

Alexandria Times

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The lynching of Joseph McCoy

On a mild April evening in 1897, Joseph McCoy, 18, a native Black Alexandrian, was brought to the station house on N. Fairfax Street by a police officer who did not tell McCoy he was under arrest until he had him in custody.

Unbeknownst to McCoy, his white employer Richard Lacy had accused him of sexually assaulting his eight-year-old daughter. News of the arrest and rumors of the reason for it ignited a racist fury that brought more than 150 men to the police station just after 11 p.m. Using a battering ram lifted from a nearby lumber yard, they broke through the doors eager to find McCoy. Lacy was said to be among them. The police managed to repel the lynch mob and secure the entrance with the same timber used to break in.

Around 12:15 a.m., the police sent word of the attempted lynching to Mayor Luther Thompson. It was within Thompson's power to sum-

mon the largest military company in the state to defend the rule of law. He also could have moved McCoy to a new location or added more police to protect him. Instead, the mayor went back to bed.

At 1 a.m., by all accounts, at least 500 people were outside the station house. Within the throngs were leading citizens and members of the militia. The white mob surged forward, hacking at the building with axes, sledges, crow bars and picks. They dragged McCoy into the street where he begged for his life. They forcibly marched him to the intersection of Cameron and Lee Streets and hanged him on the southeast corner. They beat him with fists, clubs and cobblestones. They shot him three times.

Although the Commonwealth Attorney Leonard Marbury was in the building when McCoy was abducted by the lynch mob, he did not identify the perpetrators. Instead



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The Joseph McCoy wreath.

of pursuing justice, he participated with the mayor, the police and other officials in a coverup to protect the lynchers.

No one was ever held accountable for McCoy's death or for the days of triumphalism and nights of terror that followed.

Please join the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project as we hold the past accountable by recognizing and remembering what happened to Joseph McCoy in April

1897 with a conversation about restorative, or transfor-

mational justice with Bilqis Wilkerson, an expert in racial reconciliation, at the Charles Houston Recreational Center Gymnasium at 11 a.m. on Saturday; and then at 2 p.m. on Sunday on Fairfax Street, outside city hall, for a wreath-laying ceremony in honor of Joseph McCoy. For more information about the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, please visit alexandriava.gov/historic.

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