



# Manasota Remembers

The Sarasota & Manatee Community Remembrance Project

HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION

Saturday, February 24, 2024  
11:00 AM

Unitarian Universalist Church  
3975 Fruitville Rd.  
Sarasota, FL 34232

PRESENTING SPONSOR



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

of Sarasota County

# LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way  
That with tears have been watered,  
We have come, treading our path  
Through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.

# ABOUT THE SARASOTA & MANATEE COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT

Sarasota & Manatee Community Remembrance Project, known for short as “Manasota Remembers,” is a coalition led by the Boxser Diversity Initiative together with the Manasota Branch of the Association of the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), Newtown Alive, and the Sarasota Africa American Cultural coalition (SAACC). In partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama, the goal of the coalition is to honor local victims of racial terror lynching.

According to EJI, The Community Remembrance Project is a tool EJI offers to support communities who are engaged in the work of honoring local victims of racial terror lynching. EJI’s community remembrance work is part of a larger movement to create an era of restorative truth-telling and justice that changes the consciousness of our nation.

Manasota Remembers is partnering with EJI to complete three phases of the Community Remembrance Project.

Phase 1: Racial Justice Essay Contest for local high school students

Phase 2: Historical Marker

Phase 3: Soil Collection

# PHASE 1: RACIAL JUSTICE ESSAY CONTEST



Row 1: Dan Boxser (BDI), Jennifer Harris (EJI), Nora Mitchell (First Place Winner), Linda Crump, (Essay Contest Committee) Row 2: Judge Charles Williams, (BDI Board), Litten Boxser (BDI), Vickie Oldham (SAACC), Gene Crump (Essay Contest Committee)

Manasota Remembers Education Committee, chaired by Linda and Gene Crump, organized the Racial Justice Essay Contest. The contest was open to all local high school students. Sixteen students were recognized for their participation. EJI awarded cash prizes to the top four winning essays at a recognition celebration on March 30, 2023. In addition, Manasota Remembers awarded an all-expense paid trip to the first-place winner to Montgomery, Alabama, to visit the EJI Legacy Museum, the EJI National Memorial for Peace and Justice and other historic sites.

- 1st Place: Nora Mitchell, Booker High School
- 2nd Place: Elijah Roberson, Palmetto High School
- 3rd Place: Tiffany Anderson, Sarasota High School
- 4th Place: Hanna Silva, Suncoast Polytechnical High School

## PHASE 2: HISTORICAL MARKER



Unitarian Universalist Church, site of the Manasota Remembers Historical Marker

The Manasota Remembers Historical Marker, unveiled today on the grounds of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Sarasota, Florida, memorializes the six documented and the many undocumented victims of racial violence in Sarasota and Manatee counties. The marker honors African Americans who have experienced racial terror in Southwest Florida and across the country. EJI believes that markers and monuments can help transform our national landscape into a more honest reflection of the history of America and reflect a community's ongoing commitment to truth-telling and racial justice.

# PHASE 3: SOIL COLLECTION PROJECT



This material is taken from the Equal Justice Initiative website (EJI.org) and the Manasota Remembers website (manasotaremembers.org).

Manasota Remembers project culminates with a collection of soil from the locations of the lynchings. EJI's Soil Collection project is intended to provide opportunities for community members to get closer to the legacy of lynching and to contribute to the effort to build a lasting and more visible memory of our history of racial injustice. The jars of collected soil will be on exhibit in the new Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, as well as in other exhibit spaces, to reflect the history of lynching and our generation's resolve to confront the continuing challenges that racial inequality creates.

While collecting soil from the site of a lynching might seem a simple gesture, Manasota Remembers believes it is an important act of remembrance that can begin a process of recovery and reconciliation to our history of lynching and terror. The named containers with collected soil become important pieces of our broken and terrifying past. We believe these jars represent the hope of community members who seek racial justice and a greater commitment to the rule of law and human rights.



# ABOUT DR. CARYL SHEFFIELD



Caryl Sheffield is the granddaughter of a racial terror violence victim. Her Grandfather, Caesar Sheffield, was lynched in Lake Park, Georgia, in 1915. Caryl was born and raised in a small town in western Pennsylvania in a family of 21 children. Her father Eugene, son of Caesar, was an African Methodist Episcopal minister and an entrepreneur. Her mother, Bessie Gooch Sheffield, was a saint.

