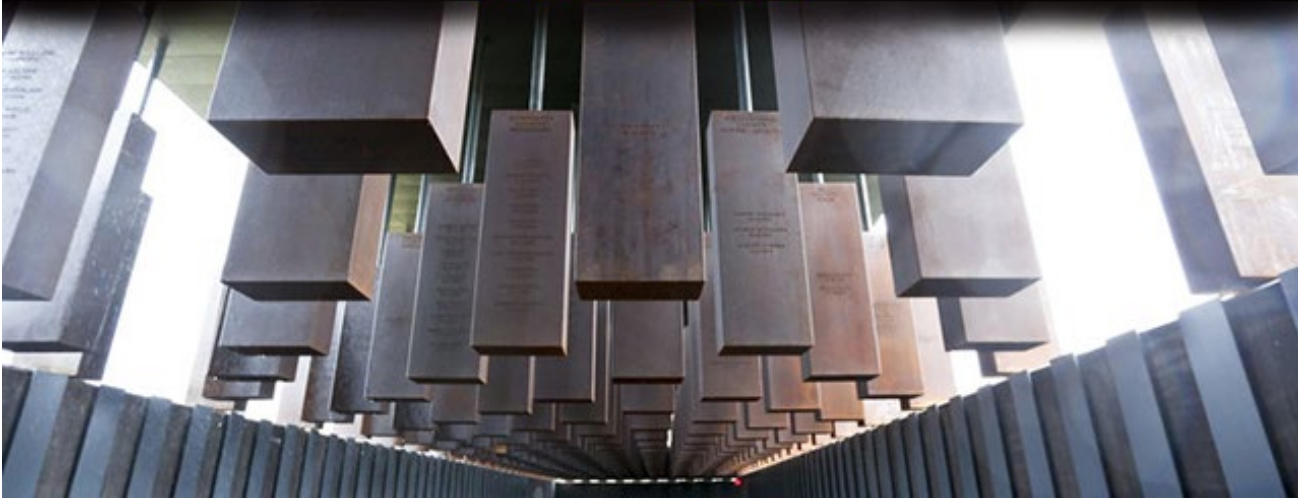


ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



December 2021 Edition

This year-end edition of the ACRP Newsletter features a detailed account of a moment in history with which Alexandria has yet to reckon.

White Terror Rose on Christmas Day in Alexandria

On December 25, 1865, Alexandrians woke to the first Christmas day, in four years, that the city was not under military law.

It was also the first Christmas in so many years that liquor sales were allowed. The white community appeared to revel in the return of their freedom; while the African American's, who should have been celebrating the recent ratification of the 13th Amendment, instead experienced a taste of post-slavery white terror.

By the end of Christmas day, United States soldiers arrested more than 50 white men, most of them former Confederate soldiers, for violent harassment of the Black community and the murder of African American John Anderson.

Within weeks of the start of the New Year, a Military Commission was set up to hear the testimony of numerous witnesses that would reveal the actions of a large group of white men, many ex-confederates who had returned home, and condemn a handful for violence and murder. The story that follows was pieced together based on the news accounts of that testimony with priority given to the African Americans and the prosecution.

Outside of St. Mary's Church at 8 a.m. a fife and drum band of Black Alexandrians in crisp uniforms had gathered. They were on the edge of Hayti, an African American enclave in the city, preparing to usher in the holiday and their new freedom with music.

"About nine o'clock, I saw a lot of colored men, about a dozen in number, parading the streets with a horn, one or two drums, and one black man had a carbine; they appeared to be pretty lively," Noble Logan, a Black Alexandrian, told the Commission.



1861 Photograph of the Marshall House, Alexandria, Va.

Trouble was brewing mid-morning outside the Marshall House, on the corner of King and Pitt streets. A dozen friends who had survived the Civil War stood in front of the hotel. John Lawler, Charles Carson and William Edds were among the Confederates who belted out the lyrics of "Bonnie Blue Flag."

"We are a band of brothers and native to the soil
Fighting for our Liberty, with treasure, blood and toil. And when our rights were threatened, the cry rose near
and far.
Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single star!
Hurrah! Hurrah!
For Southern rights, hurrah!
Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single star."

