

IT HAPPENED HERE

REMEMBERING THREE LYNCHINGS

According to the 1860 Census, there were nearly 8,000 enslaved men, women, and children living in Montgomery County, Maryland, nearly one-third of the population at that time. By November 1, 1864, the Maryland Constitution of 1864 took effect, freeing some 87,000 enslaved men women and children in the state. Montgomery County and Maryland remained deeply segregated for many more decades.

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) defines “Lynchings (as) violent and public acts of torture that traumatized Black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials. These lynchings were terrorism.” EJI has documented nearly 6,500 racial terror lynchings in the U.S. between 1865 and 1950. At least 38 of those documented lynchings took place in Maryland.

This exhibit, “IT HAPPENED HERE, REMEMBERING THREE LYNCHINGS,” seeks to reveal this forgotten and nearly-erased history that occurred in our county. It combines the “IT HAPPENED IN POOLESVILLE” exhibit on the lynching of Mr. George Peck in 1880 with the “IT HAPPENED IN ROCKVILLE” exhibit covering the lynchings of Mr. John Diggs-Dorsey in 1880 and Mr. Sidney Randolph in 1896.

With site markers and photographs, this exhibit traces the paths of the three lynchings that took place in this county. The fatal journeys of Mr. Diggs-Dorsey and Mr. Randolph both began at the old Montgomery County Jail—where the Montgomery County Council building stands today. The Remembrance Walk on September 26, 2021, passed the same locations in Rockville that Mr. Diggs-Dorsey on July 27, 1880, and Mr. Randolph on July 4, 1896, passed on the way to their deaths, ending at Welsh Park near the two farms where the Rockville lynchings occurred. “IT HAPPENED IN POOLESVILLE” begins in Beallsville, takes us the 2½ miles to Mr. Peck’s January 10, 1880, lynching in Poolesville and ends at his likely burial spot on the outskirts of town.

Each of these three men was denied any semblance of due process and each racially violent death was determined to be “at the hands of parties unknown.” Citizens collected soil from each of the lynching sites to finally memorialize Mr. George Peck (November 3, 2019), Mr. John Diggs-Dorsey and Mr. Sidney Randolph (September 26, 2021). Permanent markers have now been installed in Poolesville and Rockville honoring these three men.

This expanded exhibit is intended to reveal the history of these fatal miscarriages of justice that happened here in Montgomery County, to remember the victims, and to promote reconciliation, and healing. The thoughtful act of remembering can assist in enabling equitable judicial and policing reforms today, eliminate the practices, policies, and procedures that contributed to past racial injustices, and promote community cohesiveness as we move forward toward justice within the “Free State of Maryland.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To join MoCoLMP’s email list or to get involved in ongoing work in Montgomery County, Maryland, please email: MoCoLynchingMemorial@gmail.com.