

White man's execution in death of black would be 1st since 1863

ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND — If executed as scheduled, Tommy David Strickler will be the first white person put to death for killing a black person in Virginia since the Civil War, a death penalty researcher says.

Watt Espy, director of the Capital Punishment Research Project, in Headland, Ala., has been studying executions in the United States for 28 years. He said that in Virginia between Nov. 22, 1739, and Nov. 25, 1803, seven whites were executed for the murder of slaves.

Then, in 1863, there was a military execution for the slaying of a black man. Espy said he could not turn up any more recent examples for Virginia.

Strickler is scheduled to die Sept. 16 for the January 1990 slaying of Leann Whitlock, a sophomore at James Madison

University.

A jury convicted the drifter of capital murder after hearing testimony that he and another man jumped into Whitlock's car in Harrisonburg and later dropped a 69-pound boulder on her head. Her body was found a week later in a field north of Waynesboro.

The victim's parents, Edward and Esther Whitlock, plan to witness the execution.

"I truly never thought he would really be executed, because he's white," Esther Whitlock said. "... I don't think we'll experience happiness, but we do intend to be present when he's executed. To show support for the law enforcement who solved the case, and for the jury and judge that tried it."

Kenneth Wayne Delong, a white who killed a black man, committed suicide before his scheduled execution in 1993.