

**MARIE
SCOTT**
1898-1914



**LINGERING
LEGACY OF
JUSTICE
DENIED**

Between 1886 and 1957, there were 159 black women lynched in America. Lynching may be the most inhumane form of vigilante justice. Typically, it involves a mob of people killing someone who is believed to have committed an offense, whether the accused is innocent or guilty.

As the saying goes, there are two sides to every story. This was certainly true in the case of seventeen-year-old Marie Scott, who was lynched in 1914 for the murder of twenty-year-old Lemuel Peace. He was a farm boy from a well-respected family south of Wagoner. She had recently moved with her family from Fort Gibson to the “bottoms”, the black section of town.

Around 12:30am on Saturday, March 29th, Lem’s father found him and a friend hanging around the bottoms, warning him “it was time to head home”. Sometimes white men went there to gamble, drink, and whatever. The elder Peace probably knew where to find his son.

As Lem and his friend passed Marie’s “shanty”, they saw her changing in her room. The half-drunk men entered, locked themselves in her room, and began assaulting her. According to a nearby witness Jason Harold Coleman, Marie’s brother heard her screaming for help from the livestock stable where he was working, and came to his sister’s aid.

He kicked the door down and a fight ensued. They threw the brother out of the room after beating him severely. He retrieved a knife and returned, stabbing Lem fatally. Lem’s friend and Marie’s brother both fled. When the authorities couldn’t locate the brother, they arrested Marie.

About 1:00am on Monday, March 31st, a gang of hooded men came to the Wagoner County Jail. A one-armed jailer named Pete Ryan was told there was an officer outside with some prisoners. He opened the door to several dozen gun-toting men who pushed their way in, took the keys and opened Scott’s cell door. Ryan offered no resistance.

According to Coleman, her brother heard Marie’s cries as she was dragged from the jail but he was unable to help her. He then fled to New Mexico for safety. They dragged her down the alley to Main Street, threw a rope over a telephone cable in front of Stockton’s Grocery, raised her twelve feet in the air, and ended her life. Sheriff Connie Murphy finally showed up several hours later.

There were allegedly two county investigations into the lynching, by Sheriff Murphy and County Attorney C. E. Castle. There was speculation that Murphy had been part of the mob. Although Castle promised a full investigation and prosecution, no one was ever charged. He stated he thought the participants were Peace’s neighbors from outside the city. Coleman later reported that Marie’s mother, who remained in Wagoner, killed her daughter’s other attacker.

Senator Kamala Harris (D-California) recently introduced legislation in the United States Senate to make lynching a federal crime. The recently-opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama hopefully will lead to conversations to confront the injustice and violence of our past.