



School for Conflict Analysis
and Resolution

PRESS RELEASE

Community Dialogue on Loudoun County Lynching Memorials to Take Place on March 14th in Leesburg

Contact Information

Tanja Thompson
tthomp10@gmu.edu

Bethany Holland
bhollan@gmu.edu

Jordan Mrvos
jmrvos@gmu.edu

Audrey Williams
awill32@gmu.edu

The above are master's degree candidates at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Members of public are invited to a community dialogue on March 14th, 6:00–8:00 PM, to discuss the placement of historical markers at the sites of three lynchings of African American men that took place between 1880 and 1902 in Loudoun County.

The dialogue will be held at the Douglass School (407 East Market Street, Leesburg, VA, 20176), which is located across the street from one of the lynching sites set to be memorialized.

The dialogue will feature a panel discussion with the following speakers:

- **Phillip Thompson** – Former President of the Loudoun County NAACP
- **Pastor Michelle Thomas** – President of the Loudoun County NAACP & CEO of the Loudoun Freedom Center
- **Heidi Siebentritt** – Loudoun County Historic Preservation Planner
- **Shirley Carpenter** – Lifelong resident of Leesburg
- **Sen. Jennifer McClellan (D-09)** – Virginia State Senator

The panel discussion will be followed by a community dialogue in which members of the community will be able to discuss their perspectives on the historical markers.

Food and beverages will be provided.

The community dialogue is being organized by master's degree candidates at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University with the support of the Loudoun County NAACP, the Loudoun Freedom Center, the Black History Committee, and the Douglass School.

About the Lynchings in Loudoun County and the Historical Markers

Between 1877 and 1950, more than eighty African Americans were killed in lynchings throughout Virginia, according to research done by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). Three of these individuals—Page Wallace, Orion Anderson, and Charles Craven—were murdered in Loudoun County.

Inspired by the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, former Loudoun County NAACP president Phillip Thompson has been working with the community in Leesburg, including the local government, to place historical markers at the sites of these three lynchings: near the bridge at Point of Rocks; at the site known as potter's field near the intersection of Catoctin and Market streets; and at the site of the former freight station on the W&OD Trail along Harrison Street.

Once the markers are placed, there are also plans to collect soil from the lynching sites and send it to the National Memorial in Montgomery.

In recent years, members of the broader community, including the Loudoun Freedom Center, have initiated projects to preserve African American history and educate the public. The project to place historical markers at lynching sites has followed a continuing debate around the Confederate soldier statue in front of the Leesburg courthouse and a spate of KKK recruitment fliers being distributed in neighborhoods around Loudoun County.

About the Community Dialogue

Driven by principles of respectful listening and acknowledgment of personal experiences, community dialogues are meant to provide all and any members of the community a space in which to share perspectives on topics that may be sensitive or difficult to discuss.

The March 14th dialogue will invite members of the community not only to listen to a panel of community leaders on the history of lynchings in Loudoun County and their relevance to the present day, but also to add their own voices to the discussion. Through a dialogue facilitated by four master's degree candidates from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, members of the community will be able to share their perspectives on the historical markers not only with each other but also with community leaders.

Location

The Douglass School (407 East Market Street, Leesburg, VA, 20176)

Date

March 14

Time

6:00–8:00 PM

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/loudoun-community-questions-need-for-lynching-memorials-others-become-advocates/article_9fd3948c-474d-11e9-ae03-ff450e42af6b.html

FEATURED

Loudoun community questions need for lynching memorials, others become advocates

By Nathaniel Cline, ncline@loudountimes.com Mar 16, 2019



On March 14, a discussion on establishing lynching markers took place at the Douglass School in Leesburg. The event was organized by George Mason University graduate students from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Pictured is George Mason graduate student Tanja Thompson welcoming approximately 100 people.

Times-Mirror/Nathaniel Cline

As more historical markers are being placed across the country to remember lynching victims, Virginia is confronting its dark past and seeking to document as many cases as possible.

