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# Alexandria and the Poor People's Campaign

In May 1967, Martin Luther King Jr., Ph.D., announced his energies would not just be focused on racial justice, but human rights and economic justice for poor Americans. His plans for a nonviolent revolution led to the organization of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968, intending to march on Washington, D.C. in the spring.

King's assassination on April 4, 1968, only temporarily slowed planning by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as other leaders sought to advance King's legacy by realizing his vision. Of the eight caravans organized by the Poor People's Campaign, the most iconic was the Mule Train, and Alexandria is part of that caravan's story.

The Mule Train left Mark, Mississippi, on May 13, 1968, making it the fifth caravan to leave toward the District for the "Solidarity Day" rally on June 19. The Mule Train trav-



PHOTO/AP

Marchers reassemble their carts on Duke Street.

eled throughout Mississippi, through Alabama and Georgia and arrived in Atlanta on June 15.

The train used rickety carts and mules to make a visual mark, but their slow pace meant that plans changed to transport the Mule Train, including the mules, by railway to Alexandria. The train left Atlanta on June 17 and arrived in Alexandria the next morning. The marchers had to reassemble the carts, a moment captured in this photo taken at the Duke Street freight depot near South Henry Street.

Twenty-seven mules, four

horses and 13 wagons boarded the train in Atlanta and arrived in Alexandria. A local veterinarian inspected the caravan and ruled that five mules and all of the horses were unfit for further travel. Those animals were sent to a farm to recuperate.

The 13 wagons and 127 marchers left Alexandria in the middle of the afternoon on June 18. A broken cart-wheel and a road rage incident slowed down the already slow pace of the Mule Train. It took three hours for the caravan to reach the maintenance yard on the Virginia side of the Arlington Memorial Bridge. After five

weeks of uncomfortable travel, the caravan never reached the rally in the District. The rally's leaders decided the Mule Train's arrival would cause confusion and disrupt the rest of the rally. The exhausted marchers finally arrived in the nation's capital after the rally.

The Poor People's Campaign did not have the hoped-for impact. The loss of a visible leader like King, the logistical difficulties in organizing eight caravans, and the lack of cooperation by both federal and local governments limited the campaign's visibility and impact.

*Historic Alexandria is proud to celebrate Black History Month. Find out more about Black History Month events in Alexandria at alexandriava.gov/BlackHistoryMonth.*

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*