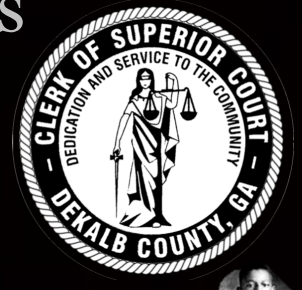


The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

Harry and Harriette Moore

"First Martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement"



Harry T. Moore was born on November 18, 1905, in a tiny farming community in Houston, Florida. When Harry's father died in 1914, Harry's mother sent him to live with his three aunts in the vibrant bustling black community in Jacksonville, Florida. They were a nurse, a school principal and a teacher and were all strong influences on Harry's education and confidence. After graduating high school, Harry became a 4th grade teacher. **Harriette Vyda Simms (Moore)**, was born June 19, 1902, in West Palm Beach. She met Harry while also teaching at the Titusville "Negro School". Harry and Harriette married on December 25, 1926. The couple moved to Mims, FL and had two daughters, Annie Rosalea (Peaches) born 1928 and Juanita Evangeline (Evangeline) born 1930. After marrying, the couple completed their college education at Bethune Cookman College, an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). The family spent evenings together playing cards or gathering with friends. They often went to the movie theater in Orlando. In 1933, a cousin of Harriette's received information on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He brought the information to Harry, who immediately reached out to the organization to join.

In 1934, Harry and Harriette founded the Brevard County chapter of the NAACP. Initially, Harry kept his job as a teacher, working in an unpaid capacity for NAACP for more than a decade. Utilizing his writing skills and education, Harry wrote eloquent letters, prepared circulars, and broadsides (a large sheet of paper printed on one side only) protesting unequal salaries for black teachers, segregated schools, and the disenfranchisement of black voters. Later, Harry began investigating lynchings, police brutality, questioning witnesses, and demanding prosecution of those responsible. The couple went door to door attempting to register black voters. With the increased attention that Harry and Harriette brought to discrimination and racial injustices, came increased visibility from the mostly white members of the community. Harry and Harriette were fired from their jobs teaching. Harry went on to become a paid NAACP organizer. He was appointed an executive secretary for the Florida NAACP. With the help of NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall in 1937, Harry filed the first lawsuit in the South calling for black and white teacher salaries to be equal. Although the lawsuit failed, it generated other federal lawsuits that led to equal salaries in Florida.

Following a 1944 US Supreme Court ruling that all-white primary elections were unconstitutional, Harry registered a record 31 percent of eligible Black voters. Over six years he added 116,000 members to the Florida Democratic Party between 1944 and 1950.

In 1949, Harry began investigating the case of the "Groveland 4" where four young black men (Charles Greenlee, Ernest Thomas, Walter Irvin, and Samuel Shepherd) were accused of violating a white woman. Within 10 days on the accusation, Thomas hunted down and shot more than 100 times by a posse. Following the arrests of the other three teenagers, an angry white mob of 400 people rampaged through Groveland's Black neighborhood, destroying businesses and burning homes. The National Guard was called in to restore order. After an all-white jury convicted the young men and sentenced them to death, Harry led a campaign to overturn the wrongful convictions. In 1951, the Supreme Court granted the appeal and ordered a new trial.

On November 6, 1951, while Sheriff Willis McCall transported two defendants, Walter Irvin and Samuel Shepherd, back to Lake County for a pre-trial hearing, he stopped the patrol car on a dark road, pulled both men out of the car and shot them. Shepherd died of his wounds, but Irvin survived. Irvin testified that Sheriff McCall had forced the two men from the car and then shot them both. Irvin was tried once again and found guilty. Harry Moore called for the suspension and indictment of Sheriff Willis McCall, the most notorious lawman in the country. Sheriff McCall was never indicted for the murder of Shepherd.

Six weeks later, on December 25, 1951, which was Harry and Harriette's 25th wedding Anniversary, a bomb exploded in the crawl space directly under their bed. The explosion was heard over four miles away. Neighbors took Harry to the closest hospital that would treat black people, 30 miles away. By the time they arrived, he was dead. Harriette died from her injuries nine days later, on January 3, 1952. Harry's mother and their oldest daughter, Annie, were also in the house but survived. The Moore's death was the first assassination of any activist to occur during the Civil Rights Movement and the only time that a husband and wife were killed during the history of the movement. In 1952, the year following their deaths, Harry was posthumously awarded the NAACP's Spingarn Medal. In 1999, the site of the Moore's home in Mims, Florida, where the bombing occurred became a Historical Heritage Landmark of the State of Florida. Five years later, Brevard County's local government christened the "Harry T. and Harriette Moore Memorial Park and Interpretive Center". For more information, go to: <https://www.harryharriette.moore.org>.