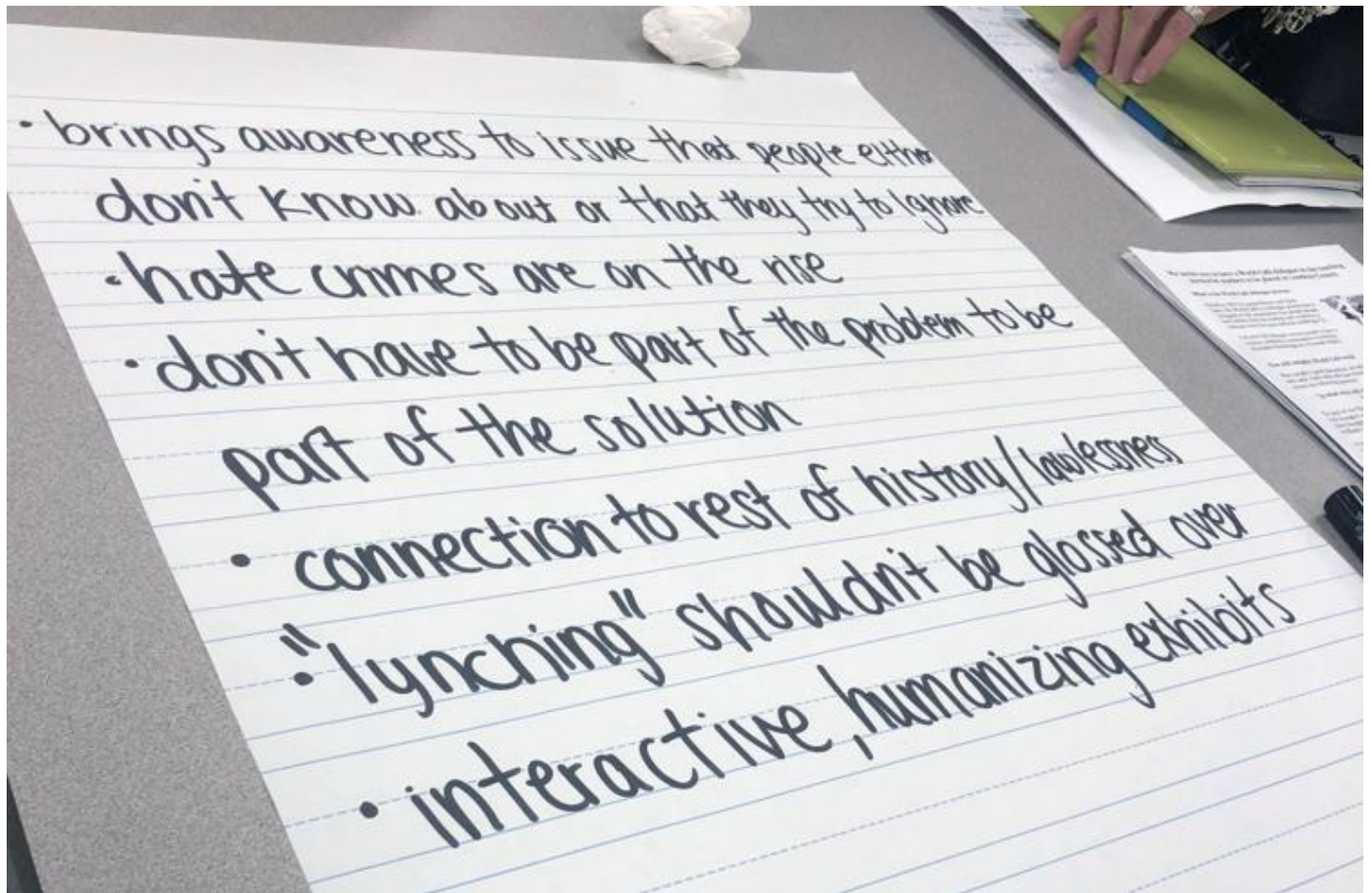
Researchers have already documented over 100 cases in the commonwealth including three in Loudoun County that are expected to be memorialized in the future.

However, for the amount of support there has been for memorializing those lynched, there is also a congregation that questioned the concept at a community discussion Thursday in Leesburg.

"Why?" one asked.

"It's been this long, why should we?" asked another.

Those were among the questions posed at a discussion event sponsored by George Mason University graduate students from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Some attendees discussed where the memorial sites would be located and how it could be used for educational tourism purposes. Others expressed concern with the security, vandalism and intention of the memorials should they be built.



Thoughts on display at the Douglass School in Leesburg during the March 14 discussion on establishing lynching markers and Virginia's history.

Times-Mirror/Nathaniel Cline

Dominion High School senior Genna Wolinsky, one of the discussion leaders, and two of her classmates attended the event that provided an opportunity to interact with approximately 100 people.

Wolinsky hoped her attendance would make a difference.

“[One man] said since he himself wasn’t a part of slavery, then why should he have to apologize for it, and I feel like this is a sentiment echoed by many today and is the reason that society hasn’t made as much progress as possible,” Wolinsky said. “Like my group discussed tonight, just because somebody wasn’t a part of the problem doesn’t mean they can’t be part of the solution.”

