



ALEXANDRIA
COMMUNITY
REMEMBRANCE
PROJECT

SOIL COLLECTION CEREMONY

Saturday, September 24, 2022 | 4 p.m. | Alexandria Market Square

HONORING THE LIVES OF JOSEPH MCCOY AND BENJAMIN THOMAS

FOR THE HANGED AND BEATEN.

FOR THE SHOT, DROWNED, AND BURNED.

FOR THE TORTURED, TORMENTED, AND TERRORIZED.

FOR THOSE ABANDONED BY THE RULE OF LAW.

WE WILL REMEMBER.

WITH HOPE BECAUSE HOPELESSNESS IS THE ENEMY OF JUSTICE.

WITH COURAGE BECAUSE PEACE REQUIRES BRAVERY.

WITH PERSISTENCE BECAUSE JUSTICE IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE.

WITH FAITH BECAUSE WE SHALL OVERCOME.

- EJI

Lift Every Voice and Sing

Lyrics by James Weldon Johnson | Music by J. Rosamond Johnson

This poem was originally written by Johnson in celebration of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln and set to music by his brother. It was performed by children in Jacksonville, Florida. Today, the song is commonly referred to as the Black National Anthem.

As part of today's ceremony, in a spirit of reconciliation, an interfaith group of ministers will join together in the reading of the poem during the collection of the soil for Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun Let us march on till victory is won.
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places,
Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our GOD,
True to our native land



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HONORING JOSEPH MCCOY AND BENJAMIN THOMAS

A Call to Gather Musical Invitation Min. Siera Grace

Welcome and Recognitions & Proclamation Mayor Justin Wilson

Intention and Purpose Gretchen Bulova, Co-Director ACRP
Audrey Davis, Co-Director ACRP

Narratives

 Narrative for Joseph McCoy Alexandria City High School Student, Irvin (Naeem) Scott

 Narrative for Benjamin Thomas Alexandria City High School Student, Nathan Desta

The Earth Speaks Zeina Azzam
City of Alexandria Poet Laureate

Blessing of the Soil

 For Joseph McCoy Rev. Dr. James G. Daniely of Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church

 For Benjamin Thomas Pastor Octavia Caldwell of Shiloh Baptist Church

Libation Ritual Rev. Quardricos Driskell of Beulah Baptist

Recognition of Descendants Rev. Quardricos Driskell of Beulah Baptist

Invitation to Collect the Soil Rev. Quardricos Driskell of Beulah Baptist

Please form a line at the outer end of each row of seats. Those on Joseph McCoy's side stay on the outside of the vessels and those on Benjamin Thomas side move along the inside of the vessels. Please extract a small amount of soil from inside of each vessel with your hands or the trowel and place it into the jar before moving to the next vessel and doing the same before carrying on to your seat. Thank you for participating.

Music for Meditation Vivian Podgainy, Cellist

Interfaith Reading of Lift Every Voice and Sing Pastor Octavia Caldwell for Shiloh Baptist Church

 By James W. Johnson/J. Rosamond Johnson

 Rev. Stacy Carlson Kelly for St. Paul's Episcopal Church

 Rev. Dr. Robert Melone for Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church

 Rev. Robin Anderson for Commonwealth Baptist Church

 Rev. Marcia Norfleet for Alfred Street Baptist Church

 Rev. Dr. Barbara La Toison for Alleyne AME Zion

 Kimberly Young for Washington Street United Methodist Church

 Rev. Collins Asonye for Meade Episcopal Church

 Rev. Grace Han for Trinity United Methodist Church

 Rabbi David Spinrad for Bethel El Hebrew Congregation

 Rev. Dr. James G. Daniely for Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church

 Rev. Dr. Noelle York Simmons for Christ Church Episcopal

 Rev. Dr. Barbara La Toison for Alleyne AME Zion

 Rev. Peter J. Clem for the Basilica of St. Mary

 Rev. Donald Fest for St. Joseph's Catholic Church

 Rev. Quardricos Driskell for Beulah Baptist Church

Closing Song Min. Siera Grace

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, on April 23, 1897, and August 8, 1899, Alexandria wielded the devastating sword of racial violence lynching two Black youth who were natives of this city and terrorizing the African American members of this community; and

WHEREAS, on this day, in the year 2022, Alexandria acknowledges these gross miscarriages of justice and accepts responsibility by telling the truth of those histories; and

WHEREAS, the events began on April 22, 1897, when Richard Lacy, a white man accused Joseph McCoy, an African American teenager who had worked for him for many years, of sexually assaulting Lacy's child. McCoy was taken to the Police Station, where he denied the charge and McCoy was locked in a holding cell and then interrogated by Lieutenant James Smith who reported McCoy confessed to the crime, despite the earlier denial; and

WHEREAS, at 1 a.m. on April 23, a lynch mob pulled McCoy from his cell, dragged him to the southeast corner of Cameron and Lee streets, and strung him to a lamp post. He was struck with cobblestones, beaten, and shot, and he died without anyone being held responsible; and