Two African American men were walking toward the river on the same side of the street as the boisterous group. As they came within reach, Lawler knocked the hat off one of the men. As the man stooped to pick it up, Lawler's fist came down on the back of his neck, knocking him to the ground. [See endnote: 1.]

At Chapell Hall, a building at the corner of Washington and Duke streets that housed an African American restaurant and a barber shop, Washington Fisher was closing the shutters when he felt something hard, maybe made of iron or wood, strike his shoulder. John Mitchell had hit him with a club or blunt instrument of some kind. It was around 11 a.m. Mitchell wasn't alone, the boys who had been at the inn were with him, including Lawler, Carson, Edds, Samuel Coleman, William Allen, H.E. Smith, Joseph Horseman and Gilbert Simpson.

Fisher went inside and shut the door against the gang, some of whom began to throw rocks and pieces of brick at the building.

Wielding a long wooden cane, Simpson ran across Washington Street toward a Black man standing behind a lamp post outside the Hall. Simpson aggressively whacked the post with the walking stick.

A Black soldier fell against Chapell Hall door. Restaurant owner Charles Chapman opened it enough to pull him into safety. Sam Coleman said the soldier would get hurt if Chapman didn't harbor him. Smith and Johnson urged John Seaton, a well known Black Alexandrian, to take the others of his race away from the Hall for their own safety. [See endnotes: 2,3.]

Edds pulled out a pistol and fired four shots through the window, shattering the glass. He yelled that he was hit; blood oozed from Edds' arm. A stone flew through the gaping window pane and hit the spigot of a whiskey cask, spilling two gallons onto the floor boards. The boys beat in the top panels of the front door, letting in a beam of sunlight along with shouts of "hurrah" for Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee.

Led by two men carrying horse pistols, the marauders moved toward Prince Street, leaving Chapman's bullet-pocked restaurant sitting in a sea of broken glass, littered with shards of wood, brick bat, and strewn rocks. The windows of Washington Fisher's barber shop were destroyed. The building sustained damage worth \$26, about \$443.35 in 2021. [See endnote: 4.]

*Inside Battery Rodgers on the Potomac River
near Alexandria, Va.*

Near Leadbeater's Corner, just before 1 p.m., four Black soldiers garrisoned at Battery Rodgers near Alexandria were walking to church. John Vaughan, Stephen Hamilton, Anthony Bowman and Taylor were on Fairfax Street between King and Prince when the gang of former confederates came up behind them. [See endnote: 5.]

"Are you a Union man?" John Lawler asked.

"Yes, I'm an abolitionist," Vaughan said.

Lawler swore at Vaughan and punched him in the mouth. Vaughan ran to grab a rock, but as he rose, Oscar Mankin hauled back and punched him in the jaw. George Huntington swore an oath and yelled, "shoot him!"

Vaughan ran. When he was about 30 yards away, he saw his friend Hamilton knocked to the ground. Bowman and Taylor had escaped.

Someone jumped on Hamilton. He was hit in the back of the head with a rock and knocked down, then the lot of them kicked him over and over. He got up and started to run, but as he neared the corner of Prince Street, A.D. Warfield, standing on his front step, slid his foot forward and tripped Hamilton. [See endnote: 6.]

Simpson, John Travis and Horseman caught him, pounded on him, and struck him on the back of the neck with a rock. They surrounded him and kicked him. Hamilton pulled himself up, only to be knocked down again with a brick.

It took Hamilton more than a week to recover from his injuries. [See endnote: 7.]

In the hours that followed, the white mob moved away from the river on King Street and engaged in a series of skirmishes.



