

Indiana group rights two wrongs for century-old lynching

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, UNITED STATES, April 1, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A century after a Black teenager was lynched in an Indianapolis park, his death is officially a homicide, and his grave is finally marked.

On March 16, 1922, when the body of George Tompkins, 19, was found hanging from a spindly tree in Riverside Park, his hands were tied behind his back.

The then-coroner said, "The man could not have hanged himself." It was front-page news.

But someone scrawled "suicide" on the death certificate. And the story vanished.

In contrast to many of the 4,000+ lynchings after Reconstruction and before the civil rights era, Tompkins had never been accused of a crime. The motive for his killing has never been determined.

Last year a group of volunteers called the [Indiana Remembrance Coalition](#) learned about this hidden chapter of Indianapolis history. After extensive research, the interracial and interfaith group asked the current Marion County Coroner's Office to take a fresh look at the case.

The volunteers also determined that Tompkins' grave never had a headstone, so they arranged to have one installed.

At a ceremony to dedicate the headstone 100 years after Tompkins' death, the current Chief Deputy Coroner Alfie McGinty unveiled a revised death certificate. Now it says "homicide."

"The Marion County Coroner's Office is honored to participate in correcting this injustice," McGinty said before a gathering of 100 people at Floral Park Cemetery, where Tompkins is buried.

"I was very surprised that this had happened back in 1922 – that the circumstances of this death were not properly examined, but I'm not entirely surprised, given the times in which this occurred."

History Professor Rebecca Shrum of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis,

described those times, saying. "During the early 20th century, cities in the Midwest came to regard lynchings as bad for their image."

U.S. Rep. Andre Carson (D-Indiana) sent his support for the event in a letter, noting that Congress tried nearly 200 times to make lynching a federal crime. The first time was in 1900. The same week as the ceremony to honor Tompkins, anti-lynching legislation headed to the President's desk. Two weeks later, President Biden signed the bill into law.

"I voted for this bill in honor of George Tompkins and every other victim of lynching – known and unknown," said Carson. "Thanks to the Indiana Remembrance Coalition for also doing its part to recognize the dignity and humanity of these Americans."

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