All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center Board Chairman Rizwan Jaka called the memorials an act of “justice” for those who were lynched.

“This is all about justice and honoring the memory of people who did not get justice,” Jaka said.

Priscilla Martinez, an advocate for interfaith and civic engagement, said she supports remembering those lynched.

“Just because there isn’t a rope involved today like there was back then doesn’t mean people’s lives aren’t being literally taken away early from them,” Martinez said. “Whether it’s systemic racism, unfairness in law enforcement and criminal justice, peoples’ lives are still being taken away, so how is that not lynching happening today?”

Close to 100 local leaders and residents packed the school’s lunchroom, including Leesburg Supervisor Kristen Umstattd (D), state Sen. Jennifer Boysko (D-33rd), Leesburg Mayor Kelly Burk, Vice Mayor Fernando Martinez and Councilman Ron Campbell.



On March 14, a discussion on establishing lynching markers took place at the Douglass School in Leesburg. The event was organized by George Mason University graduate students from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Pictured is Leesburg Town Council Member Ron Campbell speaking with residents and guests.

Times-Mirror/Nathaniel Cline

Attorney General Mark Herring (D), who shuffled around to hear different groups, said he enjoyed the dialogue format that allowed attendees to share their input with everyone in the room.

“... What I heard was that a lot of people thought this was really important to do so that we are telling history more accurately—more fully,” Herring said. “Too often it’s been romanticized and if we are going to have reconciliation and promote healing and address ongoing inequities, then we need to be honest about our history and not think it was something that happened somewhere else. It happened right here too.”

Herring is still trying to recover from his own race-related controversy. Following Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam's yearbook photo scandal, Herring disclosed that he too wore blackface in the 1980s while dressing up as a rapper for a party.

The attorney general has apologized and said he wants to work to further racial understanding and reconciliation.

The panel discussion comes shortly after the General Assembly passed a resolution for Virginia to acknowledge “with profound regret” the existence and acceptance of lynching in the commonwealth.

Democratic Sen. Jennifer L. McClellan from Richmond introduced the resolution co-patroned by Sen. Boysko. Democratic Del. Delores McQuinn (D-70th) introduced a similar resolution in the House.

McClellan, who is also the chair of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission, said after the anti-lynching statute was passed in 1928, lynchings continued to occur through the 1950s without any prosecution.

“We cannot heal as a society and achieve racial reconciliation if we are not honest about the trauma that occurred in our commonwealth to African-Americans to Native Americans, and to get beyond the trauma we have to talk about it in order to heal,” McClellan said.

The Richmond-based Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission and Department of Historic Resources are selecting sites for markers to document lynchings.

The commission will also compile the names and stories of victims of lynching in Virginia and create programmatic outreach to raise historic awareness.



State Sen. Jennifer L. McClellan (D) listens to conversations with local residents and guests at the March 15 forum in Leesburg on racial reconciliation and Virginia history.

Times-Mirror/Nathaniel Cline

Locally, Phillip Thompson and researchers say three lynchings of black men occurred in Loudoun County between 1880 and 1902: Page Wallace in 1880, Orion Anderson in 1889 and Charles Craven in 1902. All were between the ages of 18 and 25.

In August, Thompson announced a project to establish markers at the three lynching sites.

The incidents reportedly occurred along Route 15 near Point of Rocks, in the former Potter's Field at the corner of East Market and Catoctin Circle in Leesburg and at the old train station near Tuscarora Mill, also in Leesburg.

The project moved forward in September when Leesburg Town Council unanimously approved a memorial marker at the former Potter's Cemetery, now the intersection of East Market Street and Catoctin Circle, to remember the lynching of Craven.

Thompson is still working with county officials to establish the remaining two markers.

Once the project is completed, the soil from each site — like many across the country — will be collected and sent to the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice, also known as the National Lynching Memorial, in Alabama. The memorial, which was created to honor the victims of lynching, was founded by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and opened in April.

Thompson moderated a panel discussion Thursday, as did NAACP President Michelle Thomas, Loudoun County Historical Preservation Planner Heidi Siebentritt, longtime Loudoun County resident Shirley Carpenter, Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership Founding President Emerita Cathleen Magennis Wyatt and Sen. McClellan.



On March 14, a discussion on establishing lynching markers took place at the Douglass School in Leesburg. The event was organized by George Mason University graduate students from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Pictured is Loudoun County resident Tanja Thompson and her fellow graduate students from George Mason.