- Robert Alexander (a.k.a Robert Sanders) was walking up King Street when he saw more than a dozen white men approach him, with Horseman and Travis in the lead. Wanting to keep out of their way, he turned and crossed the street. Travis threw something large and sharp that hit him in the head. Alexander staggered to the other side of the road and fell. He had a gun, but never tried to use it - not even in an effort to secure his safety. He left the scene and went to L'Ouverture Hospital. He was treated by Dr. Louis Heard, who said Alexander's skull was dangerously fractured and he had suffered much in the hours after the attack. [See endnote: 8.]
- Two Black soldiers, Henry Barrott and Richard Green walked down King Street on Christmas afternoon. Out of nowhere, Gilbert Simpson appeared and punched Green, who turned and hit Simpson back. With a wave of his hand, Simpson cried, "rally" and a large group of white men materialized. Someone knocked Barrott to the ground and the crowd converged on him, knocking him down more than 20 times. [See endnote: 9.]
- Sometime before 3 p.m., Nobel Logan, a Black Alexandrian, was at Henderson's corner on the southside of King Street between Alfred and Patrick streets. He saw a Black man walking on the other side of King Street. About 25 white men were coming toward the Black man who, upon realizing what was happening, turned and walked quickly in the other direction. One of the white men threw a brick and hit him in the head. The Black man staggered into the middle of King Street. There, Travis and Horseman, in the middle of the road, leveled their guns at him and fired. Logan, who had worked for Travis, ran half a block and ducked behind a gate. The two men chased him, put their pistols over the fence, swore, and said, "If you were out here, we would do the same to you." Some of their

Confederate pals pulled them away and Logan escaped. [See endnote: 10.]

The most egregious event happened sometime between noon and 1:30 p.m. That is when a gang of white men ruthlessly murdered a Black man. John Anderson was a large, light-skinned African American. He was eating a Christmas lunch with Jane Gray at her home on West Street near King when the two learned that a Black soldier was being beaten.

Incensed, Anderson left the house in his coat and hat and headed to the corner where a large crowd had gathered. As he passed the Virginia House, he shed his overcoat and hat and rolled up his sleeves.

"I can whip any Rebel man who had hit a Union man," he said. Anderson crossed the street diagonally toward John Mankin, who stood on Gregg's corner in a dark coat and slouch hat. Anderson did not speak again. As he stepped over the curbstone, Mankin attempted to strike him, but Anderson deftly blocked the punch. As Anderson readied for a fist fight, Mankin beckoned a crowd of whites. He pulled something out of his pocket. Extending his arm, he revealed a gun and shot Anderson in the thigh.

Anderson turned. Suddenly, John's brother Oscar Mankin was there, at the forefront of a gang of white men. He shot Anderson in the head. Anderson took a few steps and fell to the ground, where he was pelted with stones and bricks thrown by the mob. Huntington and John L. Heck were there, as was George Javins, according to witnesses. John Anderson died five days later from a gunshot wound to the left side of his skull. [See endnote: 11.]

Around 1 p.m., the mayor called the military for help. General Christopher Augur, who commanded the Department of Washington, sent three companies of Hancock's veterans with orders to arrest everyone they saw rioting. Between 50 and 100 people were arrested and taken to the Slave Pen at 1315 Duke Street, now a Union prison and onetime headquarters of the largest slave-trading firm in the country.

The inside of the former Slave Pen and Union Prison at 1315 Duke St.

Most of those arrested were released the next morning. It is likely city authorities intervened on their behalf, because on Dec. 28, 1865, Gen. Augur ordered Lieut. Col. Eyre, who was in command at Alexandria, to rearrest everyone involved and "not to release any persons arrested on the demands of the civil authorities, but to refer all such cases to Department Headquarters." Several of the culprits had already left town for Richmond, Warrenton, and the countryside in an attempt to escape justice. [See endnote: 12,13.]



The week after Christmas reports of a large race riot in Alexandria that resulted in multiple deaths of whites and blacks circulated through the nation's newspapers. Several northern newspapers correctly reported that Black Alexandrians were attacked by former confederate soldiers. But newspapers in Richmond and Alexandria took great pains to blame the African American community for loud drunkenness and for causing the chaos. They argued the Blacks provoked and attacked the good, honest, church-going white people of the town - not the other way around. As for the murder of John Anderson - a group of rowdy Black's with a drum broke down John Mankin's front door and in response he shot and killed one of them. [See endnote: 14.]

