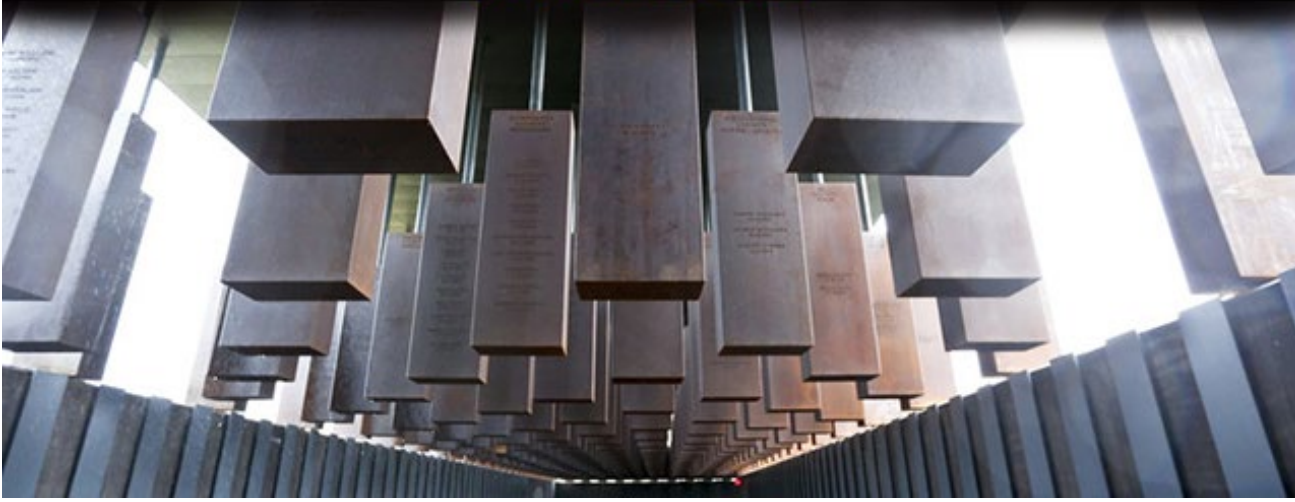


ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT

NEWSLETTER



April 2024 Edition

Fight Back

This April 23 marks the 127th year since a mob of white Alexandrians lynched Joseph McCoy on Lee Street in 1897. In remembrance, ACRP is focusing on what killed Mr. McCoy and terrorized the African Americans who lived here: white supremacy.

The two words next to each other can cause white people to stop listening. The racism embedded in our culture and institutions is often unseen by those with privilege and it poses a serious threat to the health and resilience of our community. But by fighting the urge to become defensive and learning parts of our shared history that have not been taught and in some cases remain unacknowledged, as well as gaining awareness of whiteness, our community can create positive change.

The Office of Historic Alexandria and ACRP offer opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with our shared history and the experience of Black Alexandrians, such as those who lived through the lynching of an 18-year-old Black Alexandrian in 1897. Temporary purple lawn signs dot the cityscape, telling the story of the last hours of Joseph McCoy's life, from the allegation made against him to his murder and burial. Make a plan to walk or bike the history using the QR codes on the signs or free guide books to bear witness to a time when civility crumbled and fear and hate triumphed.

ACRP is also promoting an effort to address racism organized by Alexandria's faith communities. In *The History of Racial Injustice* (Apr. 7, 2024), EJI wrote that throughout our nation's history, "white churches have played a critical role in supporting violent white supremacy in America. During the era of enslavement, while some Protestant churches initially supported abolition, white Christians, who were committed to holding Black people in bondage, embraced interpretations of the Bible that advanced white supremacy and justified enslavement."

