

On June 2, 1896 the headlines of the Enquirer-Sun: *Tuesday Morning, June 2, 1896 read:*

Justice!

**Slaton and Miles,
the Rapist**

HUNG TO SAME TREE

**Slaton Taken From the Court
Room,**

**And Then a Break Made for the
Jail.**

BOTH BODIES RIDDLED

Left Hanging on Broad Street



*The Lynching of Jesse Slaton and Will Miles
June 1, 1896 – Columbus, Georgia*

Abstracted from the Enquirer-Sun: Tuesday Morning, June 2, 1896, by the Columbus Black History Museum and Archives on January 11, 2007

From the limbs of the same tree in the heart of the city and under the bright canopy of the mid-day sun now hang the bodies of Jesse Slaton and Willie Miles. At the hands of an infuriated mob they have met their death, and the community is expunged of two loathsome offenses. For the first time in almost half a century is Columbus the scene of a hanging. The circumstances surrounding this morning's occurrence hardly have a parallel in the history of Georgia. Smarting and with hearts aching the sense of outraged hearthstones and a public indignity, men have lost reason and have avenged themselves. Slaton who outraged on Thursday last Mrs. Howard Bryan, was taken from the court room while the trial was in process which would have determined the question of his not be doubted quilt.

At 9'o'clock the grand jury assembled in the court room and were charged by the Judge. They retired and a few moments returned a bill. The Sheriff then set about to empanel a jury. The Judge appointed two prominent attorneys to appear for the defenses. They set about with ill-concealed grace to discharge a duty which was repugnant. Under their oaths it was compulsory. Scarce did they dream how vain and tragically useless were all preparations of formal... The case was ready to be taken up when a shout was heard from the street below. It thrilled the wars of every person in the court room. It was terribly ominous and every body realized that the long expected outbreak had come. In a moment the heavy tramp of a hundred feet was heard upon the steps. Nearer and nearer it came, mingled with yells and exultant shouts.

The court room was a scene of the wildest confusion; deputies ran to the doors and interposed a useless resistance. The opposing force was resistless, the doors gave way and the room was filled with a wild mass of men. Winchesters, shot guns, and pistols were everywhere flourished with yells.

Slaton, the brute, and the object of their quest, cowered alone in the chair where he had been seated. In the attempt of the deputies to resist the entrance of the mob, he had been left to himself. He was seated in a chair at an open window in the south wall.

The warehouse roof stood only a few feet off offering a tempting avenue of escape, if but for a space. But the terrified culprit saw it not. With ash face he cowered down upon the floor. The foremost of the mob bore a rope with a noose ready prepared. As the sight of this gruesome implement of his coming death greeted the prisoner's eyes, they seem to turn green, horrible shrieks came from the frothy mouth and in his delirium of fear he crawled upon the deserted rostrum and behind the judge's desk.

The mob was upon him in a moment. They pounced upon his groveling form with the fury of wildness. The noose was slipped about his neck. One long yell of triumph arose from the mob mingling with the blood-curdling shrieks of the doomed man. The rope was pulled taut by the willing hands of a score of men as they started through the door. The judge looked on in mute and powerless indignation as the prisoner was jerked along before his very eyes.

At the top of the stairs the doomed wretch fell face down the stairs, the rope tightening at every pace. Then the first shot was fired before the second floor was reached and it was certain that the brute was dead before he reached the ground. The mob started to run up the street, those behind firing hundreds of shots in the body as it whirled through the dust of the street.

Terror-stricken people ran hither and thither. *"It was a scene of alarm that is positively indescribable. It was unmentionably horrible"*.

On up the street went the infuriated mass, until they came almost to the bell tower. There they stopped, and upon the limb of a tree was thrown the end of the rope which gripped the neck of the rapist. In another moment he was swinging in the air, and a hundred weapons poured bullets into his form. As each shot struck the body it was knocked about. Bullets tore through every limb and in little more than a moment he was nothing more than a horrible mass of mutilated humanity.

The crowd was drunk with fury and bethought itself of the other rapist who had lain for many months in a cell at the prison. "On to the jail," was the cry, and off rushed the mob.

From the scene of the lynching of Slaton the mad crowd rushed to the jail for Will Miles. There the heavy iron doors of the prison and Jailer Phelts' firm determination to protect his prisoners were encountered, but of course they were no barriers to the mob. The jailer was inside the jail in the North West corner of the first story. He was not aware of the coming of the mob, and before he was aware of their presence he was covered with dozens of Winchester rifles pointed towards every window, in the hands of men demanding will Miles and swearing that they would have him at any cost.

Resistance was useless. Men had climbed upon every window sill. Determination was written on the brow of every man. It was their intentions to have the prisoner if it was necessary to tear down the jail. The jailer was told that unless he gave him up the consequences might be fatal to himself and the prison wrecked. Jailer Phelts plead with the mob but no avail. Then he consented to surrender Miles, but begged that he'd be permitted to protect the other prisoners. He was commanded to quickly open the doors and show them to Miles' cell. He obeyed, conducting the mob to the cell containing twelve prisoners, one of which was the man they sought. The cell was on the second

The jailor was commanded to point out Miles, which he did very promptly, commanding their intended victim to stand. No sooner had he risen to his feet than he was seized and rushed down the stairway.