Times-Mirror/Nathaniel Cline

Nathaniel Cline

https://www.richmond.com/news/local/central-virginia/charles-city/first-historic-marker-commemorating-a-lynching-victim-in-va-unveiled/article_575c9645-33ca-5019-b5ae-945b91d2f305.html

FEATURED

First historic marker commemorating a lynching victim in Va. unveiled in Charles City County

By BRIDGET BALCH Richmond Times-Dispatch Apr 7, 2019



A historical marker dedicated to Isaac Brandon was unveiled in Charles City County on Sunday.

MARK GORMUS/TIMES-DISPATCH

Three days after Isaac Brandon, a 43-year-old father of eight, was seized by a mob of masked men from the Charles City County courthouse jail and hanged from a nearby tree in 1892, the Richmond Dispatch newspaper recorded his lynching as the “merited fate of Isaac Brandon, the Charles-City Negro Fiend.”

On Sunday, 127 years after that night, a crowd of more than 80 people — about the same size of the mob more than a century before — gathered at the same courthouse for the unveiling of a historical marker commemorating Brandon's death and those of about 100 other lynching victims in the state. It is the first historical marker to do this in Virginia.

Lynching has been "the chief method to intimidate an entire race of people, without legal representation, without a trial, without a lawyer, without due process, without any regard to your humanity," said Colita Nichols Fairfax, vice chairwoman of the state Board of Historic Resources, in a speech. "You become a tortured victim because you are black."

Nichols Fairfax read the headline of the Richmond Dispatch article as a reminder of the acceptance of the violence that was lynching and racism in Virginia.

"In our exercise of memory today, we have to pledge ourselves to right the wrong," she said. "This marker reminds us of the violence of lynching. It keeps Mr. Brandon's memory alive and it pushes us to continue to struggle with the dregs that are at the bottom of history."

The marker sits along the Virginia Capital Trail, a 52-mile cycling and pedestrian trail that stretches from Richmond to Williamsburg. The sign is part of the state Department of Historic Resources' attempt in recent years to feature a more balanced representation of Virginia's history through its historical marker program, said Julie Langan, the department's director.

"Even those [stories] that are painful — even those that some people think have been forgotten, we use our marker program to educate the public," Langan said.

Brandon, who was accused of attacking a white woman, never received a trial before he was killed on April 6, 1892. No charges were ever filed against anyone who participated in his torture and killing, the marker states.

In preparing to erect this marker, organizers in Charles City worked to track down Brandon's descendants and found Tish McDonald, his great-great-granddaughter, through her mother's obituary. Along with McDonald, more than a dozen other Brandons who may be related to Isaac Brandon attended the ceremony Sunday.

State Sen. Jennifer McClellan, D-Richmond, extended the family condolences for their loss, speaking to the crowd gathered.

"It is very much overdue, but very sincere," she said.

McClellan, who is Senate chairwoman of the General Assembly's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission, said the state government is taking the initiative to commemorate African American history and that its latest project will be to focus on lynching.

The project was inspired by the Equal Justice Initiative, an organization focused on racial inequality, which found that there were more than 4,000 documented lynchings of African Americans in the U.S. between 1877 and 1950.

McClellan then read from a resolution passed in February by the General Assembly acknowledging "profound regret for the existence and acceptance of lynching" in the state, a resolution that she said was the first of its kind to be passed by any state.

"This apology, I know, is too little, too late for the Brandon family and the families of over 100 Virginians who were killed through racial terror," she said. "But it's a start."

McDonald learned of her great-great-grandfather's fate only after being contacted about the historical marker. For her, the realization that her ancestors were victims of lynching — not only in the general sense of being terrorized as a people, but in the specific violence against Brandon — was a reminder of the importance of standing up to hate.

"All it takes is a few to stand up and say, 'no,' just like with the women in the #MeToo movement," McDonald said. "At the core of it, we're all human and we want the same things: we want to be loved, cherished, be successful, have families and just live — a God-given right."

After the marker was unveiled, a dozen or so Brandons — some of them meeting each other for the first time — gathered for photos at the sign. Then they chatted and exchanged numbers.

McDonald's 9- and 10-year-old nephews ran around and played on the grassy hill that separates the marker from the courthouse, not far from where their great-great-uncle was hanged.

She hopes that they will grow up knowing their history, both the painful and the faith-filled.

bbalch@timesdispatch.com

(804) 649-6601

Twitter: @bridgetbalch

Bridget Balch

Please Join Us

The NAACP Loudoun Branch along with its partners
Loudoun Freedom Center and NOVA Parks cordially invites you to

The Orion Anderson Remembrance Memorial For Peace and Justice

An EJI inspired memorial

Juneteenth, Wednesday, June 19, 2019

6:00 pm–7:00 pm

W.O.& D. Trail & Harrison St.