WHEREAS, just two years later, on August 7, 1899, a 16-year-old Black youth named Benjamin Thomas was accused by a seven-year-old white girl who lived next door of assaulting her; her father, Edward Kloch, swore out a warrant and police arrested Thomas; and

WHEREAS, despite his plea of innocence, he was charged with a crime but never tried. Thomas was taken from the City jail on August 8, a rope pulled tight around his chest, and he was dragged for half a mile down Saint Asaph Street and then King Street. The white mob pelted him with stones, bricks, and pieces of iron. Wounded and bleeding, Thomas cried out for his mother. The mob stopped at the southwest corner of King and Fairfax streets and hanged Thomas on a lamp post. An inquiry revealed he died by "hands unknown"; and

WHEREAS, no white Alexandrian was held accountable for the murders, and

WHEREAS, Alexandria deeply regrets the actions and inactions of our white forebearers and on September 24, in the year 2022 acknowledges the terror experienced by McCoy, Thomas, and the African American members of this community; and we recognize these two men whose legal rights were thwarted, to whom justice was denied and who lost their lives to racial hatred; and we apologize to Joseph McCoy, Benjamin Thomas, to their families, and the Black community, posthumously; and

WHEREAS, this Alexandria soil represents the lives of McCoy and Thomas, as well as the heritage and accomplishments of the African American members of this community; and

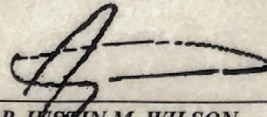
WHEREAS, as such this soil is sacred to us; and

WHEREAS, Alexandria citizens will carry this hallowed soil to a final resting place at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama to bring peace to the souls of McCoy and Thomas, and to the community of Alexandria; and upon our return from this pilgrimage this City will continue to lay bare past and present inequities, to expose our troubled racial history, and to bear witness to these atrocities. Alexandria is committed to reconciliation, so our community emerges stronger and more inclusive. In this way, the deaths of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas will never be forgotten.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JUSTIN M. WILSON, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby recognize this soil collection ceremony as the memorialization of the lives and legacies of:

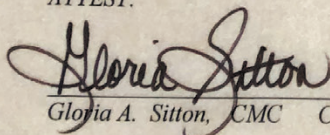
"JOSEPH MCCOY" & "BENJAMIN THOMAS"

The City of Alexandria and I call this observance and pilgrimage to Alabama to the attention of all our citizens, so that all will know the City of Alexandria will continue to place first and foremost the rights of all humanity, so that our city may be an example for all.



MAYOR JUSTIN M. WILSON
On behalf of the City Council
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:



Gloria A. Sitton, CMC City Clerk



The Earth Speaks:

Honoring the Lives of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas

The earth speaks.
Listen to the stories
from beneath our feet.
Gather the soil, touch it, smell it,
reply with your breath
and heart.
This hallowed ground
witnessed despicable deeds.
It cries in pain.
Let us open our ears to hear
the mobs, fists, whips, guns, and chains.
Let us comprehend the horror
of the noose on the lamppost.
We must look back
to sense the wounds and grief,
the wrongs inflicted
on the agonized and the aggrieved.
At the same time
we ask this soil to teach us
about where our ancestors
walked and worked and loved,
the places they learned and played,
slept and ate and prayed,
held weddings and baptisms
and communal celebrations.
They honored the living and the dead,
protected and uplifted each other
with love and kindness.
This earth tells vital stories.
We feel the deep foundation
gripping the stones we walk on,
the roots of the struggle for freedom
that keep trying to reach upward
to emerge and grow, until today.
We are still learning to make way
for rays of light
to nourish them.
As we cup this sacred soil in our hands,
we become grounded in history,
surrounded by messages from the earth
and blessings from the sky
to keep listening—
like rain on an autumn day
as it touches everything:
our schools, homes, neighborhoods,
the river and the trees,
these tangible memories of Joseph and Benjamin,
and the earth
that continues
to speak.

JOSEPH MCCOY | APRIL 23, 1897

One-hundred-and-twenty-five years ago, on a mild April evening in 1897, a doctor told Richard Lacy his 8-year-old daughter had been “tampered with” and set in motion a series of events that ended with the brutal lynching of Joseph McCoy.

When Lacy discovered his daughter had been sexually assaulted, he blamed the 18-year-old Black youth he had known and had employed since a child. A neighbor who found Lacy searching for McCoy became concerned he might kill the boy and told police about the alleged crime.