Alexandria was no exception. At the turn of the 19th century the city economy and society was so enmeshed in slavery it caused great consternation among the Quakers and many members of Trinity United Methodist Church. Both faiths had abolitionists as well as enslavers in their congregations. Trinity was by far the larger church. By 1793, the church had 98 members, forty of whom were Black Alexandrians. By 1804, membership had grown to 450 members, 200 of whom were Black, according to the *Alexandria Gazette* (Sept. 4, 1876). In 1832, Black members from Trinity started their own church at 600 S. Washington Street. The McCoy family belonged to that church, now called Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church.

By the mid-1840s, when Alexandria was still part of the District, Trinity Methodist had about 700 congregants. Then in 1844, Trinity's Pastor Alfred Griffith, authored an antislavery resolution that ripped the denomination in half.

Not all members of Trinity agreed with their pastor, and as abolitionist voices gained traction irritating enslavers and those who profited from the slave economy, a culture war simmered beneath Alexandrian society. By 1849, Alexandria had rejoined Virginia, and a group of Trinity congregants met at Sarepta Hall on June 1 to declare themselves to be "Southern in position, feelings, institutions, and interests."

The church administration responded by expelling about 100 "Secessionist Members" who formed their own church and called a preacher from the Virginia Conference Methodist Episcopal Church South. The Washington Street United Methodist Church founders had familiar names, such as Benoni Wheat, John D. Harrison, John Shackelford, H.L. Simpson (father of George Simpson who was mayor when Benjamin Thomas was lynched) William Berkeley and John T. Creighton, according to Fern C. Stukenbroeker's history of Trinity, *A Watermelon for God*.

EJI wrote that after the Civil War racial violence and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan were a response to "emancipation and calls for Black equality. The KKK launched a campaign of terror, violence, and murder targeting African Americans and white people who supported Black civil rights."

After the Civil War, Trinity's congregation atrophied to 125 members. Alexandria's major newspaper and conservatives in charge of city government embraced the lost cause and on April 23, 1897, a white mob killed Joseph McCoy. Two years later, on August 8, 1899, a white mob lynched 16-year-old Benjamin Thomas upon a 7-year-old child's accusation.

Mob violence allowed white southerners a chance to "redeem" southern society, restoring it to its pre-Reconstruction days, according to The Institute for Southern Studies. This continued into the 20th century, as the Great Migration drove a revitalization of the KKK. EJI states that "By the 1920s, millions of white people were members of the Klan; in almost all cases, membership was exclusively reserved for white christians" most of whom were middle class protestants.

On Sunday, April 21, 2024, a presentation and discussion of the role White Supremacy has played in American Christianity and culture, will be held at 3 p.m. at the Virginia Theological Seminary.

Experiencing these educational opportunities loosens the roots of racism in our everydayness, creating awareness of what is usually ignored or underplayed. Acknowledging can make a big difference and move Alexandria toward our goal of ensuring our community is inclusive and bound by equity.

"Until we confront our history of racial injustice and its legacy, we cannot overcome the racial bias that exists today" – The Equal Justice Initiative.

Upcoming Events

The Brutal Truth of 1315 Duke Street Revealed: The 1837 Case of Dorcas Allen

Thursday, April 18, 2024

7:00 pm

Alexandria History Museum at the Lyceum

\$15 per person, \$12 for volunteers and members of Historic Alexandria, [purchase in advance](#).

At a lecture led by Dr. Alison Mann, who serves as the Historian at the National Museum of American Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State as a subject matter expert in the field of diplomatic history, 19th-century American history, public history, and education, you will learn about Dorcas Allen. This courageous woman lived with her husband and four children as a free Black woman in Washington D.C. Then she was enslaved by James Birch, imprisoned in Alexandria, and tried for the murder of her two youngest children. A jury acquitted her by reason of insanity and, with John Quincy Adams' assistance, she regained her freedom. This is a story of African American agency in the most desperate of circumstances...when an enslaved mother feels death is better for her children than life in bondage. Proceeds from the event support Freedom House Museum.