A former special education teacher, Dr. Caryl J. Sheffield retired in 2015 after 24 years at California University of Pennsylvania (now PennWest California), where she served in the positions of Associate Provost/Associate Vice President in the Office of Academic Affairs and professor/chair of the Childhood Education Department. A career educator with over 40 years of experience, Dr. Sheffield earned a B.S. degree in Special Education from California University of Pennsylvania (a M.S. degree in Counselor Education from Slippery Rock University, and a doctorate in Instructional Design and Technology from the University of Pittsburgh). She has expertise in educational consulting, training, project management, strategic planning, international education, accreditation, and assessment. She is the recipient of several prestigious academic fellowships, including the Fulbright Scholar Award. While at California University of PA, Dr. Sheffield dedicated herself to promoting diversity with students and faculty.

As a Sarasota resident, Dr. Sheffield is past President of the MASALA Giving Circle and is an active member of the Manasota branch of the Association of the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). Following her passion for reading to children, she has volunteered at Emma E. Booker and Alta Vista Elementary Schools.

Dr. Sheffield and her husband, Dr. James Stewart, are avid collectors of art of the African diaspora. They are the proud parents of four daughters and eight grandchildren.

# PROGRAM

## **Call to Gather**

Kuumba Drummers

## **The Occasion**

Dr. Caryl Sheffield  
Chair, Historical Marker Dedication Committee

## **Welcome**

Jay Wolin  
Pastor, Unitarian Universalist Church

## **“Lift Every Voice and Sing”**

Delores McKinsey  
Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

## **Opening Prayer**

Kelvin Lumpkin  
Senior Pastor, Light of the World International Church

## **Equal Justice Initiative**

Sumita Rajpurohit  
Project Manager

## **The Lynching of**

**HENRY THOMAS**

## **Proclamation**

Debbie Trice  
Commissioner At-Large, City of Sarasota

## **The Lynching of**

**MR. RUDDY, SAM ELLIS, AND WADE ELLIS**

## **Proclamation**

Manatee County Board of Commissioners

## **The Lynching of**

**WILLIE ENGLISH**

## **Proclamation**

Trevor D. Harvey  
President, Sarasota Branch  
National Association for the  
Advancement of Colored People

Luther Keith Wilkins  
President, Manatee Branch  
National Association for the  
Advancement of Colored People



# PROGRAM (CONT'D)

## **The Lynching of JAMES FRANKLIN**

### **"Strange Fruit"**

Synia Carroll, accompanied by Tom Pizzi

## **REMARKS FROM PARTNERS**

### **Boxser Diversity Initiative**

Dan Boxser, Co-President

### **Newtown Alive**

Vickie Oldham, Founder

### **Sarasota African American Cultural Coalition**

Vickie Oldham - President & CEO

### **Manasota Branch, Association for the Study of African American Life and History**

Harold Young, President

*with a special performance by the  
Manasota ASALH Freedom School Students*

### **Racial Justice Essay Contest**

Linda Crump

Essay Contest Committee

### **Spoken Word**

Melanie Lavender

### **"I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to Be Free"**

Maicy Powell

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

### **Call to Gather**

Kuumba Drummers

Please follow the drummers to the grounds of the church for  
the unveiling of the Historical Marker

## **HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION**

Sherry Suggs, Historical Marker Dedication Committee

### **Reading of the Marker**

**Libation** - Dr. James Stewart

Retired Professor, Penn State University

### **Unveiling of the Marker**

**Benediction** - Rabbi Jennifer Singer

Interim Rabbi, Jewish Congregation of Venice

# STORIES OF LYNCHING VICTIMS

## Henry Thomas \*

Parrish, Manatee County, Florida

March 8, 1903

On March 6, 1903, a white girl was sent by her parents in Parrish, Florida to run an errand at a nearby farm. The girl returned home and claimed that during the trip a Black man attempted to embrace and then kiss her: the man then allegedly followed her home and threatened the girl and mother with a gun.

As these allegations spread, a mob formed and focused their suspicion on Henry Thomas, a black man. Reports do not indicate why Mr. Thomas was targeted, but the mob declared their intent to lynch Mr. Thomas before the legal system could or would act. They roamed Manatee County for two days.

