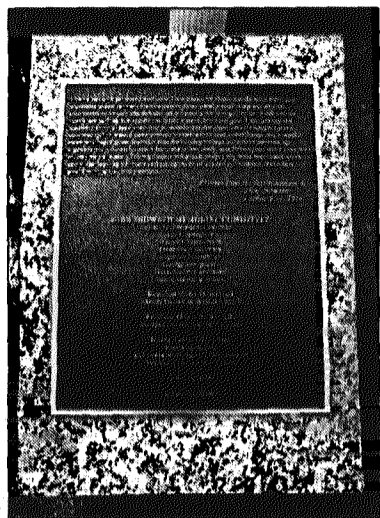


“But God knows I am telling the truth.”

— from the last statement of John Snowden, February 1919



Honor at last?



Photos by John Gillis — The Capital

The Rev. Wendell O. Christopher, right, of Mount Moriah A.M.E. Church, reads aloud the inscription on the John Snowden Memorial Plaque after its unveiling yesterday. Listening, from left, are Carl Snowden, organizer of the memorial service; Hazel Snowden, niece of John Snowden, and the Rev. Mamie A. Williams, the superintendent of Asbury United Methodist Church. At top is a close-up of the inscription, which quotes excerpts from John Snowden's last statement.

Plaque memorializes hanged man

By MARGOT MOHSBERG
Staff Writer

It was more than 81 years ago that John Snowden was hanged for murder, yet several hundred people who believe he was innocent gathered yesterday for a memorial service in Annapolis on what would have been his 110th birthday.

The service at Brewer Hill Cemetery on West Street, where the African-American icemaker was laid to rest, was the effort of a group of activists who want to right what they believe is a shameful wrong in the county's history.

It was organized in part by Asbury United Methodist Church leaders and Carl Snowden, a top aide to County Executive Janet S. Owens who is not related to Snowden. He has asked Gov. Parris N. Glendening to posthumously pardon the man who was convicted of murdering a pregnant white woman.

Mr. Snowden unveiled a 3-foot-high bronze and granite monument to Snowden, who proclaimed his innocence to the last.

"I am convinced that this monument to John Snowden will be a reminder that his passionate plea for justice did not fall on deaf ears," Mr. Snowden said.

The governor is currently waiting on a recommendation from the Maryland Parole Commission, which is still investigating the

THE FACTS

- John Snowden was convicted in 1918 of brutally raping and killing a pregnant white woman in Annapolis.
- Two witnesses recanted incriminating testimony, and 11 of the 12 jurors asked the judge to commute Snowden's death sentence.
- He was hanged Feb. 28, 1919.
- On the day of his funeral, the sheriff's office received an anonymous letter from someone claiming to be the true killer.
- Shortly after, another anonymous letter was published in *The Capital* in which the writer claimed to have committed the murder.

(See PLAQUE, Page D6)

PLAQUE

(Continued from Page D1)

case, according to a spokesman from his office.

Snowden was convicted in 1918 of brutally raping and killing Lottie Mae Brandon in her Annapolis home.

The crime sparked a racially charged outcry, which eventually forced Gov. Emerson Harrington to call out the National Guard to preserve order.

Historian Janice Hayes-Williams at yesterday's ceremony described the scene downtown in the final minutes leading up to Snowden's execution.

"On Feb. 28, 1919, with the city of Annapolis under martial law, Gov. Emerson Harrington was barricaded in the State House, due to threats on his life. A shabbily dressed blind man traveled from Baltimore and offered his life in exchange for John Snowden's," she said.

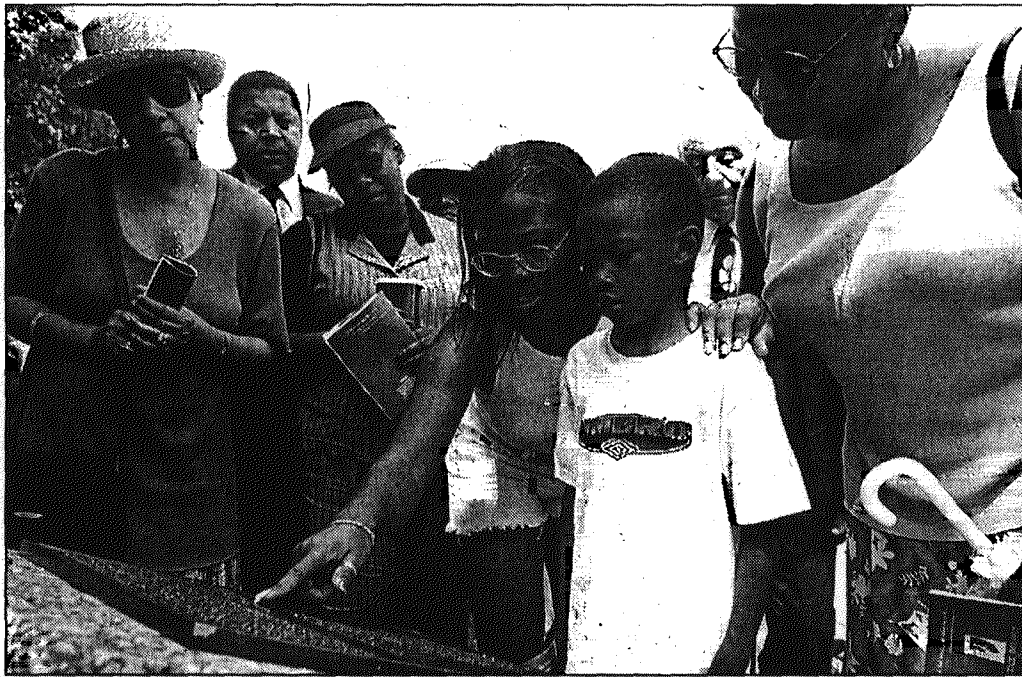
Snowden even turned down a last-minute offer to confess and spare his life, insisting, "I could not leave this world with a lie in my mouth."

He was the last person in the county to die on the gallows.

On the day of his funeral, the sheriff's office received an anonymous letter from someone in Washington, D.C., the former home of the murdered woman, who claimed to be the true killer.

Following Snowden's conviction, two key witnesses recanted testimony putting him at the scene of the crime, and 11 of the 12 jurors who convicted him signed a petition to Harrington asking him to commute Snowden's death sentence, but he refused.

Shortly after Snowden's death, another anonymous letter was published in *The Capital* in which the writer claimed to have committed the murder.



By John Gillis — The Capital

Local African-American community leaders believe enough evidence has come to light to suggest Snowden may have been innocent.

"Justice didn't exist for African Americans back then. If you were accused of raping a white woman, you were presumed guilty," said the keynote speaker at yesterday's ceremony, Leroy Philips Jr.

The author of the book "Con-

tempt of Court," which helped to exonerate a Chattanooga, Tenn., African-American man also hanged for murder, he urged Mr. Glendenning to exonerate Snowden.

"I say to the governor of the great state of Maryland, in God's name, grant this man a posthumous pardon. Not for him, but for us. We need to believe that this country stands for fairness."

Attendees of the John Snowden memorial service yesterday at Brewer Hill Cemetery read the new plaque created in Snowden's honor. In the middle is LaVonda Terrell, who is pointing out the inscription to her son, Mark Bishop, 7.

Len Sipes, a spokesman for the Maryland Parole Commission, said it is not clear when the commission will complete its investigation of Snowden's case.

"The hunt for hard, objective evidence is elusive but it continues," he said.

The commission is asking anyone with information concerning the case to call its office at (410) 585-3200.