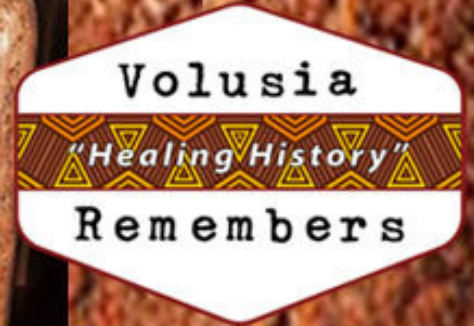


VOLUSIA REMEMBERS

The Official Newsletter of Volusia Remembers



What is Volusia Remembers?

Volusia Remembers is a diverse local organization of volunteers committed to healing divisions within the community through acknowledging, understanding and confronting painful events in Volusia County's history. Volusia Remembers' mission is to remember, acknowledge, and reflect upon our history of racial terror by partnering with the Equal Justice Initiative to install monuments to victims of lynching in Volusia County.

Volusia Remembers' goals are to:

- **HONOR** – Remember lynching victims and celebrate civil rights victories.
- **EDUCATE** – Explore our divided past and chart a united future.
- **RECONCILE** – Cultivate healing and reconciliation.

In April of 2020, Volusia Remembers officially became a Community Partner of EJI, the Equal Justice Initiative. Through this partnership, Volusia Remembers:

- Will gather soil for remembrance at the sites of documented lynchings in Volusia County.
- Will erect historical markers at the lynching sites.
- Will install in Volusia County a replica of the Volusia monument now displayed at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL

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“The opposite of poverty is not wealth — it’s justice,”
Bryan Stevenson

The Victims

The lynching of African Americans was a widely supported campaign to enforce racial subordination and segregation during the period between Reconstruction and World War II. "Lynching in America," a report by the Equal Justice Initiative, documents more than 6,000 racial terror lynchings in the United States during this period. These events did not occur solely "somewhere else." The EJI has identified and documented five cases of lynching in Volusia County, Florida. Additional research has been undertaken by The Volusia Remembers Coalition using original sources, including newspaper articles and public letters from the time of the event. As additional research yields more details, we will update this list.

Lee Bailey | September 26, 1891

Lee Bailey had recently been employed by J.R. Wetherell in DeLand. While Mr. Wetherell was out of town, attending to business, Mrs. Wetherell, alone in their house on south Amelia, reported to a neighbor that she had been raped. Mr. Bailey was soon arrested and identified by Mrs. Wetherell. As the local paper, *The Florida Agriculturist Supplement*, reported at the time. Mr. Bailey had the "same straight hair, the peculiar shaped head, the woolen shirt and his breath was impregnated with whiskey. The negro who committed the dastardly deed had all of these" (September 30, 1891). On this basis, an "indignant" white mob overwhelmed the sheriff at the jail that night and dragged Mr. Bailey to a nearby oak on Rich Avenue, not far from the jail, where he was hanged and his body riddled by bullets. *The Agriculturist* proclaimed in its headline that this was "A JUST FATE!" Charges of sexual assault by Black men against White women were often enough to justify White lynch mobs. Upholding the "purity" of White Southern womanhood and presenting Black men as over-sexualized and violent reinforced a key idea underpinning Jim Crow segregation and anti-Black racism.

Anthony Johnson | September 17, 1896

Anthony Johnson, an agricultural worker, was lynched with Charles Harris in or near DeLand. The exact location and other circumstances are currently unknown. We know only that Mr. Johnson and Mr. Harris were not given a chance to defend themselves in court against an allegation that they had assaulted an eight-year-old White girl, Eva Bruce. Racial terror lynchings, where the alleged victim was a White woman or girl, were commonplace during the Jim Crow era. The Equal Justice Initiative has now documented well over 6000 racial terror incidents; a good number of these cases fall into this pattern. White lynchings were almost never brought to justice for their racial terror murders. Victims never had an opportunity to defend themselves.

Charles Harris | September 17, 1896

Charles Harris was also an agricultural worker. We don't know much else about his life, other than that he was lynched alongside Anthony Johnson in or near DeLand. Both Mr. Harris and Mr. Johnson were accused of assaulting an eight-year-old White girl, Eva Bruce. That charge was never tested in court, because the two men were lynched by a White mob before they had a chance to defend themselves. In the Jim Crow era, a complaint about a criminal assault of a White woman or girl was commonly given as a justification for lynching. Protecting the "purity" of White women was part of the ideology to keep Blacks separate and lower than Whites. Whites, even though well-known in the community and sometimes even when they were pictured in local newspapers, were almost never prosecuted for lynching Black men.

