



City of Santa Ana
20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701
Staff Report
November 15, 2022

TOPIC: Councilmember Requested Item: Community Historical Marker

TITLE

Discuss and Consider Directing the City Manager to Direct Staff to Develop a Community Historical Marker Policy and to Install a Community Historical Marker on the Corner of Sycamore and Fourth Streets to Honor, Remember, and Memorialize the Story of Francisco Torres

DISCUSSION

Councilmember Hernandez added the following councilmember requested item:

Historical Analysis: Lynching of Francisco Torres

Francisco Torres was a Mexican farm laborer of the Modjeska Ranch in Santiago Canyon during the summer of 1892. The 400-acre ranch belonged to the Polish actress Helena Modjeska and her husband Karol Bozenta Chlapowski. Those close to Mr. Torres described him as a good worker and a quiet man who kept to himself. Standing at five-foot-two, Mr. Torres was given the nickname “Shorty.”

On the morning of July 30, 1892, Chlapowski learned the county road overseer had been unable to collect the annual road poll tax of \$2.50 from Torres, who had worked at the ranch for less than a month. William McKelvey, 55, a former sea captain and ranch foreman, was instructed by Chlapowski to withhold the \$2.50 from Mr. Torres’ \$9 salary as a “poll tax” owed to the county.

During this era, deep racial hostility lurked in Orange County, oftentimes fueling tensions between Anglo and Latino communities. Additionally, the language and cultural barriers played a vital role in this incident. McKelvey was unable to explain to Torres why his pay had been docked, causing Torres to leave without his pay in frustration.

As Mr. Torres protested, he returned to the ranch to demand his money. A fight ensued and Mr. McKelvey was found dead by a housekeeper. Due to McKelvey’s popularity, there was a public outrage, protests were organized, and rewards were offered for Torres’ capture. Through a cell window, Torres claimed he had acted in self-defense and that McKelvey had attacked him first and had drawn a pistol.

Councilmember Requested Item: Closed Session Discussions Relating to Labor Negotiations

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On August 20, 1892, a mob of men wearing white cloths over their heads with eye cut-outs, including many “prominent citizens”, broke into the Sycamore Street Jail, dragged Francisco Torres out, and lynched him by hanging him from a telegram pole on the corner of Sycamore and Fourth streets. Mr. Torres’ lawyers had asked for a change of venue, claiming that their client’s life was in danger. When his body was found at dawn a place card was pinned to Mr. Torres’s chest, which read “Change of venue.” No one was ever held accountable for the lynching of Torres.

This lynching has been considered the county’s darkest moment, the only lynching to ever occur in Orange County and the last in California state history. This historical marker will serve as a testament to Fernando Torres to condemn the vigilante justice that occurred, the lack of action taken to bring Torres’ murderers to justice, and education to our community about this heinous act of racism within our city. Only when we acknowledge our downfalls as a whole can we move to right our wrongs and deconstruct the racial and cultural barriers that led to the loss of lives. Everyone has the right to due process and no one should fall victim at the hands of a mob motivated by racist vigilante justice.