Three Joseph McCoy Remembrance Events Now through April 23, 2024

Joseph McCoy Remembrance Walk

April 10-24, 2024

Multiple Old Town Locations

Online and Printed Brochure Guides available free at the Alexandria Black History Museum, the Freedom House Museum, the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum, the Visitor Center, or the Old Town Farmers Market (4/20, 7 to noon).

The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project marked locations in the city important to the story of the life and death of Joseph McCoy, an 18-year-old native Alexandrian accused of a crime and lynched by a mob on April 23, 1897. The purple signs call attention to Joseph McCoy's existence and the role his life and death played in our shared history. Use the QR Codes on the signs to learn the story related to the sign and its location or pick up a printed booklet to explore what happened on April 22 and 23, 1897.

Special Guide-Led Joseph McCoy Remembrance Walk

Saturday, April 20, 2024

1:00-3:00 pm

922 Cameron Street (meet up location)

Free

At the request of some ACRP members, we are offering a special guide-led walking tour on Saturday afternoon. Walk the story of the lynching of Joseph McCoy in chronological order - which means a lot of walking through Alexandria. Please come prepared with good walking shoes and a full bottle of water. All are welcome!

Courageous Conversation: The Role of White Supremacy in American Christianity

Sunday, April 21, 2024

3:00 pm

Lettie Pate Evans Room at the Virginia Theological Seminary

3737 Seminary Road, Addison Academic Center Building

Free

Leaders from Alexandria's faith communities have organized a presentation and discussion featuring the film God + Country with speakers Rev. Rob Schenck, Rev. Quardricos Driskell, and Dr. Sabrina Dent. The event will explore the history of white supremacy and the role it has played in American religion and culture. This interfaith public event is being hosted by the Virginia Theological Seminary at the Lettie Pate Evans Room in the Addison Academic Center.

Joseph McCoy Remembrance Ceremony

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

5:00 pm (gather time)

Penny Hill Cemetery

700 Block of S. Payne Street (parking at the Nannie J. Lee Center or S. Payne Street)

Free

The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church and city officials will hold a wreath laying ceremony with remarks by Mayor Justin Wilson, Interim Police Chief Raul Pedroso, and Roberts Memorial Rev. Josette Franklin and feature music by cellist [Tim Thulson](#). All are welcome to attend. This is a rain or shine event.

Illumination of Remembrance Sites

April 22-25, 2024

Alexandria City Hall, Police Station at City Hall, George Washington Masonic National Memorial, and the Lynching site.

Honoring the life of Joseph McCoy, Alexandria sites will be illuminated in purple - the color of remembrance and memorialization – as a way to pause and remember Joseph McCoy.

Book Signing! Hip Hop @ 50

Saturday, April 27, 2024

11-12 pm

Alexandria Black History Museum

Free

Join Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Steering Committee Member Michael Johnson and others as they celebrate the launch of Hip Hop @ 50. Howard University held a two-day conference with scholars, artists and media icons of Hip Hop in October 2023. The book features many of the symposium's essays that examine Hip Hop's impact from 1973 to today, including a chapter by ACRP's Johnson. Dr. Elizabeth Clark Lewis edited the book that other Alexandria residents are featured including, Cathay Driver, A. Edna Santiago and Stephanie Johnson. Books will be available for purchase at the event.

Committee Reports

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Steering Committee met on April 2 at Alexandria Black History Museum and discussed the upcoming remembrance events and fundraising for a mini-pilgrimage for ACHS Remembrance Students that will take place at the end of April.

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Planning Committee for Joseph McCoy Remembrance met on April 5 at the Lloyd House and finalized planning for the April 23 ceremony being held in Remembrance of Joseph McCoy.

Upcoming Committee Meetings

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Steering Committee Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 7 at 5:00 pm at the Alexandria Black History Museum.

[Joseph McCoy](#) [Benjamin Thomas](#).

[For more information](#)

[Donate to the Project](#)

ACRP@alexandriava.gov

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.

**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**



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