

About Us

In 2018, a group of Guilford County residents formed a coalition in response to the Equal Justice Initiative's opening of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. This memorial commemorates the victims of lynching and racial terror throughout the U.S. in an outdoor setting with 800 six-foot tall, engraved Corten-steel monuments for each county in the U.S. where documented instances of this terrorism took place.

The GCCRP is charged by EJI with stimulating community conversations that effectuate social justice, peace, and reconciliation in the wake of slavery, racial terror, and mass incarceration. Raising community consciousness about the injustices of racism is a prerequisite to the GCCRP receiving both a historical marker about lynch law and a clone of the Corten-steel monument designated for Eugene Hairston/Guilford County.



Guilford County's monument at the National Memorial for Peace & Justice in Montgomery, AL

In partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative, and working in alignment with their values, the GCCRP remembers Eugene Hairston, the only documented victim of lynching in Guilford County. The coalition aims to educate the community about this contentious, long-forgotten atrocity and other acts of racial violence, so that we may collectively grieve, heal cross-generational wounds, and endeavor to create a future free of racial terror and social injustice.



Award presented to GCCRP by the Greensboro History Museum

The coalition consists of a Steering Committee and interested community members. In collaboration with EJI, the coalition and the larger community will participate in a variety of commemorative activities that publicly recognize the traumatic era of lynching and address its legacy of racial inequality, such as collecting soil from the lynching site. Through community engagement and dialogue, we will face our community's brutal history and work to build trust and empathy, and advance racial reconciliation in Guilford County.



Guilford County Community Remembrance Project

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GCCRP

Guilford County Community Remembrance Project

**In Partnership with the
Equal Justice Initiative**

**Commemorating
the victims of
lynching and racial terror
in Guilford County,
North Carolina**

eji Equal Justice Initiative

EJI collaborates with communities to memorialize documented victims of racial violence and foster meaningful dialogue about race and justice.

The 1887 Lynching of Eugene Hairston

– as presented in contemporaneous news accounts

On August 23, 1887, Eugene Hairston, an approximately 17-year old black man was apprehended and arrested in Colfax, NC, and accused of assaulting Mahala C. Sapp, a 17-year old white woman in the woods near her grandmother's home. At first, Hairston was taken to Kernersville, NC, (four miles west of Colfax in Forsyth County) and, according to an article published in *The Western Sentinel* (Winston-Salem) on Sept. 1, 1887:

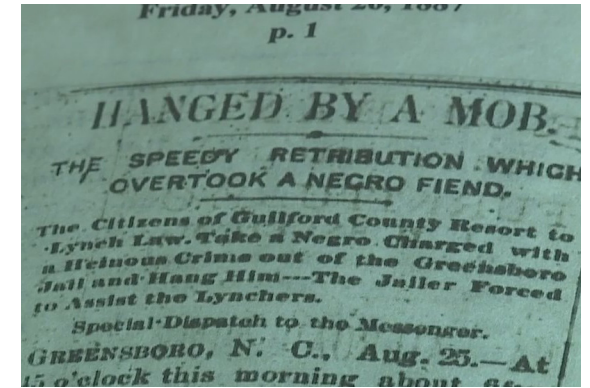
Within thirty minutes after the first news of the attempted rape was received at Kernersville, the best citizens of the community were saying: "He should be lynched, let us do it!" Armed men were soon scouring the country and brought him to town. Before nightfall it was well understood that his life would be taken that night. The shrewdness of the officers in removing him to Greensboro alone saved his life for the time..^[1]

An officer took Hairston by train to the jail in Greensboro; however, he was not safe from the mob there either.

According to a special report in *The Morning News*, published on August 25,^[2] in the early morning hours that day, a mob of masked men rode into Greensboro by way of the High Point road, and demanded that the jailer release Hairston. When the jailer refused, they used sledgehammers and crowbars to break down the door of Hairston's cell. They took Hairston to "the suburbs of the city, in the neighborhood of Mr. Jackson's farm, and hanged [him] near the little brick school house."

The next morning, the coroner assembled a jury of six men and held an inquest at the scene.^[3] In addition to being hung by the neck, Hairston's lifeless body was riddled with buckshot and bullets. A group of African American men who were present, "expressed the belief that the perpetrators could be discovered if proper efforts were made on the part of the coroner." The case was adjourned until September 3, to await further developments.

Hairston's step-father, Ben Palmer, his mother, Sophia Hairston, and his sister, Bettie, retrieved his body later that day and took his remains to Kernersville in a one-horse wagon.



Wilmington Messenger, August 26, 1887, p.1

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.

**~ Maya Angelou,
*On the Pulse of Morning***

^[1] "Lynch Law & Lynchings," *The Western Sentinel*, Winston-Salem, NC, Thursday, September 1, 1887, p. 2.

^[2] "Lynched!", *The Morning News*, Greensboro, NC, Thursday, August 25, 1887, p. 3.

^[3] "The Testimony of Miss Mahala C. Sapp—The Dead Man—The Coroner's Jury--Adjourned to September 3d", *The Morning News*, Greensboro, NC, Friday, August 26, 1887, p. 4.