

The Gainesville Hanging

Joe Dye and a man with the last name of Heflin were in the Fauquier County Jail tried, convicted, and waiting to be hung. Joe Sanders had almost completed making the gallows and was waiting for the first good day to put them in position. The gallows were to be positioned so that they would be in full sight of the pair of convicted murderers. Sanders was planning on using the same ropes that were used in 1879 to hang John Williams and Winter Payne. It was also said that one of the ropes was used to hang Samuel Robinson at Leesburg in the year 1888.

On the dark and stormy night of March 17th 1892 the authorities in Fauquier began to hear rumors that a large lynch mob was gathering at Calverton with intentions of breaking the two murderers out of jail and lynching them. A Fauquier judge ordered C. M. Pattie, the jailer, to procure two guards and a wagon and take the prisoners to Alexandria for safe keeping. The plan was to take them to Gainesville Station to get the early morning train. John Brawner and J. D. Jolley were selected as guards and James Hord was hired as the driver. With all five in one hack they left Warrenton about 11:30 P.M. by a secret route selected by Pattie.

About an hour later a group of about 35 masked men rode up to the jail and seeing that the pair was missing began to fire guns in the air. A person in a group of bystanders informed the mob that they had left for Gainesville.

At about 3 A.M. the hack with the guards and prisoners was overtaken by a number of masked and mounted men about a half mile west of Gainesville Station close to Haywood Triplett's place on the turnpike. Being completely outmanned and overwhelmed the guards surrendered the prisoners to the masked mob. The prisoners were unmanacled and their hands tied behind them. Dye was led to an old redwood tree and when they tried to hang him the limb broke. He was then hung on a stronger limb of the same tree. Heflin was hung at the same time on a nearby tree. The hanging didn't seem to satisfy the mob because some time after the hanging Dye was shot eight times and Heflin four after they were already dead.

After daybreak some of the local Gainesville men cut the bodies down and held an inquest into the deaths. After the inquest the bodies were transported to the old Gainesville depot where a large group had gathered.

Dye's wife later in the day came with a wagon and driver to take her husband's body back to their residence at Catlett Station. A man who gave his name as Mr. Colton transported Heflin's body home to Stafford County.

The Grand Jury later met in Prince William County. Witnesses were called but none could identify anyone involved. One of the witnesses a Mr. John R. Grant of Auburn Store testified that a large group of the mob stopped at his store and bought cigars but he couldn't remember what any of them looked like.

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