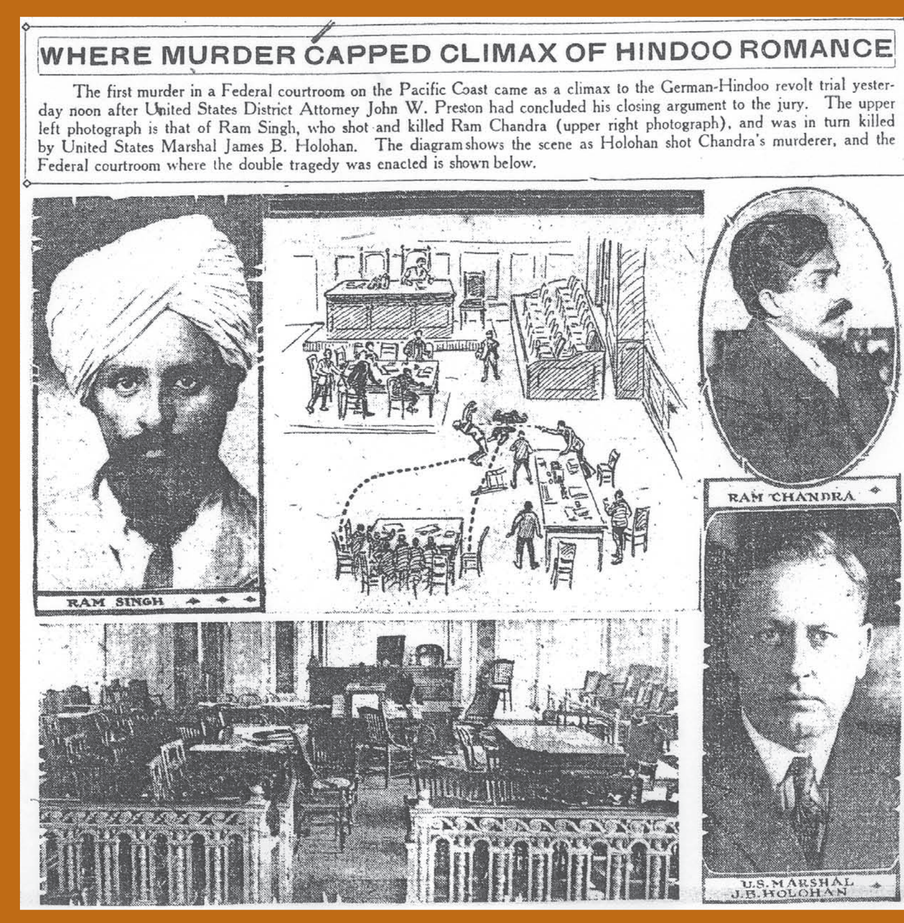
HINDU CONSPIRACY CASE



The most dramatic single moment in the District Court's history happened during the Hindu Conspiracy Trial.

The case, *U.S. v. Bopp,* was directed against Franz Bopp, the German consul general in San Francisco who was tried along with dozens of other defendants with conspiring to smuggle arms to India in an effort to overthrow British rule. Germany supported the free-India cause because German officials figured that an Indian uprising would divert British money and supplies from the Great War. The 85-day trial, before U.S. District Court Judge William C. Van Fleet in Courtroom One, ended on April 23, 1918, when one of the defendants, Ram Singh, shot and killed fellow defendant Ram Chandra. Moments later, U.S. Marshal James P. Holohan shot and killed Ram Singh.

The pandemonium was described years later by Carl Calbreath, who was a young assistant clerk. He wrote:

> It late developed that among the 40 Hindus on trial there were two factions. One headed by Ram Chandra and the other by Ram Singh. It is believed that the attorneys for the Hindu defendants knew of the existence of this feud, but did not believe that there would be any shooting, especially in the court-room.
>
> To set the scene in the court-room prior to the shooting--the noon recess had been declared by Judge Van Fleet; the jury had filed out of the court-room before any one else left the room, then Judge Van Fleet left the bench. The room was still packed with defendants and attorneys and spectators and newspaper men. Ram Chandra was a small man, about 5 feet 5 inches tall and very thin. He was standing with his back to the rear of the room and talking with his attorney Stanley A. Moore. Mr. Moore was a rather large man and towered over little Ram Chandra. Ram Singh came across the room and up in back of Ram Chandra and holding the revolver not more than two or three feet from Ram Chandra's back fired one bullet. Ram Chandra dropped to the floor immediately. Many have wondered why the bullet did not go through Ram Chandra and enter the body of Mr. Moore, but it did not. It was felt that the bullet had not had time to gain maximum velocity. Marshal Holohan was about 10 or 12 feet away when he shot over the heads of the attorneys standing in front of him. His bullet entered the heart muscle of Ram Singh.

Moments later, Judge Van Fleet returned to the bench.

“What does this mean?” he asked as he looked upon the scene. He ordered the marshal to take every defendant into custody. The jury came back to the courtroom at 2 p.m. to receive instructions and retired at dinner time. It returned a verdict just before midnight. All but one of the remaining 43 defendants were found guilty.

It was later discovered that Ram Singh fired more than one bullet. A stray bullet was later found in a glass-mosaic inlay near the judge's bench. The chipped glass from the bullet hole remains there today.