

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ceremony remembers those killed by Memphis police

By [Jody Callahan](#), Daily Memphian

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Solomon Hatley, whose grandfather Phillip Hatley was killed in Memphis in 1939, speaks June 21 at the Harriet Performing Arts Center. The event memorialized people who have been killed by Memphis police officers. (Patrick Lantrip/The Daily Memphian)

On the morning of Jan. 22, 1939, Phillip Hatley was cooking breakfast for his family when two Memphis police officers, both allegedly drunk, pulled the man out of his Binghampton home and shot him to death.

On Oct. 3, 1974, two Memphis police officers chased Edward Garner, a 15-year-old who had just stolen \$10 and a purse, into the backyard of a home. As the unarmed

On Jan. 7, 2023, several Memphis police officers beat Tyré Nichols after a traffic stop; he died in the hospital three days later.

Judge recusal adds turmoil to sentencing of former MPD officers

Families of the three men, all of whom were Black, came together Saturday, June 21, at the Harriet Performing Arts Center at 2788 Lamar Ave. for an event to recognize and honor those killed by Memphis police officers over the decades.

Those family members spoke to a crowd of about 60 people packed into the former fire station that was converted into the Harriet in 2023. More than a dozen small markers with the names and photos of the dead were placed around the room. The names included those deemed to be unjustly killed by police as well as others whose deaths were ruled justified.

“I would summarize (today) as a celebration, a reflection, a remembrance, and a coming together of unity,” said Daryle Hatley, Phillip Hatley’s grandson. “Moving forward, how can we bring the community and the police department together so that we can better ensure that these tragedies that have occurred can be addressed?”

The grief from the families of Garner and Nichols remained potent.

Federal sentencing hearings in Nichols’ death canceled



The Harriet Performing Arts Center is at 2788 Lamar Ave. (Patrick Lantrip/The Daily Memphian)

Nichols' stepfather Rodney Wells spoke to the crowd and was still visibly angry over the recent not-guilty verdict in state court against several of the officers who beat his stepson, as well as the sentencing delays in federal court for those same officers, all of whom are Black.

"Me and my wife and my siblings and family has went through a travesty with this court system. (There's) no way in America if you saw the video of our son getting beat to death that you couldn't come up with a guilty verdict."

While the Nichols case remains very much in the collective Memphis memory, the other two have largely faded.

Garner's case, though, lives on because his family sued the Memphis Police Department after the shooting, arguing that state law that allowed police to shoot fleeing suspects was unconstitutional.

In 1985, the Supreme Court agreed, establishing that police couldn't shoot fleeing suspects unless officers had probable cause to believe that the suspect presented a

“significant threat of death or serious physical injury” to police or others. The officer who killed Garner was Black, and he was never prosecuted in the case.

Some believe that case had a strong effect on reducing the number of officer-involved shootings, although not everyone agrees.

“ ... my brother was killed, and my parents took it to court. They won the case, but police brutality is still going on. **”**

Diana Garner
Sister of Edward Garner

Diana Garner, who was 11 when her brother was shot and killed, is glad for that decision, she said Saturday, but it doesn't change the fact that she lost her brother.

“We had a lot of fun together. We played together. We did a lot of things together, (made) a lot of fun memories,” she said. “So the main thing I would like to say is, my brother was killed, and my parents took it to court. They won the case, but police brutality is still going on. Right today.”

Memphians ‘shocked’ at verdicts for ex-cops charged in Tyre Nichols’ death

The Hatley case seems largely unknown today, although that may be changing. The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University School of Law has been investigating the case, and members of that project attended Saturday's event.

Locally, the Institute for Public Service Reporting is planning to release a podcast on the case this summer.

“ *Moving forward, how can we bring the community and the police department together so that we can better ensure that these tragedies that have occurred can be addressed?* **”**

Daryle Hatley
Grandson of Phillip Hatley

The Hatley tragedy began that cold morning when two white off-duty officers, both of whom had reportedly been drinking, went to the Hatley home, based on accounts of the case in The Commercial Appeal (which called him “Hadley” instead of “Hatley.”)

Elmer Broens and Roy McElroy claimed they wanted to talk to Hatley about bootlegging, but soon after arriving, they took him to their squad car and started beating him, the investigation showed. They then took him back inside the home and continued beating him.

Hatley tried to run, but Broens opened fire, shooting him once while Hatley was still on the back porch and again while he ran across his own backyard.

Both officers were fired and charged with murder. Clifford Davis, then the police commissioner as well as a leader of the local Ku Klux Klan, told reporters that “It was inexcusable. We have information both were under the influence of liquor. This department will not condone unjustifiable slaying.”

Despite a trial that began less than a month after Hatley was slain, neither officer served a day for the killing. Criminal Court Judge Phil Wallace dismissed the charges against McElroy, saying that witnesses put him on the other side of the street during the shooting. An all-white jury acquitted Broens after deliberating for just 75 minutes.

To close Saturday's commemoration, Hatley family members traveled to the Memphis National Cemetery, which is the final home for thousands of military veterans, to place flowers at his grave. Hatley was a veteran of World War I.

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