At the door a halt was made and the jailer asked to produce a rope and some handcuffs. He had neither. Then the jailer requested the men not to harm the prisoner in the vicinity of the jail as it would only add to the excitement of the already terror-stricken family, who had witnessed the entire proceedings. He was assured that his request would be complied with, and the mob started off bearing in their midst the quaking form of a criminal. A runner was sent ahead to procure a rope, and by the time the mob reached Broad street the noose was ready prepared to receive his neck.

In front of 500 heavily armed men, the prisoner was marched out Tenth Street. At Broad and Tenth Streets they turned up Broad, towards where the body of Slaton dangled from a tree. Up to this time Miles had not received a scratch. He saw plainly his fate, however and his face clearly betrayed his feelings. His piteous pleadings were suddenly interrupted by the rope being thrown over a limb of the same tree upon Slayton was swung. Like a flash he was jerked into midair, when volley after volley was fired into his dangling form. In less time than is required to tell if his body had been literally riddled with bullets.

And Will Miles had paid the penalty of his crime. The bodies are now swinging at rope's end to the Broad street tree. Upon the body of each is pinned this placard

***"All cases of this kind shall be treated likewise." This was also pinned to Miles body:
"Both cousins This One convicted twice: Mistrial Once."***

Shortly, before 9 'o' clock the prisoner was taken from the jail to the court room. He was walked between two deputies while six others followed behind. As the escort passed through Tenth street to the Webster building a large crowd lined the sidewalks. Threats of lynching had filled the air and the opportunity seemed ripe enough. It was easy to see that with a determined mob the protection afforded the prisoner would have availed little. Therefore, when the prisoner passed through this crowd in safety many marveled. It seemed as if he would be unmolested and the law allowed to take its course.

It will be hard for any one who witnessed the scene to forget the look of abject terror on the countenance of the Negro. For three days he had lain in his prison cell suffering from the agony of hell, while the military and the evil forces protected him from the speedy death. The effect upon him was weirdly apparent. He seemed to have become many pounds thinner. As he pushed along the crowded street his face was ashen. His breath came and went in gasps, and the agony of mortal terror was upon him. The nearer they approached to the court room the more turbulent became the crowd. "Take him now." rang out the cry but to no effect, for in a very few moments the prisoner was safely landed in the court room.

The crime which Jesse Slayton has expiated is familiar to all the readers of the Enquirer-Sun. On Thursday last he outraged the person of Mrs. Howard Bryan at her home at Clapp's Factory. The assault was a particularly cold-blooded and dastardly offense. Surprising the lady alone in her home by threats upon her life he forced her to submit to his fiendish desires. At the time only her two-year old son was in the house, and Mrs. Bryan was in a delicate condition. The news of the crime spread like wildfire over the community, and soon the woods were full of infuriated men searching for the culprit. A few hours later he was captured at his home on upper First Avenue by two officers. After

The community was aroused to a pitch of the greatest indignation by the crime, and serious trouble was feared at the jail. Thursday night passed off quietly, but on Friday night the Columbus guards and the Browne Fencibles were called out by Governor Atkinson, at the request of the civil authorities to assist in keeping down a riot. They were summoned to the jail, and in the face of a boisterous mob conducted themselves with great credit and soldiering bearing. At the point of the bayonet. Captain Little protected the jail from every assault.

On the following night the military halted on arms at the armory ready to answer the call for their maintenance which the occasion might require. Until midnight they kept guard again, but their services were not needed.

On yesterday they were not called out. The quiet, quick, and preconcerted action of the mob left no time to forewarn anyone.

Hardly was the situation realized before the deed was done and the vengeance of the mob accomplished. It was not the work of the amateurs or bunglers. The results show that. Every plan was well laid and arrived at before the attempt was made. It all happened in less time than it takes to tell it.

Though Miles' deed was committed some three years ago, the particulars need not be again recited for they have already been published in detail in these columns, and besides they have been repeatedly related from the witness stand in the court house. While he failed to accomplish his fiendish purpose the act was even bolder than that of Slaton. It will be remembered that on one night he stole into the room of his intended victim, entering by the way of a window. Fortunately her husband was at home at the time and her screams brought him to her assistance before the brute had succeeded in carrying out his intentions. She knew him well however and recognized him as he escaped through the window, and has so stated on three different occasions under oath. He was tried and convicted twice, and at the last term of court a mistrial was made. His case was to have been called during the present session of court. Miles' family had some property, and he was defended by some of the ablest lawyers at the bar.

From 11 'o' clock the time of the execution, until ten minutes to 8 'o' clock the bodies of the Negro rapists were allowed to hang suspended from the tree on Broad street. At that time they were cut down but the coroner and placed in rude pine coffins and conveyed to the colored cemetery.

A jury was there empanelled and an inquest held. Few witnesses were examined, and the following verdict returned after mature and deliberate consideration:

"We the jury find that Jesse Slaton and Will Miles case to their death by strangulation and gun shot wounds at the hands of parties unknown."

A rather curious mistake was made by the mob in pinning a placard to the body of Will Miles, stating: "Father hung for same offense".

It was doubtless intended to place this notice upon the body of Slaton, as it was said to have been hung for rape. Miles father is still living.

