

Clinton aldermen asked to move forward on lynching marker

By Randy Bell

Clinton could soon take a step to acknowledge one of the darker moments in the city's past. A Mississippi College history professor is asking the aldermen to place a marker near the spot where two Black men arrested on robbery charges were taken from jail and later lynched in 1894. Dr. Otis W. Pickett said an investigation he's done, along with research by MC student Jeremy Watkins and a colleague, Dr. Patrick Connelly, produced more than enough evidence to substantiate the murders of Will James and Henry Smith at the hands of a Clinton mob.

"It's something the City ought to pursue," Pickett said after speaking to the aldermen during a Board work session in early May. "We know the names. We know where it happened."

Pickett said it's important for the City to address the lynchings.

"We're showing the rest of the state and the nation that we're really wrestling with this history. We're not sweeping it under a rug. We're really trying to walk through it and be open and honest about it."

Pickett said the actions of the mob angered many people who were living in the city at the time.

"A lot of Clinton citizens were outraged that this happened. We have a resolution from Mississippi College faculty and alumni that absolutely denounced this, asking the governor to seek a reward" for apprehending those involved.

James and Smith had been arrested for robbing a store and were in the jail, known as the Clinton Calaboose, when the mob took them and left the men hanging from persimmon trees about a mile from town along Clinton-Raymond Road. Pickett believes the jail site in Olde Towne would be an appropriate place for the marker.

"That's where the men were taken [from]. That would be a place where people could walk by and see [the marker]. A prominent place."

Pickett said Clinton would become the second city in Mississippi to erect a lynching marker. Oxford has already done so.

"I think it can bring us together and make us stronger."

Pickett will be leaving his position at MC at the end of June.

"I wanted to make sure before I left that these documents were disseminated to the aldermen, so that someone else wouldn't have to go back and do the research again."

He said Alderwoman Ricki Garrett has been an advocate for the

project and helped to arrange his appearance before the Board.

The City's ad hoc History Committee has been working in recent years to tell the story of race relations in Clinton.

"Some of it would make you really proud, and some of it would make you just flinch," said committee member Martha Hudson. "Lynching is another part of that story. We cannot pick and choose. It might be something we would rather not explore - but we must - for the sake of telling the history as it happened." There's already a marker in Olde Towne commemorating the assassination of Senator Charles Caldwell, who was ambushed a few weeks after encouraging fellow Blacks to vote in an 1875 election.

Hudson said she appreciates the work of the professor and his associates in providing the documentation about the lynchings.

Clinton's only Black alderman would like to see the marker installed.

Ward 6 Alderman James Lott said, "It's a great opportunity for the city to come to terms with its past." He said having a marker at the actual location where the incident began would be "invaluable."

Pickett said the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) is willing to fund the

project, so the marker could be erected at no cost to the City. EJI, based in Montgomery, Alabama, promotes Community Remembrance Projects, which include historical markers. EJI partners with community coalitions in identifying marker sites, drafting the text for the markers and planning meaningful unveiling ceremonies. The organization pays the cost of fabricating the markers and having them shipped to the communities. A statement on its website says, "EJI believes historical markers change our national landscape; they publicly claim the truth in necessary ways."

And while the marker could serve as an official acknowledgement of what happened to these two men 128 years ago, Will James and Henry Smith weren't the only victims of mob violence in Clinton. It's believed that Ellis Young met a similar fate in 1888. Pickett has been trying to document that incident, but he said more research needs to be done. Eventually, the names of all three men could be added to a lynching memorial at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson, which now lists the Clinton victims as "unknown black males." The museum is doing its own research to confirm Pickett's findings.

Wood Activity Center plans summer events and celebrations

The Clinton Courier

This month, the Wood Activity Center's Living Young program will again host its infamous Wood Center Swap, giving participants not only the opportunity to get rid of things lying around their houses that they aren't using, but pick up some new items that they might be interested in having, as well.

Organizers say they want to top last year in participation and in the number of items that are collected for the swap. Participants are encouraged to clear out closets, attics and cupboards and bring in gently used and clean items such as jewelry, clothing, books, knick knacks, home décor and other household items. For each item brought in for the swap, a participant will get a ticket to swap for other items at the sale. The number of items brought in will determine the number of tickets that each participant receives, and tickets are used as a form of payment towards items that a participant wants to "purchase" from the swap.

Those interested in bringing in items need to make an appointment for item drop off. For questions or

to schedule a drop off time, call 601-924-6387.

The swap will be open for browsing and purchases beginning June 14 at 9 a.m. and will conclude on June 16 at 4:30 p.m.

On June 23 at 11:45 a.m., the Wood Center will be the place to be to celebrate those who have birthdays during the months of April, May or June. Refreshments and activities will be provided. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP by June 16.

Also in June, the Wood Center will host a Living Young Sundae Fun Day, set for June 30 at 1 p.m. The afternoon event will combine one of America's favorite game shows, *The Price is Right*, with an ice cream social. Those interested are asked to RSVP by June 23.

The Living Young program for ages 50+ at the Wood Activity Center offers year-round activities, almost daily during the week. For more information about their programs, visit them on Facebook or call 601-924-6387 to be added to the distribution for their calendar of events. The Wood Activity Center is located at 111 Clinton Boulevard.

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