



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Connecting with history

*Alexandria Times, August 25, 2022*

When Judge Vanzetta Penn McPherson knelt in the Alabama grass and pierced the ground with a trowel where John Temple was lynched in 1919, she felt an undeniable encounter with a new truth. “For all I know, some of the very dirt we dug was there. What if dirt could talk?” McPherson said, adding it was a poignant way to connect with Temple.

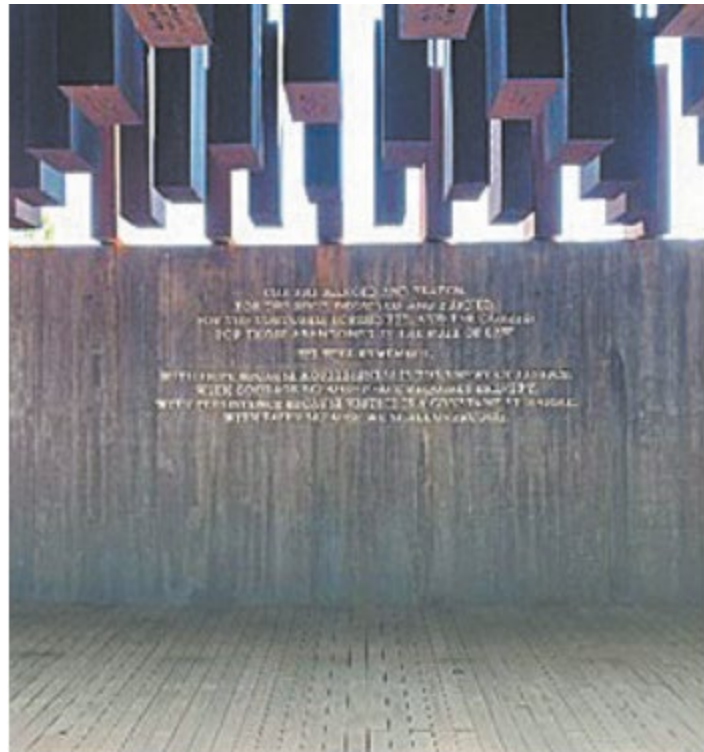
The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, in partnership with the national nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative, will further memorialize Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, who were lynched in the city in 1897 and 1899, with a soil collection ceremony next month in Market Square followed by a trip to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama.

The EJI Community Remembrance Project requires localities to hold a soil collection and take a pilgrimage to their memorial and museum in Montgomery, Alabama. The ACRP has decided to connect these two events by bringing the sacred soil on the pilgrimage and delivering it to the Memorial for Peace and Justice with two special ceremonies. The soil collection ceremony for both men is on Sept. 24 at 4 p.m. in Market Square. Those attending have an opportunity to place soil representing the lives of McCoy and Thomas in jars bound for EJI.

The ceremonial soil containers are being built by eighth grade Alexandria City Public School students.

EJI Executive Director Bryan Stevenson explained the importance of this experience.

“In this soil, there is the sweat of the enslaved. In the soil, there is the blood of victims of racial violence and lynching. There are tears in the soil from all those who labored under the indignation and



*A view of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Photo/Equal Justice Initiative.*



## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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humiliation of segregation. But in the soil, there is also the opportunity for new life, a chance to grow something hopeful and healing for the future,” Stevenson said.

In the early morning of Oct. 6, the ACRP pilgrimage will begin. Buses will leave from the Nannie J. Lee Center carrying the EJI soil jars to Montgomery. The next morning, the McCoy and Thomas soil will be hand delivered to a final resting place during a ceremony at the Memorial of Peace and Justice. Participants will have time to tour the Memorial and then EJI’s Legacy Museum. That evening, participants will meet with members of Montgomery’s Community Remembrance Project.

On Oct. 8, participants will tour Montgomery’s civil rights locations. The following day, the group will have the opportunity to tour Selma and learn about Bloody Sunday. As a group, participants will also cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The pilgrimage will conclude with a banquet showcasing foods from the African diaspora.

The October ACRP Pilgrimage will be a one-of-a-kind community and social justice experience. Space is limited and on a first come, first serve basis. Registration closes Sept. 6.

Learn more about the soil collection and pilgrimage, including costs and registration, at: [Alexandriava.gov/Historic](http://Alexandriava.gov/Historic)

*“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.*