Gen. Augur called for an investigation. Charges were brought against nearly 20 white Alexandrians. John Mankin, George Huntington, Oscar Mankin, John L. Heck, Charles Javins, John Heichew, A. D. Warfield, John Lawler, John Travis, John Mitchell, Joseph Horseman, Gilbert Simpson, H.E. Smith, William Wheately,

William Edds, Charles Carson and William Allen, were charged with assault and battery and intent to kill U.S. Soldiers Stephen Hamilton, John Vaughan, Richard Green, Henry Barrott and Alexandria resident Robert (Alexander) Saunders.

Those charged with the murder of John Anderson included: John Mankin, George Huntington, Oscar Mankin, John L. Heck, Charles Javins, John Heichew, A.D. Warfield, John Lawler, John Travis, John Mitchell, Joseph Horseman, Gilbert Simpson. H.E. Smith, William Weatley, William Edds, Charles Carson, William Allen.

A trial was held at the U.S. District Court from Jan. 10 to Feb. 19, 1866. The courtroom was consistently crowded, according to news accounts.

Defendants were held at the Slave Pen prison for the duration of the trial and until an order was issued in April announcing the court's decision.

The defense called the trial illegitimate and said the accused should be tried by civil authorities, not by a military commission. Numerous Black witnesses bravely testified and identified the perpetrators. But defense attorneys portrayed the witnesses as prostitutes and drunks. Lawyers for the defense said it was "just as difficult for a Black man to distinguish between white man as it is for a white man to distinguish between black." Anderson's killing was not murder, they said, but merely homicide, a charge that carried a lesser penalty. Adding, he didn't die at the hands of the Mankin brothers either, "but by someone who escaped." [See endnote:15.]

A few days before the judgement was announced, the *Alexandria Gazette's* editorial page (then written by Edgar Snowden) expressed the following:

"Six of the citizens of this city are now and have been for one hundred days confined in a military prison in this city, called the Slave Pen, upon an alleged charge - for the sworn evidence was conclusive as to their innocence - of riotous and disorderly conduct upon our streets during last Christmas day. If the laws can be sustained and enforced in Virginia by the proper civil authority, as the President declares, let the friends of the prisoners sue out at once a writ of habeas corpus, have them brought before the proper civil officer, and let him determine upon what ground, and by whose order they are still imprisoned, while their families are suffering from the want of the proceeds of their daily labor. Petitions were in circulation yesterday for signatures, praying the President for an order releasing the parties; and affidavits were being taken before the Magistrates, certifying to their innocence."

Their request fell on deaf ears. On April 3, 1866, John Mankin was sentenced to five years imprisonment, reduced from 15 years of hard labor. John Lawler would serve two years, reduced from five years of hard labor. John Travis, Joseph Horseman, and Gilbert Simpson each were given six months of hard labor. All were sent to a penitentiary in Albany, New York.

On April 6, a large crowd, including women, gathered outside the former slave prison on Duke Street at 5 p.m. to see the guilty men put on a northward train. The *Alexandria Gazette* wrote [see endnote 16]:

"We will not attempt to express the feelings excited in all the spectators of this sad ending of, at most a Christmas frolick, but the appearance of five residents of this city -- born and raised here, and known to all our old citizens, as honest and upright young men, manacled together with iron handcuffs, and carried through the street in charge of a military guard, after the issue of the peace proclamation was sufficient cause for anxiety to all. The sobs and cries of some of the ladies were painfully audible, and the feelings of one were so acted upon that she fainted, and fell upon the streets. It is our deliberate impression that the President, when he approved the following findings of the Commission which tried the parties, was not fully informed in regard to the circumstances attending this affair."

The former confederate soldiers were treated like martyrs and the first seeds of the Lost Cause were cast upon the welcoming terra of Alexandria.

In the next months, the legal system returned fully to the purview of civil authorities and by the end of Spring, the convicted "Christmas riot prisoners" were released. Lawler and John Mankin were the last to return from Albany, just two months after they left. The same month, Alexandria book stores began selling Edward A. Pollard's *Lost Cause*, the pro-slavery precursor to *The Lost Cause Regained* setting forth the argument that the war was fought to preserve state's rights. [See endnotes 17, 18.]

