



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

Joseph McCoy was killed by a lynch mob on April 23, 1897 at the corner of Lee and Cameron streets.

## A southward journey

### City plans Alabama pilgrimage to honor lynching victims

BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

City of Alexandria officials are currently planning a trip, tentatively scheduled for October 2022, to Montgomery, Alabama to honor two victims who were lynched in Old Town.

The trip is in tandem with

the Equal Justice Initiative, which opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in April 2018 to remember the legacy of enslaved Black people and their descendants who experienced racial terror hate crimes and institutionalized discrimination such as lynching, racial segregation and Jim Crow laws.

According to EJI, the memorial was created in

hopes of creating a “sober, meaningful” site where people can gather and reflect on America’s history of racial inequality. Set on a six-acre site and filled with sculpture, art and design, the memorial square includes 800 six-foot tall monuments to symbolize thousands of racial terror lynchings across the United

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## Bondsman convicted, awaits sentencing

### Man Nguyen convicted for contempt of court

BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

Man Nguyen, the bail bondsman involved in the Karla Dominguez murder case, was convicted for contempt of court on Jan. 26 in Alexandria Circuit Court.

As defined by the Code of Virginia, Nguyen was convicted for “exhibiting disobedience or resistance of an officer of the court, juror, witness or other person to any lawful process, judgment, decree or order of the court.”

Specifically, the court found that Nguyen violated the recognizance he signed mandating that Ibrahim Bouaichi stay at his parents’ home in Greenbelt, Maryland while awaiting trial for allegedly raping Dominguez.

Nguyen, a then surety bondsman with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services who posted the \$25,000 to release Bouaichi, went on to employ Bouaichi at his kiosk in the Arundel Mills Mall, spent time with Bouaichi at a local park and asked him to watch his dogs while away for the weekend. While Bouaichi was out on bond, Nguyen gave Bouaichi the keys to his vehicle and

home, inside of which was a bag of unlocked handguns. Bouaichi later drove Nguyen’s vehicle to Dominguez’ apartment and allegedly fatally shot her.

Alexandria Magistrate Elizabeth Fuller, whose office issues arrest warrants and holds bail hearings, told the Times in an October 2021 interview that Nguyen came to work after Dominguez’ murder boasting about the fact that Bouaichi had used his gun and vehicle. Fuller subsequently filed a complaint with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, even though she said her supervisor advised her not to.

DCJS opened an investigation and held an Informal Fact Finding Conference which resulted in the revocation of Nguyen’s bail bondsman license in September 2020. Fuller was later fired for speaking with the Times about her decision to file the complaint.

Because Nguyen was convicted of indirect contempt of court, meaning he violated orders outside the courtroom, he faces a misdemeanor offense and therefore a potentially harsher sentence than he would if he

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**EJI** FROM | 1 States, each engraved with the names of the victims. Every county in which EJI confirmed a lynching occurred has one pillar in the memorial and a second to bring back to the area, which city officials plan to do after the pilgrimage.

The upcoming trip follows City Council's decision in 2019 to approve the erection of two monuments in the city honoring Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, two Black Alexandria teenagers who were lynched in the late 1890s.

McCoy was arrested for allegedly assaulting two young white girls. On April 23, 1897

a lynch mob broke into the jail where he was being held and lynched McCoy on the corner of Lee and Cameron streets. Thomas was arrested for allegedly attempting to assault a young white neighbor. On Aug. 8, 1899, a lynch mob broke into his jail cell, threw a rope around his neck and dragged him half a mile to the corner of King and Fairfax streets, where he was murdered.

In an interview, Coun-

cilor John Chapman recalled the decision-making process that went into the approval of the monuments. According to Chapman, several members on council had recently heard about both EJI and neighboring Virginia jurisdictions that were looking to participate in the program and bring home their pillars from Montgomery.



**JOHN CHAPMAN**

"We thought it would be a good way to start to have some discussions about some of the harder topics of history in Alexandria," Chapman said.

So, the city began a public process to engage community members, organize specific subcommittees and plan an

Alabama trip to secure the pillars and place them somewhere in Old Town.

Council's approval was the result of mounting pressure from community members calling on the city to more actively reckon with its history.

Adrienne Fikes, a 20-year resident and longtime advocate of restorative justice implementation in Alexandria, was one of those community members. Fikes remembers urging council members to participate in the program early on. Additionally, Fikes hosted a gathering on the corner of King and Fairfax streets on Aug. 8, 2019 to commemorate the life of Thomas, who was killed 120 years prior.

Fikes said she approached the city to ask if there were

plans to commemorate the event. When she found out there were not, within two weeks she organized a small gathering with music, prayers, libations and a reading of old newspaper clippings recounting what had happened.