Two stories of McCoy’s arrest emerged, one placed him at Lacy’s home still working at 7PM, while the other claimed he was arrested at his Aunt Rachel’s house at 4 Muire’s Alley (about three blocks North of Lacy’s property at Church and Washington Streets). [3]

The morning edition of *The Washington Times*, printed the night before the lynching, carried the following story of the arrest:

“When the horrible truth was discovered this evening, the father immediately went in search of McCoy, and would doubtless have killed the negro had he been able to find him at that time. The occurrence was reported to police headquarters about 7 o’clock, and Lieut. Smith went immediately in search of the negro. He found McCoy at the home of his aunt, in Muire’s Alley, near the scene of his brutal crime. As soon as Mr. Lacy learned that the negro had been captured, he became greatly excited and ran to his home evidently with the intention of securing a revolver. The officer in the meantime hurried to the police station with his prisoner,” *The Washington Times*, April 23, 1897.

The other arrest story published in afternoon newspapers and retold by Lieut. James Smith during a Governor’s inquiry into the lynching of McCoy, stated that Smith went to the Lacy residence to find McCoy before the enraged father did. Smith said he asked McCoy to come to the police station with him but did not tell the young man he was under arrest until they arrived there.

The *Times* initial account is more likely to reflect actual events since in the aftermath of the lynching authorities colluded to provide a version of events that would protect the identities of those who murdered McCoy.

Once they were at the station, Smith invited City Councilman and Newspaperman John Strider into the Chief of Police’s empty office while he interrogated McCoy. [4]

According to all accounts, Joseph “flatly” denied the allegations made against him, however, after what was described as “a little persuasion” McCoy “broke down and acknowledged that he was guilty of the crime charged against him.”

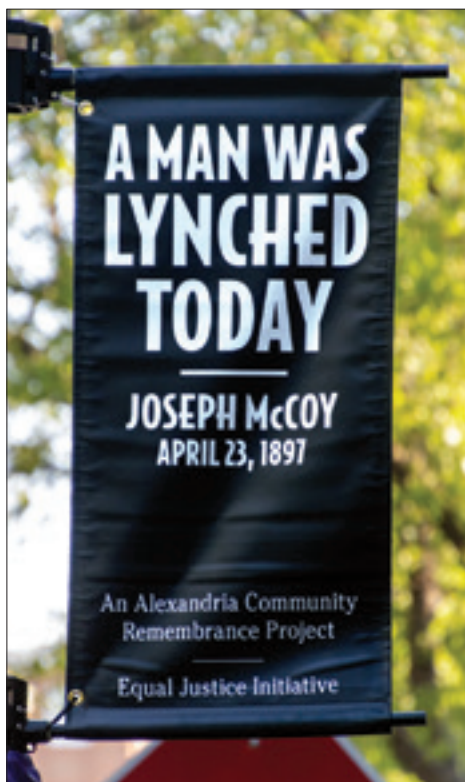
News of the crime and McCoy’s arrest spread throughout the city igniting a racist fury that brought more than 150 white men to the police station just after 11 PM. Eager to met out their own justice, the mob asked officers to hand McCoy over to them, but the police refused.[4]

Using a battering ram lifted from a nearby lumber yard the mob broke through the police station doors. Lacy was among them. Officers managed to repel the lynch mob, arrest the ring leaders, and secure the entrance with the same timber used to break in. [4]

Around 12:15AM the police sent word of the attempted lynching to Mayor Luther Thompson. It was within Thompson’s power to summon the largest military company in the state to defend the rule of law, he also could have moved McCoy to a new location or added more police to protect him. Instead, the mayor told police to free the leaders of the attack and then he went back to bed. [4]

At 1:00AM, by all accounts, at least 500 people were outside the station house. Within the crowd were leading citizens and members of the militia. The white mob surged forward, smashing shutters, chopping window sashes, hacking at the building with axes, sledges, crowbars, and picks. They dragged Joseph into the street where he begged for his life. They force marched him to the intersection of Cameron and Lee Streets and hanged him from a streetlamp on the southeast corner. Joseph’s neck didn’t break. They beat him with fists, clubs, and cobblestones then shot him three times. In the first hour of Friday, April 24, 1897, Joseph McCoy died because he could not breathe.

Hours later, Alexandria’s white leaders realized they were being scrutinized when Virginia Governor Charles



O’Ferrall, a law-and-order Democrat who crusaded against mobocracy and lynchings, sent a telegram to Alexandria’s Judge J.K.M Norton. In it he asked why the Alexandria Light Infantry (ALI) had not mobilized and said he wanted a detailed account of what happened and where the fault lay.

“Please wire me the facts briefly and follow with letter in case of lynching in your city this morning. It seems most irregular to me that in Alexandria with police force and strong military company such a thing should occur. Where rests the blame? Is it with the Civil officers or military?”

To hide the identities of the lynchers, the ineptitude of police, and to explain the failure of the ALI to mobilize, Mayor and *Gazette* reporter L. Thompson, Councilman and *Times* reporter J. Strider, Commonwealth Attorney Leonard Marbury, ALI Capt. Albert Bryan, and the police developed

a new narrative about the detention and lynching of McCoy.

In the end, no one was held accountable for Joseph’s death or for the days of triumphalism and nights of terror that followed.