The Victims Continued

Herbert Brooks | July 31, 1920

Herbert Brooks, a twenty-four-year-old British subject from Nassau in the Bahamas, was living in Miami, when he was arrested in a door-to-door search of Black residences because, deputies alleged, his description fit “in a general way” the description given by a fifty-five-year-old White woman who reported being assaulted nearby. A White mob of some 1200 men surrounded the city jail. For safe keeping, Sheriff D.W. Moran decided to transport Mr. Brooks out of town by train, ultimately to a jail in Jacksonville. Returning to Miami for trial, Mr. Brooks was alleged to have jumped from the train, dying after his head struck the tracks just north of Daytona Beach. He was accompanied by deputies and shackled and handcuffed at the time. An autopsy was performed in Daytona Beach and another, at the request of the British Consulate in Miami. After reviewing the autopsy results and description of injuries, which did not indicate any head injuries, some Bahamians and Blacks in Miami concluded that Brooks was beaten to death before being brought onto the train and then dumped on the tracks. This story—a Black man murdered in police custody after an arrest for an alleged crime against a White woman—is often repeated during this period. Mr. Brooks never had an opportunity to defend himself in court.

Lee Snell | April 29, 1939

Lee Snell, a resident of Daytona Beach, was a veteran of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, a branch of service open to African Americans in the strictly segregated military of that time. After his service, he returned home to a hero's welcome; his military service is memorialized today on a plaque at Halifax Hospital. Mr. Snell became a respected member of the community and a successful entrepreneur, owning his own taxi service in Daytona Beach.

In 1939, in an early morning accident, a White child on a bicycle, Benny Blackwelder, collided with Mr. Snell's taxi. It is unclear whether Mr. Snell's taxi struck the boy, or the boy collided with the taxi. The boy was rushed to Halifax Hospital where, sadly, he died. Mr. Snell, shaken, submitted to arrest at the scene, and was taken to the Daytona jail on the charge of manslaughter. When a White mob was rumored to be forming, inflamed by the boy's older brothers, Everett and Earl Blackwelder, the decision was made, and widely announced, that a single White constable, James Durden, would escort Mr. Snell by car to the County Jail in DeLand for safe-keeping. Before Mr. Snell could defend himself through the legal process, however, he was lynched by the older Blackwelders, by the side of the old brick highway between Daytona and DeLand.

Drawing on eyewitness testimony and newspaper accounts at the time, historian Walter T. Howard offers this chilling description of the lynching, allowing us to feel the moments of terror Mr. Snell must have experienced. The Blackwelders forced the constable's car to the side of the brick road and dragged Mr. Snell from the car, beating him with the stocks of their rifle and shotgun. As Mr. Snell was “clinging tightly for his life to the officer's arm,” Earl shot him with his high-powered rifle. “The injured man fled in panic,” Howard writes. “Everett shot him in the left knee, and as he fell, Earl shot him twice in the upper body” (*Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida during the 1930s*, 124-132). There was a trial, but Constable Durden and other witnesses refused to identify the Blackwelders in court as his murderers, and so they were released.

The lynching of Lee Snell attracted state and national attention. Volusia County educator and legendary civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune, at the time, wrote a letter to the editors of Florida's newspapers to ask for justice for Mr. Snell. “The eyes of America and the world,” she wrote, “are turned this way taking note of your standard of justice.” Some small measure of justice was restored in 2020 when members of the Volusia Remembers Coalition gathered to honor Mr. Snell on Memorial Day and to lay a wreath on his marble military tombstone in Daytona Beach. Our first soil collection, tentatively scheduled for the end of February, will be at the site of Lee Snell's lynching on the Old DeLand Highway.



The Volusia Remembers coalition.

Healing hard history: Remembering the first of five black Volusians lynched

*BY EVAN KELLER Volusia Remembers Communications
Chair | May 29, 2020 | Published in The West Volusia Beacon*

Memorial Day weekend is a fitting setting to remember Lee Snell, a World War I Army veteran, who, in 1939, was the victim of racial terror by lynching in Daytona Beach.

Pfc. Snell is the first of the Volusia Five to be memorialized in the Volusia Remembers initiative, through a Saturday-morning service at his little-known grave in the Mount Ararat Cemetery in Daytona Beach.