Processional:

Old Jail House Site

(Church Street Parking Lot)

5:30 pm

*(attendees will gather at 5:00 pm -5:15pm,
history retold 5:15 pm-5:30 pm)*

Reception

7:00 pm-8:00 pm

To register for this free event, click link: [Orion Anderson Lynching Memorial](#)



Orion Anderson

1875-1889

Hamilton, Virginia

Lynched November 8, 1889

The Orion Anderson Remembrance Memorial for Peace and Justice (informally known as Loudoun Lynching Memorial) is the first State Lynching Memorial in Northern Virginia, dedicated to commemorating the life, legacy and community of the youngest (only 14 years old) victim of lynching in Loudoun County. The historic memorial is intended to acknowledge Loudoun's past history of racial terrorism and advocate for present day equality, equity and social justice in Virginia and across the nation. Lynched November 8, 1889

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/we-are-part-of-the-fabric-of-this-nation-loudoun/article_456de3ae-935a-11e9-ad2d-1795f8e582b6.html

FEATURED

'We are part of the fabric of this nation:' Loudoun County learns the sad tale of Orion Anderson's lynching, looks to the future

By Nathaniel Cline, ncline@loudountimes.com Jun 20, 2019

Cousins James Howard and Michelle Lane didn't know about their great grand-uncle who grew up in the late 1800s.

It's understandable why Howard, Lane and other family members didn't know about their relative until last week. That's because their uncle did not live his adult life – he was hanged and shot at the age of 14.

But now, the descendants and hundreds of other Loudoun County residents will remember their late family member, Orion Anderson, and where he was hanged.

Loudoun County's first lynching memorial was unveiled in southwest Leesburg Wednesday night.

Howard told the Times-Mirror he was overwhelmed by the dozens upon dozens of people who came out for the ceremony on a steamy Wednesday night. Joined by his cousin, his wife and daughters, Valerie and Jazmyne, Howard said he hopes the opportunity will be used to celebrate his uncle's life and bring awareness to the history of lynching.

"We are not celebrating the lynching. We are celebrating his life just like you would any relative," Howard said. "I think this gives him a voice in life, because otherwise he would've been known as somebody that was just lynched, and I'm glad they were able to research and find the families, otherwise nobody would've known."



Cousins Michelle Lane and James Howard react to the unveiling of the first lynching memorial marker in Loudoun County, which remembers their great grand-uncle Orion Anderson. He was hanged at the age of 14 in 1889.

Times-Mirror/John Battiston

Located in southwest Leesburg, near the intersection of Washington & Old Dominion Trail and Harrison Street, the first marker was established to remember Anderson, who was targeted for allegedly scaring a white, teenaged girl in 1889.

But before Anderson's day in court, researchers say a small mob broke into his jail cell, dragged him to the Leesburg freight depot in southeast Leesburg, hanged him and shot him.

Wednesday's unveiling brought out community members and elected officials to join representatives from the Loudoun County NAACP, Loudoun Freedom Center, Loudoun Black History Committee, Friends of Balch Library and NOVA Parks to remember Anderson in the first of a series called Loudoun Remembrance and Reconciliation.

Loudoun Freedom Center Executive Director and Leesburg Town Councilman Ron Campbell started the program by sharing Anderson's story where the teenager was held at the old jailhouse, now a parking lot. Loudoun County Historic Records Manager Eric Larson and Historical Preservation

Planner Heidi Siebentritt joined Campbell in remarks before the group proceeded to where Anderson was hanged in southeast at the former Leesburg depot.

ADAMS Boy Scouts Troop 2019, with an escort from the Leesburg Police Department, led the half-mile walk through town.

At the site where Anderson would meet his death, several people spoke as a soil collection was taken up, flowers were laid out in remembrance and the marker was unveiled.

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Rev. David Mylam offered the invocation followed by greetings from Loudoun County Chairwoman Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) and Congresswoman Jennifer Wexton (D-Va.).

"We've come a very long way since what happened to Mr. Anderson, and don't let anybody tell you we haven't," Randall said. "... but we have a long way to go, and we will do it standing together, standing in peace and standing in love."

Wexton, who commended the organizers for their work, shared that one of her most memorable trips since being elected to Congress last November was her visit to Alabama to tour the Memorial for Peace and Justice, which holds one of the largest historical records collection of lynchings.

"The only way that we will be able to move forward is by recognizing our past and not repeating it," Wexton said. "The only way we are going to lead Virginia into the future that we want is by recognizing and reconciling with our past, and events like this and groups like the Loudoun Freedom Center are so helpful in helping us do that."



