

ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



March 2023 Edition

Interested in hearing Bryan Stevenson speak on March 28, 2023 in Charlottesville, VA? See upcoming events below and don't delay purchasing your ticket.

Feature Story

Part 1: Black Education in Alexandria: A Legacy of Triumph and Struggle

As an African American in Alexandria, any kind of formal education would have been nonexistent if Alexandria had not been part of the District of Columbia at the start of the 19th-century. It was because of its nation's capital status that Alexandria had a comparatively vibrant education scene for both free and enslaved Blacks as early as 1793.

Initially, Quakers and white ministers offered educational opportunities to free and enslaved Black Alexandrians. By the second decade of the 1800s, Black teachers were establishing schools and earning salaries.

One well-known African American educator, Alfred Parry, opened a thriving day school called Mount Hope Academy where he taught 75-100 enslaved children. Parry and other Black educators' successes came to an abrupt end after Richmond took control of Alexandria in 1846. Schooling was suddenly forbidden and Alexandria authorities moved quickly to enforce Virginia's unforgiving laws - striking terror into the heart of the Black community.

Given this history, it is not surprising that soon after Union boots hit the docks on Alexandria's shore, African American schools once again flourished. During the war, there was a mix of free and tuition schools available for Black children. When the Freedmen's Bureau arrived on the scene, they worked with the Black education establishment to streamline money coming from Northern benevolent societies, churches and abolitionists, to supplement the teaching force with northern teachers and help to build schools.

By the end of the war, George Seaton, who was born free, founded the Free School Society of Alexandria. Although many members had little means, the organization managed to raise \$1,600 and in 1866 paid for two

buildable lots in The Bottoms and Uptown neighborhoods. The Freedmen's Bureau then paid Seaton, a skilled carpenter, and a work crew to build a schoolhouse on each site.

George Seaton went on to help write a new State constitution that was required for Virginia to rejoin the United States. Seaton was the first Black member of the House of Delegates and advocated for a State-sponsored system of free schools as part of the new compact.

On July 6, 1869, Virginians ratified the constitution instituting the first statewide public school system in the history of the Commonwealth. An achievement sullied by white fears when the General Assembly met to set the system into law. In the halls of the state capitol, Rep. Seaton (R-Alexandria) and the other 24 African American lawmakers offered full-throated arguments for an integrated education system as the only path to true equality. But they simply could not overcome ingrained prejudices. Virginia's new free school system would be segregated from the start.

The thriving Black education scene in Alexandria was hampered after white City officials took over in 1870. The two schools built with Black labor paid for by the Freedmen's Bureau, on land owned by Black Alexandrians and operated by a Black Board of Trustees, became part of Alexandria's public education system. Assigning the Black children to these two schools would relieve City officials of the obligation to fund new buildings. Over time, the buildings were neglected with deferred maintenance until they were in such disrepair that one burned in a fire and the other was too dangerous to use.

In 1919, the City used taxpayer dollars for the first time to buy a lot and build a free school for Black children. When teachers entered the building to begin using it, it was simply a shell. The Black community, however, stepped up to buy the supplies and equipment needed to teach the students.

Until 1920, the two Seaton buildings housed the only schools for Black children in the city. That year, the Civil War era schools were combined into the Parker-Gray primary school making it the sole school for Black children in the City of Alexandria.

Part 2 to follow in the May newsletter.

In The News

Remembrance Students Win Award! The ACHS students who went on the pilgrimage to Alabama in October 2022 have won the Virginia Education Association's Barbara Johns Youth Award for Human Relations and Civil Rights. This award was presented to the Black Student Union, Theater Department and Television and Media Production students for promoting positive intergroup relations and appreciation of diversity. The documentary style film the students made ["They Are All Honored Here"](#) was recently featured at special showings at ACHS and at The Lyceum.

THEY ARE ALL HONORED HERE



[An ACRP Pilgrimage Video](#) is available for those who would like to learn more about how City residents delivered soil reflecting the lives of Alexandria lynching victims Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas to a final resting place with the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

Please take our survey! ACRP's Steering Committee is interested in finding out how our members would like to honor Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. [Please take our short survey to let us know.](#)

Upcoming Events

An Evening with Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative "Act Justly, Love Mercy, Exploring the Heart of Equal Justice"

Tuesday, March 28, 3 – 11 p.m.

Charlottesville, Virginia

Fee: \$50, includes round trip bus transportation, boxed meal, and event ticket

Join members of the ACRP on a bus trip to Charlottesville on Tuesday, March 28 to hear Bryan Stevenson speak at the John Paul Jones Arena. The 2023 Scoper Lecture in Christian Thought event is presented by Theological Horizons. UVA President Jim Ryan will join Stevenson during the discussion. Meet at the Nannie J. Lee Center (1108 Jefferson Street) to park and board the bus. "Clear bag" policy enforced at the John Paul Jones Arena. [Register here.](#) (Shop software may be updating. If you receive an error message, please check back or email your interest in attending to ACRP@alexandriava.gov). Scholarships available upon request.

In Remembrance of Joseph McCoy

ACRP Presents: Restorative or Transformational Justice? What is Justice?

Saturday, April 22, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Charles Houston Recreation Center Gymnasium, 901 Wythe Street

What is justice? How do communities address the historic wrongs of slavery, lynchings, segregation, massive resistance, and the school-to-prison pipeline in a way that will bring justice, healing, and transformation? The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project has teamed up with the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center and the African American Redress Network at Howard University to learn more about opportunities to address the injustices of Alexandria's past while moving to a more inclusive and just future. Please plan to attend to hear from experts on this important issue.

Joseph McCoy Remembrance Wreath Laying

Sunday, April 23, 2 -2:30 p.m.

Fairfax Street Side of Market Square

On Sunday, April 23, Alexandria will remember the 1897 racial terror lynching of Joseph McCoy with a wreath laying. Join the procession from the doors of the original Police Station House where McCoy was kidnapped by a white mob to the corner of Cameron and Lee Streets where McCoy was lynched.

EJI Essay Contest Scholarship Awards

Saturday, May 20, 11 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Council Chambers in City Hall

The essay contest is one of the EJI Remembrance Programs' expectations for localities who are engaging in the work of truth-telling, memorializing, and transforming their communities. A collaboration between ACRP and ACPS, the essay contest closed on March 17, 2023, and winners will be announced and celebrated at the May 20 event.

Committee Meetings

Alexandria Community Remembrance Steering Committee met on February 28, 2023 and discussed upcoming events, a survey for ACRP members and an Alfred Street Baptist Foundation scholarship.

[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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