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**History Lesson**  
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## **Murders in the Hanford Courthouse**

Little Hanford California is probably regarded locally as a pretty calm and quiet place. Outside of a few bar fights and shootings, not much of a violent nature regularly happens in Hanford. Of course, the Mussel Slough Tragedy where seven people were killed in just 45 seconds occurred just a few short miles from Hanford. It is important to note that the main issue in that dustup was a disagreement about an agricultural issue, the ownership of land. 37 years later, an incident that took three lives in a few minutes time would happen in downtown Hanford, and again it was a dispute over an agricultural issue, this time it was the cost of a tractor.

It seems that one Lorenzo P Denny, a very well-known Tulare Lake area rancher owed the Yuba Construction Company \$2000 for the purchase of a tractor. For some heretofore unknown reason, farmer Denny disputed that claim, saying he didn't owe the money. Former California State Assemblyman Elias Cospers, an attorney in Hanford, had been hired by W.D. Wiley, the local manager of Yuba Construction to act as his attorney. Lorenzo Denny retained the services of former Superior Court Judge J G Covert as his attorney. Wiley had already brought suit against Denny, so the parties met in Cospers's office in the Kutner Goldstein Building near the Hanford Courthouse to try to settle the matter out of court.

At first, the meeting was friendly and all parties brought their arguments to the fore. But soon, Lorenzo Denny became angry, very angry, to the point that he jumped up out of his chair yelling, "I'll settle this my own way." He produced

his revolver and shot Attorney Cospers through the shoulder. Cospers ran into an adjoining office and collapsed. Denny then pointed his gun at W.D. Wiley and shot him too, killing him instantly. In his rage, he then whirled around and pointed his gun at Judge Covert who yelled, "Not me, Denny, I'm your lawyer!" Denny ran out of the room, but not before he shot Cospers one more time for good measure, killing him.

Denny ran down the street to the Hanford Courthouse. He could have just run away and escaped, but it seems he was out to settle another score that day. In the basement of the courthouse was the justice courtroom where Judge Meadows presided. Judge Meadows had presided over this same lawsuit against Denny earlier, and Denny wasn't happy with his treatment at the hands of Judge Meadows.

Seated at his desk in his chambers, Judge Meadows was an easy target, Denny started shooting and the Judge got up to run away. Denny put three bullets into him before he reached the door, killing him. Denny then ran out of the justice courtroom into the hallway.

Upon hearing gunshots in the courthouse several people ran out of their offices to see what the commotion was. Among them was District Attorney Justin Miller, Constable Perry Gard, Superior Court Judge M L Short, and Bailiff L C Whitney. The men arrived in the hallway just in time to find Denny beating a hasty retreat. Having literally bumped into Bailiff Whitney, Denny jammed the revolver into Whitney's stomach and said, "Oh, so you want some too?"

Judge Short screamed "Don't shoot that man, Denny! Don't shoot!!!" For some reason Denny didn't shoot. Instead he ran out of the courthouse to the Vendome Hotel, where he had parked his automobile.

Meanwhile, having heard the commotion near Cospers' office in the Kutner Goldstein Building, Sidney Sharp, another

Hanford famous attorney and Assistant District Attorney at the time, ran up to the second floor to find Maggie Moore, Cospers's secretary lying on the floor. She had fallen down the building's rear staircase while trying to escape the gunfire, and had broken her leg. Sharp picked her up and took her across the street to a restaurant. She kept telling him, "Denny's up there killing people." Sharp went back to the stairs followed by drayman Lester Works. The two crept slowly into the office and discovered a now very dead W.D. Wiley. "That man is dead," Sharp told Works. Moving further into the room they found Cospers, also dead.

Sharp summoned Marshall William Hime up to Cospers's office. They just began removing the bodies when there was more commotion below. They heard shouts of, "There he is!" They ran outside and there was Denny, cranking his car. They both ran across the street towards Denny, who upon seeing the Marshall charging toward him, reached for the revolver he had tossed onto the seat of his car.

As he raised the pistol, Hime shot him. Suddenly both Hime and Sharp had engaged Denny in a street brawl, wrestling him to the ground. After a bit of struggle, it was clear that Hime and Sharp were wrestling with themselves because Denny was dead. Thus, in a few short minutes, three men lay dead in Hanford.