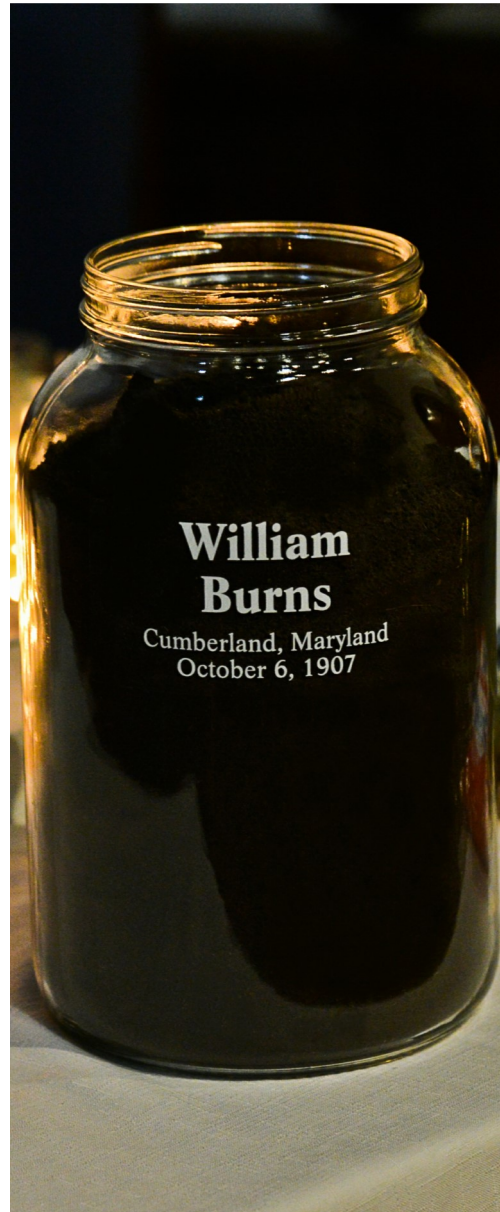


**Our mission** is to acknowledge and memorialize Robert Hughes aka William Burns, who was lynched in Cumberland, Maryland – while helping Allegany County residents reconcile with the intergenerational harm caused by lynching and other violent acts against the African-American community.



Learn more at  
[www.thebrownsvilleproject.com/acltrc](http://www.thebrownsvilleproject.com/acltrc)

## Remembering *ROBERT HUGHES aka* *WILLIAM BURNS*

October 6, 1907



This jar contains soil from the site where **Robert Hughes aka William Burns** was lynched. It was collected on **October 3, 2020**, the **113th anniversary** of the beginning of the sorrowful events preceding Robert Hughes' death just 3 days later. This jar joins many others from racial terror lynching sites across America that are on display in Montgomery, Alabama at the **Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, the Peace & Justice Memorial Center**. The display serves as a memorial to documented racial terror lynchings in the U.S. and is in collaboration with the **Equal Justice Initiative**.

Shortly after midnight on **Sunday, October 6, 1907**, a large white mob lynched an 18-year-old African American man known as **William Burns** in Cumberland, Maryland. After being involved in an altercation with a local white police officer on October 3, 1907 that resulted in the officer's death, Mr. Burns was arrested and driven to the local police headquarters and held in a cell. The next morning, he was transported to the county jail in Cumberland, Maryland. While he awaited trial, a mob entered the jail, abducted Mr. Burns, and beat and shot him to death. Although several local officials were present, no one would identify members of the mob, and no one was ever held accountable for the lynching of William Burns.

Originally from Fauquier County, Virginia, Mr. Burns relocated to Allegany County and had been living there for six months before October 1907. Before his death, Mr. Burns was employed as a porter at Alpine Hall, a hotel in Cumberland, and as a driver for George Palmore, the owner of a local saloon. After work on Thursday, October 3, Mr. Burns and another Black man named Jesse Page visited a couple of local saloons near the canal wharf in Cumberland. While at the second saloon known as Kate Preston's saloon, Mr. Burns was accused of disorderly conduct and thrown out. Shortly thereafter, August Baker, a local white police officer on the Cumberland Police Force, arrived on the scene to arrest Mr. Burns. Before the officer could take him into custody, a struggle ensued, wherein Officer Baker struck Mr. Burns with a mace. Reports stated that during the struggle, Officer Baker was shot in the abdomen by Mr. Burns, but he was still able to handcuff Mr. Burns. After calling for assistance, the officer had a Black ice wagon driver named Humphrey Green and another witness, Abram Speck, transport Mr. Burns by cab to the Cumberland police station before he was placed in the local jail. While Mr. Burns was incarcerated, word spread around Cumberland that Officer Baker had been shot, and on Saturday,

October 5, Officer Baker's death was publicly pronounced by a coroner's jury.

Meanwhile Jesse Page had fled in fear after being assaulted at the scene. In the confusion witnesses had thought he was an accomplice to a crime when in fact, he had gone to phone the police. (The next morning he would go to the station and be held in a cell near William Burns at the county jail.)

Reports indicate that Mr. Burns feared retaliation from the citizens of Cumberland. As anger rose in the white community, County Sheriff Horace Hamilton chose not to put extra guards on duty at the jail, stating that he did not fear an uprising.

In most cases of racial terror lynching, local law enforcement failed to intervene or use force to repel lynch mobs, even when the threat of lynching was evident and underway. Despite their legal responsibility to equally protect anyone in their custody, law enforcement were often found to be ineffective in preventing, or even complicit in, the seizure or lynchings of Black men, women, and children by abdicating their responsibilities or yielding to mobs' demands.

That evening, Deputy Sheriff Noah Hendley was the only person standing guard at the jail.

Mr. Page had thankfully been cleared of any charges and released earlier that day, as the mob also sought to lynch him.

By midnight on October 5, an initial group of approximately 50 white men gathered in the streets near the jail "with their coats turned inside out and handkerchiefs bound over their faces."

By the time the mob reached the jail, there were several hundred participants.

Contemporary reports described conflicting accounts of how the mob was able to enter the jail and abduct Mr. Burns. According to Deputy Sheriff Noah Hendley, the mob stormed the jail and demanded keys to enter, which he refused. He stated that the mob then obtained a pole, which they used repeatedly in an effort to break down the door. Unsuccessful, the mob then held him at gunpoint, stripped his clothing, and took the keys, which they used to enter the jail. Alternatively, some informants reported that Deputy Sheriff Hendley gave them the keys, which allowed them to enter the jail. Other reports claim that Hendley's wife convinced him to give up the keys or that the mob forcefully gained entry.

After entering the jail and locating Mr. Burns, the mob beat and dragged him outside. Reports indicate that by this time the mob had grown to approximately 2,000 active white participants and spectators.

Finish the story at:  
[www.thebrownsvilleproject.com/about-william-burns](http://www.thebrownsvilleproject.com/about-william-burns)

