indicted on  
vs } Blackmail  
Phillip J. Foley

Counsel \_\_\_\_\_

Orange County *Oyer & Termine*  
*June 29th. 1892*

THE PEOPLE

vs.

*O. T. Howell*

*W. Schrickberg*  
District Attorney.

**A True Bill.**

*Thos Caldwell* Foreman.

Filed *June 29 1892*

Arraigned \_\_\_\_\_

Plead \_\_\_\_\_

Trial \_\_\_\_\_

Verdict \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence \_\_\_\_\_

Witnesses: \_\_\_\_\_

*John A. ...*  
*June 29 1892*  
*8 M. 2 M.*

*Helpful member of  
Grand Jury*

# GRAND JURY EVALUATION



- **Permission to present to a grand jury in the fall term**
- **September 1892 new GJE**
- **No additional indictments**

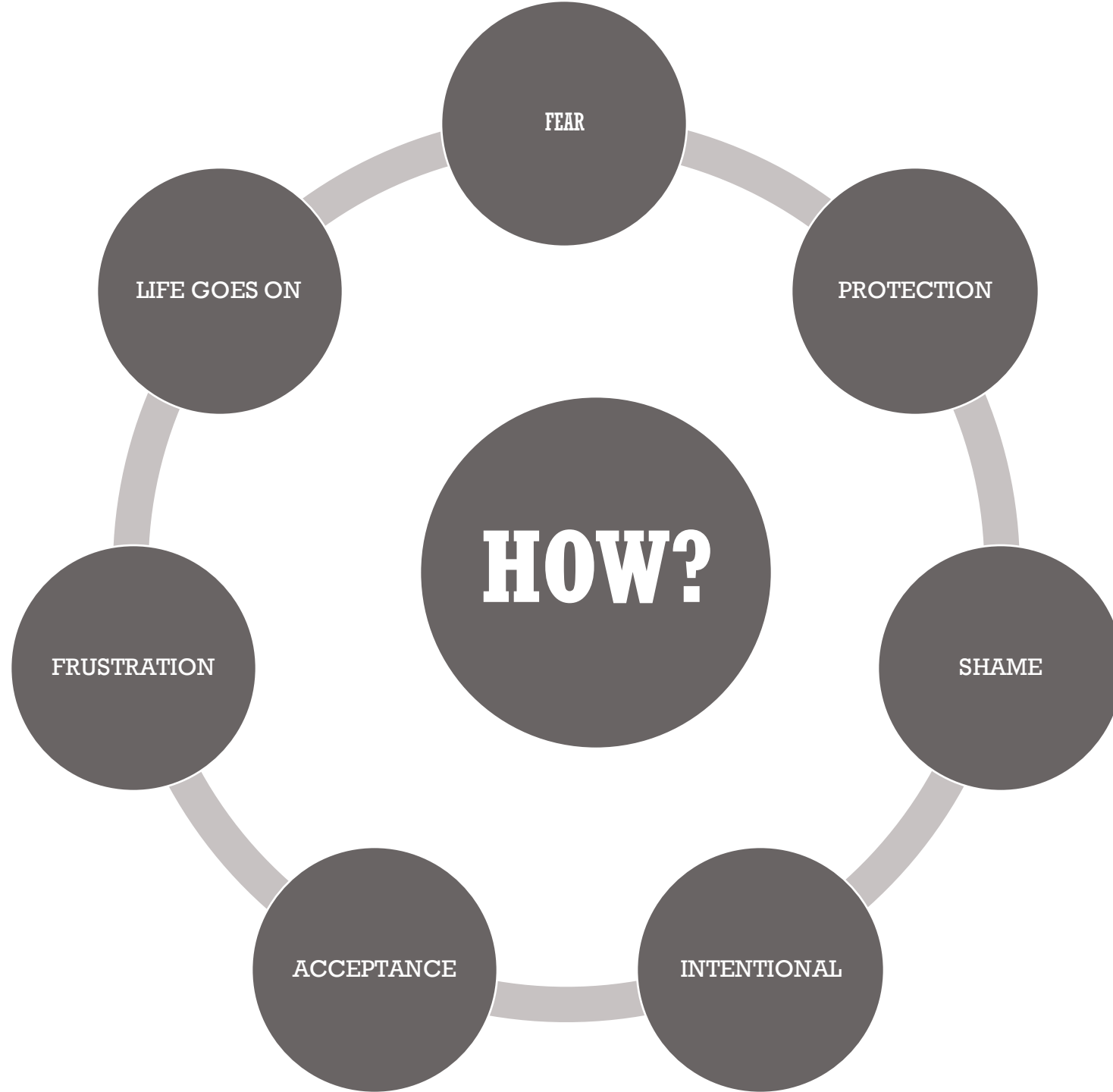
# **GRAND JURY EVALUATION**

A black and white photograph of the Lady Justice statue, blindfolded and holding scales of justice. The statue is the central focus, with its head tilted back and eyes covered by a blindfold. The scales of justice are held in its right hand, and a sword is in its left. The background is a plain, light color.