However, Alexandria’s African Americans did not forget these grave events, and two years later, when another Black youth was accused of sexually assaulting a little white girl, they tried to defend the accused and they vehemently protested mob law in the weeks, months and years that followed.

This narrative for Joseph McCoy was written by Tiffany Pache, ACRP Coordinator, and is based upon newspaper accounts, court records, and the research report produced by ACRP’s volunteer research committee that can be read at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/cultural-history/alexandria-community-remembrance-project>.

BENJAMIN THOMAS | AUGUST 8, 1899

It was 8PM on a clear Monday night the 7th of August 1899 when two policemen knocked on Elizabeth Thomas’ door. They were there to arrest her 16-year-old son Benjamin for an alleged attempted assault. [6]

Earlier that day, Lillian Kloch, a seven-year-old white girl who lived next door was sent by her parents to retrieve an ax from the Thomas family. Screaming, she ran home without it, and told her parents that Benjamin had pulled her into the house and attempted to assault her. After hearing his child’s story, Edward Kloch swore out a warrant and had the teen arrested. [6]

Thomas denied the charges and proclaimed his innocence, but the officers pulled him from the safety of his home and took him to the police station anyway. Benjamin Thomas was locked in a cell. He would never see 700 N. Patrick Street again. [4]

That same night, after hearing a group of white men threaten to lynch “some negro,” James Turley and Albert Green organized Alexandria’s African American men. Remembering the sudden lynching of Joseph McCoy and at a time when the South was experiencing a record number of manhunts and lynchings, the Black men were determined to protect Thomas from the same fate.

First, the men who were leaders in the Black community, went to the police and told them that Benjamin Thomas was in jeopardy of being lynched. They offered to help protect the youth, but the officers rejected them. Next, they went to Mayor George L. Simpson and told him of the danger Thomas faced. He told them to go home.

But these heroes had no intention of leaving and late into the night, more than 100 Black Alexandrians stood vigil around the police station. Their nonviolent presence irritated some white citizens and annoyed Lieut. James Smith to the point that he complained to Mayor Simpson who gave him permission to order them home and arrest any who didn’t comply. Smith led officers and deputized citizens out into the streets to question, antagonize and arrest Thomas’ defenders. [7]

The next day, Mayor Simpson severely punished the 15 Black men who had been arrested and charged with “disorderly conduct” and “attempting to incite a riot,” with significant fines. Most couldn’t afford the debt they incurred trying to uphold the law and were forced to labor for the city on the chain gang.

During the hearing, police officers did not bring up the fact that these men had overheard a threat to Benjamin’s life and were requesting more protection for him. Instead, they told the packed



Jeff Hancock Photography

courtroom and newspapermen that while white Alexandrians slept in their beds, the Blacks were in the streets threatening them - setting the scene for a race riot, or a lynching.

That same morning, Thomas' 7-year-old accuser Lillian testified before the court about his conduct the previous day. Without hearing from Benjamin Thomas, Mayor Simpson sided with the child and placed the teen into the custody of the City Sergeant B. B. Smith. Thomas was taken to the City Jail at Saint Asaph and Princess Streets until a grand jury could meet. [8]

All day long, white Alexandria revisited grievances that still festered from when they lynched McCoy - the fear of retaliation from armed African Americans, the ridicule from big city newspapers from Boston to Washington, D.C., the Governor's investigation of the lynching. They imagined armed Black men looking for a fight and parading through the streets the night before; and complained they wouldn't have dared had the Kloch's been rich instead of poor. By late afternoon, it was clear, a lynching was in the works.

That night, an armed and angry crowd of between 500 and 2000 white people gathered outside the prison walls and crudely demanded authorities turn the teen over to them. Officers made a half-hearted attempt to scare them off, but when members of the mob fired their guns at the building, the police went to the jail's office and hid. [8]

Fifty men went into the jail to bring Thomas out. But breaking into the corridor took more work than expected and several times they returned to those waiting outside to ask for help. For more than an hour they rooted around the jail with little interference from the officers on duty. [8]

Mayor Simpson took advantage of the lull, appearing with a dozen friends and officials to address the crowd, he said,

"Gentlemen and fellow citizens, he shouted, in the name of the law I beg of you to disperse. As Chief Executive of the City of Alexandria I give you my solemn promise that the Grand Jury shall be empaneled tomorrow, and that the case of this negro whom you are seeking to lynch shall be brought before it. He will be indicted, and I promise you a trial on the following day and a speedy execution. If he is not indicted tomorrow, I give you my word of honor as Mayor and as a citizen that I will personally lead you tomorrow night in lynching this negro, and I defy any man to point to an instance where George L. Simpson has ever failed to keep his word," according to the *Washington Post*.

The article reported that Simpson's statement was met with derision.

Members of the mob dismissed the mayor with a shout: "lynch the negro." [8]

Meanwhile, those inside had gained access to the cells and in their search for Benjamin, terrorized a number

of prisoners before finding the youth hiding in the basement.

