

Posthumous Honor Given to 1st Black Federal Law Officer Killed in Duty

LEXINGTON, Ky.— The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) posthumously presented its Gold Star Medal to William Henderson Foote, the first African American federal law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty. Foote, who served as a post-Reconstruction Era deputy collector with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), an ATF legacy agency, was honored during the annual conference of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) in Lexington, Ky., 128 years after his death. ATF's Acting Director Kenneth Melson, NOBLE's Executive Director Jessie Lee and members of the Foote family were in attendance. Foote's grandniece, Dr. Bettye Gardner, a professor of African-American history at Coppin State University, Baltimore, accepted the award.

Foote was killed Dec. 29, 1883, in Yazoo City, Miss., while jailed and awaiting trial in conjunction with a racially motivated incident in which he intervened as a federal law enforcement officer.

"ATF is proud to honor the memory of William Henderson Foote whose bravery, courageous service and ultimate sacrifice



Courtesy photo

Patrick R. Melvin, left, president of NOBLE; Kenneth Melson, acting director, ATF; Bettye Gardner, grandniece of William H. Foote during presentation of award July 18, at NOBLE's annual conference in Lexington, Ky.

for his country are especially significant given the circumstances surrounding his death," said Melson.

"NOBLE is honored to participate in the presentation of this ATF posthumous award to William Foote and to recognize his heroism as a federal law enforcement officer during a volatile period in our nation's history," said Lee.

With the presentation of the ATF Gold Star Medal, ATF pays tribute to Foote's heroism, dedication to service and ultimate sacrifice. Next year, during National Police Week activities, Foote's name will be unveiled on the ATF Memorial Wall and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington.