

Alexandria Times

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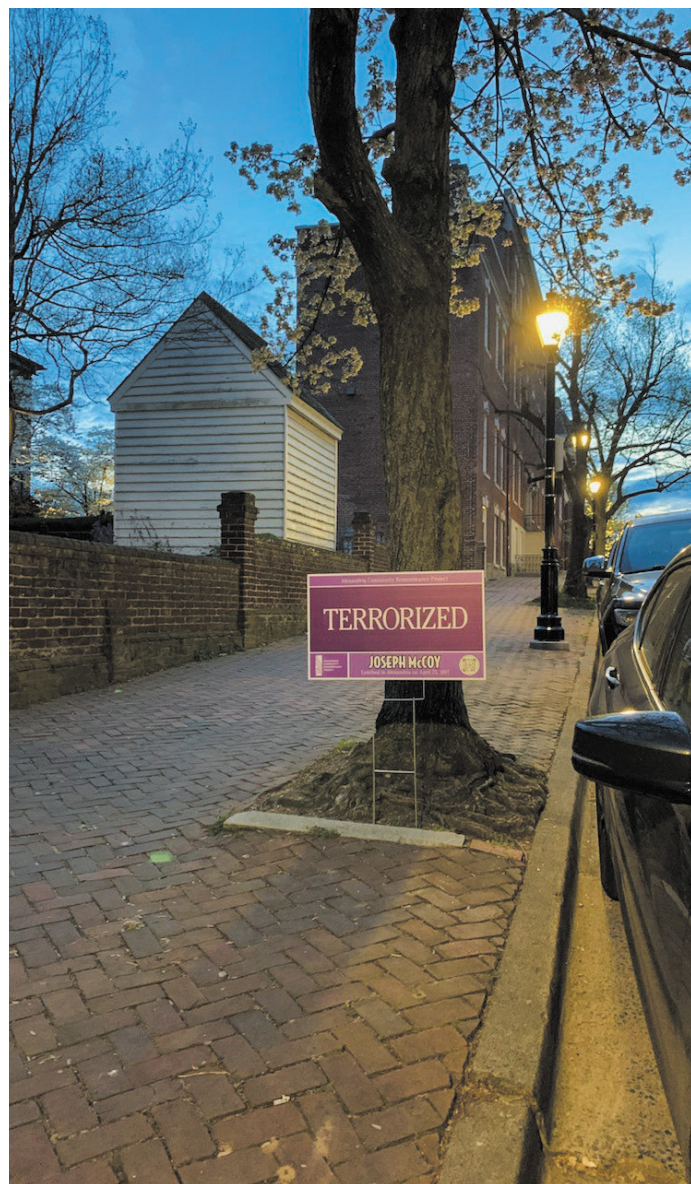
Stepping up by stepping into the past

White words on purple yard signs posted across Old Town cry out “Home, Allegation, Arrest, Lynched.” Each a call to explore a site, a concrete contemporary place that bore witness to a moment in this city’s past when civility crumbled and fear and hate triumphed.

On April 23, 1897, 127 years ago, an 18-year-old Black Alexandrian was pulled from a jail cell by a mob and lynched on Lee Street. As part of this year’s Joseph McCoy Remembrance, 13 locations have been marked to honor the lost life of Joseph McCoy.

Drive, walk, or bike this route through April 24 to follow the Remembrance Walk. Using QR codes on the signs or a booklet – available at the Alexandria Black History Museum, Freedom House Museum, Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum and the Alexandria Visitors Center – explore the events that unfolded on April 22 and 23, 1897.

By walking the streets and noting the locations where Joseph McCoy lived, worked and was likely arrested, we remember and acknowledge Alexandria’s history of racial terror. After touring the historic Black neighborhood known as the Bottoms, travel to Market Square to the original police station location where Joseph first learned about the charges he faced – which he denied –



PHOTO/OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

One of the signs from the Remembrance Walk that is part of the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project.

before eventually confessing. The young Black man twice experienced intense fear as an enraged white mob came after

him with murderous intent. Continue to the lynching location, which is marked special for this remembrance. Then travel up King Street to a former location of Demaine Funeral Home to read about the verdict of the Coroner’s Inquiry. Spoiler alert: no one was held accountable.

Finally, head to Penny Hill Cemetery where the city paid to bury McCoy after his Aunt Rachel, who raised him, refused to accept his broken body. Her protest, similar to that of a future Mamie Till-Mobley, mother of Emmett Till, who would show the world what white supremacy looked like.

This special Remembrance Walk is one of several opportunities to acknowledge injustices from Alexandria’s past, while working toward creating a more inclusive community. On April 23, the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church and city officials will hold a wreath laying ceremony for Joseph McCoy at Penny Hill Cemetery at 5 p.m.

For more information and to sign up for the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project newsletter, visit Alexandriava.gov/Historic.

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