"As the mob caught sight of him, a piercing shriek of exultation rent the air. Pistols were fired and a throng of hundreds charged down upon the helpless victim," wrote *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1899.

Outside, they threw him into the waiting crowd.

Officer Wilkinson drew his pistols and told the lynchers to stand back -he told them they had the wrong man. As the mob retreated, he took the noose from Benjamin's neck. In the next moments, Thomas almost escaped, making it three quarters of a block before the spell wore off and he was pulled back into the vicious throng. [8]

They placed a rope around his neck, in his mouth and under his arms and ran down Saint Asaph Street dragging him over cobblestones. For over a half of a mile, they struck, pierced, bludgeoned, kicked, and wounded Benjamin who cried out for his mother as he struggled to free himself.

At the corner of King and Fairfax Streets, the white citizens of Alexandria hanged Benjamin Thomas from a lamp post. The boy's neck did not break, and he struggled to live for more than 20 minutes. [9]

Officer Wilkinson cut the suffering boy down and laid him on the ground. He tried to use his revolver to keep the lynchers away, but all at once they were there kicking and beating the boy until someone put a gun to Benjamin's heart and fired. [9]

In the wake of the devastating murder, the African American community in Alexandria and Washington, D.C. rallied. Servants in both cities refused to go to work for their white employers, several Black men attended the inquiry into his death as human rights witnesses, a fundraiser for the family was held, secret meetings were had to consider moving his body from a pauper's grave to Douglass Cemetery. [10]

Alexandria's African American leaders planned a mass meeting for Thomas' memorial service at Shiloh Baptist Church. More than 600 people attended and protested the terror, proclaimed Thomas' innocence, and called for an economic boycott. [11]

This narrative for Benjamin Thomas was written by Tiffany Pache, ACRP Coordinator, and is based upon newspaper accounts and the research report produced by ACRP's volunteer research committee that can be read at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/cultural-history/alexandria-community-remembrance-project>.

SOIL COLLECTION SITES



Soil has been collected from areas in the City of Alexandria associated with the lives, arrests, and deaths of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, as well as areas of historical significance to the African American community in this City. What follows is a list of the locations for the soil collection for each man, with corresponding numbers to the narratives and map.

JOSEPH MCCOY LYNCHED IN ALEXANDRIA, APRIL 23, 1897

Soil was collected from Joseph McCoy's boyhood home on S. Alfred Street, the place of his arrest at 4 Muire's Alley, from outside the Police Station House on the East side of City Hall where he was taken by a lynch mob, and from his home church. This soil was combined with samples from sites of significance to local African American history and placed in a vessel engraved with McCoy's name. Students at Jefferson-Houston IB K-8 School led by their technical education instructor Nicole Reidinger designed and built the vessel.

1. SHUTER'S HILL



As early as 3000 BCE, Native Americans camped on this site during hunting and fishing expeditions. A wealthy white merchant and slave owner named John Mills was the first person to establish a plantation house on the property in the early 1780s. Enslaved men and women lived and worked on the property for Mills,

and for later owners of the land in the 19th century. Archeologists have identified the foundations of six buildings on the property, many of which were occupied by the enslaved workforce, making this one of the few places in Alexandria where so many artifacts related directly to households of enslaved Americans have been discovered. One of the buildings uncovered at Shuter's Hill served as a laundry, a place where enslaved washer women cleaned, mended, and sewed clothing. The finding is an additional link to McCoy's story, since his grandmother who raised him spent her life working as a laundress in Alexandria.

2. 400 BLOCK OF SOUTH ALFRED STREET

Joseph McCoy was raised in The Bottoms neighborhood of Alexandria by his grandmother Cecelia McCoy. The 1880 Census showed that Cecelia and one-year old Joseph, lived at 491 S. Alfred Street. Today, the Heritage at Old Town apartments span the length of the block across from where the McCoy home once stood.

3. NO. 4 MUIRE'S ALLEY

In February 1897, Rachel Chase, who was related to Joseph McCoy, married Samuel Gairy



(sometimes spelled Gary or Geary) and lived at Number 4 Muire's Alley, located just behind 714 Franklin Street. It is likely that McCoy was at Rachel and Samuel's house when he was arrested.

4. THE ALEXANDRIA POLICE "STATION HOUSE"



The Station House was located at 126 N. Fairfax Street on the east side of City Hall. Today, you can still see the words etched above what was an entrance

with double doors. Joseph McCoy spent his last hours alive in a cell in this building. This is where he reportedly confessed to criminal assault against Lacy's daughter and where a white mob twice attacked the building before apprehending McCoy and dragging him to the corner of Cameron and Lee streets where they tortured and hanged him

From the Alexandria Gazette, April 23, 1897.

5. NOW KNOWN AS ROBERTS MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



The McCoy family belonged to Roberts Memorial Chapel at 606 S. Washington Street. Rev. William Gaines, who was the pastor, performed the funeral service for McCoy.

