



**RESOLUTION OF THE JACKSON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
IN SUPPORT OF ERECTING A STATE HIGHWAY HISTORICAL MARKER  
TO RECOGNIZE THE “COWEE TUNNEL NINETEEN”**

**WHEREAS**, the North Carolina Historical Marker program was established to “designate places, events or persons of statewide historical significance”; and

**WHEREAS**, historical significance requires primary source documentation and denotes the place, event or persons who made “a lasting contribution to North Carolina history” which must extend beyond “local or regional importance”; and

**WHEREAS**, modern transportation infrastructure, primarily in the form of railroad tracks and roads, was essential for the development of the entire state’s economy; and

**WHEREAS**, much of the modern transportation infrastructure during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was accomplished by leased prison labor; and

**WHEREAS**, the conditions under which those prisoners labored were fraught, uncompensated and publicly unrecognized; and

**WHEREAS**, the vast majority of those workers were African-Americans; and

**WHEREAS**, one of the largest single day loss of life happened outside of Dillsboro when 19 shackled convicts died after a barge transporting them to work on the Cowee Tunnel capsized mid-river; and

**WHEREAS**, the dead men were then interred in unmarked graves in Jackson County; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a need to correctly document the history of these tragic deaths and for people visiting the area to learn about its historical significance; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a need to have a fuller and more accurate picture of the past we share; and

**WHEREAS**, primary sources carried the news throughout the State of North Carolina of the Cowee Tunnel Tragedy at the time it happened, thereby meeting the criteria for a marker.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Jackson County Board of Commissioners recommends that the North Carolina Historical Marker Program accept the Jackson County NAACP-Branch's sponsored 10020-13 application for a marker recognizing the tragic deaths of 19 African-Americans in Dillsboro on December 30, 1882.

Adopted May 18, 2021.

JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
BRIAN THOMAS MCMAHAN, Chairman

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
ANGELA M. WINCHESTER, Clerk to the Board