New Historical Marker Honors Memory of Alexandria Lynching Victim Benjamin Thomas

By Grace Arnold - August 11, 2021

An historical marker was installed on the corner of King St. and Fairfax St. on August 8 to honor the memory of Benjamin Thomas, an African American teenager who was lynched in 1899. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

ALEXANDRIA, VA–On August 6-9, 2021, Alexandria City Hall and Carlyle House and the George Washington Masonic Memorial were illuminated in purple, the color of mourning, in honor of the anniversary of the lynching of Benjamin Thomas.

City Hall and Carlyle House were lit up in purple, the color of mourning, to honor the memory of Benjamin Thomas. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

Benjamin Thomas, a 16-year-old African American teenager, was lynched in Alexandria on August 8, 1899. According to Alexandria.gov, The City of Alexandria is "committed to the accurate dissemination of its history." Thus, the City honors the memory of Benjamin Thomas with a wreath laying and historical marker to "fight injustice and keep the memory of its lynching victims alive."

The wreath laying took place at City Hall on August 8. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

Considered a community reflection, the three-day memorial event witnessed several Alexandria notables pay their respects. Mayor Justin Wilson, Alexandria Poet Laureate KaNikki Jakarta, several members of the Alexandria Police Department, and many others spoke at the wreath laying on August 8 at Market Square and the lynching site on the corner of King and S. Fairfax streets.

Mayor Justin Wilson. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

Dozens of Alexandria residents gathered to hear their powerful words and witness history anew, as an historic marker was installed forever cementing that fateful night in the literal foundation of Alexandria's history.

Alexandria Poet Laureate KaNikki Jakarta. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

The marker's caption details how in 1899, white rioters attacked the city jail on N. St. Asaph St., seizing and dragging Thomas for a half-mile on the cobblestone street, all while pummeling him with bricks, iron, and stone. Allegedly, Thomas cried out for his mother in the horror of the night, but he was ultimately hanged just outside of City Hall and the Police Station.

The Alexandria Police Department was also present. (Photo Steven Halperson, Tisara Photography)

You can read the full story of Thomas's lynching at Alexandriava.gov or on the historic marker now at the corner of King and S. Fairfax streets.