

THE TOWN OF Batesburg-Leesville

Sgt. Isaac Woodard Historical Marker Dedication

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A historical marker memorializing the “Blinding of Isaac Woodard” will be dedicated on Saturday, February 9th at the site of the old Batesburg Police Station (corner of W. Church Street and Fulmer Street). The public is invited to take part in the unveiling and should gather at the marker beginning at 11:45am.

In February 1946, while traveling home to Winnsboro, South Carolina from Fort Gordon, Ga, newly discharged Sargent Isaac Woodard, Jr., an African-American World War II veteran, was riding on a bus when a disagreement between Woodard and the driver occurred. At a stop in Batesburg the driver contacted local police who ordered Sgt. Woodard off the bus. As Woodard began to explain himself, he was struck with a night stick by officers. The initial beating and subsequent beatings while in custody left Woodard blind in both eyes. He was charged with “drunk and disorderly” and ordered to pay a fine. Sgt. Woodard would spend more than three weeks in an Aiken hospital recovering from his injuries.

The blinding of Sgt. Woodard, Jr. in February 1946 sparked a series of events culminating in President Harry Truman’s creation of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights – the first national civil rights commission. Following the commission’s report in late 1947, President Truman desegregated the U.S. military in July 1948.

The incident also changed forever the thoughts and feelings of Federal Judge, J. Waties Waring. Judge Waring, upon seeing the acquittal of police officers charged with violating Sgt. Woodard’s civil rights, would go on to issue landmark civil rights rulings including a dissent in *Briggs v. Elliott* (1952). This ruling would become the model for *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

The placement and dedication of the marker is the culmination of more than two year’s effort by numerous groups and individuals. Sponsors for this event include the Sgt. Isaac Woodard Historical Marker Association, Disabled American Veterans Organization, and the Town of Batesburg-Leesville.

“I am beyond grateful and humbled by the effort put forth by so many to cast light on how this horrific event triggered the creation of laws needed to fight inequality. This was the spark which ignited President Truman, and so many others, to uphold what all of us are afforded in the Constitution. That all are created equal.” Said Mayor Lancer Shull

Last summer in order to right the wrong (to the extent possible) of this injustice, the Town vacated the conviction of Sgt. Woodard.

“Our Town Attorney Chris Spradley, Police Chief W. Wallace Oswald, and Town Judge Robert Cook

got together, reopened the case and dismissed the charges against Isaac Woodard,” said Mayor Shull. “Although Sgt. Woodard died in 1992 and has no direct descendants, we wanted to do something to make it right. As right as it can be. Batesburg-Leesville is a wonderful place in 2018. We’ve come a long way and our future is very bright.”

Prior to the event an RSVP only ceremony with remarks from special guests will be held at Southern Occasions starting at 11:00am. Audio equipment will be setup outside of Southern Occasions for members of the general public.

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