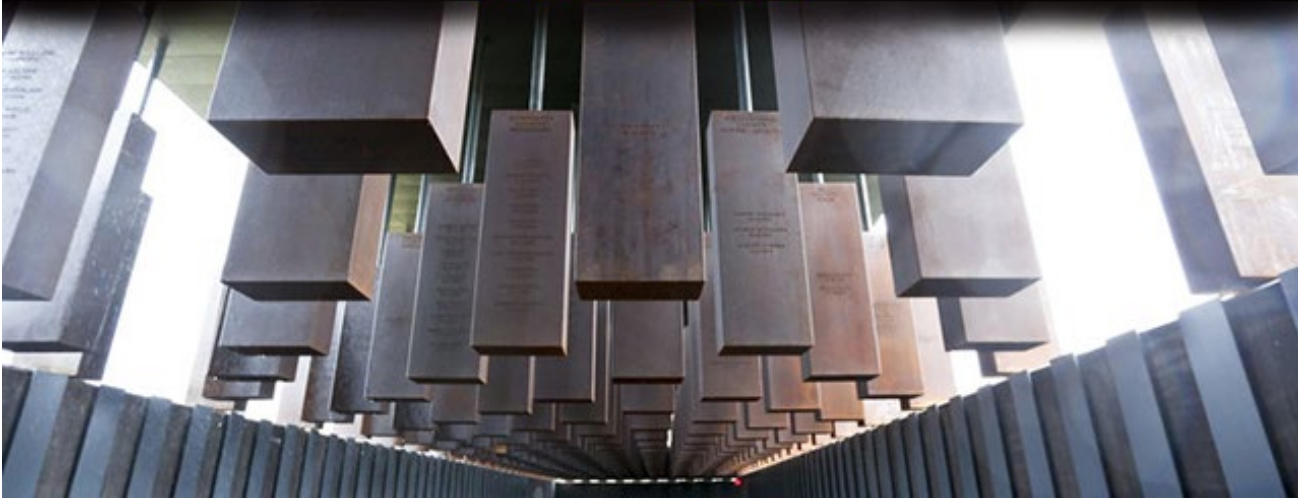


# ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



## September Edition

On September 24, our Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) will take a significant step toward our goal of creating an inclusive and more equitable community by holding a formal soil collection ceremony to honor the lost lives of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. Working in partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), the ACRP will place soil collected from Alexandria sites related to the lives of McCoy and Thomas into jars bearing their names. As part of the October ACRP Pilgrimage to EJI, the soil jars will be hand delivered to EJI in Montgomery, Ala.



Because of the urban nature of Alexandria, soil was collected from multiple meaningful locations and sifted together to honor each man. This soil will be placed into two wooden vessels - one for McCoy and another for Thomas – designed and fabricated by Nicole Reidinger with her eighth-grade students at Jefferson-Houston PreK-8 IB School. Each vessel holds 10 gallons of soil and four EJI gallon-size glass jars.

During the soil collection ceremony, participants will have the opportunity to scoop soil from the center of each vessel and place it into one of the glass jars. On October 7, members of the Alexandria community will deliver one set of jars to their final resting place at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. The other three sets of jars will be on display at:

- Alexandria Black History Museum (along with the vessels)
- Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church (McCoy)
- Shiloh Baptist Church (Thomas)
- Alexandria City Hall

### **Soil Collection for Joseph McCoy, 1897**

Soil was collected from McCoy's boyhood home on S. Alfred Street, the likely 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 with the 1897 soil layer from Shuter's Hill.

- At the time of the 1880 Census, when Joseph McCoy was 1-year-old, he was living at 491 S. Alfred Street with his grandmother Cecelia McCoy. The house is no longer there, but soil was gathered from the area where it would have been.
- The first report of McCoy's arrest was published by The Washington Times morning paper, stating that he was arrested by Lt. James Smith at his aunt's home at 4 Muire's Alley, off of Franklin Street. By the time the afternoon papers reported the arrest, the story had changed to Lt. Smith locating McCoy at his accuser and employer Richard Lacy's home at 7 p.m. Smith later told investigators that he didn't tell McCoy he was arrested until he had him at the station. Lacy's home was about three blocks south of Muire's Alley. Neither the house at #4 nor the alley off of Franklin Street exists. In its stead there is a parking lot, restaurant, and apartment condominiums. Soil was excavated from a strip of land that likely belonged to the alley at the turn of the last century. Whether or not this was the place of McCoy's arrest, family lived on the alley with whom he may have been residing since his grandmother passed away in 1895.
- The Station House, located at 126 N. Fairfax Street, was where McCoy spent his last hours alive. This is where he reportedly confessed to the criminal assault of Lacy's daughter and where a white mob twice attacked before apprehending him and dragging him to the corner of Cameron and Lee streets where he was hanged. A sample of soil was excavated from the area in front of the station house doors during recent maintenance work on the street.
- The McCoy family belonged to Roberts Memorial Chapel at 606 S. Washington Street. Rev. William Gaines performed the funeral service for McCoy. The congregation is known as Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church today.
- Soil for Joseph McCoy was supplemented with soil from Shuter's Hill, located on the grounds of today's George Washington Masonic National Memorial. In July, field school students and summer camp participants worked with City Archaeologists to slowly scrape away the more recent soil layers, peeling back the pages of history to the 1890s when McCoy lived and worked in Alexandria.