On March 8, Henry Thomas was captured near Hickman's sawmill by a white man who claimed he planned to turn Mr. Thomas over to law enforcement. The mob found Mr. Thomas and abducted him for lynching. Although the mob coerced Mr. Thomas to "tremblingly admit" that he had hugged and kissed the girl, Mr. Thomas denied the allegation of rape and maintained his innocence.

The mob took Mr. Thomas to the garden where the alleged assault occurred and proceeded to lynch him. There is no evidence that anyone involved in the lynching of Mr. Thomas was ever held accountable.

Days later, on March 11, The Tampa Tribune reported that the sheriff had received photographs of Mr. Thomas's murder. Despite photographic evidence and many eyewitnesses, local law enforcement and prosecutors granted impunity to the members of the mob.

# STORIES OF LYNCHING VICTIMS

## Mr. Ruddy, Sam Ellis, and Wade Ellis\*

Palmetto, Manatee County, Florida

March 6-7, 1910

In March 1910, a mob of white men led by law enforcement lynched three Black men over the course of two days in Manatee County, Florida.

On March 6, 1910, a Black man named Mr. Ruddy was lynched following racial violence sparked by a conflict over wages between Mr. Ruddy, who was a contract employee, and his white employer, who was a head contractor in Tampa.

This dispute between Mr. Ruddy and his boss escalated into a shootout that ended with Ruddy's boss being fatally wounded, after which a deputy sheriff led the mob — with no legal authority — to find Mr. Ruddy.

After his murder, Mr. Ruddy's body was found abandoned near a swamp at his home; no one was held accountable for killing him. Contemporary newspapers reported only his last name.

A white man later reported to the sheriff that during the search, likely on Sunday, he killed Mr. Ruddy. Mr. Ruddy had run for cover in palmetto trees near his home before deciding to act in self-defense. When he did so, the man reportedly shot Mr. Ruddy multiple times and left his body abandoned in a swamp near his home, which was later found by the mob.

Also on Sunday, March 6, 1910, the deputy and mob hunting Mr. Ruddy arrived at the home of Sam and Wade Ellis. The Ellis brothers had no involvement in the death of Mr. Ruddy's boss but were soon accused of interfering with the capture of Mr. Ruddy because the bloodhounds led the mob to their home during the search.

After an exchange of gunfire between the brothers and the mob, the deputy sheriff had been killed. The mob left to seek back-up and from there, the racial conflict continued to escalate as white mobs led by other deputy sheriffs terrorized the Black community for the next 24 hours.

On the morning of Monday, March 7, two deputies were standing watch on a bridge when they saw Sam and Wade Ellis approaching them. According to the deputies, when they ordered the men to stop, the brothers kept walking and the deputies began shooting at them.

When the encounter ended, Sam Ellis had been wounded by a shot to the head, Wade Ellis had fled into the swamp for safety, and one of the deputies was injured. The other deputy seized the injured Sam Ellis and tied him to a tree before taking the injured deputy to get medical treatment.

Shortly after the deputies abandoned Sam Ellis, an armed white mob arrived and shot him to death. The mob of several hundred then continued in search of Wade Ellis. When the mob found Wade Ellis asleep in the swamp near the Manatee River around dusk, they shot him to death and left his body on the riverbank. No one was charged with their deaths.

# STORIES OF LYNCHING VICTIMS

## Willie English \*

Bradenton, Manatee County, Florida

July 2, 1912

According to a 1910 Census of Manatee County, Florida, a 20-year-old Black man named Willie English was living in Manatee Town working as a teamster and living in the home of his step-father Henry Oliver, and mother Mollie Oliver. On July 2, 1912, a mob abducted him from the Manatee County Jail in Bradenton, Florida and lynched him.

A white woman had complained that Mr. English had spoken to her in a way she found insulting. Though press accounts provided no further information about the reported conversation between Mr. English and the woman, law enforcement arrested Mr. English, and he was placed in the Manatee County Jail.

The Tampa Tribune reported that, after Mr. English was placed in jail, plans were being made "to have English tried at an early date." However, four days later and before a trial could happen, a mob of at least 40 white men from "the various river towns" came and surrounded the county jail close to midnight on July 1 intent on lynching Mr. English. When the jailer on duty realized the mob was besieging the jail, he resisted, firing upon the mob and demanding they desist. Nevertheless, in a brazen display of disregard for the constitutional rights of Mr. English, the mob opened fire on the jail, broke through the door, confiscated the keys from the jailer, and kidnapped Mr. English.