**NONE OF THE INDICTED MEN ARE  
EVER BROUGHT TO TRIAL**



# A FORGOTTEN CRIME

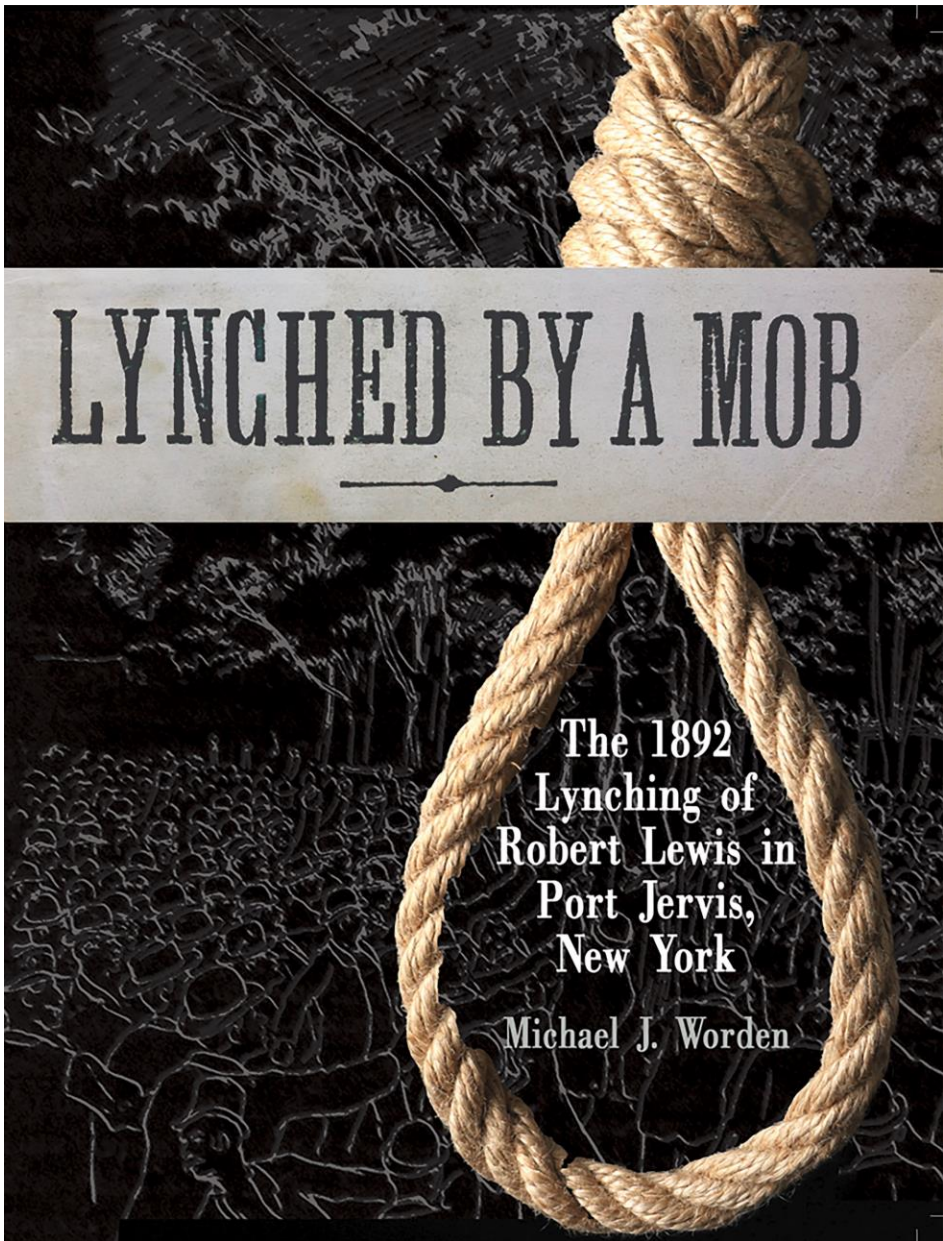




# 1892 LYNCHING

ON JUNE 2ND ROBERT LEWIS,  
A LOCAL BLACK RESIDENT, WAS  
MOB LYNCHED NEAR THIS SITE.  
NO ONE WAS HELD ACCOUNTABLE  
FOR HIS MURDER.

FRIENDS OF  
ROBERT LEWIS AND MVHS



**TRUE CRIME CATEGORY**  
**2023 GOLD**  
**MEDAL**  
**Independent Publisher Book Awards**



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