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Lynching Memorial Includes Six Killed Near Cincinnati

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened Thursday in Montgomery, Ala. The names of victims are inscribed in 6-foot, rust-colored steel monuments, each representing a county in which lynchings occurred. ALBERT CESARE/MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER

National monument to victims, which opened Thursday, has 4,400 names

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Bearing 4,400 names, the first national memorial to African-American victims of lynching opened Thursday in Montgomery, Alabama.

Racial terror was not confined to the Deep South. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice contains the names of six African Americans lynched in Greater Cincinnati — two in Butler County and four in Boone County.

Enquirer research found the names of four additional African- Americans lynched in Boone County, along with one black man — Noah Anderson — snatched from law

enforcement by a white mob in New Richmond and hanged, this newspaper re- ported on Aug. 22, 1895, “on the highest poplar tree of Clermont County,”

Seeking to learn which six local names appear in the memorial, The Enquirer provided the names of the 11 local lynching victims to the memorial’s creator, the Equal Justice Initiative. Officials at the nonprofit legal and civil rights group, based in the Alabama capital, did not respond.

White lynch mobs killed thou- sands of people across America during a 70-year period beginning in 1877. The withdrawal that year of the last federal troops from the South ended the formal attempt through Reconstruction to establish racial equality and blacks’ rights in the former Confederate states.

At the new memorial, the names of victims are inscribed in 6-foot, rust-steel monuments. The colored 805 monuments, representing each county in which lynchings occurred, suspend vertically — like a body — from the ceiling on steel rods.

In all, Kentucky had 168 lynchings of African-Americans, led by Fulton County’s 20, according to Equal Justice Initiative data.

Ohio had 15. Butler's documented lynchings made it the state’s only county with more than one.

Linking racism past and present

Why this memorial in 2018? The Equal Justice Initiative wants it and an accompanying institution — the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration — to be racially therapeutic for the country.

“We cannot heal the deep wounds inflicted during the era of racial terrorism until we tell the truth about it,” Equal Justice Initiative Director Bryan Stevenson said in a news release.

"The geographic, political, economic, and social consequences of decades of terror lynchings can still be seen in many communities today, and the damage created by lynching needs to be confronted and discussed. Only then can we meaningfully address the contemporary problems that are lynching’s legacy.”

The memorial grew out of research begun in 2010 by the organization into lynchings in 12 states, including Kentucky, where they were most prevalent.

In 2017, additional research was done on lynchings in eight more states, including Ohio and Indiana, where lynchings also were known to be common.

In 2015, the Equal Justice Initiative released its report “Lynching released its in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror.” The 4,400 lynchings of African-

Americans documented in the report include nearly 1,000 more on a list compiled from 1882 to 1968 in research done at Tuskegee University in Alabama.

The monument and museum opened eight months after the white supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, raised questions about the extent of the country's racial divide. The event, during which a counterprotester was killed, touched off a national debate about the presence of Confederate memorials on public property.

The debate and backlash against the removal of Confederate monuments add to the timeliness of the lynching memorial, says one historian.

“To those who would ask why now and why a memorial to lynching victims, you can't have it both ways,” said George Wright, a history professor at Texas A&M University and author of “Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and ‘Legal Lynchings.’ ”

"In the Deep South, many people want to hold onto certain, selected of their aspects history and not others,” said Wright, a University of graduate and former Kentucky faculty member. “I say the past, all of it, is relevant. Don't destroy it. Tie it together. Have a thoughtful discussion about our past and its effects on our present.”

A Cincinnati connection

The memorial aims to provoke discussions of race and the shared history of racial trauma nationwide.

It presents a direct challenge to counties in which lynchings occurred. For now, 805 duplicative county monuments inscribed with the names of victims rest horizontally — like coffins — in a six-acre park that surrounds the memorial building. Government officials will have the opportunity to claim their monument and display it in their county.

“Over time, the national memorial will serve as a report on which parts of the country have confronted the truth of this terror and which have not,” Equal Justice Initiative wrote in a news release.

