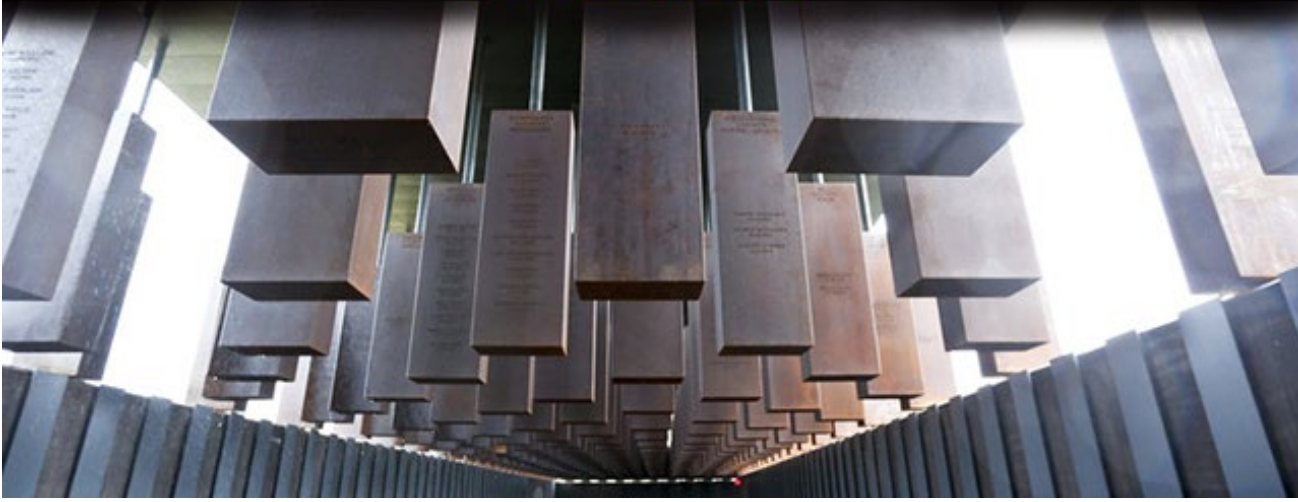


ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



May 2022 Edition

HERSTORY

“As the people killed him they will have to bury him,” uttered an “aunt” of Joseph McCoy, a young Black Alexandrian who had been lynched by hundreds of white Alexandrians in the early morning of the previous day.

Who was this African American woman, who with her powerful condemnation has provided us a glimpse into the resilience of the African American community that lived in Alexandria in 1897?

Since we began researching McCoy’s lynching, one of the more perplexing questions has been the identity of this “aunt” who brazenly told the press that the city should bare the costs of burying her nephew they said was murdered “at the hands of parties unknown.”

On Saturday, August 24, 1897, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported:

“An aunt of McCoy called at Mr. Demaine’s and after looking at the body said, “As the people killed him they will have to bury him.”

After piecing together clues left by newspapers, city directories and the census, we believe that Rachel (Chase) Gairy (a.k.a Gaery and Gary) was most likely the aunt who spoke these words in loving defense of her nephew. Rachel Chase was the daughter of Ann and Samuel Chase.

Barely a month before Joseph was lynched, on February 15, 1897, Rachel married Samuel Gairy in Alexandria.

Old city directories show that Samuel Gairy lived at 4 Muire's Alley (not to be confused with today’s Muire's Court). The alley was located in the Bottoms neighborhood. It ran North-South through a block bound by Jefferson Street, Franklin Street, Washington Street, and Columbus Street. It was once called Fighting Alley.

The alley no longer exists, but was then close to Richard Lacy’s property on South Washington beyond Jefferson Street and across from St. Mary’s Cemetery. Muire’s alley was described unflatteringly in an 1893 *Gazette* story that identified it as a “colored” neighborhood, but said there were “filthy gutters and surface drainage” present as well as a “sickening stench.”

One of the first papers to be published the morning after the lynching was *The Washington (Morning) Times*.

Correspondent John Strider wrote the following:

“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 identity of Joseph’s aunt was revealed by the reference to her home in which he was found on Muire's Alley. Aunt Rachel, newly wed to Sam Gairy who lived in Muire's Alley behind George Gairy who lived at 714 Franklin Street.

The alternative story of Joseph’s arrest that placed him at Richard Lacy’s home in the barn appeared in the ACRP research report. This story was gleaned from multiple afternoon newspaper accounts and transcriptions of interviews when Col. Percy Hawes investigated the lynching at the request of Gov. Charles O’Ferrall. It was the most dominant narrative and had been repeated in multiple sources. However, since that report was published, we have uncovered a conspiracy among the white leadership who also controlled the major newspapers and therefore the narrative. This is one of several slight differences in the stories reported in the first edition of *The Washington Times* and the *Washington Post* (only an a.m. paper) from the stories that came out Friday evening and in the following days. We will continue to update our research reports and biographies as we learn more about the lives of both Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.

In The News

Prior to the Joseph McCoy Remembrance on April 23, [stories appeared in local newspapers](#), including a full page ad and an Out-of-the-Attic that explained more about the history of what happened 125 years ago that were published in the *Alexandria Times*.



For those unable to attend the Remembrance at Market Square, the speeches of most of the presenters are available on the [In Memoriam page](#) for Joseph McCoy. Please don’t miss the remarks by Yahney Marie Sanguar, a student at Alexandria City High School, who spoke passionately about the lynching, issues still affecting the African American community and ways to integrate our past with our present.

Remarks:

- [Justin Wilson, Mayor of Alexandria Proclamation](#)
- [Don Hayes, Chief of Police](#)
- [Bryan Porter, Commonwealth’s Attorney](#)
- [Yahney-Marie Sangaré, Vice President of the Black Student Union, Alexandria City High School](#)
- ["To Bring Justice Near," Zeina Azzam, Poet Laureate of Alexandria](#)
- [Eulogy for Joseph McCoy, Reverend James G. Daniely, Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church](#)

In addition, Audrey Davis wrote an op-ed that appeared in the [Alexandria Gazette](#) and will appear in the *Alexandria Times*. Neither paper covered the event on the day and ACRP thought it important that those who could not be there heard that city officials apologized on behalf of their predecessors for the lynching of Joseph McCoy.



Dr. Thomas Lutz told those attending the “Spaces for Remembrance Symposium” on April 22, 2022 that “we have to transmit the memory” of history to others. History that is not memorialized is often lost by the third generation after events, he said. German memorials and educational institutions such as the documentation center that Lutz heads offer an opportunity for citizens to work through the past. It is important to note Germany's “landscape of memory” that inspired Bryan Stevenson’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL didn’t come into being overnight. For a long time, German society and the leadership were unwilling to speak about the crimes of the past. It was activists, including Holocaust survivors and citizen groups, who agitated for discussion and debate.

Upcoming Committee Meetings

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Pilgrimage Committee, Monday, May 23, 7-8p.m. Virtual meeting [register here](#).

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Steering Committee, Tuesday, May 24, 4-5p.m. in person meeting at the Lloyd House."

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Soil and Marker Committee, Thursday, May 26, 7 p.m. in-person meeting at Freedom House.

Committee Reports

The Pilgrimage Committee [met virtually](#) on [Monday April 25, 2022](#) for thirty minutes to discuss the options for a bus contract to travel to Montgomery, Alabama on October 6-10.

The Soil and Marker Committee [met virtually](#) on [Thursday, April 28, 2022](#) to be updated on the latest research for descendants of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. They also discussed vessels for a remote soil collection and how to prepare for the next meeting which will be a planning meeting.

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

[For more information](#)

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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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