

Springfield Reconciliation Coalition



May 2002

Prayer Walk: Healing the Wounds of Springfield



A group prayer-walk along the route of events during the Springfield Race Riot of 1908 was held Saturday, April 20, 2002. Eight people from Hope Evangelical Free Church and Abundant Faith Christian Center gathered at 9:00 a.m. and traveled together to downtown Springfield. Although the weather was cold, damp and

blustery, the dedicated group completed the walking tour to all of the commemorative markers located along downtown sidewalks.

The group stopped at each marker and offered prayers for forgiveness, reconciliation and healing in the city of Springfield. The first marker is at the site of the old county jail on the south side of Jefferson Street near 7th. This marker has been temporarily removed to make way for the construction fencing around the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum site. An interesting observation was made that this location, where the mob first gathered to demand the release of two black prisoners with the intent of lynching them, will 100 years later be in the heart of the buildings that honor the Great Emancipator.

The second stop was in front of Hardee's and Sebastian's Restaurants on south 5th Street. It was here that the mob took out their anger on the restaurant owner who had assisted in helping the prisoners escape to safety. We often think of the Race Riot in terms of the evils that were done, but here we remembered and thanked God for a man who opposed the mob and stood for what was right. There were others like him who tried to defend and assist their fellow human beings from the intended harm.



Today's Horace Mann Plaza is located in the middle of the area where many black businesses and homes were looted and burned in 1908. Following the steps of

the mob from the site of Scott Burton's barber shop here to the location of the tree where his dead body was taken and hanged – 11th Street, it became clear why 11th Street has for many years been an invisible racial dividing line in Springfield.



Many prayers were offered to erase the dividing line and heal the wounds represented by this horrific and symbolic event. Prayers at this site were the most intent and passionate due not only to the tragedy of one life lost, but to the repercussions that are still with us nearly a century later.

The final three markers trace the steps of the mob on the second day of the riot, from the hardware store on Monroe where they purchased lengths of clothesline rope, suitable for hanging, to the State Arsenal where the blacks who had been burned out of their homes were being housed (the Governor had called in the State Militia and the mob was turned away from the Arsenal), across the State Capitol lawn to the location of today's Illinois State Museum where they hung their final victim, a wealthy, retired black businessman. As the group passed through this area, thoughts were turned from Springfield to the entire State of Illinois, represented by the buildings which house its seat of government. It is our hope and prayer that the healing of racial tensions in Springfield will be a catalyst for similar healing all across the state.

While this prayer group was small in numbers, the prayers were large and we know God is pleased. Let the healing begin...



“Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them”

Daniel 10:12



For more information about the Springfield Reconciliation Coalition
Contact Nicholas Stojakovich, 217-585-0307.