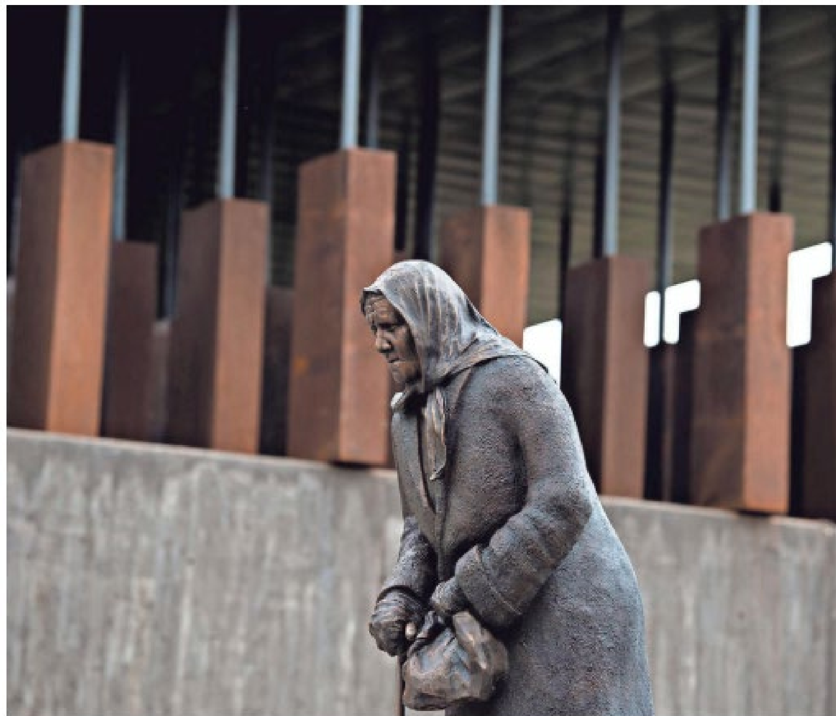
In Boone County, a group of marauding Confederate army veterans from the Walton area terrorized African-Americans. They were responsible for forming mobs largely responsible for some of the eight lynchings of black men that took place from 1876 through 1885, said Hillary Delaney, a local historian at the Boone County Public Library.

The Boone library has photographs of the 19th-century hangman's tree near Burlington, near what today is the intersection of Kentucky 18 and Camp Ernst Road.

Would Boone County install a monument to black lynching victims? Judge-executive Gary Moore said he is interested in the subject matter and is in contact with the county's historic preservation officer, who has more information on the history of lynching there.

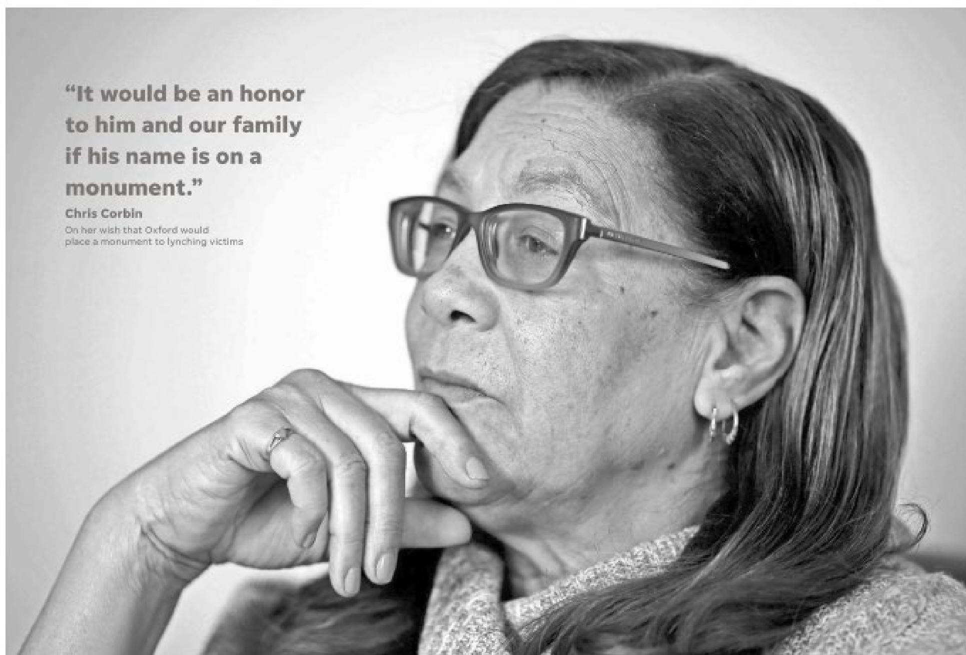
Many African-Americans fled Boone County for Butler County, Ohio, before the Civil War. Oxford was a stop on the Underground Railroad. The home of Miami University was known among African-Americans as a tolerant racial haven. Some black families who went to Canada returned there after the war. Yet the area was not immune to racism and racial violence.