As a home to one of the oldest African American congregations in Alexandria, this

site is significant to Alexandria's African American heritage.

BENJAMIN THOMAS LYNCHED IN ALEXANDRIA, AUGUST 8, 1899

A majority of the soil collected for Benjamin Thomas was excavated from 720 N. Patrick Street. In 1899, the Thomas family lived on this block in the predominately African American neighborhood known as Uptown.

Soil was also collected from Thomas' home where he lived and was arrested at 700 N. Patrick Street, then from Hard Corner where Princess and N. Fairfax meet, the jail on St. Asaph where he was kidnapped by a lynch mob, and from the site of his lynching at Fairfax and King Streets. This was mixed with soil from the Odd Fellows Hall where protest meetings occurred after his death, his home church, and locations significant to the heritage of the African American community in Alexandria.

The combined soil representing the life and death of Benjamin Thomas has been placed in a vessel engraved with his name made by students from Jefferson-Houston IB K-8 School led by their technical education instructor Nicole Reidinger.

6. 700 N. PATRICK STREET

On August 7, 1899, Benjamin Thomas, 16, was at his home at 700 N. Patrick Street when Lillian Kloch, 7, a white girl who lived at 702 N. Patrick Street, came by to retrieve an ax.

Hours later, two police officers knocked on the Thomas' front door. They held a warrant for Benjamin's arrest sworn out by the girl's father, Edward Kloch. He was accused of criminally assaulting the girl and despite his plea of innocence the officers arrested him. That night, as he was pulled out of his mother's arms, Benjamin saw his house for the very last time.

7. HARD CORNER



On the night that Benjamin Thomas was arrested, more than 100 African American men gathered on the street corners around the police station after overhearing

a group of white men threaten to lynch the youth. Their offers to help law enforcement protect Thomas were rejected by police and Mayor George Simpson. Refusing to recognize their valid concerns, police arrested the ring leaders at the intersection of Fairfax and Princess Streets - a crossroad at the heart of The

Berg known at the time as Hard Corner. Soil from this spot was excavated to represent these local heroes.

8. CITY JAIL



On Tuesday, August 8, 1899, Mayor Simpson placed Thomas in the custody of the City Sergeant. Thomas was moved to the City Jail at 401 N. Saint Asaph

Street to wait for a grand jury to meet. According to newspaper sources, a lynch mob surrounded the jail at 11 p.m., sought out Thomas, and tortured him as they paraded him through town.

9. LYNCHING SITE

On a lamppost at the intersection of S. Fairfax Street and King Street, a lynch mob hanged Benjamin Thomas.

10. ODD FELLOWS HALL



The late 19th century brick building at 411 S. Columbus Street was an important gathering place for African Americans at the turn of the last century. In the wake of the Thomas lynching,

the African American community rallied and held a series of protests - some of which were planned in this building.

11. SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH



The Thomas family belonged to Shiloh Baptist Church at 1401 Duke Street. Two years before his lynching, Benjamin was Baptized and became a member of the church. More than 600 African Americans from Alexandria and Washington, D.C. attended his memorial service at Shiloh. The church was established in 1863.

ALEXANDRIA'S HISTORIC AFRICAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS

In remembrance of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, soil was collected from several historic African American neighborhoods in Alexandria.

12. THE BOTTOMS

Established in 1790, The Bottoms was the first African American neighborhood in Alexandria. It was settled by Free Blacks who were allowed to hold long term rental agreements with property owners. It is called the Bottoms because surrounding streets are at a higher elevation. Joseph McCoy's home and Odd Fellows Hall are in The Bottoms community.

13. HAYTI

A second African American neighborhood was developed in the early 1800s with the help of Quakers Mordecai Miller and his son Robert. Mordecai emancipated several slaves and testified to the free status of many of Alexandria's free Blacks who often had to prove their status to avoid being enslaved. Mordecai built nine houses on the 400 block of S. Royal Street and rented them to free Blacks. When Robert became president of First National Bank of Alexandria, he then sold the homes to their Black renters. The neighborhood grew to include the 300 block of S. Fairfax Street. It is thought that residents named the area Hayti in recognition of the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s.

14. THE BERG

During the Civil War, African Americans escaping slavery arrived in Union occupied Alexandria in large numbers. The bulk of these refugees established a neighborhood north of King Street called The Berg, named after Petersburg, Va. from where many had escaped. In the 1870s, the neighborhood was a hot bed of radical republicanism. African Americans from this community held leadership posts in the local and state republican party. On the night of Benjamin Thomas' arrest, many of the men from this neighborhood were involved in trying to protect the youth from a threatened lynching.

15. FISHTOWN

Just to the East of The Berg was Fishtown, a seasonal village of enslaved and free African Americans that originated in the 1700s along the waterfront. Each fishing season (March to May), small wooden shacks and stalls would spring up at the foot of Oronoco Street where up to 600 Black's counted, beheaded, gutted, cleaned, and

salted thousands of fish for sale. By the mid-1800s, Fishtown included land from Princess to Oronoco and from Union Street to the Potomac River.