The mob took Mr. English from the jail and headed towards the outskirts of town. Along the way, "a halt was made and residents of the section heard several shots fired." Willie English was shot to death before being hung from a tree. A coroner's jury was held later that afternoon and returned a verdict that Willie English "came to his death at the hands of unknown men."

Rather than condemn the mob's lawlessness, The Tampa Tribune printed an article the day after Mr. English was lynched stating that the mob killed him "as a warning to others". In the end, no one was held accountable for the lynching of Willie English.

# STORIES OF LYNCHING VICTIMS

## James Franklin \*

Bradenton, Manatee County, Florida

April 4, 1934

James Franklin was a middle-aged Black man who worked as a yardman in the city of Bradenton. Little is known about Mr. Franklin's life in Bradenton, and it is unknown whether he had a family in the area. On March 31, Mr. Franklin was working next door to a citrus farm when he witnessed a young white girl fall to the ground from a mulberry tree. Mr. Franklin attempted to help the young girl, and shortly after the girl told her father that Mr. Franklin assaulted her.

Police officers searched the city for several days before locating and arresting Mr. Franklin while he was working a yard job on the night of April 3rd. Mr. Franklin maintained his innocence and denied the claims of assault.

On the morning of April 4, 1934, the chief of police and his deputy escorted James Franklin to a physician for a mental and physical wellness exam. As they were departing the physician's office to return to the jail, the father of the white girl, Joe Kopman, approached them from behind. Allegedly unnoticed by the two officers, Kopman fired two gunshots into the back of Mr. Franklin's head at point blank range.

Kopman then surrendered his gun and admitted guilt by saying, "you won't have to do anything to him now." The officers immediately arrested him and brought him to the county jail, leaving Mr. Franklin on the sidewalk as a crowd began to gather. James Franklin died one hour later at the county hospital.

A coroner's jury was impaneled by the county judge later in the afternoon of April 4 to investigate Mr. Franklin's lynching. The jury of six people briefly viewed Mr. Franklin's body and were presented with the evidence that Kopman had approached Mr. Franklin from behind and fired two shots into his body.

The coroner's jury ruled the same day that the cause of death was "justifiable homicide" and called for the immediate release of Kopman. No one was ever held accountable for the lynching of James Franklin.

*\*The lynching stories are taken from [www.ManasotaRemembers.org](http://www.ManasotaRemembers.org).*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **The Unitarian Universalist Church**

The Sarasota & Manatee Community Remembrance Project (Manasota Remembers) extends our sincere gratitude to the Sarasota Unitarian Universalist Church for their friendship and support. We truly appreciate our strong partnership and are privileged to be aligned with an organization that shares our values and vision. Manasota Remembers would not have been successful without the congregation's generosity of spirit and resources. Special thanks to Dale Anderson and Amy Martin for their leadership and expertise.

## **Family of Dr. Christopher Drake**

Manasota Remembers is especially grateful to Suzanne Drake and family for their generous gift in memory of Dr. Christopher Drake. The Drake family donation funded the beautiful sitting area near the Historical Marker on the grounds of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota.

## **Community Foundation of Sarasota County**

Manasota Remembers thanks the Community Foundation of Sarasota County for its monetary contribution. As the sole Presenting Sponsor for this project, the Foundation's financial support allowed us to present the dedication ceremony in a manner that honored the racial terror lynching victims with the dignity they truly deserve.

## **Special Thanks**

The committee appreciates Charles Clapsaddle and Manatee Educational Television (METV) for their technical assistance and photographer Barbara Banks.

So many people and organizations contributed time, financial support, expertise, and resources; there are too many to name. Please know that The Sarasota & Manatee Community Remembrance Project truly appreciates your support.

## **Manasota Remembers Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony Committee**

Dr. Caryl Sheffield, *Chair*

Dale Anderson

Dan & Litten Boxser

Josephine Eisenberg

Francis M. Garcia Fernandez

Rosa Grillo

Sherry Suggs



# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Presenting Sponsor



**COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION**

**of Sarasota County**

Manasota



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# **Manasota Remembers**

The Sarasota & Manatee Community  
Remembrance Project

[www.manasotaremembers.org](http://www.manasotaremembers.org)