In September 1877, a mob estimated by The Enquirer of between 200 and 400 people broke into the Oxford town jail, where a 21-year-old black man, Sim Garnett, was being held. He had been accused of raping a white woman in College Corner, about five miles northwest of Oxford. The mob overpowered a guard. One man knocked Garnett unconscious with a sledgehammer. Three bullets were fired through his head. They dragged his lifeless body into the street.



The memorial grew out of research begun in 2010 by the organization into lynchings in 12 states, including Kentucky, where they were most prevalent. PHOTOS BY ALBERT CESARE/MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER

Members of the media tour the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened to the public on Thursday.



Chris Corbin, a descendant of lynching victim Henry Corbin, said she welcomed the creation of a national lynching memorial. SAM GREENE/THE ENQUIRER

Memorial

In January 1892, Henry Corbin was hanged in Oxford's town square — at the current corner of High Street and East Park Place — after being accused of killing the white widow for whom he'd worked as a handyman for two years. Members of a mob broke into the jail and put a noose around Corbin's neck before dragging him across the street.

The mob fired 400 pistol balls into Corbin's body after he'd been hanged, the Ohio State Journal reported on Jan. 14, 1892.

A Corbin descendant said the family disputes the official account of his death. Chris Corbin, 68, of Alexandria, Kentucky, said Henry Corbin's only offense was looking a white woman in the eye and speaking to her while walking in uptown Oxford. She said a mob broke into the family home that night and took him to a park near a covered bridge north of Oxford and hanged him.

On a visit to Oxford, where she graduated grew up and from Talawanda High School in 1969, Chris Corbin said she welcomed the creation of a national lynching memorial and said she hoped her hometown would accept a lynching monument.

"It would be an honor to him and our family if his name is on a monument," said Corbin, who has researched her family's genealogy since her mother died in 1998.

She is Henry Corbin's second cousin twice removed. "We're blood," she said.

Oxford Mayor Kate Rousmaniere, an educational leadership professor at Miami, said the decision to place a monument to lynching victims would not be hers alone but is one she supports.

"We've been exploring our history — good and bad — so we're not afraid of this stuff," Rousmaniere said. Butler County Commissioner T.C. Rogers did not respond to a phone message seeking comment about a possible lynching monument there.

Why lynchings?

Lynchings were a tool of racial control in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to maintain whites' economic, social and political dominance over African-Americans.

Lynchings of black people were less common before the Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War. Whites were less willing to kill valued slave property than freed male slaves guaranteed the right to vote by the 15th Amendment in 1870.

Public spectacle lynchings, which became popular in the 1890s, sent an effective and efficient "know-your-place" message to African-Americans. And that place was not the South.

Lynching changed the country’s racial geography. Violent terror, extreme poverty and discriminatory Jim Crow laws in the South caused the migration of six million African-Americans to the North and West after the turn of the century. African-Americans who came to Cincinnati found themselves squeezed into the segregated West End and Kenyon-Barr neighborhoods.

The illegal public executions of African-Americans drew thousands of white people — men, women, children. The killings frequently featured prolonged torture, mutilation, dismemberment and burning of the victims. Onlookers often fired rounds of bullets or pistol balls into the body. If hanged, the body was often left in place for a few days.

Of the documented lynchings of African-Americans, 30 percent of victims were accused of murder and 25 percent of sexual assault of white women. According to the Equal Justice Initiative lynching report, though legitimate criminal justice systems were in place in many South-ern counties, they were deemed too good for black people. Due process did not exist for African-Americans, the report states, and the nearest black man often would do to satisfy a white mob’s desire for vengeance.

Not all lynchings were hangings, though many victims were hanged.

"The manner of death did not matter,” said Robert Thurston, professor emeritus of history at Miami and author of two books on lynching, including “Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective.”

"They were an illegal homicide by a group acting outside of the law but acting on pretext or in service to publicly held values,” he said. “Racism was a publicly-held value and was widely accepted and the norm in the white South for centuries.”

For Daryl Rowe, a 1972 Walnut Hills High School graduate who has been a psychologist in Los Angeles for 30 years, pulling back the scab on the lynching wound can be a deep positive but painful process for African-Americans.

The story revealed in the new memorial, he said, “is consistent with the country’s history of savage treatment of people of African ancestry and the series of lies told to dehumanize them.”

“Lynching,” added Rowe, an African-American who grew up in Evanston, “is the clearest example of that savagery without consequence.”