Loudoun NAACP members Phillip Thompson, left, Michelle Thomas and Ron Campbell collect soil from the Leesburg site where Orion Anderson was hanged and shot in 1889.

Times-Mirror/John Battiston

NOVA Parks Chairman Michael Nardolilli spoke, as did Donna Bohannon and Lori Kimball from the Loudoun Black History Committee and Friends of Balch Library, respectively. They provided Anderson's history and genealogy.

Anderson was one of three black men lynched in Loudoun County between 1880 and 1902, according to researchers. Anderson was lynched in 1889, Page Wallace in 1880 for an alleged rape and Charles Craven in 1902 for an alleged murder.

All the lynching victims were initially believed to be between the ages of 18 and 25, but further research concluded that Anderson was just 14 years old, prompting historians to begin a search for all of the victims' descendants. Previous records showed Anderson to be around 19 and 20.

"What's wrong with Virginia is that there is a grave omission of African American history," Loudoun Freedom Center and Loudoun County NAACP President Michelle Thomas said. "Only 2 percent of historical land markers throughout Virginia is dedicated towards African American history. In Loudoun County, 1 percent is dedicated to African American history. Today, we add to the narrative to say that 'we are a part of the fabric of this nation.'"

Shortly after Loudoun County NAACP member Phillip Thompson, the organization's previous president, announced efforts to establish the markers last summer, the Remembrance and Reconciliation Initiative began with a group of researchers investigating the descendants of those lynched. Graduate students from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution aided in the process through research and discussion.

Efforts to establish the remaining two markers are ongoing. Community members with additional information about the lynchings are encouraged to reach out to the members of the Loudoun Freedom Center or Loudoun County NAACP.

"This is not a long time ago. This is just a generation ago, and we need to remember this," Thompson said.

Once the project is completed, the soil from each site will be collected and sent to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, also known as the National Lynching Memorial.

Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring (D), who is still dealing with backlash following this year's admission that he wore blackface as part of a costume in the 1980s, attended Wednesday's ceremony. Herring said the marker is a step that Loudoun is taking toward justice, equality and

reconciliation.

"I think that we as a community should be proud that we are doing this together. Because not every community in Virginia is ready or willing yet to take that important step," the attorney general said. "It says something about the character of this community that we are strong enough to be honest and unafraid to do the right thing in commemorating the life of Orion Anderson. And hopefully soon we will do the same for Page Wallace and Charles Craven. Orion Anderson's life ended here in 1889. But with this marker, his name, and his story, will live on."



Pastor Michelle Thomas, president of the Loudoun Freedom Center, addresses the crowd at Wednesday's event remembering Orion Anderson and sharing his story.

Times-Mirror/John Battiston



Charlottesville Dedicates Historical Marker Remembering Lynching

July 12, 2019

Today, 121 years after John Henry James was lynched near Charlottesville, Virginia, in Albemarle County, community members and officials are unveiling a historical marker recognizing the lynching. The marker dedication is part of the community's multi-year engagement with EJI's Community Remembrance Project.

Last summer, dozens of activists, clergy, historians, elected officials, and students gathered soil (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/sacred-ground-now-reclaimed-a-charlottesville-story/2018/07/07/a2d12d0c-7e12-11e8-b0ef-fffcabeff946_story.html?noredirect&utm_term=.3b1b0aee71f3) [1] during a ceremony in a grove of trees near the railroad tracks where Mr. James was pulled from a train. Three glass jars were filled with soil: one each for display in Albemarle County, the City of Charlottesville, and EJI's Legacy Museum (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>) [2].

Over 100 Charlottesville residents, including city council members, Mayor Nikuyah Walker (the first black woman to serve as the city's mayor), and the mother of Heather Heyer, who died while protesting a white nationalist rally in 2017, then traveled by bus to bring the jar of soil to Montgomery. They honored Mr. James with a ceremony at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>) [3], where his name is inscribed, and met with EJI director Bryan Stevenson for a discussion about the importance of recognizing our history of racial injustice.

"Even though it's complicated," Mr. Stevenson told the group, "there is something better waiting for us in this country, but we can't get there if we stay silent about this history."

Elected officials, community leaders, and residents from Charlottesville and Albemarle County have continued the urgent conversation started last summer. Yesterday, they hosted a panel discussion about how monuments impact public spaces and shape the racial narrative of the community.

Virginia Senator Jennifer McClellan, who introduced a resolution acknowledging racial terror lynchings (<http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2019/feb/15/virginia-expresses-profound-regret-history-lynchin/>) [4] in Virginia, spoke at the panel discussion last night. Under the resolution, which passed unanimously in February, the state's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources will document each lynching in Virginia, and the state will memorialize the lynchings online and with historical markers. The first marker (https://www.richmond.com/news/local/central-virginia/charles-city/first-historic-marker-commemorating-a-lynching-victim-in-va-unveiled/article_575c9645-33ca-5019-b5ae-945b91d2f305.html) [5] was unveiled in Charles City County in April, acknowledging the lynching of Isaac Brandon, a 43-year-old father of eight who was seized by a mob from the courthouse jail and hanged from a nearby tree in 1892.

Hundreds of people, including Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, joined local officials, community organizers, residents, and EJI staff for the marker unveiling ceremony today, which featured remarks from Charlottesville Mayor Nikuyah Walker, Albemarle County Supervisor Diantha McKeel, and Jefferson School executive director Dr. Andrea Douglas,

and a reading by University of Virginia professor Dr. Jalane Schmidt. Siri Russell, the Director of the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Inclusion, unveiled the marker.



Last summer, on the 120th anniversary of the lynching of John Henry James, community members collected soil as part of EJI's Community Remembrance Project. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/sacred-ground-now-reclaimed-a-charlottesville-story/2018/07/07/a2d12d0c-7e12-11e8-b0ef-fffcabeff946_story.html?noredirect&utm_term=.3b1b0aee71f3) [1])

The Lynching of John Henry James

In 1898, John Henry James, an African American man, was working as an ice cream vendor in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he had lived for about five years.

On July 11, he was arrested after being falsely accused of assaulting a white woman. Police took him to Staunton that evening to avoid a potential lynching, but officers escorted him back to Charlottesville the next morning by train. An armed mob of 150 white men stopped the train at Wood's Crossing in Albemarle County and seized Mr. James. A group of black men tried to stop the lynch mob but were outnumbered and forced to retreat.

The white mob threw a rope over Mr. James's neck and dragged him about 40 yards away to a small locust tree. He protested that he was innocent, but the mob hanged Mr. James and fired dozens of bullets into his body.

The Richmond Planet, an African American newspaper, reported that, as his body hung for many hours, hundreds more white people streamed by and cut off pieces of his clothing, his body, and the locust tree to carry away as souvenirs.

A grand jury session was interrupted by news of the lynching and, despite knowing that Mr. James had been killed, it indicted him for assault.

The Charlottesville police chief and Albemarle County sheriff were present at the lynching, but no one was ever charged or held accountable for the murder of John Henry James.

EJI's Community Remembrance Project

EJI's Community Remembrance Project (<https://eji.org/community-remembrance-project>) [6] is part of our campaign to recognize the victims of lynching by collecting soil from lynching sites, erecting historical markers, and developing the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>) [3], which acknowledges the

horrors of racial injustice.

As part of its effort to help towns, cities, and states confront and recover from tragic histories of racial violence and terrorism, EJI is joining with communities to install historical markers in communities where the history of lynching is documented. EJI believes that by reckoning with the truth of the racial violence that has shaped our communities, community members can begin a necessary conversation that advances healing and reconciliation.

Lynching in America

Thousands of black people were the victims of lynching and racial violence in the United States between 1877 and 1950. The lynching of African Americans during this era was a form of racial terrorism intended to intimidate black people and enforce racial hierarchy and segregation.

Lynching was most prevalent in the South, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. After the Civil War, violent resistance to equal rights for African Americans and an ideology of white supremacy led to violent abuse of racial minorities and decades of political, social, and economic exploitation.

In an expanded edition of Lynching in America (<https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america>) [7], EJI also documented racial terrorism beyond Southern borders (<https://eji.org/lynching-in-america-outside-the-south>) [8], detailing more than 300 lynchings of black people in eight states with high lynching rates in the Midwest and the Upper South, including Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, West Virginia, Maryland, Kansas, Indiana, and Ohio.

Lynching became the most public and notorious form of terror and subordination. White mobs were usually permitted to engage in racial terror and brutal violence with impunity. Many black people were pulled out of jails or given over to mobs by law enforcement officials who were legally required to protect them. Terror lynchings often included burning and mutilation, sometimes in front of crowds numbering in the thousands.

In response to this racial terror and violence, millions of black people fled the South and could never return, which deepened the anguish and pain of lynching. Many of the names of lynching victims were not recorded and will never be known, but EJI has documented 84 racial terror lynchings in Virginia alone between 1877 and 1950.