### **Benjamin Thomas, 1899**

A majority of the soil for Benjamin Thomas was collected 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 was also arrested at 700 N. Patrick Street, then from Hard Corner where Princess and S. Fairfax meet, the jail on St. Asaph where he was kidnapped by a white mob, and from the site of his lynching at Fairfax and King Streets. This was mixed with soil from locations significant to African American history in Alexandria.

- It was at Benjamin Thomas' home at 700 N. Patrick Street on August 7, 1899, that Lillian Kloch, 7, a white girl who lived at 702 N. Patrick Street, said he had assaulted her. Later that night, two police officers arrested Thomas based on a warrant sworn out by the girl's father Edward Kloch.
- That same night, more than 100 African American men were arrested at the intersection of Fairfax and Princess Streets known at the time as Hard Corner. Hours earlier, these heroes warned authorities of a threat to lynch Thomas and when they were told to go home, they stayed and tried to protect him. For this they were arrested, fined, and sent to the chain gang. Soil from Hard Corner was excavated to recognize these local heroes.
- On August 8, 1899, Benjamin Thomas was taken from the Jail at 401 N. Saint Asaph Street where he was waiting for a grand jury to hear his case. According to newspaper sources, 500 to 2000 white men formed a lynch mob and sought out the 16-year-old. They dragged him to the city center. Today, the jail where these events took place has become a private residence. The owner, who supports ACRP, invited archaeologists to collect soil from the foundation of the old jail.
- On a lamp post at the intersection of S. Fairfax and King Streets, an angry mob hanged Benjamin Thomas. During street work in 2022, ACRP volunteers acquired soil from the corner beneath the current lamp post.
- Odd Fellows Hall at 411 S. Columbus Street was an important gathering place for African Americans at the turn of the last century. In the wake of Thomas lynching, James Buckner held a fund raiser for the Thomas family there. Meetings in the building brought together the Black leadership to plan a mass meeting to protest the lynching and to consider ways to disinter Thomas from a pauper's grave and move him to Douglass Cemetery.
- Two years before his lynching, Benjamin Thomas was baptized at Shiloh Baptist Church. A few weeks after he was killed, more than 600 African Americans from Alexandria and Washington, D.C. attended a memorial service to proclaim Benjamin Thomas' innocence and protest the terror wielded against him and the African American community. Pastors from Alexandria and Washington, D.C. spoke and advocated for a boycott of white businesses. Shiloh was established in 1863 and is significant to Alexandria's African American heritage. Soil was collected from the grounds of the historic building at 1401 Duke Street.

**The soil collected from these areas has been combined with more that was excavated from the following sites:**

- **Historic African American Neighborhoods**
  - o **The Bottoms**
  - o **Hayti**
  - o **The Berg**
  - o **Uptown**
  - o **Fishtown**
    - **Alexandria African American Heritage Park**
    - **Alexandria Black History Museum**
    - **Alexandria Library on Queen Street**
    - **Departmental Progressive Club**
    - **Site of the Parker-Gray High School**
    - **Charles Houston Recreation Center, for the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame**

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Soil Collection Remembrance Ceremony for Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas**

*Saturday, September 24, at Market Square at 4 p.m.*

Please join us as we fulfill one of the Equal Justice Initiatives imperatives by holding a soil collection

ceremony for Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas who were lynched in Alexandria in 1897 and 1899, respectively. We will participate in the collection of soil by filling glass jars that bear the names of each young man who was murdered by a white lynch mob.

### **Pilgrimage to EJI and Montgomery, Ala.**

*Thursday, October 6-10 in Montgomery, Ala.*

Registration has now closed and 165 members of the community will travel to Montgomery, Ala. to deliver the soil representing McCoy and Thomas to the Equal Justice Initiative. Over three days, participants will have an opportunity to learn more about the history of racial terror in this country, as well as that of the civil rights movement and the continued fight for equal rights. The trip concludes with a tour of Selma and an opportunity to cross the famous Edmund Pettus Bridge. Soon after our return, members of the ACRP will have opportunities to share their pilgrimage experience and continue the work of creating an inclusive community bound by equity.

### **Orientation for Pilgrimage Attendees**

*Tuesday, September 27, 7 p.m. at The Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street*

Open to Pilgrimage attendees, an overview of the trip with a Q&A session will be offered. This is an opportunity for attendees to meet other participants. The power point will be made available to those who are unable to attend.

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### **Upcoming Committee Meetings**

**The Community Remembrance Pilgrimage Committee** will meet Monday, September 26, 7-8 p.m. Virtual meeting held via [Zoom](#).

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### **Committee Reports**

**Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Outreach Committee** [met on Wednesday, Aug. 24](#) to discuss the last push to register participants for the pilgrimage and encourage people to take part in the soil collection on Sept. 24.

**Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Soil and Marker Committee** [met on Thursday, Aug. 18](#), to discuss needs for the soil collection ceremonies to be held in Alexandria and then in Montgomery.

**Community Remembrance Project Pilgrimage Committee** [met on August 29](#), to review the plans for the pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama.

**Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Steering Committee** met Tuesday, Aug. 30 at the Lloyd House and reviewed soil collection ceremony, descendant and pilgrimage updates.

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[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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