

Chapel Hill Nine Commemorative Marker

In November 2018, Town Council approved a recommendation to install an informative, engaging, and aesthetically appropriate commemorative marker at 450 West Franklin Street to commemorate the Chapel Hill Nine and their role in Chapel Hill's Civil Rights Movement.

Since then, Town staff, in collaboration with community stakeholders and in partnership with a local design team, have developed the concept and site plan for this marker. We are on track to unveil the installed marker on February 28, 2020, marking the 60th anniversary of this event.

Chapel Hill Nine Story

On Sunday, February 28, 1960, nine young men from Chapel Hill's all-black Lincoln High School sat at a booth in the Colonial Drug Store (450 W Franklin Street) and sought the same service that was given to white customers. This courageous step, planned and executed under the remarkably mature leadership of an extraordinary group of high school students who grew up in this community, sparked a decade of direct-action civil rights demonstrations in Chapel Hill.

Those nine young men were Harold Foster (18), William Cureton (18), John Farrington (17), Earl Geer (16), David Mason Jr. (17), Clarence Merritt Jr. (17), James Merritt (16), Douglas Perry (17), and Albert Williams (16).

Learn more about their story online: <https://chapelhillhistory.org/the-chapel-hill-nine-story/>

Historical Marker Background

On September 27, 2017, Mayor Pam Hemminger formed the Council Task Force on Historic Civil Rights Commemorations (HCRC). She charged this group with developing a timeline of the important people, places and events "significant in the town's Civil Rights struggle so that they may be commemorated in historical context by the Town, including the sit-in at the Colonial Drugstore and the Lincoln High Students ('Chapel Hill Nine') whose actions ignited the integration movement in Chapel Hill."

After documenting the full history of the Chapel Hill Nine, the Task Force recommended that the Town dedicate a historical marker in their honor. Informed by community input, the Task Force identified and agreed upon the following underlying needs or interests for such a marker. It should:

- Inform visitors about the first sit-in in Chapel Hill, including who the Chapel Hill Nine were and their role in Chapel Hill's Civil Rights Movement.
- Be located in historical context at the site of the first sit-in, 450 West Franklin Street.
- Be physically and intellectually accessible and engaging to a broad audience.
- Inspire reflection and conversation.
- Be aesthetically pleasing.
- Evoke community history and connections.

Design Process

Following Council's approval of the Task Force marker recommendation, Town staff developed a process for community engagement in designing the marker. That process was informed by the community history framework & guiding values developed and articulated by the HCRC Task Force.

Town facilitators led community sessions in which invited participants engaged in activities to develop the big ideas for the marker design. The design team met with living members of the Chapel Hill Nine and, using the inputs from all of these sessions, developed a concept for the marker. That concept has since been refined in consultation with Town staff and stakeholders. The attached marker design and site plan is the result.

Design Team

The chosen vendors for the design and build of the Chapel Hill Nine Marker are Alicia Hylton-Daniels and Stephen Hayes. Both individuals were actively recruited for this project based on the interests presented to Town Council from the Historic Civil Rights Commemorations Task Force in November 2018.

Alicia Hylton-Daniels, an African American general contractor based in Durham, has a deep interest in community work, deep knowledge and experience in black culture and history, and the expertise to conceive and manage a design/build project to completion.

Stephen Hayes, an African American sculptor with a national reputation in public art, is currently artist-in-residence at Duke University. Hayes's work speaks directly to black history and culture and its place in society. In fall 2019, Chapel Hill's Community Arts and Culture showed Stephen Hayes's work, *Cash Crop!* in the popup studio space at 109 E Franklin Street. This show was a moving memorial to the four hundred year anniversary of the start of the Atlantic slave trade.

Both Hylton-Daniels and Hayes have met with the living members of the Chapel Hill Nine, as well as other community members, to learn about Chapel Hill and the community that gave birth to the Chapel Hill Nine. They are both passionate about sharing the story of the young men responsible for igniting Chapel Hill's direct action Civil Rights Movement with new generations.