For Black Alexandria, a Christmas that began with hope for equal treatment waned and white terror began its rise. The start, time would reveal, of an all too familiar pattern of racial violence that would simmer

unchallenged for more than a century.

Endnotes:

1. From African American George Dogan's testimony before the court, *Alexandria Gazette*, January 12, 1866, p.3.
2. From the testimony of African Americans: Washington Fisher, Charles Chapman and John A. Seaton, *Alexandria Gazette*, January 13, 1866, p.3 and January 17, 1866, p.3.
3. News accounts did not provide a first name for Johnson. Charges against him must have been dismissed at the start of the defence during the trial.
4. Testimony of Fisher and Chapman before the court, *Alexandria Gazette*, January 13, 1866.
5. The first name of Taylor, the African American soldier, was not available in news accounts.
6. A.D. Warfield,(Abel Davis Warfield), was a dyer who moved to Alexandria from Washington, D.C. before 1860, according to the 1850 and 1860 Census. He was the father of Edgar Warfield, who was a druggist and prominent citizen of Alexandria. Edgar Warfield had a Pharmacy and large Commercial Residential building in Alexandria. He was also a member of the 17th Virginia Regiment and was at Appomattox for the surrender. He would later be a founding member of the R.E. Lee Camp. A.D.'s grandson and Edgar's son, Edgar Warfield, Jr., was also a druggist, and he was on the inquest panel that looked into Joseph McCoy's murder. He did not find any white people responsible for the lynching and no charges were brought because of this decision.
7. From the testimony of: John Vaughan (African American), Stephan Hamilton (African American), D.R. Smith (white) James G. Adams (white) and Virginia Bell (African American), *Alexandria Gazette*, January 12, 13, 15, 1866, all on the third page of each paper.
8. From the testimony of Robert Alexander and Dr. Louis Heard, *Alexandria Gazette* January 13, 1866 p. 3 and February 9, 1866 p.3; *National Republican* January 18, 1866 and February 9, 1866 and *Alexandria Gazette* January 22, 1866, p.3.
9. From the testimony of Henry Barret and Richard Green, *Alexandria Gazette*, January 17, 1866, p.3; *National Republican* January 18 and 20, 1866.
10. From the testimony of Nobel Logan, an African American resident in Alexandria, *Alexandria Gazette*, January 12 and 13, 1866 and *National Republican*, January 12 and 15, 1866.
11. From the testimony of African American Alexandrians Jane Gray, Susan Gray, Thomas Murray, Dr. Louis Heard, Thomas Davis and Georgie Smith (white), *Alexandria Gazette*, January 17, 19, 22, 23, 1866; *National Republican*, January 18, 20, 24, 1866, *The Washington Evening Star*, January 20, 1866
12. "The Alexandria Riot," *Evening Star*, December 28, 1865, page 2.
13. Several of the culprits had already left town for Richmond, Warrenton, and the countryside in an attempt to escape justice, *Evening Star*, December 30, 1865.
14. *New York Times*, December 27, 1865, p.4.
15. Lawyers for the defense said it was "just as difficult for a black man to distinguish between white man as it is for a white man to distinguish between black." Anderson's killing was not murder, they said, but merely homicide, a charge that carried a lesser penalty. He didn't die at the hands of the Mankin brothers, "but by someone who escaped." *Alexandria Gazette*, Saturday, February 17, 1866, p.3.
16. The date of April 6 for the departure was confirmed in the *Evening Star's* April 7, 1866 edition.
17. *Alexandria Gazette*, June 4, 1866, p. 3.
18. *Alexandria Gazette*, June 5, 1866, p.2.

[Joseph McCoy](#) [Benjamin Thomas](#).

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The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) is a city-wide initiative dedicated to helping Alexandria understand its history of racial terror hate crimes and to work toward creating a welcoming community bound by equity and inclusion.

**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**



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