By 1920, Fishtown was gone. Today, Founder's Park stands in its place. Soil from this location was collected in recognition of the Black men and women who lived and labored in the fisheries.

16. UPTOWN

The streets that make up the neighborhood were laid out as early as 1796, but the area was mainly developed after the Civil War. By 1899, rowhouses were packed tightly together merging The Hump and Colored Rosemont into Uptown. The majority of residents were Black, however, white people also lived in this district.

As the talons of Jim Crow gripped Alexandria during the 20th century, the 1100 Block of Queen Street became a hub for Black-owned businesses.

The Thomas family lived in Uptown.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE SITES

Soil was gathered from sites of significance that recognized Alexandria's African Americans role in the struggle for equal rights and combined with soil representing the lives of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.

17. ALEXANDRIA LIBRARY ON QUEEN STREET



Two decades before the Civil Rights movement spread through the south, Black attorney and activist Samuel Tucker led a sit-in at the Alexandria Public Library. In 1937, the Alexandria Free Library opened, but African Americans were not allowed to use it. After failing

to convince officials to provide library services to both white and Black Alexandrians, Tucker organized a protest.

On August 21, 1939, five African Americans, Otto Tucker, Edward Gaddis, Morris Murray, William Evans and Clarence Strange, went into the reading room, pulled books from the shelves and when

asked, they refused to leave. They were respectful, well dressed, and nonviolent, just as Tucker had instructed them to behave. The five men were arrested and charged, but then they were released without a judge's ruling. Tucker had been counting on representing the men in court, but when the charges were dropped his plan was thwarted.

As a result of the protest, the City built the small Robert H. Robinson Library for African Americans which opened in 1940. Tucker and other Blacks felt this was an inferior option and continued to advocate for library privileges at the Queen Street building.

18. ALEXANDRIA BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM



As a result of the 1939 sit-in, the Robert H. Robinson Library was constructed at 902 Wythe Street and opened in

1940. Once a segregated reading room, the building is now the Alexandria Black History Museum. The museum collects and interprets Black Alexandrian's contributions to local and national history and culture.

19. THE DEPARTMENTAL PROGRESSIVE CLUB



In 1927, seven African American's who worked for the federal government, established the Departmental Progressive Club to provide a setting for Alexandria's Black community to meet and hold social events before, during, and after segregation. Known as the Secret Seven, these men worked to integrate Alexandria City Public Schools and fought tirelessly for social and civil rights in this city. Members continue this legacy today.

20. PARKER-GRAY HIGH SCHOOL

Due to segregation in education, the Parker-Gray High School opened in 1920 to teach Black students in grades 1 thru 8 at 901 Wythe Street. The name comes from the former principals of boys' and girls' schools set up by the Freedman's Bureau after the Civil War.

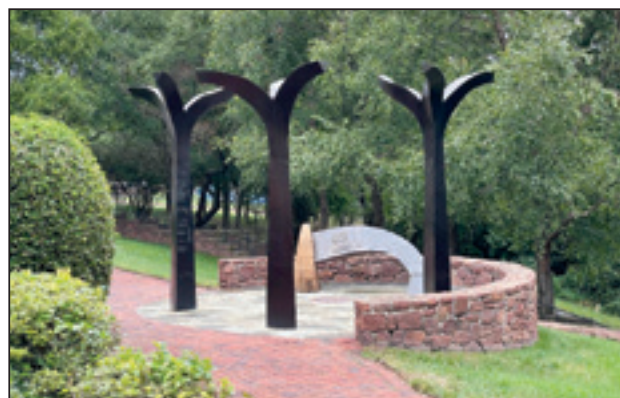


At its opening, the Parker-Gray School employed nine teachers and was led by Principal Henry White. Because the City was meager in its support, members of the community banded together to provide the furniture, equipment and supplies needed to teach the children.

In the 1930s high school grades were added and in 1936, the first students graduated. In 1950, a new Parker-Gray High School was built on Madison Street and the school on Wythe again became an elementary school. It was named after Charles Houston, the NAACP lawyer and civil rights leader.

Parker-Gray produced doctors, lawyers, judges, a brigadier general, the first African American NBA player, numerous college and high school coaches and Federal workers, scientists, musicians, and businessmen of note. Today, the site of the old school is the Charles Houston Recreation Center that houses the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame to recognize the many impressive graduates.

21. ALEXANDRIA AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE PARK



Established on the site of the oldest known independent African American burial ground, the Black Baptist Cemetery, the park with its bronzed memorial, Truths that Rise from the Roots - Remembered by Jerome Meadows, honors the contributions of African Americans to the growth and success of Alexandria.

The cemetery was chartered in 1885 by the Silver Leaf Colored Society of Alexandria.

