

THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
REMEMBRANCE
PROJECT



It Happened Here: Joe McNeely

In a piece commissioned by this project, Charlotte spoken word poet Hannah Hasan begins:

**“Before he was a murder victim
He was somebody’s son
Some mother’s child
I bet she prayed for him at night
Bet she remembered him in her dreams
I bet she dreamed for him a different, safer, more secure life ... ”**

A young Black man named Joe McNeely was killed in the first documented racial terror lynching in Mecklenburg County. In the early hours of August 26, 1913, a mob of about 35 white men pulled McNeely, 22, from his Good Samaritan Hospital bed, stripped off his clothes, dragged him down the stairs onto Hill Street and shot him to death.

Police had failed to increase security despite word of possible violence, and two officers at the hospital failed to stop the mob. Four days earlier, an altercation on South Tryon Street between McNeely and a white police officer ended in a shootout, injuring both men. Police said they had received a report that a man was shooting at people — though no one was reported hit or injured.

Charlotte’s daily newspapers, owned and edited by white people, reported the police version of the shootout as fact, and turned rumors into headlines. Their speculation that Joe McNeely would recover, and the officer would die — he did not — was thought to have fueled the mob, along with reports McNeely had been “impudent” to guards.

City leaders called for investigation and arrests, but within days public outrage evaporated. Before the crime, Charlotte leaders and local newspapers boasted the city had never had a lynching and never would; afterward, the killing was reviled in the white community more as a stain on the city’s reputation than for the racial terror inflicted upon Black people.

A judge called the mob “murderers” and asked the all-white grand jury: “What are you going to do?” The jury adjourned three days later, indicting no one. No one was ever charged.

In 1996, the site where Good Samaritan Hospital stood became part of Bank of America Stadium, home of the NFL’s Carolina Panthers and the MLS’s Charlotte FC. Both the City of Charlotte and Tepper Sports & Entertainment have committed to erecting a historical marker for Joe McNeely on stadium grounds.

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