In attendance were veterans, dignitaries, university historians, and local NAACP chapter leaders.

Intentionally a small gathering (with social distancing practiced) due to the current pandemic, participants stood in a wide circle and took turns sharing with each other — and with a broader audience via Facebook Live — what is known about this honorable man, who was denied all honor when his blood was spilled in extralegal violence.

The historical setting of Snell's death was the Jim Crow era, in which the largely unpunished practice of lynching claimed more than 5,000 black victims, Bethune-Cookman University history professor Rick Buckelew said during the service. Those involved terrorized the remaining black population into submission to laws and norms meant to subjugate them as subhuman.

Mary Allen, director of DeLand's African American Museum of the Arts, eulogized a man who should have remained alive into her own lifetime. Unfortunately, Mr. Snell's life was snuffed out with a firearm on April 29, 1939, in a highway ambush involving a deputy's vehicle, in which Snell was supposedly under protective custody.

As was common in the era of lynching, the extralegal execution was carried out with brash impunity, inflicting Snell's family with a grief devoid of justice.

Allen pointed out that in 43 short years, Mr. Snell had accomplished much, especially in the context of the extremely limited opportunities afforded to black men in the Jim Crow South.

In addition to serving his country in the trenches in France, he was a family man, he owned his own taxicab, and he was held in high esteem by the local black community.

His high standing in the community was evidenced by the large crowd of supporters attending a hearing regarding the accidental death of a young white male bicyclist who strayed into traffic and was struck by Mr. Snell's taxicab.

No one at the inquest accused Mr. Snell of driving carelessly, much less of striking the youth intentionally.

Fast-forwarding to the present, and, sadly, none of Snell's living relatives were able to attend Saturday's memorial to share stories of his life to reveal more of his true character.

As Rina Arroyo of Stetson University shared beside Mr. Snell's gravestone, our partners at the Equal Justice Initiative hope "a new era of truth-telling" will catalyze a "beloved community" here in Volusia County and around the country.

“I am not interested in punishing America with this history. I want to liberate us,” Equal Justice Initiative founder Bryan Stevenson said. “I think we are a nation that has never truly sought truth and reconciliation. We are not going to be free, really free, until we pursue that.”

This sentiment was echoed by retired Judge Hubert Grimes at the Mount Ararat Cemetery.

“White Americans have never apologized for slavery; thus black Americans have never forgiven them for it,” he said.

By confronting this hard history, Volusia Remembers seeks to heal our festering racial wounds and forge a reconciled and united future.

At Saturday’s memorial, Daytona Beach Mayor Derrick Henry spoke up to honor Mr. Snell, affirm the work of the coalition, and offer his unreserved support of Volusia Remembers.

He noted that some have considered Daytona Beach to be “above the curve” due to the extraordinary achievements of black educator Mary McLeod Bethune, but cautioned against accepting that superficial reading of our history.

Volusia Remembers is striving to embody this healing and teamwork across the color line, which we hope will become as common as the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University



The grave of Lee Snell, who was shot to death in 1939 while in the custody of deputies, at Mount Ararat in Daytona Beach.

Cessna planes that made it hard to hear the morning’s presenters.

Those deadened voices remind us that the sorrow-laden voices of Lee Snell’s people have been suppressed for 400 years.

While airplane engines drowned out some of the words of remembrance, songbirds seemed to accentuate them – hinting at the joyful melody of the “beloved community” that Volusia Remembers hopes to nurture.

After a prayer offered by the Rev. Reginald Williams, the memorial ended with a song of human voices – “God Bless America” – emphasizing the grace we’ll need to receive and share with each other in order to forge a future of trust and joyful friendship.

Belated by 81 years, Black and White Volusians jointly decorated Mr. Snell’s grave with a U.S. flag, a patriotic wreath, and even a ceremonial libation (a traditional way to honor ancestors) around a freshly cleaned tombstone.

With various upcoming events, including the collection and display of soil from lynching sites and the installation of historical markers and monuments, the Volusia Remembers Coalition will continue to use history to shed light on present-day racial tensions and start a hopeful dialogue leading toward a positive future — together.