Source URL (modified on 07/12/2019): <https://eji.org/news/charlottesville-dedicates-historical-marker-on-lynching>

Links

[1] https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/sacred-ground-now-reclaimed-a-charlottesville-story/2018/07/07/a2d12d0c-7e12-11e8-b0ef-fffcabeff946_story.html?noredirect&utm_term=.3b1b0aee71f3

[2] <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>

[3] <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>

[4] <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2019/feb/15/virginia-expresses-profound-regret-history-lynchin/>

[5] https://www.richmond.com/news/local/central-virginia/charles-city/first-historic-marker-commemorating-a-lynching-victim-in-va-unveiled/article_575c9645-33ca-5019-b5ae-945b91d2f305.html

[6] <https://eji.org/community-remembrance-project>

[7] <https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america>

[8] <https://eji.org/lynching-in-america-outside-the-south>

https://www.dnronline.com/news/local/locals-talk-lynching-history/article_ca8fd651-8238-53e1-8188-7ac7333e1e6b.html

CENTERPIECE

Locals Talk Lynching History

By JESSICA WETZLER Daily News-Record Sep 17, 2019



Steven Thomas, left, a member of the Northeast Neighborhood Association, discusses the effort to memorialize Charlotte Harris, an African-American woman who was lynched in Harrisonburg in the late 19th century.

Jessica Wetzler / DN-R

HARRISONBURG — For the more than 100 people who attended Monday’s “The History of Lynching in Virginia,” the conversation is only beginning.

James Madison University hosted the first working group dialogue on Harrisonburg’s past of lynching, paving the way for future meetings set in Charlottesville, Alexandria and Culpeper, among others.

Those facilitating the conversation included Steven Thomas, with the Northeast Neighborhood Association, Gianluca De Fazio, assistant professor of justice studies at JMU, Harrisonburg Mayor Deanna Reed, City Councilman Sal Romero, Assistant to the City Manager Amy Snider, Rockingham County's Director for Planning Bradford Dyjak and state Sen. Jennifer McClellan, D-Richmond.

The event stems back from an effort that began in 2017 by Thomas and the rest of the NENA along with De Fazio to learn more about the lynching of Charlotte Harris, a black woman who was abducted from law enforcement from the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County jail by a mob and was lynched on March 6, 1878, and to memorialize her life.

Harris is the only documented black woman in the state of Virginia to have been lynched.

"The lynching of Harris is not ancient history," Thomas said. "These lynchings were terrorism and created a fearful environment ... for decades."

A main talking point for Monday's discussion talked about progress the local Community Remembrance Project has made and work being done by the History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group.

The local Community Remembrance Project is composed of Thomas from the NENA, Romero, Snider, Dyjak, JMU professor Susan Zurbrigg and De Fazio. The History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group is led by McClellan and includes legislative members, educators, historians, along with the local leaders.

As part of its campaign to recognize lynching victims, the Community Remembrance Project collects soil from the lynching site, places a historical marker and creates a national memorial that acknowledges the horrors of racial injustice, according to its website.

When asked the significance of collecting soil, McClellan said it can show the figurative or literal sense of bloodshed collected in the soil during the time of a lynching.

The History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group was formed in 2018 and is a work group of the Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission, which aims to shed light on the history of lynching in the state, according to the memorial commission's website.

“When a community suffers a trauma, you never heal until you process it,” McClellan said. “Tomorrow, this conversation will continue.”

In its attempt to bring awareness to the history, the commission has been compiling the names and stories of the lynching victims and outreach to communities throughout Virginia.

“The commission noted that many of our stories over the past 400 years has not been told,” McClellan said. “It is important to talk about history, not for history’s sake, but to connect issues today to our origins.”

The General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution this year to acknowledge the existence and acceptance of lynching in the state and called for reconciliation among every city and county where African-Americans faced discrimination.

“It is an apology that is 100 years too late, but it is a start,” McClellan said.

The General Assembly also said it would support placement of historical markers in any county or city that can provide documentation of a lynching.

To memorialize Harris, Rockingham County and Harrisonburg passed resolutions to show their support to the NENA, which is working toward getting a monument and historical marker around the county courthouse.

“This has been a humbling and sobering experience to see this as a joint community remembrance project,” Dyjak said. “The [historical] marker will be the first step.”

Those who wish to show their support can contact NENA at hburgnena@gmail.com.

“I am hopeful that we are moving this project forward, but the more support the better,” Thomas said.

Contact Jessica Wetzler at 574-6279 or jwetzler@dnronline.com. Follow Jessica on Twitter [@wetzler_jessica](https://twitter.com/wetzler_jessica)