Planning Committee and Event Volunteers for the Soil Collection Ceremony

Patrick Andriuk	Mark Farkus	Michele Longo	Rabbi David Spinrad
Amy Bertsch	Garrett Fesler	Laura Macaluso	Gal Spinrad
Gretchen Bulova	Emily Flores	Letty Maxwell	Shaina Thomas
Karen Coda	Darryl Lynn Franklin	Richard Merritt	DeeDee Tostanski
Jeff Davidson	Linda Howard	Brenda Mitchell-Powell	Beth Tuttle
Audrey Davis	Michael Johnson	McArthur Myers	Ashley Washington
Rose Dawson	Jean Kelleher	Tiffany Pache	Sarah Whelan
Rev. Quardricos Driskell	Caroline Klam	Shelli Ross	Percy White
Lynn Eiseman	Lotte Lent	Benjamin Skolnik	

Alexandria City High School Teachers

Ms. Leslie Jones Mr. RaAlim Shabazz

Alexandria City High School Remembrance Student Ushers

Yannet Gad	Miracle Gross	Amel Mohdali	Ariana Singleton
Mikey Goldsberry	Jei Huddle	Yahney-Marie Sangare	Tanween Syed

Jefferson-Houston K-8 IB School 7th Grade Students Built the Soil Vessels

Chris, Zakiyah, Livi, Alejandra, Taliyah, Micahyah, and Mai
Design and instruction by teacher, Nicole Reidinger

Property Owners for the Soil Collection

Stephanie Johnson	Shiloh Baptist Church	The Departmental	Residents of the Odd
Walter Steimel	Roberts Memorial United	Progressive Club	Fellows Condominiums
Old Town Salon and Spa	Methodist Church		

We would like to thank the following City Offices and staff for supporting today's event

City Manager's Office | Department of General Services | Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Library | Alexandria Police Department | Alexandria Fire Department
Alexandria Sheriff's Office | Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
Office of City Clerk | Office of Human Rights

All photographs courtesy Office of Historic Alexandria unless cited otherwise.

Do you have a family connection to the lynchings that occurred in Alexandria?

If you are comfortable sharing this information, please reach out to

Audrey.Davis@alexandriava.gov or visit

AlexandriaVA.gov/Historic

THE EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE AND COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE

The mission of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) that was founded by Bryan Stevenson is to end the mass incarceration in the United States while challenging racial and economic injustice and protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society.

As a law office, EJI represents clients who have been sentenced to death and condemned to die in prison. Through this human rights work, they have exposed racial bias in the criminal justice system over the last 30 years. This work revealed that mass incarceration is rooted in America's history of racial injustice and inspired the Community Remembrance Project to document and memorialize the eras of enslavement, racial terror lynching and segregation.

After a multi-year investigation into lynchings during the period between Reconstruction and World War II, EJI researchers documented 4,743 lynchings of African Americans. *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror* makes the case that lynching was terrorism and was used to enforce racial subordination and segregation. Lynchings were violent and public events that traumatized Black people throughout the country and were tolerated by state and federal officials.

In 2018, the project opened sites in Montgomery, Alabama including, the Legacy Museum, From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Peace and Justice Memorial Center.

EJI believes "it is critical for communities across the country to do the difficult work of unearthing and confronting their own histories of racial justice, while exploring how that history continues to shape the present." They have shared their research findings to support community memorialization work through the Community Remembrance Project.

EJI partners with community coalitions, such as the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, to memorialize documented victims of racial violence throughout history and foster meaningful dialogue about race and justice today.

The Community Soil Collection Project aims to elevate the history of lynching by gathering soil from every site to form a tangible representation of the lives that were lost and the terror that was inflicted. EJI displays the soil jars, each bearing a victims' name, in haunting exhibits.



EJI's Historical Marker Project erects historic markers in public locations describing the devastating violence, today widely unknown, that once took place at each location.

These efforts create a visible memory of our history of racial injustice and cause communities to reckon with their past.

These projects help to center the African American experience of racial injustice and empower the African American community members who have directly borne this trauma.

This work is critical to building relationships and holding conversations that can advance healing and reconciliation.





ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT

Established by Alexandria City Council, February 2019

The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) is a city-wide initiative dedicated to helping Alexandria understand its history of racial terror hate crimes and to work toward creating a welcoming community bound by equity and inclusion.

City Council Appointed ACRP Steering Committee

Office of Historic Alexandria
Office of Human Rights
Alexandria Library
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Alexandria City Public Schools
NAACP, Alexandria Chapter
Northern Virginia Urban League
Representatives from the Faith Community
Citizen representatives

Special thanks to the more than 200 volunteers who support the ACRP, serving on the following committees:

Education
Fundraising
Marketing
Outreach
Pilgrimage
Research
Soil and Marker

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project
Alexandriava.gov/Historic
ACRP@alexandriava.gov

To learn more about ACRP, join a committee,
or to receive the newsletter, visit us online.