"We said, 'If we're the only ones going to be here, we'll be the only ones being here, but it's significant and something needs to happen,'" Fikes said. "I didn't know what was going to happen, standing out there doing that, but I knew it had to be done. So, we stood out there, my little sticker board was falling apart while we were there, and it was a beautiful moment."

Fikes' impetus for the commemoration stemmed in part from her own personal

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PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

A white mob dragged Benjamin Thomas half a mile from the city jail to the corner of King and Fairfax streets on Aug. 8, 1899, where they then lynched him.

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connection to the community.

“As an African American, as a person who knows I descend from both free and enslaved Africans, I can call out the names of my ancestors who were alive when Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas were being lynched here in the City of Alexandria. It’s very personal, but it’s also a very collective experience for me,” Fikes said.

She added that the racial terror hate crimes that occurred in the 1890s were not so long ago and created ripple effects that continue to affect residents today.

“It is recent history. It is immediate history. If you talk about the genetic impact of trauma, we know that trauma has a collective impact. We know that when someone gets shot by the police, there’s a negative impact on the entire community,” Fikes said.

This resident-galvanized event was one of many that both sparked conversations on racial justice in the city and shed light on the Old Town lynchings. The upcoming Montgomery pilgrimage, which Chapman called a “culminating event,” is the outcome of many community members, preservationists and historians coming forward and pushing for the preservation of African American history.

A fourth-generation Alexandria resident and owner of Manumission Tour Company, which aims to tell the story of Alexandria’s Black history through guided tours, Chapman said that the trip is particularly meaningful for him. He speculated that the recent push to uncover and reckon with the city’s past is due to the fact that much of it can be tangibly found.

“There’s a recognition, just in general, not just in our city, not just in our region but across the country, that

history has to be told. It’s no longer okay to hide stories because they don’t make somebody look good or make somebody feel good,” Chapman said. “It’s about bringing out these stories so that we fully understand what happened and how we [got] to where we are, and from a policymaker standpoint I think that’s really interesting and key for us as a community.”

The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, a citywide initiative established in 2019 that is dedicated to educating Alexandria visitors and residents about the city’s history of racial terror hate crimes, is currently working with EJI to plan out logistics for the Montgomery pilgrimage. Audrey Davis, director of the Alexandria Black History Museum, said that along with claiming Alexandria’s pillar and bringing it back to install, the city will collect soil from the lynching sites and personally deliver it to the Equal Justice Initiative.

Davis said the pilgrimage will likely take place over the course of three to four days in October, unless the COVID-19 pandemic forces a delay. The first day will include a tour of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, where the group will formally deliver the collected soil for EJI to add to its collection.

ACRP also plans to enlist a step-on guide who will lead daily discussion groups as well as a tour around the city. The hope is to conclude the stay with a farewell banquet, dozens of reading lists from each remembrance and a set of educational materials from EJI.

The 13-hour bus ride each way will be filled with movies about civil rights and social

justice to encourage conversations among participants and pack in as much education as possible.

According to Davis, the cost of the trip is still up in the air, as are the approximately 100 participant spots. The Office of Historic Alexandria is currently working on ways to offer discounts and subsidize travel expenses for participants. One idea is an essay contest for high school students, in which the winner earns a free spot on the trip. Davis and her boss, Gretchen Bulova, plan to make the trek down to Montgomery at the end of this month to finalize many of these logistics and meet with EJI.

“We really do feel like this is showing not only our commitment, but our continued commitment. So much has been done in the city to advance social justice, of course with the hiring of our first racial equity officer, with the work that we do in our museums, with infusing diversity and inclusion into everything we do as city employees,” Davis said. “I think it’s a great statement. It’s one part of a bigger piece, it’s just one step to educating the public.”

The Montgomery trip is one palpable way for the city to demonstrate its commitment to advancing social justice, but Fikes said there’s still a long way to go. As someone who helped spearhead the movement for racial justice in Alexandria, Fikes said she’s excited about the educational opportunities the Montgomery trip will provide, but expressed concern that the city views the racial injustice “as a historic event, not a current event.”

She advocated for conduct-



AUDREY DAVIS

“There’s a recognition, just in general, not just in our city, not just in our region but across the country, that history has to be told. It’s no longer okay to hide stories because they don’t make somebody look good or make somebody feel good.”

– John Chapman,  
councilor

ing research into whether there are descendants of Thomas and McCoy, and if so, extending the opportunity to attend the trip and shape discussion surrounding the city’s reconciliation efforts.

“I would like this to center the African American experience, and not in a gawking [way], but ‘What impact has this had on you? What impact has this had on your family?’”

–oanderson@alextimes.com



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