Negro Shot To Death While Constable En Route To DeLand With Him; Blackwelder Boys Have Promised They’ll Surrender

TENSION RUNS HIGH AT DAYTONA

State Attorney Murray Sams took charge of an investigation into Volusia’s first lynching case in over 50 years today as Sheriff S. E. Stone and his deputies continued their efforts to apprehend Earl and Everitt Blackwelder, young Daytona Beach men reputedly guilty of the slaying Saturday afternoon of Lee Snell, 43, Negro taxi driver who ran over and killed their 12 year old brother, Benny Blackwelder. Described the lynching as a “tragic thing”, the state attorney con-

Mruz Lands

From Page 1 of a 1939 DeLand Sun News article. The boys accused of shooting Lee Snell during police transport were acquitted by an all-white jury after a constable retracted his earlier testimony identifying them as the shooters.

DELAND SUN NEWS ARCHIVE

PBS Interview with Bryan Stevenson

pbs.org/video/bryan-stevenson-acdjum/

In the midst of America's racial reckoning, this program provides inspiration from Bryan Stevenson, one of the country's leading advocates for racial reconciliation, on what motivates him to continue the work toward justice.

How to Get Involved

"You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love" | Martin Luther King Jr.

Volunteer Your Time

Everyone is welcome to join our organization. We meet monthly and have many opportunities for individuals to get involved. Email us at info@volusiaremembers.org to volunteer.

Donate Money

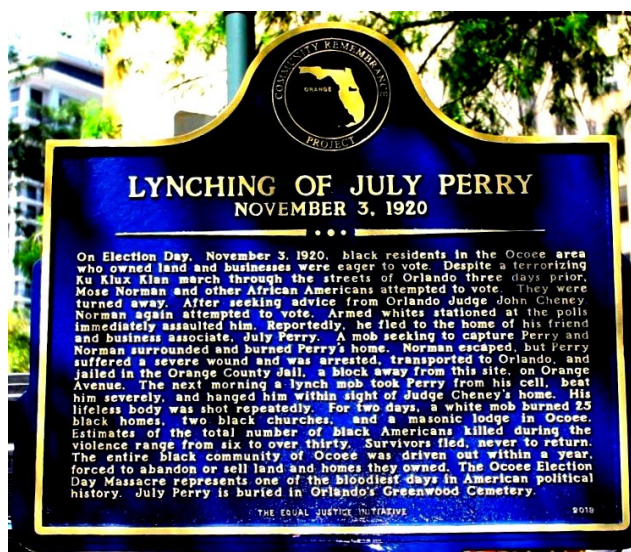
<https://www.volusiaremembers.org/donate>

Visit the website above to donate via Debit or Credit Card. To donate by check: Checks should be made payable and mailed to The Civitas Project: Volusia Remembers Coalition P.O. Box 1319, DeLand, FL 32721-1319. Thank you for considering a tax-deductible gift.

Each gift will receive an official receipt and acknowledgement. The Volusia Remembers Coalition tax reporting organization is CIVITAS – FEIN 81-1762328.

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This Equal Justice Initiative marker describes the "Election Day Massacre", a little west of Orlando in Orange County. It has special meaning this fall 2020. The lynchings were part and parcel of the larger story of Jim-Crow voter suppression via intimidation, home burnings, entire community destruction and human displacement that lasted for lifetimes.

Lynching of July Perry

On Election Day, November 3, 1920, Black residents in the Ocoee area who owned land and businesses were eager to vote. Despite a terrorizing Ku Klux Klan march through the streets of Orlando three days earlier, Mose Norman and other African Americans attempted to vote. They were turned away. After seeking advice from Orlando Judge John Cheney, Norman again attempted to vote. Armed whites stationed at the polls immediately assaulted him. He reportedly fled to the home of his friend and business associate, July Perry. A mob seeking to capture Perry and Norman surrounded and burned Perry's home. Norman escaped, but Perry was severely wounded. He was arrested, taken to Orlando, and locked in the Orange County Jail.

The next morning, a lynch mob took Mr. Perry from his cell, brutally beat him, and hanged him within sight of Judge Cheney's home. His lifeless body was shot repeatedly.

Over the next two days, a white mob burned 25 Black homes, two Black churches, and a masonic lodge in Ocoee. Estimates of the total number of Black Americans killed during the violence range from six to over 30. Survivors fled, never to return. The entire Black community of Ocoee was driven out within a year, forced to abandon or sell land and homes they owned.

The Ocoee Election Day Massacre represents one of the bloodiest days in American political history. July Perry is buried in Orlando's Greenwood Cemetery.

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Volusia Remembers wishes everyone a healthy and joyous holiday season, including Christmas, Hanukkah, Birthday of the Prophet, Kwanzaa, and celebration of a much-awaited New Year!